Classical Chinese and Vernaculars: Mutual Understanding Between East Asians[1)]

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要　旨

近代以前には、東アジアにおける中国文化の威光と漢文の過剰な権威づけの結果、漢文以外の俗語（それぞれの国語）による中国と周縁諸文化間の双方向の交流や、周縁地域相互の「水平的」な交流はきわめて乏しかった。近代に入って漢文の威光は衰えたが、今度はヨーロッパ、ついでアメリカの文化と言語を中心と仰ぐ権威主義が取って代わり、東アジア諸国は相変わらず隣接文化への無関心を維持しつづけた。欧米中心主義がようやく光を失いつつある今、われわれはまずたがいに近隣諸国の俗語を学び合い、じかに話し合うことが先決である。

キーワード：East Asia／Classical Chinese／Sino-centrism／*kanbun*／vernaculars

Comparative literature took shape as an academic discipline roughly a hundred years ago in France. A chair was first created at the University of Lyon in 1896 and, then, at the University of Paris in 1910. This was a time of global crisis exactly like these days. The principal founder of the field, Fernand Baldensperger, was born in Lorraine, a region in France which borders Belgium, Luxemburg and Germany and was frequently the scene of conflict between France and Germany. After studying in Zurich, Nancy, Paris, Oxford, Göttingen and Heidelberg, Baldensperger started to teach German, English and, later, comparative literature in France at the turn of the twentieth century with gloomy forebodings of an impending world war. After the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, a sore need had been felt in France for a deeper understanding of Germany, an immediate neighbor

rapidly emerging as an industrial power which, nevertheless, had remained an "other" little known to the French. With the opening of the new century, this need grew more urgent. In a way, comparative literature was born out of the desire to know one's neighbors better under the threat of full-scale war.

Another war is being waged now, and I wonder if people know their neighbors much better than they did a hundred years ago. In East Asia, needless to say, we have a common heritage, a collective memory of Classical Chinese tradition. As we are painfully aware, however, this memory is quickly fading away from the minds of East Asians, especially of the younger generations who have barely been schooled, if at all, in the Chinese Classics. How, then, should we make up for the loss of this common memory? Are we to deplore our recent tendency to forget our shared knowledge? Much has been said about the benefits of the Classical Chinese tradition. Here I propose to see the issue in a different light and try to discuss its *hampering* effect on the mutual understanding between East Asians.

The names "East Asian Literature" and "East Asian Comparative Literature" have recently established themselves on the Japanese academic scene. They have duly replaced older research areas such as "Wakan hikaku bungaku"(和漢比較文学) (Comparative Studies of Classical Japanese and Chinese Literature) and "Nicchū hikaku bungaku"(日中比較文学) (Comparative Studies of Japanese and Chinese Literature). Further back, right after the Meiji Restoration, there used to be an academic discipline called "Kōkan gaku"(皇漢学) (Imperial and Chinese Studies), too. This last, however, was a newfangled field in which the traditional Classical Chinese Studies and "Kokugaku"(国学) (Nativist Studies) were put together in a desperate effort to rival "Yōgaku"(洋学) (Western Studies) which had suddenly come into vogue. What the three former fields have in common is the fact that they envisage all of East Asia in terms of the bipolarity of China and Japan alone, while disregarding the culture and literature of Korea and other adjacent countries.

Indeed, such an oversimplified polarization has been rampant in Japan, not only in literature studies but also in comparative studies of culture in general, ranging from psychology to politics and economics, wherein a comparison is often made between "Japan and the West" or "Japan and Europe"—— which is tantamount, for example, to pitting Seoul against the United States ——, while never questioning whether the pairs are well-matched or not. These discussions are evidently based on the unwarranted assumption that Japan represents the whole of Asia and take no heed of the

great civilizations of India and China, not to mention the neighboring cultures of Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, etc. To some observers, this is seen as a manifestation of the egotism or, at best, the extreme self-consciousness of the insular Japanese. On the other hand, a closer look shows that this seeming egocentrism or narcissism actually derives from a profound reverence for the past glory of Chinese civilization and for the more recent accomplishments of the West. In both cases, the unbounded admiration of a foreign culture is aroused by a sense of inferiority and marginality vis-à-vis a center in full possession of overpowering authority. Close neighbors were overlooked simply because the Japanese were too intent on watching China or Europe.

