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*Special Issue:*

Trajectories of Cultural Diplomacy:

East Asian Texts and Artefacts in the Anglosphere

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# NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF ASIAN STUDIES

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## SPECIAL ISSUE

### Trajectories of Cultural Diplomacy: East Asian Texts and Artefacts in the Anglosphere

Guest Editor: Dennitza Gabrakova

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## TRAJECTORIES OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: INTRODUCTION

DENNITZA GABRAKOVA  
*Victoria University of Wellington*

This special issue started as a panel titled “Trajectories of Cultural Diplomacy” at the NZASIA Biennial International Conference in Wellington (November 24–27). “Cultural diplomacy” and “soft power” were buzz words, a highlight of the conference being the celebration of the publication of *China in Australasia: Cultural Diplomacy and Chinese Arts since the Cold War*. In the introduction to *China in Australasia*, the editors delineate the trajectories through which resources from “a nation’s culture” could be channeled into diverse agendas of influence. A “subsection of public diplomacy,” cultural diplomacy is enabled by official endorsement or sponsorship, yet, as the editors of the volume argue for the case of the PRC’s “soft-power strategies,” there is a “lacuna” in recognizing its significance (p. 4). The lacuna of addressing the “role the arts have played in shaping the nature of relations between nations” (ibid.) is an intriguing proposition not only because it could be so easily reversed into questioning “the role the nature of relations between nations” have played in shaping art exchange. In an earlier publication Alexander Bukh (2014) critiques the “agent-level approach” in his overview of Japan’s soft power, which draws our attention to the “international ideational structures” that inform both discourses on national identity and cultural diplomacy. *China in Australasia* also invites a larger geopolitical perspective extending from global powers such as the USA and the UK to pacific nations such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Samoa, as a larger frame to its case studies, but as the two book reviews suggest, there are a number of fascinating questions concerning the personal and even idiosyncratic agency within institutional or semi-institutional structures of cultural exchange.

For humanities-informed approaches, as demonstrated in the four essays to follow, it is precisely the “limitations in terms of their ability to shape relations between countries” (p. 8), that provide a certain critical distance from the instrumentalization of artistic practice. The lacuna in placing culture within soft power is indicative of the complexity of situating creative practices within political and economic relations. Building on existing research, the editors refer to characteristics facilitating the selection of cultural resources such as “the acceptable,” “the apolitical,” and “the harmless,” alongside with “the traditional” which reserves a prioritized relationship with such resources. The four essays address the introduction of cultural material from Japan and China to Britain, America, and New Zealand across a wide historical span focusing specifically on the periods of the late 1800s, 1950s, 1980s, and the modern day. It is true that the cultural material from the East is colored by a fascination with tradition



drawn from stories of honor and courage of the Japanese samurai class, Chinese ghost stories, the philosophy of Japanese ceramics, and Chinese ancestor worship. All four essays emphasize the role of the mediators: Mitford, Lin Yutang, James Greig, and Renee Liang, the so-called “cultural ambassadors” in not only reshaping this traditional material, but also in interrogating the boundaries of the apolitical.

The efforts of these “cultural agents” – to borrow the term Florian Knothe applied to the philanthropists dedicated to collecting Chinese art in the West – are officially endorsed and sponsored in varying degrees. Even in the case of Mitford, who took a significant financial risk by the publication of his *Tales*, the hours spent on compiling and writing were secured amidst paperwork and English lessons within the premises of the British legation in Tokyo. A diplomat in the strict sense, Mitford’s cultural foray points simultaneously at the connection between his diplomatic and literary careers and their divergence, which is what Anna Gubinskaya argues in her essay. “The role of the nature of the relations between nations,” that is imperialism, behind Mitford’s cultural diplomacy, demonstrates how cultural appreciation can take a voyeuristic form in the face of blood-curdling violence. Lin Yutang establishes himself as a popularizer of Chinese culture with the encouragement of a Nobel Prize awardee, while their common background of missionary Christianity displays another aspect of East Asian modernization. In *Famous Chinese Short Stories*, Lin deals with Chinese “tradition” in a manner comparative to Mitford’s *Tales*, projecting the marketable image of Asia as exotic and untainted by westernization. As Liu Min’s essay shows however, Lin’s treatment of “tradition” is strategic in precisely narrowing the gap between Chinese culture and modernity and its apolitical aspect – a sign of individual autonomy. Both collections of stories harness the soft power of collective narrative traditions of Japan and China, hinging on various proportions of strangeness and familiarity. Actual military conflicts involve British and American interests in Asia at the time of these publications.

The geopolitical paradigm change can be symbolized by Japan’s hosting of Expo 1970, whereas New Zealand as a site of reception of Asian culture offers important insights into the economic shifts in the region. Japan is the place to learn from in the field of ceramics, and the New Zealand potter James Greig chose as his inspiration a Japanese potter equally traditional and eccentric. Greig’s study of Japanese tradition, including Buddhist aesthetics, is filtered through the work of an individual, and as Kumiko Jacolin demonstrates, Greig’s combination of work with clay and writing evokes a more abstract yet personal language for cross-cultural exchange. The spirituality, emanating from Greig’s pursuit of artistic enlightenment, is an example of the “apolitical” lacunae protected by economic growth and political stability. Japanese tradition here, even if not fully submitted to scrutiny, involves a riskier self-transformation beyond Mitford’s admiration and Lin’s aspiration for universalism.

The *Bone Feeder*, critically examined by Luo Hui, shows a range of recent developments on the themes of acceptability and harmlessness amidst contesting frameworks of empowerment and disempowerment in multicultural New Zealand (including the fact that Renee Liang is the only female cultural agent among the four case studies and that the coherence of a national is not self-evident). The minority’s

cultural production already raises questions of representability, intensified by the play's advance into the grand scale of opera. The discussion on Lin Yutang prepares us to think of the strategic retrieval of Chinese tradition as a site for identity negotiations. However, the revolutionary aspect of the staging of singers of Asian descent and having them perform as Chinese New Zealanders is astounding, especially when juxtaposed with the limited scope of Asian roles in the operas of Mitford's days. The cultural and cross-cultural performativity revolving around tradition is also placed in sharper focus in Luo Hui's analysis, alongside its boundary-crossing dimension and critical potential. The way the Chinese ancestral worship ritual is staged in Liang's work effectively blurs the boundary between ritual and performance. Ritual becomes performance and performance is ritual. Since the ritual here resurrects the memory of a historical trauma against a broader background of political and economic injustice, the ritual is directed at placating the ghosts of history to counter historical amnesia or retaliatory sentiments.

The burial sites of the Chinese-New Zealand ancestors are a heterotopy beyond the boundary protected by the Maori ferryman, allegorizing the threshold between life and death. In retrospect, Greig's homage to Kawai Kanjirō, Lin Yutang's summoning of ghosts, and Mitford's honoring of Japanese heroes' graves appear to be precarious models of inclusivity, which once celebrated can easily regress into exclusiveness and exclusion. Cultural diplomacy is a ritual of communication which demands constant vigilance over the potential silence of the other side.

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Dennitza Gabrakova teaches Japanese at Victoria University of Wellington and is interested in postcolonial critiques, translation studies and the environmental humanities. She is the author of *The Unnamable Archipelago: Reading the Wounds of the Postcolonial and Postwar Japanese Literature and Thought* (Brill, 2018).



## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE AGE OF THE EMPIRE: ALGERNON BERTRAM MITFORD (1837–1916)

ANNA GUBINSKAYA

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In this article I use the figure of a member of the British Legation in Japan as a case study to illustrate how trends in international politics during the third quarter of the XIX century manifested themselves in the field of cultural exchange. The critical lens I am exploring is the modern concept of cultural diplomacy, more specifically – the role of translation as one of its facets. I argue that the scope of an individual's influence in Japanese-British cultural exchange might be broader than we critically acknowledge in modern scholarship.

The relationships of the British crown to subordinated states is usually reflected through the idea of post-colonial studies and hardly ever in terms of cultural diplomacy. Even though Japan was hardly ever treated by the scholars of postcolonialism as a country with relevant legacy, the overall trend and global political trends influenced Japanese policy greatly, as assessed by Komori (2001, p. 12). However, the terms of exchange may take a new inflection if we personify the movement of the underpinning powers and zoom into important figures' perspectives on the intercultural mediation in the age of the empire. On one side, the politically sovereign territory of Japan was bound by a network of unequal treaties, initiated under a military threat of world powers, as a 'weaker', 'backward,' 'feudal' state. Under these conditions, the concept of diplomacy might prove impossible to apply. On the other side the influence Japanese art had on European decorative art, painting, literature, poetry, drama, and to a certain extent even on music, gives us an impression that aesthetic expression somehow was treated as a phenomenon if not superior to European – at least from the viewpoint of an equally plausible set of standards. This dialectic relationship might be seen as a metaphorical embodiment of the modern concept of cultural diplomacy and, applied retrospectively, reveals the translational mechanisms of how culture can occupy the field cleared by military corps.

One of the brightest examples of this shifting dichotomy is a figure of a British diplomat Algernon Bertram Mitford (1837 -- 1916). He was an advocate of British superiority, a firm believer that his duty was to translate the will of the British Empire for the inferior and weaker Japan, and on the other hand -- one of the most influential promoters of Japanese culture in Europe of the third quarter of the XIX century. Pertinently, he was one of the first translators of Japanese language among the British, author of the book *Tales of Old Japan* (1871). Not without his works was conceived the image of the *samurai* – Japanese warrior without fear and reproach, which amalgamated loyalty with extreme violence, arrogance with self-destruction and aggressiveness with refinement.

In this article, I focus on the imagery and atmosphere Mitford created in his work. It is an elegiac dirge lamenting the disappearance of Japanese culture as Mitford saw it. *Hara-kiri* and *samurai* were the kernels of that disappearing feudal code of conduct Mitford amalgamated in his work. I argue that while compiling the texts with alleged authority and authenticity through the critical eye view of a ‘culturally competent’ mediator, Mitford (deliberately or unwillingly) was mostly projecting his heroic self-ideal onto the repertoire of cultural material rather than facing the realities of Japanese culture per se. Secondly, I point out Mitford’s stance as a translator and interpreter and try to reveal the discrepancy between the role of the translator as we credit it today and the diplomatic licence Mitford took creating *Tales*.

### Close reading of *Tales of Old Japan*: mediating tradition

*Hara-kiri* or *seppuku* – ritual suicide by disembowelment practiced by the *samurai* class – can be seen both as a metaphorical and chronological ‘cut’ that marked the beginning of an era of Western-style diplomacy in Japan. *Seppuku* as a ritual execution was showcased at first to appease the foreigners; these were living within very limited areas of settlement in late feudal Japan and were under constant threat of being assassinated. The assassins’ motto *sonnō-jōi*, which means ‘veneration of the Emperor, expelling of the barbarians’ was the engine that drove Japanese national thought, and the ‘criminals’ – usually *rōnin* – warriors without a signor or master – would submit to the death sentence without complaint. For *hara-kiri* in the name of the Emperor was a guaranteed way to martyrdom. So strong was the will of the westernized government of late Tokugawa Japan to demonstrate a dignified compliance to the Western Powers’ will, that the procedure would include witnesses from the European legations. This was how British legation officials, second secretary Algernon Bertram Mitford, later known as Baron Redesdale, and his close friend, the legation’s official translator, Ernest Mason Satow, were invited to witness the ceremony of *seppuku* of Taki Zenzaburō.

The ‘performance’ of *hara-kiri* and the ensuing report submitted to the British Legation became the first of Mitford’s Japanese accounts written in 1869. As the invitation of foreign representatives to the official procedure by the Meiji government was an act of political diplomacy, so the publication of the full account on Japanese affairs by Mitford became a true *tour de force* of cultural diplomacy, quenching the thirst for the exotic embodied by Japanese aesthetics – and the West enthusiastically embraced a new artistic paradigm embodying everything feudal and medieval – as opposed to modern industrial British reality.

Before the 1870s the image of Japan in the Victorian eyes was fragmented and superficial. Since the so-called ‘opening of Japan’ by Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853, naval officers, traders, diplomats, and adventurers trod the way to Japan and flooded the European book market with Japan-related travelogues. Most of the writings of this sort would gravitate towards a picturesque image of a dollhouse-like, cute, and miniature countryside inhabited by beautiful *musume* and furnished by Far Eastern paraphernalia. However, rare examples of memoirs of diplomats and naval officers (Matthew Perry and his crew, Sir Rutherford Alcock, Lawrence Oliphant,

Sherard Osborn to name a few) assigned to represent Western Powers in Japan would offer a gruesome landscape, filled with cunning and deceitful people and violent to the extreme ruffians. Mitford achieved a more nuanced and complex representation.

Amidst a scarce amount of research on Mitford as a persona, even fewer publications delve into a deep textual analysis of the *Tales*. In this regard, Toshio Yokoyama's study has done justice to Mitford's work as a threshold in the evolution of the image of Japan and is a valuable secondary source for my analysis. Morton's recent detailed biography is also proof of the need to shed light on this historical figure. The author of *Japan in the Victorian mind* (1987) Yokoyama points out general trends which shaped the strategies of publications on Japan in the late XIX century. Even before Japan was forced to break its seclusion, the British public was aware of the singularity and likeability of Japanese customs. The first author to be found responsible for the rosy image of Japan was Henry Morley, an author in Charles Dickens' magazine *Household Words*. He published an account of an imaginary vessel called *Phantom Ship* entering the port of Nagasaki as one of the several stories on yet unknown countries of the world. This publication appeared in 1851 and anticipated the actual expedition of Matthew Perry in 1853, which resulted in the first unequal treaty signed by the Japanese government in 1854 and also in the publication of the expedition's materials in the form of voluminous and raw impressions of the Commodore. The flow of information about Japan in print steadily grew along with a rise in the audience's interest. The publications of the time covered miscellaneous topics starting from the landscape and nature and extending to Japanese traditions. The leitmotif was the exemplification of the differences between the West and unique Japan.

The early 1850s were approximately the time when the idea of Japanese XIX century feudalism as a direct reflection and a counterpart of the European Middle Ages became salient in print. An image of picture-like idealised Japan was disturbed after the 1861 attack of ronin on the headquarters of the British legation. Sir Rutherford Alcock and Lawrence Oliphant, both members of the legation, submitted their memoirs in print. While Lawrence Oliphant further contributed to the plausible image created by earlier works, Alcock's opinion at some points oscillated towards unveiled dislike. After the incident, the opinions of the British audience split and the tone of the articles changed. Victorian readership was unsure whether it was worth interfering in Japanese domestic affairs and whether the presence of the world powers was detrimental to Japan at all. Around the time, so-called globe trotters flooded Japan; therefore to obtain a certain authority to pass judgement on Japan it became necessary to emphasise the length of the stay or otherwise to justify one's sources of information. This trend manifested itself even in the titles, let alone the content of the books.

A full historical overview of the underpinnings behind an image of Japan in Victorian society is beyond the scope of this article, so I will focus on the singular figure A.B. Mitford. As an author and diplomat who survived the turmoil of the Japanese civil war, who spent more than four years in Japan, and had a command of the Japanese language, Mitford and his book *Tales of Old Japan*, published in 1871, became a great revelation for most of Victorian readers. As Mitford mentions in the foreword it is the thoroughness and the comprehensiveness of his approach that stood out:

The books which have been written of late years about Japan have either been compiled from official records, or have contained the sketchy impressions of passing travellers. Of the inner life of the Japanese the world at large knows but little: their religion, their superstitions, their ways of thought, the hidden springs by which they move—all these are as yet mysteries. [...] The lord and his retainer, the warrior and the priest, the humble artisan and the despised Eta or pariah, each in his turn will become a leading character in my budget of stories; and it is out of the mouths of these personages that I hope to show forth a tolerably complete picture of Japanese society (Mitford, 1910)

The reception of Mitford's writings and their influence on the publishing trend and readership taste is seen as 'an important event in the history of ideas about Japan in British periodicals' as the publication of *Tales* gave rise to the trend for a 'quest of inner life' of the Japanese (Yokoyama, 1987, p. 88). It was the time when the aesthetics of *Japonisme* found its way to decorative art, painting, design, theatre, and literature.