The so-called "Kanji bunka ken"(漢字文化圏)(cultural zone with a common heritage of Chinese characters), or the Confucian Zone, in East Asia is often compared to medieval and modern Europe with its Latin tradition. The two worlds, however, have three obvious differences between them. First, the Roman Empire, in which Latin had served as a common language, began to decline as early as the fourth century, after which it ceased to be the predominant power in Europe whereas, in East Asia, China kept its overwhelming influence on the surrounding countries until the middle of the nineteenth century. Latin only survived during and after the Middle Ages as a sacred language of the intellectuals and the clergy, while "kanbun"(漢文), or Classical Chinese, was constantly used as a living, albeit written, language in East Asia. It was the leading language of diplomacy and international trade as well as that of official documents and the more formal literary and philosophical writings in each country. Second, the intellectuals who could read and write Latin in Europe, therefore, were far smaller in number than the East Asian literati who were well versed in Classical Chinese. And, finally and most importantly, vernaculars such as Italian, French, Spanish, English and German were more widely used in international discourse in Europe than Latin. People of the higher orders, including members of royalty and the nobility, were frequently communicating with each other through marriages, visits, and travels and thus were highly motivated to learn each other's language. In the final act of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, for example, where Henry courts the French Princess Catherine after his hard-won victory at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, Catherine bashfully answers him in an awkward English, but it *is* English all the same. Diplomats and soldiers, painters and musicians, students and merchants, craftsmen and clergymen all moved

around and communicated, using various vernaculars.

In East Asia, by contrast, Classical Chinese in its written form continued to serve as a common language irrespective of how it was pronounced in different areas in and outside China. The currents of international communication, especially in the literary and cultural domains, however, mostly took a form of one-way traffic, radiating out from China in the center to the peripheral countries. This continued domination of East Asia by Classical Chinese brought about two unfortunate consequences. On the one hand, the periphery had practically no chance for feedback to the center because China simply had no interest in the cultures of ambient barbarians. On the other hand, the channels of communication between the marginal countries themselves remained blocked. Unlike Europe, East Asian countries never established an adequate network of vernacular communication for purposes of bilateral interchange.

Take, for example, the case of Japan before modernization. Only on very rare occasions throughout its history did it make substantial contacts with its neighbors. With the exception of the naturalized persons who had come over in great numbers from Korea and the Continent in ancient times, as well as those who were engaged in several Japanese wars of aggression in Korea and coastal China, the outstanding instances of Japanese and East Asian people who came in close touch with each other are few in number : such instances include the Japanese envoys to China in the Sui(隋) and Tang(唐) Dynasties ; Chinese monks such as Ganjin(鑑真) (687-763) and Ingen(隠元) (1594-1673) who were invited to Japan ; the samurais and merchants who launched into South-East Asia and built "Japanese Towns" from the middle of the sixteenth century to the seventeenth ; and, after Japan definitely closed the door to foreigners in 1639, the Chinese traders who were only allowed access to Dejima (出島) in Nagasaki ; and, finally, the Korean missions on official visits to Edo every time a new Shogun took office. But even in these specific cases of major contact, there is scant evidence that the vernaculars of China, Korea and Japan were used in conversations. The prevailing means of communication was a talk conducted in written form, as was usually the case with the Korean envoys, the most conspicuous exception to this rule being a small number of interpreters working at Dejima, who were rare specialists in Chinese vernaculars. Looking back over more than a thousand years' history of Japan's interrelationships with China and Korea, one cannot help marveling how bad and unsociable neighbors the East Asians were.

Viewed from China, to be sure, Japan was a far-off island country often compared to the legendary Peng-lai(蓬萊) or Ying-zhou(瀛洲), while the Korea Strait acts as a natural barrier between Korea and Japan. But then, England is also an island country separated from the Continent by a strait. Both the Korea Strait and the Strait of Dover are in fact very narrow : on a clear day, one can see Tsushima(対馬) from Pusan(釜山). Distance, therefore, cannot account for the peculiar estrangement between Korea and Japan, nor can Japan's seclusion policy during the Edo period, which lasted for a mere two hundred years. Korea, it should be noted, immediately adjoins China and yet there were no frequent bilateral exchanges between these two countries either, least of all through vernaculars, as were prevalent, say, between France and Germany.