Mitford matched all criteria for authorial unity in the field of Japanese writings: he possessed the knowledge, guaranteed by his long stay in the country; his position in the Legation provided access to the highest social classes and even to the Emperor's person; fluency in Japanese expanded his opportunities for research; and his effortless and exciting style of writing provided ease of consumption. On the other hand, the book matched the fashion for exotic and orientalist writing along with a high degree of fascination with the feudal past in higher British society. Perceived as being so natural and authentic, so explicitly British, Mitford, moreover, offered a palatable and relatable image of the singular oriental culture, providing a glimpse into the Japanese 'floating world,' then dissolving in the course of modernization. The *Tales* were illustrated with hand engravings made by an anonymous native artist, commissioned to do this job by the author himself.

As mentioned before, in 1869, before the publication of *Tales of Old Japan*, three articles were submitted for publication in *The Cornhill Magazine*, a prestigious and respected literary journal at the time. Two of those on Japanese sermons had cold reception, but the article on *hara-kiri* somehow met the expectations of the Victorian audience for macabre reading (it should be remembered that the time was marked by the rise of the Victorian Gothic novel, and the article went out during the part of the century marked by the popularity of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley in 1818 and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, 1897). As Robert Morton, Chuō University professor and a researcher of Mitford's life based on the personal archive and correspondence with his father, comments on Mitford's intent:

Death over dishonour was at the heart of Mitford's beliefs and he had the highest respect for the combination of courage and adherence to tradition that the *hara-kiri* demanded. [...]

He thought it important to educate the British about the *hara-kiri* and described the act in terms that Victorian upper class Englishmen would

relate to, indeed something that could almost have been part of their own gentleman's code (Morton, 2017, p. 95).

The thirst for danger and adventure, mixed in Mitford's heart with admiration for the valiant and noble, was contradictory to Mitford's primary duty in the Legation which included mostly paperwork, taking a toll on his career. He wrote to his father on his way back that he was going to provoke the interest of the British public to his writing by an upfront publication even if that meant he was paying for the publication from his own pocket. As he wrote, 'don't stick out for money – I want them in print – with my name attached – “translated by A.B. Mitford.”’<sup>1</sup>

To understand why the expertise on Japan was such a valuable symbolic commodity for Mitford, that he voluntarily risked forfeiting a significant sum of money, it is necessary to look at his biography. Algernon Bertram Mitford was the third son of Henry Reveley Mitford and a descendant of the earls of Beverly Georgiana, born in London in 1837. His family left for the continent three years later and settled down in Frankfurt am Main. Between 1842 and 1846 they spent most of their time in France. By 1846 Mitford had entered Eton College, and in 1855, Christ Church College, Oxford. After leaving university in 1858 he was appointed to the Foreign Office, and in 1863 was sent to St. Petersburg as the second secretary of the embassy. A year later he left the Russian Empire as envoy to Constantinople. In 1865 he volunteered to go to China, and finally by 1866 was transferred to Japan (Gosse, E., & Matthew, H., 2004). Mitford had two elder brothers and felt like he had to fight for his place in life, without much hope to inherit a fortune. This is probably the reason why he pushed himself to pursue both a diplomatic career as well as aspiring to gain acknowledgement as a writer - a way of symbolically conquering a new field.

Mitford's life and welfare, in the end, was hardly dependant on his years in Japan, as his fortune came from a different source rather than commission income from publications. But little did he know about it this earlier in life while preparing the *Tales* for print. As Morton writes:

Mitford could not see his future clearly, but, in combination with his fluent Japanese and Chinese, he was thinking this book could be the key to maximising the profit from his stay in the Far East. Being so calculating was frowned on by the upper classes in Britain, and even more so in Japan. But Mitford was skilled at giving the impression that he was above the rat race [...] (Morton, 2017, p. 137)

The cost of the illustrations and publication of materials he had gathered was a natural extension of the financial investment Mitford made in his decorum and native language proficiency. Mitford complained, that the cost of learning the language was not covered by the Foreign Office. Moreover, he said he had earned 400 pounds a year,

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1 Cited by Morton, 2017, p. 156 after A.B. Mitford to H.R. Mitford, 24 March, 1869.



but spent 800 pounds. “When asked whether he thought he had been extravagant, he said that such expenditure was ‘necessary if you wish to keep up your position at all towards the natives’” (Morton, 2017, p. 154) – additional evidence of the message Mitford was trying to communicate.

A.B. Mitford planned to publish the materials – collected and written down during his stay in Japan - well before his return. He carefully recorded the information from expeditions in the rural areas of the country, ordered the illustrations by Japanese artists and rewrote some of the materials, and submitted as a report to the Legation (Yokoyama, 1987. p. 92). As much as Mitford was counting on igniting an interest towards Japan in the Victorian readership, he was not expecting an immediate success of his debut on the literary field (Morton, R., 2017, p. 158).

The book turned out to be a bestseller, and hardly was there a bookshelf in Britain which could get away without it. In his desire to see the book out in print, Mitford had sold the rights on pitifully unfavourable conditions, having received only 240 pounds sterling of remuneration (which probably hardly covered the expenses of creating the illustrations), and the success of the first edition made him regret the ‘mistake which [he] made’ (Redesdale, 1915, p. 554). This may be evidence that Mitford was above all aiming to please the taste of the general audience and find a place in a highly specialized publishing market at that time.

Close reading of the text explains the popularity of Mitford’s publication. The first part of the two-volume hardback is comprised of stories which are portrayed with remarkable skill and the thrill of the explorer. Here Mitford ingeniously betrays his promise of social inclusiveness as the *samurai* class dominates the repertoire. Duty, loyalty, chivalry and justice thematically form the kernel of the book. Passages are held together by the image of the sword and the figure of the warrior or fighter, who sometimes is exemplified by *samurai* or *rōnin*, and sometimes by a person in a position of the outlaw – *otokodate* – in competition with samurai. The plot either revolves around sentimental love and the crimes justified by the feelings of the characters, or an offence avenged by homicide. Even the story of an Eta<sup>2</sup> Maiden is actually the telling of the story of a samurai lord, who has fallen in a ‘forbidden’ love with the woman from the despised class. The plots of the stories mutually overlap to the extent that the Russian translation of the *Tales* (2011) was published under the title *The Legends of Samurai*, severely uprooting the intention of the author to create a holistic image of the society, but creatively summarising the impression the finished work provides.

In the first place, I want to focus on the mode of narration and its distinctive features. The very first opening passage is offering us a story, which will become probably the most iconic image of the military prowess of Japanese warriors’ – the tale of the forty-seven *rōnin*. A narrator, the yet invisible author, depicts a view of the Edo landscape as if giving us a first-person immersive impression or framing a tableau.

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2 Pariah, a group of outcasts related to unclean jobs involving human and animal corpses

I beg my readers to fancy themselves wafted away to the shores of the Bay of Yedo—a fair, smiling landscape [...]

In the midst of a nest of venerable trees in Takanawa, a suburb of Yedo, is hidden Sengakuji, or the Spring-hill Temple, renowned throughout the length and breadth of the land for its cemetery, which contains the graves of the Forty-seven. Rōnins, famous in Japanese history, heroes of Japanese drama, the tale of whose deeds I am about to transcribe.

On the left-hand side of the main court of the temple is a chapel, in which, surmounted by a gilt figure of Kwanyin, the goddess of mercy, are enshrined the images of the forty-seven men, and of the master whom they loved so well. The statues are carved in wood, the faces coloured, and the dresses richly lacquered; as works of art they have great merit—the action of the heroes, each armed with his favourite weapon, being wonderfully life-like and spirited. [...] (Mitford, 1910)

The above selected passages offer only a taste of the visual references and intriguing comparisons. This is a picturesque introduction, which then follows in a third-person narrative similar to that of Victorian novels and ghost stories. The narrative of the incident of the past is mixed with the fantasy of the author to the extent that it is hard to distinguish what was told to him by his anonymous informant and what was added to season the dry facts.

As brackets, encircling the authentic Japanese story reproduced in details, the author provides a frame of the narrator's figure wandering around the temple.

A silver key once admitted me to a private inspection of the relics. We were ushered, my friend and myself, into a back apartment of the spacious temple, overlooking one of those marvelous miniature gardens, cunningly adorned with rockeries and dwarf trees, in which the Japanese delight. One by one, carefully labelled and indexed boxes containing the precious articles were brought out and opened by the chief priest. (Mitford, 1910)

As the silver key opens the gate to the treasury and boxes are opened in front of the narrator's eyes, the stories, contained in the frame of Mitford's own's words and impressions, are deployed in a carefully coordinated way. In the manner of an experienced playwright, the author not only gallantly offers his viewpoint as a lens to observe the scenery, but he also steps onto the stage to escort the reader through the plot, providing exhaustive explanations to what we might stumble upon during the journey.

*The Tale of the Forty-seven rōnin* or *Chūshingura*, a story of Ako ronin, or a story of Forty-seven loyal retainers, hardly needs any further introduction and the person to be praised for that should undoubtedly be Mitford. Previous accounts (such as short articles on Japanese art and drama in popular periodicals of the time including *London Illustrated News*, *Blackwood Magazine* and *Cornhill Magazine*) on Japanese literature and theatre mention the story, but in a fraction of the length of Mitford's depiction.

The visibility of the author in the text is important. On one hand, Mitford was well aware of himself and his position within the Japanese landscape. The authorial presence in his writing, quite alien to comprehensive ethnographic research of the Japanese people and society, is well-founded in the genre of travelogue and more so in guidebooks. It gives an interpretative lens for the reader, who will supposedly relate to the reassuring persona of the author and will be invited to share a vantage point of the educated gentleman on another culture.

Self-awareness which borders on narcissism is evident in Mitford's letters and diaries. A passage of Mitford fleeing the fire from the Legation is described in the following manner:

As I was shaving, my Chinese servant came and told me that there was a fire two-thirds a mile off. 'All-right,' I said. 'When I am dressed I will go and see it'. Little did I know the rapidity of flames in a native town. By the time I had shaved I saw that there would be just time to huddle on a pair of trousers and a pea-jacket. (Redesdale, 1915, p. 382)

The anecdotes of British nobility, preferring to perish in flames to showing up in public underdressed or breaking a daily hygiene routine for the sake of seeking refuge from all-consuming fire has become quite proverbial. This is only one anecdotal example of how Mitford saw and presented himself and created an image of a *sang-froid* and impeccably groomed gentleman, and there are plenty more in his writings.

The tales Mitford is telling are permeated with noble intentions, courage and valour irrespective of how mundane the setting might appear. For instance, when portraying the death of Chōbei of Bandzuin, who was deceived and tricked into entering a 'bath-room', which became his execution room, Mitford dramatizes the scene:

So he went to the bath-room, and, leaving his clothes outside, he got into the bath, with the full conviction that it would be the place of his death. Yet he never trembled nor quailed, determined that, if he needs must die, no man should say he had been a coward. (Mitford, 1910)

Thus, a narrative of trickery and outwitting by the foes of Chōbei is turned into a self-sacrificial act for the sake of demonstrating courage, pride, and indifference.

Another distinctive feature of Mitford's writing is narration that fictionalizes events to the point that the text becomes like the script for a drama. Mitford is prone to attribute deep feelings to his characters: characterizations which sit well within his own personal code of conduct, fulfilling the demand for romantic, inner conflict and justifying the character's actions in the eyes of readers. While depicting the *hara-kiri* in *Memoirs*, he mentions that the gruesome scene had so intimidated the French officers on a previous occasion of a mass execution to the point where the head of the French legation stopped the ceremony half-way through, as they were unable to keep watching.

The whole spectacle was so gruesome that when eleven men had died—this being the number of the murdered victims—the Frenchmen could hold out no longer, and Captain du Petit Thouars prayed that the remaining nine men might be spared. His account of the scene to me was blood-curdling. Brave man as he was—one of the bravest—it nearly made him sick only to think of it, and his voice faltered as with difficulty he told the tale. (Redesdale, 1915, p. 446)

Satow, writing on the same issue, contemplates the French marine's impetus in a more biblical eye-for-eye way. However, even his assessment offers more practical and rational reasoning behind French captain's behaviour compared to Mitford's text.

Twenty were condemned to death, and one could only regret that Captain du Petit Thouars judged it necessary to stop the execution when eleven had suffered, for the twenty were all equally guilty, and requiring a life for life of the eleven Frenchmen looked more like revenge than justice. (Satow, 1921, p. 347)

Captain du Petit Thouars himself gives pragmatic reasoning for his actions in a report to his superior. As mentioned by Bargen, a French officer was worried about the change of the place of execution and returned to his ship and crew, postponing the rest of the ceremony to the next day (Bargen, 2006, p. 133).

Meanwhile it was getting late; the weather was threatening, and I deemed it important to join the boats again, so that our men might be aboard before dark. To demand the postponement to the next day of the execution of the men that remained did not appear practical. I determined, therefore, as soon as the eleventh head should have fallen, to inform Mr. Godoi that in view of the manner in which the engagement had been kept, I begged him to suspend the execution [...] (United States Department of State, 1868–1869, p. 713)

This report was written on March 16, 1868, the day after the execution. No one but Mitford presents the action – no doubt unpleasant to see –with stirring epithets such as 'blood-curdling' and 'gruesome'.

This example is not the only which might put the objectivity of Mitford's writing under a question mark. To be added, even contemporaries found Japanese-related 'faith in fakes' to be worrisome. As Tokyo University linguistics professor, British by descent, translator and author B. H. Chamberlain wrote:

The foreigner cannot refuse the bolus thus artfully forced down his throat. He is not suspicious by nature. How should he imagine that people who make such positive statements about their own country are merely exploiting his credulity? He has reached a stage of culture where such mythopoeia has become impossible. On the other hand, to control information by consulting original sources lies beyond his capacity. (Chamberlain, 1933)

Captive to a fascination with dignified masculinity, Mitford relishes in blurring the boundaries between ‘stages of culture’.

What remains omitted from the frame of Mitford’s *Tales* is no less characteristic. The Chinese servant is fleetingly mentioned in the passage about the fire – and hardly ever seen again – discreetly leaving the baron’s unperturbed lonely figure to loiter in *Tales* and *Memories*. The name of this servant was Lin Fu and he accompanied Mitford to Japan from China. Obviously, Mitford was fond of him, but also secluded him within a very narrow inner space of his personal life, as the servant likely could not speak any language except Chinese. The selectivity of Mitford’s writing resurfaces in the omission of the detail of his having fathered a child with a Japanese woman: left out from both his memoirs and private correspondence.

The British sense of controlled humour and the spirit of Enlightenment in contrast to the ‘natives’ manifests itself as a narrative as well as a compositional device. In the story of Eta Maiden,

The mounted escort of the British Legation executed a brilliant charge of cavalry down an empty road; a very pretty line of skirmishers along the fields fired away a great deal of ammunition with no result [...]. In fact, it was like fox-hunting: it had “all the excitement of war, with only ten per cent of the danger.”(Mitford, 1910)

This haughty view from the perceived vantage point of civilization and technological advancement on the so called ‘backward’ Japanese warfare is taken further by seizing the higher moral ground in the following passage:

The first thought of the kind-hearted doctor of the British Legation was for the poor old woman who had been wounded, and was bemoaning herself piteously. When she was carried in, a great difficulty arose, which, I need hardly say, was overcome; for the poor old creature belonged to the Etas, the Pariah race, whose presence pollutes the house even of the poorest and humblest Japanese; and the native servants strongly objected to her being treated as a human being [...] (Mitford, 1910)

Whilst the Western morality leaves no human behind and is merciful even to the people who insulted and chased the Westerners on the dark empty streets of Yedo, the Japanese reject the *Eta* woman, though she is of their own race. While fulfilling the agenda of describing the salient view on all classes of Japanese society, Mitford misses no opportunity to point out the higher standing of European morality. His limited capacity for self-critique is demonstrated later in briefly admitting the flaws of Englishmen in not following the Japanese etiquette and only reconfirms a sense of control and the confidence of access to the ‘native’ culture.