The prestige of Chinese civilization and Classical Chinese in East Asia was so great that the Chinese, Korean and Japanese vernaculars as they were actually spoken were held in very low esteem and rarely used as a means of international communication. Nothing is better evidence of this than the extreme scarcity of translations, literary and otherwise, into vernaculars. In Japan, for instance, there developed a systematic method, called "kundoku"(訓読), of word-for-word rendering of texts in Classical Chinese into Japanese. More akin to transliteration or, better, to present-day mechanical translation than to ordinary translation, the "kundoku" created a target language which neither sounds quite natural as Japanese nor can capture fine nuances of the original Chinese. However, since this method of hyper-literal translation was believed to be the best way to approximate the Chinese texts as closely as possible —— one could easily render the "kundoku" Japanese back into the original Chinese ——, it soon acquired the highest distinction in Japan with the prestige of Classical Chinese behind it. All the Chinese Classics were read "directly" in this way, thus naturally pre-empting normal translations into vernacular Japanese.

It should be added, in parentheses, that there were some successful attempts at vernacular translations around the turn of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, when Jesuit missionaries and Japanese Christian converts printed with type, for the first time in Japan, religious books and Aesop's fables, among others, which were rendered into the beautiful colloquial Japanese of the time. They were mostly translated, however, from the original Latin. These books called for translation in the ordinary sense precisely because Latin was an utterly foreign language unlike

Classical Chinese, which was felt to be an integral part of Japanese culture.

The case of the Buddhist Scriptures was even worse than that of the Chinese Classics read through "kundoku". The authoritative versions of the sutras regularly used in Japan were Classical Chinese translations from the original Sanskrit and the priests habitually recited them at rituals according to the ancient Chinese pronunciation which had been naturalized in Japan, called "ondoku"(音読) as opposed to "kundoku". Among those present, however, very few understood the sutras being chanted, except for the priests themselves. Prior to the Meiji Restoration, no serious effort was made to give people direct access to the Scriptures through vernacular translations or, at least, through "kundoku" reading. This fact again shows the deep and almost religious reverence of the Japanese for Classical Chinese with its absolute authority. It also provides a striking contrast to the situation in Europe, where the Greek and Latin Classics as well as the Bible were rendered into various vernaculars in close succession during and after the Renaissance and, in part, even before it.

Japan, nonetheless, had a brief period called *Genroku jidai*(元禄時代), during which, under the reign of the Fifth Shogun Tsunayoshi(綱吉) (1688-1703), the learning of contemporary Chinese was strongly encouraged. A number of Chinese vernacular novels and stories(白話小説) were translated and adapted into Japanese and exerted a marked influence on popular literature in Japan. This trend originated from the very few "kara-tsūji"(唐通事) (Chinese-Japanese interpreters) engaged in Chinese trade in Dejima as well as the Chinese intellectuals and Zen monks of the Ōbaku(黄檗) Sect who had fled to Japan at the end of the Ming Dynasty. They conveyed the knowledge of "living" Chinese and opened the way for commercial and cultural exchanges through the Chinese vernacular as well as the direct reception of contemporary Chinese arts, sciences and religions in a manner quite different from the traditional "kundoku" way. Chinese-Japanese interpretation was a hereditary occupation, mostly followed by the descendants of refugees from China at the end of the Ming Dynasty. Since the interpreters, who were usually eight in number, had dealings with merchants from Southern China, they spoke the dialects of Fuzhou(福州), Zhanzhou(漳州), and Nanjing(南京). They hardly ever used the Beijing dialect.[2)]