At these the visitor is warned by a notice to take off his boots, a request which Englishmen, with characteristic disregard of the feelings of others, usually neglect to comply with. (Mitford, 1910)

Mitford's awareness of the etiquette accompanying the admission into the cultural space of Japan allows him to traverse cultural barriers. An etiquette is comprised of both respect and also a conservative code of conduct which manifests itself in a comportment. Its reason is not necessarily understood by an actor but by observing it they acknowledge the tradition and the expectation of the second party to fulfil the protocol. The same way a tombstone is a reverent keeper of a selected past, which acknowledges and translates its importance to posterity.

A key will open a cemetery gate again in the introductory passage of the story of Gompachi and Komurasaki:

Through all this discourse about temples and tea-houses, I am coming by degrees to the goal of our pilgrimage—two old stones, mouldering away in a rank, overgrown graveyard [...] The key is kept by a ghoulish old dame, almost as time-worn and mildewed as the tomb over which she watches. Obedient to our call, and looking forward to a fee ten times greater than any native would give her, she hobbles out, and, opening the gate, points out the stone bearing the inscription, the "Tomb of the Shiyoku". (Mitford, 1910)

This passage gives us another dimension of Mitford's writing style oscillating from grim depictions of battles and combats, death and graveyards to the pastoral countryside. The only point in the middle is the practical transactions with the so called gate-keepers of the past. The tombs of the forty-seven ronin will open the stories, and the plot will unveil while the reader is silently standing in front of forty-eight stones. Tombstones of star-crossed lovers will open the passage on Gompachi and Komurasaki. Another graveyard will be visited in Zōzōji temple – the burial place of the *Shōguns* in Yedo. The stories, which were spun around the gruesome sight of Taki Zenzaburō, taking his own life in front of despised foreigners, meander around their author's visits of one memorial site after another. Metaphorically Mitford was witnessing the death of the Japanese feudal state, and he did not conceal his awe and grief towards Medieval Japan, even though the political demolition of this very system guaranteed his free movement in the country:

The feudal system has passed away like a dissolving view before the eyes of those who have lived in Japan during the last few years. But when they arrived there it was in full force, and there is not an incident narrated in the following pages, however strange it may appear to Europeans, for the possibility and probability of which those most competent to judge will not vouch. Nor, as many a recent event can prove, have heroism, chivalry, and devotion gone out of the land altogether. (Mitford, 1910)

The title of his writing – tales of 'Old Japan' – also implies that the country he is writing about remained in the past, and the book itself is a metaphorical engraving on a tombstone of the Shōgunate.

The elements of Japanese culture Mitford admired the most were exactly the relics of the past. Feudalism (chivalry was an exemplary quality of the feudal hero) was

opposed to the pragmatic thought of the age of almighty capital, promoting merchants to the leading roles and pushing people of noble descent – including Mitford himself – to the back lines. Furthermore, the reason for Mitford to return home was boredom – he survived the most dangerous years of the political feuds, and peaceful times along with a routine of diplomatic service did not please his taste. Neither did they provide exciting material for publication. The success of a diplomatic mission was precisely what has eliminated the challenge of political manoeuvring and gave impetus to modernization in Japan, wiping away all the exotic charm and the adventure of overcoming inaccessibility. Ages of presumable chivalry were eradicated, Japan was quickly turning into a Western country whereas Mitford was the one to advocate Japan staying as pure (and naïve) as possible. Mitford, as he wrote in a letter to his father, had no intention of seeing the baby teething (Morton, 2017, p. 138). As he admitted in the lecture *Old and New Japan*: ‘indeed, I sometimes think that no retrograde or reactionary Samurai of the old school could look back on those times more regretfully than I do’ (Redesdale, 1913).

No tombstone happens without death, and the honourable deaths entombed in the stories involve and revolve around swords. As an epitome but also a relic of the pristine chivalric culture, the image of the sword is highly visible in the *Tales*. Mitford renders the story of the Kazuma Revenge as ‘The Tale of the Sword’ (Mitford, 1910) and starts it with a preface devoted to a swordsmith in Osaka and the craftsmanship of blacksmiths in general. But in reality, there is more than one tale of the sword, involving vital issues of ownership and connoisseurship. The story of the Otokodate of Yedo, which links to the story of Gompachi and Komurasaki, has its beginning in an argument about the swordsmith that produced a family heirloom of one of the characters, and while Nagoya Sanza – a popular warrior trope in kabuki theatre – turns out to be right, the other samurai decide to kill him for the humiliation they feel for having mistaken a work by a famous artisan. Mitford further consolidates the image which is covertly present in the narrative and justifies his choice of the belligerent topic by the acknowledgement that ‘It is a law that he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword. In Japan, where there exists a large armed class over whom there is practically little or no control, party and clan broils, and single quarrels ending in bloodshed and death, are matters of daily occurrence’ (Mitford, 1910).

A thrill of danger Mitford felt blended well into a picture of the feudal world in a form of a knightly tournament. A defeat is a loss of one’s face which metaphorically equals death. The Lady of Roses remains immaculate even in the brothel according to the supreme rule of the genre, and all the characters in the list are abiding to their roles. No wonder this world felt less chaotic and invigorated with a real taste for live – as opposed to repulsive death – but it was nevertheless artificial in its core. As an outsider, Mitford lived in Japan through the time of a civil war and witnessed bloodshed every day, but it is a grave overestimation to think that unmotivated homicide was an everyday reality for the Japanese capital.

### **Orientations and strategies behind Mitford's writing**

The features of the Mitford's writing style, discussed in the first part of this article, have been reflected in the selection of the texts for publication. What attracted Mitford to the Orient in the first place was a formative experience built on a visually presented fantasy of excess. Mitford himself describes the circumstances of his appointment in the memoirs:

I too, as a child, had dreams which carried me far away. A kind aunt had given me a set of so-called rice-paper pictures of lovely imperial ladies with architectural structures of hair on their heads, gentlemen clad in purple silk robes with ephods embroidered with five-clawed golden dragons, drawings of vividly-coloured flowers and fruit, of horror-striking tortures, unheard of out of Tartarus, being inflicted upon bleeding criminals. But beyond all was the story of Aladdin falling in love with the Princess Badroulbadoor on her way to the bath at Peking. My young brain was aflame with the longing to go to China and see all these things. (Mitford, 1915, p. 328)

This passage substantiates his collector's zeal mentioned in his introductory remarks to the *Tales*' sub-section of Fairy-tales:

Knowing the interest which many children of a larger growth take in such Baby Stories, I was anxious to have collected more of them. I was disappointed, however, for those which I give here are the only ones which I could find in print; and if I asked the Japanese to tell me others, they only thought I was laughing at them, and changed the subject. (Mitford, 1910)

It is easy to believe that Mitford collected children's stories partly for his own interest in the Far East which was influenced by a children's book in the first place. Another substantial notice to be taken is the behaviour of the native informants he points out. The stories were fixed in their print versions even in the land of their origins. In his pursuit of the unique content for his translations, Mitford encountered an unforeseen resistance. The informants refused to discuss the folklore with a British diplomat. The intercultural communication with the informants could not be easily established, probably due to lack of consensus on genre and folklore – a well-established, by that time, viewpoint on the orality of the European folklore as a cradle of the national identity. This idea was far from finding its way in Japanese discourse.

An article by *The London Illustrated News*, published on March 5, 1859, might shed some light on the assortment of the books in a 'native Japanese bookshop'. The correspondent mentions numerous publications on education, books from the Confucian canon, and more:

The small works to be found in every shop, and sold for a few cash to the children, are objects of great curiosity. They are profusely illustrated, and in some cases very carefully and skilfully so. [...] From the Chinese



introductions which are prefixed to several of them, it is plain that the subject of the books are narratives or stories connected with their national history [...]. It is thus a military taste is nurtured amongst the people. (Bennett, Cortazzi, Hoare, 2006, p. 59).