Shogun Tsunayoshi and Yangisawa Yoshiyasu(柳沢吉保) (1658-1714), a chief member of his Council of State, fostered learning and rallied many Confucians around them. They often held lecture meetings and invited eminent scholars such

as Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠) (1666-1728) to give talks on the Confucian Canon. Surprisingly, the Shogun and the Chief Councilor condescended at times to deliver their own lectures. It is also noteworthy that the lectures and subsequent discussions were often conducted in "Tōwa" (唐話), or vernacular Chinese. Ogyū Sorai reportedly served as an interpreter on these occasions but the Chief Councilor's knowledge of colloquial Chinese was apparently good enough to communicate, without further assistance, the questions and answers being exchanged.[3] During this period, vernacular interpretations of Classical Chinese poems also became popular, the most famous of them being the *Tōshisen kokuji-kai* (唐詩選国字解) (Vernacular Interpretation of *The Anthology of Tang Poetry*) by Hattori Nankaku (服部南郭) (1683-1759), a disciple of Sorai's. Similar attempts were made on the poems of Du Fu (杜甫) in Korea during the Li dynasty.

One of the most remarkable Confucians of the Genroku period is Okashima Kanzan (岡島冠山) (1674-1728), who formerly served as a Chinese interpreter at Dejima. Partly for his own pleasure and partly for brushing up his Chinese, Kanzan pored over Chinese vernacular novels and published, on top of many introductions to the language, a Japanese translation of the *Tale of Water Margin* (水滸伝) entitled *Tsūzoku chūgi Suikoden* (通俗忠義水滸伝). This started a steady flow of Japanese translations and adaptations of Chinese popular novels and stories in colloquial Chinese, which were successively published in Edo, Kyoto and Osaka. They include full-length novels like the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国志演義), dated from the sixteenth century, and a large number of short stories from the popular collections such as the *San yan er pai* (三言二拍), compiled in the early seventeenth century.

In the early years of the Edo period, too, there were a few translations of popular ghost and criminal stories of the South Song and Ming Dynasties. Although these stories partially contained colloquial Chinese, however, they could still be read through the traditional "kundoku" method. It was not until purely vernacular novels and stories had been introduced from China during the Genroku period, therefore, that the need for vernacular translations was keenly felt. What this means is that Chinese literature translated into Japanese for the first time in this period was something written in a *foreign language*, quite distinct from Classical Chinese which had been internalized by the Japanese literati.

And, sure enough, these vernacular translations exercised an immediate and

decisive influence on popular litareture in Japan. Tsuga Teishō(都賀庭鐘) (c. 1718 -94) inaugurated a genre called "yomihon"(読本) (book of narratives) with his *Hanabusa-zōshi*(英草紙), which mainly consisted of fantastic stories adapted from the Chinese. This trend reached its summit when Ueda Akinari(上田秋成) published *Ugetsu monogatari*(雨月物語) (Tales of Rain and Moon), a collection of mysterious stories largely inspired by Chinese stories, which featured an original style mixing classical Japanese with the vocabulary and rhetoric of the Chinese vernacular. These collections led the way to the full-length *yomihon* masterpieces such as the *Nansō Satomi hakken-den*(南総里見八犬伝) (Romance of the Eight Dogs) by Takizawa Bakin(滝沢馬琴) (1767-1848) and, later on, to the early novels of the Meiji era. Unfortunately, however, translation from the colloquial Chinese never saw another period of such exuberance until the Meiji Restoration, although the learning of colloquial Chinese still remained fairly popular.

In Korea, it would seem, the authority of Classical Chinese was even more marked and indisputable, presumably due to its immediate proximity to China which constantly put pressure on it in all aspects : military, diplomatic, cultural, and commercial. A large majority of pre-modern Korean literature consists of prose and poetry written in "kanbun". Given the utter devotion of the Korean government officials-cum-literati for Classical Chinese and their contempt for works in the Korean vernacular or Hangul —— a notable exception, perhaps, being their interest in *shijo* (時調) ——, a vernacular-to-vernacular translation of Chinese literature might well have been virtually out of the question. Needless to say, both in studies of the Confucian Canon and in literature in Classical Chinese, which mainly consisted of philosophical, ethical and political essays and expository prose as well as poetry, Korea had attained the topmost level under the Li Dynasty, and produced "kanbun" writers of the highest order. Japanese were well aware of this fact : when the Korean embassies visited Japan during the Edo era, for example, the intellectuals who lived on their route used to rush to their lodgings and felt it a great honor to carry on conversations in writing with the envoys and have their own writings corrected by them. Strangely enough, however, Korean literature in Classical Chinese never constituted an important part of Japanese Classical studies. Most probably the same applies to China, too.

All these anomalies can be accounted for, in the final analysis, by the complete domination of East Asia by the Chinese civilization and the consequent unilateral

radiation of light from the center to the periphery. This exaggerated Sino-centrism, not only on the part of the Chinese themselves but also of the peoples on the margin, is an interesting case of "hegemony" as expounded by Antonio Gramsci, since this sort of absolute predominance would have been impossible without implicit consent of the dominated neighbors whether or not they were under heavy military or political pressure from the center. What this particular situation engendered in the whole area was a brand of conciliatory authoritarianism carried by those who seek to share in the power of authority by total submission to it. In what is called the "Kanji bunka-ken" (cultural zone with a common heritage of Chinese characters), in fact, there were only different vertical paths leading up to the summit, which was Classical China, and very few horizontal paths or passages allowing the goings and comings of people living at various levels of the mountain. Things were not so different even inside China, either.

Things *were* quite different, however, in Europe. Although, roughly speaking, its cultural center moved from Italy and Spain to France and later, in part, to England and Germany, there was in Europe no single overwhelming influence like China with its Classical language. That is why a close and lively network of mutual communication could develop there through the use of different vernaculars, quite apart from that of Latin.

As a result of the modernization of East Asia, the powerful spell of Classical Chinese was finally broken both in and out of China. Under the influence of Western nationalism, as well as Romanticism in literature and art, a critical revaluation of vernacular literature (in Bai-hua, Hangul, and colloquial Japanese) was made in the whole area. Creative writings in native languages were highly encouraged and complete rewritings of past literary histories were undertaken everywhere. And, moreover, there emerged a steady flow of vernacular-to-vernacular translations at long last.

And yet, this same tide of Westernization that had promoted national identity ironically also brought about another trend towards servile authoritarianism. This time around, it was Western Europe and, later, the United States that took the place of China as center of civilization. The modern age, after all, was the time when the West had thoroughly marginalized the rest of the world, just as China did in East Asia before. This had the unfortunate, if inevitable, consequence that the same old lack of mutual, "horizontal" communication in vernaculars was revived in East Asia

as in the old days. Everyone was raptly gazing up at the West, and had no time to look around to see what's happening in their neighborhood. The modern counterpart of Classical Chinese in the past was German, French, English or, at times, Japanese, the language of a nation which was foremost in the race for modernization in East Asia.

The world supremacy of the West in culture and language, however, is being challenged now. For the first time in their history, the peoples of East Asia are breaking away from the grip of a powerful center and starting to hold conversations with each other in vernacular languages. The names "East Asian Literature" and "East Asian Comparative Culture" may well reflect these latest developments. Evidently, Korean scholars have taken the lead in attempting a bird's-eye view of the whole East Asian Literature, especially from the perspective of its Classical Chinese tradition. It is a sad fact, nevertheless, that, actually, very few people have mastered the three important languages of East Asia: Chinese, Korean and Japanese, the rare exceptions, as far as I know, being the Chinese students from the Korean community of Yanbian(延辺) who have studied or are studying in Japan. To my regret, I myself am a peculiar product of modern Japan in that I can speak English and French but have no Chinese or Korean. Maybe it is too late for an old man like me to start learning a new langue, or is it? It is high time, anyway, that the younger generations in East Asia should be incited not only to learn English but also each other's language and acquire a deeper mutual understanding through firsthand contacts with each other.

Notes

1) This is a revised version of the keynote address delivered at the 2001 Korea Comparative Literature Association Congress: "Cultural Memory in the East and the West" held on October 13, 2001, at Ewha Woman's University in Seoul.
2) See Ishizaki Matazō, *Kinsei Nihon ni okeru Shina tsūzoku bungaku-shi* (A History of Chinese Vernacular Literature in Early Modern Japan), 2nd ed., Kōbundō shobō, 1943, pp. 11-29.
3) See *ibid.*, pp. 49-53.