The reason Mitford's writing focused around similar topics can be explained 'merely' by the availability of the primary sources he could translate. Mitford, whose passion towards everything exotic was ignited by a children's book on China, could see no reason to omit Japanese fairy tales. Mitford's curiosity, however, was met by the natives' bemusement of a plain ignorance towards the publications he never attempted to translate. As Anthony Pym suggests in his *Method in Translation History* (1998), the meaningful source of information can be found not only in the selection of texts which were translated, retranslated, or re-printed but also in a conceptual absence of certain texts and non-translations within a target culture's discourse.

The heterogenous content of the book, containing *kabuki* plays along with historical documents, children's fairy tales and reports on such a horrific ceremony as *hara-kiri*, was skilfully bound together and levelled by a smooth writing style with apt commentaries. However, the rhetoric behind the book's value was to give an impression of an authentic Japanese text. The quest for authenticity was reflected on a meta-textual level – manifesting the text to be a genuine product of Japanese culture – and in the text itself with the attempts of the author to do justice to a Japanese text, saving peculiarities of Japanese long titles and unfamiliar terms with no counterpart in English. Yokoyama (1987) points out several distinctive features of Mitford's writing, which provide a useful reflection upon the influence of his writing on contemporary Victorian society. In the first place, Mitford uses the strategy of foreignizing when describing the phenomena, which could be seen by the Victorians as sinful. The examples of this are direct loanwords such as *hara-kiri* or *kaishaku*.<sup>3</sup> Direct adoption of the specific terms, according to Yokoyama, is a sign of recognition of certain traditions as having no counterpart in European culture.

In other cases, he proposes unusual and non-conventional associations between terms. The word *samurai* is translated as gentleman, drawing inevitably the association with British nobility. In this case, Mitford confronts the writing of Sir Rutherford Alcock, who tended to call *samurai* 'ruffians' or 'swashbucklers'. Noteworthy, that Victorian writers were prone to the appropriation of Japanese culture in English terms. In one instance the correspondent of *The London Illustrated News* even renders the Gempei War as the War of The Roses.<sup>4</sup>

Another difference from the majority of writers lies in Mitford's knowledge of Japanese. While most of the travellers (and even diplomats, such as Alcock and Parkes) relied generally on observations, Mitford was trying to have the story written down by the reliable informant and then to translate the text.

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3 An adjutant of the person, committing seppuku. His duty was to cut off the head of the sentenced.

4 Bennett, Cortazzi, Hoare, 2006. p. 59.

The last feature is that Mitford explicitly avoids patronising Japanese culture from the viewpoint of Christian morality or mainstream Victorian ideas. For instance, while Christian beliefs taught that suicide is a grievous sin, and Victorians referred to *hara-kiri* as a 'happy dispatch', Mitford's rhetoric lies beyond these popular concepts and shares his understanding of the 'Japanese' perspective of the named cultural phenomenon. The respect Mitford pays to Japanese culture of the military class as a counterpart of English gentry while admitting that their rituals and cults might have no equivalent in a hierarchy of the Western values and virtues, and standing as a witness of the disintegration of the feudal world, is closely intertwined with the 'respect' Japanese officials paid to the Westerners allowing them to witness the sacred ritual of disembowelment of Taki Zenzaburō. This intention to demonstrate the obligation of the Japanese court to the Europeans was reciprocated by the first British to ever see *seppuku* with his own eyes and his loyalty became an asset that Japanese were to use at a later stage. More importantly, there is a secondary framework to Mitford's stories, beside the fieldwork-style overtures and landscapes. That is the frame of faithfulness as translation.

### The Diplomat as a translator

The foundation of the theory of translation in the Western world may be metaphorically seen in the reflection on the legend of Septuagint, which, in the words of André Lefevere:

has given us the basic categories of the history of translation. These categories are: authority (the authority of the person or institution commissioning or, later, publishing the translation: the patron; the authority of the text to be translated [...]; the authority of the writer of the original [...]), and the authority of the culture that receives the translation), expertise, which is guaranteed and checked, trust, which survives bad translations, and image, the image a translation creates of an original, its author, its literature, its culture. (Translation, history, and culture, 1990, p 17)

For a long time, the Western world remained multilingual, and all the literati of Europe were expected to share at least one language in common – first Latin and then French – until the end of the Enlightenment. This made translation unnecessary. It served merely as an exercise in achieving language proficiency. However, by the end of the XVIII century, the rise of Romanticism, which venerated the national literature, and a great increase in literacy by the beginning of the XIX century split the readership into a wider audience and scholars. That was the time when translation properly came into play. The translations and their publications split into two uneven groups as well, separating specialised translations published by translators for the scholars working in the same field, and regular translations aimed at a wider audience.

The notion of the 'original' work was contemplated differently as well, and a translation could take the form of an adaptation and even of another original, the power balance between an author of the original and a translator gravitating towards

equilibrium rather than to unequivocal acknowledgement of the dominance of the original (Brown, 2012).

If we let Mitford speak for himself, we would find out his presentation of the work on the *Tales* was mostly one of the translator, with the translation activity organically blended into his routine:

I rise at seven after a cup of tea in bed, Eastern fashion – till nine I dress and dawdle. Then I have my official work and letters to write. This occupies me until twelve when I breakfast. At one I have a class of three Japanese whom I am teaching English. At about half past two I go out, returning at five. I then work at my translations for about two hours, after which dinner is ready, and at eight I work away again until 10 or eleven o'clock when I go to bed.<sup>5</sup>

The following question then must undoubtedly emerge. In what proportion can Mitford's work be counted as a translation? In the first place, the nature of the book is heterogeneous. The author sporadically mentions the sources of his information, which can be considered as source texts, loosely binding the stories with ample reasoning concerning his interpretation of Japanese culture or the circumstances of his artistic endeavour. As one of the examples of Mitford's strategic use of the term 'translation,' which has already been mentioned, Mitford contemplated his three articles, published in 1869, as translations, even though he had clearly based at least one of them on his own report written for the legation.

As the author mentioned at multiple places in the text of the *Tales*, his method of deriving information may be divided into several groups (Mitford, 1910).

Proper translation:

[...] Translated from a native book called the "Yedo Hanjôki," or Guide to the prosperous City of Yedo, and other sources.

The proper translation of the text, written in Japanese by native informant at Mitford's demand:

[...] I translated it from a paper drawn up for me by a Japanese who was able to speak of what he had seen himself.

And Mitford's own interpretation of the stories, told by eye-witnesses or connoisseurs:

[...] The case of a young fellow, only twenty years old, of the Choshu clan, which was told me the other day by an eye-witness [...]

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5 Cited in Morton, 2017, p. 137 after the letter of A.B. Mitford to H.R. Mitford, 11 December 1868.

Mitford's role was far beyond the contemporary conventional understanding of the translator's contribution. Mitford acted at the same time as the patron, as author, interpreter, translator and compiler. Moreover, he ordered a set of illustrations, acting as a layout artist and editor, in an attempt to recreate an authentic experience for the reader and stage his storytelling. Even though in the modern age of copyright his text can be called an original, during the Victorian times he could definitely claim publishing the translation, giving his work more first-hand credibility. Such a method was used by Horace Walpole in the *Otranto Castle* novel as an artistic device, known as a translation of a non-existing original. This would have placed a seal of professionalism on him as a diplomat, showcasing a virtue of proficiency in Japanese and therefore enjoying all the advantages of such an approach without strenuous responsibilities of the sole author of the ground-breaking work. As P. Rangarajan mentions with regard to the early translation of *The Arabian Nights*, 'the extent to which "good" oriental tales were considered the result of a translative process that obscured author identity and involved substantial rewriting, implying that regardless of the intrinsic value of original oriental tales, an excellent one was always assumed to have been subjected to substantive translative tampering' (Rangarajan, 2014).

Mitford's diplomatic career, permeating into the text, conflicts with the beliefs he advocates. He praises straightforward courage and integrity in following the code of the gentleman as opposed to outmanoeuvring and outwitting the opponent. Here the trope of Nagoya Sanza, who lost his life in a fight over the authenticity of a respected item, misidentification of which was portrayed almost like sacrilege, is embedded in the promoted set of values. It is disrupted by Mitford's career as a diplomat with a constant play of minds as a *modus operandi* for all diplomatic service. This tension is projected onto his translational tampering and the grey zone of his work is on the borderline between translation and authentic creative work, between truth and embellished version of his perception of such, which is disturbingly close to misinterpretation.

### Reception of *Tales*

Mitford's promotion of Japanese culture yielded impressive results. After his return, he was treated as probably the most authoritative expert in the field. It was only with his mediation that the Japanese government was granted a bank loan to build a railway, and he participated in a mission to Japan to negotiate an establishment of a submarine telegraph line. Gilbert and Sullivan used Mitford's expertise during the preparation of the *Mikado* opera, and he was the person to reproduce the tune of *Miya-sama* piece for a record.

In 1906, after Japan's victory over Russia, Mitford was granted the title of Baron Redesdale to accompany Prince Arthur on the mission of a highest diplomatic influence – to present an Order of Garter to the Meiji emperor. Even forty years after he resigned from the Foreign Office, Mitford was still an acknowledged expert on Japanese matters and read lectures as such.

However, his major achievement remained the publication of *Tales*. Robert Morton observes, that ‘the press wrote about the *Tales* at length, clearly considering their appearance to be newsworthy’ (Morton, 2017, p. 160). Opinion was on the spectrum between the highest praises to accusations of simplifying characters to the level that they become caricatures.

It is noteworthy that intending to emphasise the sense of honour, duty and spirit of chivalry in Japanese culture, Mitford has distilled a popular image of *samurai*. A Japanese warrior values his honour over his life, is loyal to the lord till the last breath and follows a strict code of conduct, which forbids to take an offence lightly. This symbol, featured in theatre and literature, became the frontline in cultural diplomacy. This motif was incorporated later in works by Nitobe Inazō and Ruth Benedict among others.

A vivid image of the warrior, armed with a pair of swords, ready to take the life of himself as easily as one of the enemy, became so deeply embedded in the Victorian mind, that it found its reflection in the ‘Mikado’ opera, exploiting the public impression of the Japanese as a bloodthirsty, irrational nation. As mentioned by Morton (2017, p. 162) ‘[i]n Mitford’s stories, so many of the deaths stem from trivial matters – the vendetta in *The Forty-Seven Rōnin* originates in nothing more than insulting behaviour. Such stories seem to invite the kind of parody they get in *The Mikado*’.

Among the writers, referencing Mitford’s book, there are both Western and Japanese scholars. Basil Hall Chamberlain, the author of *Things Japanese*, mentions the *Tales*. Almost thirty years after the first publication, Nitobe Inazō, the contributor to the worldwide popularity of *Bushido*, references Mitford as ‘by a far abler writer, whose book is not much read now-a-days’ and in his chapter on *hara-kiri* acknowledging that he has nothing to add to Mitford’s observations (Nitobe, 1918). Even though Nitobe assumes that Mitford’s writing is losing popularity, after the first edition in 1871, the second edition followed in 1874 and was succeeded by multiple reprints up to 2012 (even though the e-book was uploaded into the public domain in 2004).

The book was published in Russian as *Legends of Samurai. Traditions of Old Japan* in a commissioned translation by O. Sidorova in 2011.

The combination of martial art with philosophy is the main tradition of *samurai*. As a courageous warrior, sophisticated poet and inspired artist the *samurai* is always eager to sacrifice his life for the greatest ideals. In the foundation of this unique phenomenon lies the philosophy of *Bushido* (Way of the Warrior) – a harmony of the unquestioned belief and an ability to appreciate the beauty in all its manifestations. (translation from Russian)

This advertising blurb published on the Internet, proclaims *Bushido* as the backbone of the narrative, closing the loop of cross-references of the Japanese ideology, circling it back to the British diplomat of the Imperial era.

Mitford’s legacy is mostly buried in history nowadays, overshadowed by his infamous descendants and influential contemporaries. However, through research on

his diplomatic career and artistic endeavours, I conclude that Mitford's influence and the imagery he inspired with his writings are seen in the popular view on samurai until nowadays. Moreover, his worldview expressed through the corpus of texts produced through the process of creative translation of the personal experience into a text palatable for a wide audience has never been critically re-interpreted and assessed. Mitford's agency that exceeded a conventional translator's authority is a key to understanding the implications permeating the text. One of them is the formation and imposition of a taste Mitford demonstrated in the compilation of the subjects for his book. When seen in the wider context of his works, it is noticeable how homogenous is the representation and therefore the scope of its selectiveness. Secondly, Mitford claimed the role of a translator – the figure whose invisibility has been only recently theorised – while in reality he was a magnifying lens emphasizing and amplifying certain features. The influence Mitford's *Tales* had on contemporary representations of immersive military aesthetics is hardly charted, and it is up to the scholars of the XXI century to outline it. Mitford's legacy can become an important case study on the forging of the soft power of the sword.

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### Bibliographical Note

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THE “PARTIAL” ORIENTALIST:  
LIN YUTANG’S *FAMOUS CHINESE SHORT STORIES* AND THE  
SOFT POWER OF CHINESE TRADITION

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**Introduction**

Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895–1976) was, and still is, one of the rare Chinese writers who wrote primarily in English, and made a career of being the chief interpreter of Chinese culture to the West for three decades. During Lin’s stay in the US from 1936 to 1966, at the invitation of Pearl S. Buck, he produced some 30 English works to transfer Chinese culture, philosophy, and customs to the Western audience. He was hailed as the “foremost Chinese scholar in the West” in the twentieth century (*The New York Times* 1976: 57), and as a “cultural ambassador” between China and the United States (Qian 2015: 1). However, many of these works, some of which are bestsellers in Lin’s time, have now faded into oblivion and hardly receive any attention from the English readership. In contrast, Lin’s work has enjoyed a revival of interest in the Chinese-speaking world. Not only have his books been reprinted, back-translated, and adapted for film and television in both Taiwan and the Chinese mainland since the 1980s, more recently, there has been a significant amount of scholarly effort to reassess Lin’s cultural legacy and his place in literary history. This reassessment has inevitably been complicated by the translingual and transcultural dimensions of Lin’s work.

A critical commonplace in Lin Yutang’s reception is the perceived internalisation of Orientalism in Lin’s work, a type of Self-Orientalisation that succumbs to the colonial power dynamics between China and the West, as well as the power of the American literary market. As early as 1945, Edmund Wilson lamented that Lin was Americanised and deliberately produced English works which fit Western expectations of Chinese culture (1945: 73–74). *Famous Chinese Short Stories: Retold by Lin Yutang* (hereafter *FCSS*), published by the John Day company in 1952, offers a particularly revealing case study of this charge due to its subject matter. *FCSS* contains twenty traditional Chinese tales, from both literati and popular sources, which Lin Yutang selected, edited and rewrote in English with Western story-telling techniques. In a rather crudely titled review in *The New York Times*, “The Sauce is Chinese,” Mai-Mai Sze praised Lin’s skilful retelling of the stories and their popular appeal to a wide circle of American readers (1952: 4). Contemporary critics are less accommodating. Qian Suoqiao claims that Lin’s rewriting was so market-driven and readership-oriented that his approach to traditional Chinese culture and pre-modern society was one of appropriation (2011: 190). Charles Laughlin charges that the approach with which Lin packaged Chinese tradition smacks of Orientalism as it caters to Western taste and distorts the true colour of Chinese tradition (2015: 39).



Further, Madalina Yuk-Ling Lee characterises Lin's stance on Chinese tradition as "elite-populist", which satisfied the reading expectations of his upper-middlebrow audience in the US (2009: 126–27).

Although Orientalism can be a useful critical framework in which to discuss Lin Yutang's work, much of the existing Orientalist critique can be limiting and reductive, and is itself heavily readership-oriented. While the East-West axis is an important one in Lin's literary production, not enough attention has been given to the tradition-modernity axis, which, to my mind, lies at the core of Lin's rewriting. In this article, I re-examine Lin's intricate process of rewriting in the production of *FCSS* to reveal a more complex stance vis-à-vis Orientalism. I characterise this cultural position as that of a *partial* Orientalist, in the sense that Lin's Orientalism was incomplete, and it betrayed his partiality for Chinese cultural values. In other words, Lin's unique cultural stance exhibited an ambiguity that nevertheless fragmented Orientalism as a cohesive system of thought. Moreover, "partial" could be understood as a strategic fragmentation of traditional Chinese culture. Lin's selective approach to Chinese tradition and his highlight of the modern potential embedded within Chinese tradition revealed an alternative vision of Chinese modernity.

I begin with an analysis of Lin's reinterpretation of the traditional Chinese cultural ideal *xingling* 性灵 [authentic expression of individuality] in the 1920s and 1930s, which illustrates his distinct approach to Chinese cultural tradition and its modernisation. Then, through close reading of the textual and paratextual elements in *FCSS*, I demonstrate how Lin's rewriting of traditional Chinese tales is informed by his re-interpretation of *xingling*, and conversely, how the modernity of his re-interpretation is conveyed and embodied in his selection of the tales, his rewriting strategies, and his adoption of certain modern story-telling techniques. I will also compare Lin's work with the rewritings of three other prominent Chinese writers (Lu Xun 鲁迅, Wang Zengqi 汪曾祺 and Wang Xiaobo 王小波) to illustrate that the rewriting and reinterpretation of traditional Chinese literature has been an integral part of the Chinese pursuit of modernity throughout the 20th century.

I will therefore shift the context of *FCSS*, and much of Lin's literary practice in the US, away from the US readership and reception, and reconnect it with the deeper roots of Chinese modernity. Yet there is no denying the fact Lin's works were written in English, and that they were without doubt vehicles of cultural diplomacy. However, by firmly situating Lin's English works in China's struggle towards its modernisation, I argue that works such as *FCSS* project a soft power of Chinese tradition that transcends the ephemeral goal of the "likeability" of Chinese culture in the West, as it is ultimately concerned with the construction of an alternative Chinese modernity that subtly resists the dominant discourse of Western modernity. This shift of perspective also pinpoints the fact that the construction of Chinese modernity is inherently cross-cultural and transnational in scope, and its trajectory goes beyond national and linguistic borders.

### Lin Yutang’s Reinterpretation of *Xingling*

In the 1920s and 1930s, Lin Yutang was noted for his affiliation with three literary ideals<sup>1</sup> – *xingling* 性灵 [authentic expression of individuality], *xianshi* 闲适 [leisure], and *youmo* 幽默 [humour], which he promoted against the tide of the dominant May Fourth New Cultural Movement (Wu Si xin wenhua yundong 五四新文化运动) (hereinafter the May Fourth). Both *xingling* and *xianshi* are traditional Chinese ideals that harken back to the late Ming dynasty in the 17th century, and in juxtaposition with the concept of humour imported from the West, they seemed at odds with the mainstream May Fourth discourse which advocated the eradication of the Confucian literati tradition and the borrowing of Western science and technology to realise Chinese modernity.

However, Lin’s treatise on *xingling* involved a considerable amount of reinterpretation that blurred the lines between Chinese tradition and Chinese modernity. In “Lun wen” 论文 [On literature] and “Ji xingling” 记性灵 [On xingling], Lin wrote:<sup>2</sup>

“*Xingling* is none other than self” (*xingling* jiushi ziwo 性灵就是自我) (1994: 147).

Each person has his own *gexing* 个性 [personality], this Personality [originally in English] unrestrainedly and freely expressed in literature is called *xingling*. In literature, what calls to give free rein to one’s personality has always been called *xingling*. *Xingling* is Personality. (1936: 525–26)

In “Lun wen”, Lin further stated that *xingling* writers and Western expressionists, despite being from different historical and cultural backgrounds, reached a consensus on the criteria of literary creation. Sohigian has observed the interesting trajectory of Lin’s discovery of the values of *xingling* writers in the late Ming via Croce’s and Spingarn’s theories of expressionism of the early 20th century (2015: 118). Lin’s appreciation of Western aesthetics and literary criticism prompted him to embark on a reassessment of the legacy of Chinese tradition.

*Xingling* was first proposed as a literary ideal by the Gong’an school (gong’an pai 公安派)<sup>3</sup> in the late Ming. In his preface to his brother Yuan Zhongdao’s 袁中道 (1560–1624) poetry collection, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610) pointed out

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- 1 In the 1930s Lin launched three journals in Shanghai, in which the literary ideals of *xingling* 性灵, *xianshi* 闲适 and *youmo* 幽默 were proposed, explained and popularised. The three journals are *Lunyu banyuekan* 论语半月刊 [The Analects Fortnightly] (est. 1932), *Renjian shi* 人间世 [This Human World] (est. 1934) and *Yuzhou feng* 宇宙风 [Cosmic Wind] (est. 1935).
  - 2 The following two quotations were originally in Chinese and translated by Qian Suoqiao (Qian 2011: 138).
  - 3 The late Ming Gong’an school (gong’an pai 公安派) was named after Gong’an in Hubei, the birthplace of its core figures, the three Yuan brothers (Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 and Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道), among whom Yuan Hongdao was the best known poet and critic of the Gong’an school.

that Yuan Zhongdao's poetry "*dushu xingling, buju getao*" 独抒性灵, 不拘格套 [expresses his *xingling* and is not bound by the externals of form], and prized *xingling* as the highest dictum of writing (1964: 5). It can be deduced from the couplet that Yuan Hongdao thought that content played a more important role in poetry than formal attributes, and that ideally freedom of style could be achieved in poetic production. Yuan Hongdao further added in his preface that his brother was unwilling to produce any work not flowing from his heart, and deemed *zhen* 真 [truthfulness] and *xin* 新 [newness] as the two main characteristics of *xingling*.

From Yuan Hongdao's words we can roughly interpret *xingling* as a literary feature which encourages writers to articulate personal feelings and emotions in a genuine manner. His emphasis on the genuineness of literary production is not hard to understand if we consider the literary milieu in the late Ming, which was dominated by the imitation of ancient models, in particular the poetry of the High Tang period (Ong 2016: 23–24). Yuan Hongdao's proposition of *xingling* thus undertook a systematic critique of Ming archaism by stressing the role of the writer's natural feelings, which produced freshness and individuality in literary production.

The concept of *xingling* evolved from the late Ming and was transformed during the Republican Era. Despite its liberating insights on writers' unfettered creativity, the notion of *xingling* was marginalised in the late Ming, and *xingling* literature was even banned by the Qing court, chiefly due to *xingling*'s implication of overturning the regulative standards of Confucian orthodoxy (Daruvala 2020: 134). After three centuries of oblivion, the notion of *xingling* was rejuvenated in the 1920s by Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), one of the leaders in the New Literary Movement (*xin wenxue yundong* 新文学运动), as the precursor of the literary renaissance of modern China. Zhou reckoned that the late Ming literature, epitomised in *xingling* literature, was the origin of the literary movement in the 1920s. In Zhou's view, because *xingling* literature embodied the free-thinking voices and the liberation of style, thought and sentiment, the Gong'an school writers marked a real break with archaism and truly entered modern literary writing (1937).

Lin Yutang endorsed and expanded on Zhou's celebration of *xingling* writings as a native Chinese precedent for modern liberality and pluralism (1935). In Lin's view, originality as advocated by *xingling* literature saved Chinese writing from substituting mere composing for real thinking, avoided the literary production guided or enforced by external political dicta, and defended the autonomy of literature. Against this background, Charles Laughlin's translation of *xingling* as "the liberation of spirit" responded to Zhou's and Lin's recognition of *xingling* as a symbol of the originality and freedom of writing (2015: 47).

If Laughlin's translation "the liberation of spirit" indicated the source of the writers' original and free thinking, then Qian Suoqiao's translation of *xingling* as "self-expression" (2011: 127) underscored the approach with which the writers turn free thinking into literary production. Taking departure from Lin's statement of "*xingling* is none other than self", Qian argued that the defining feature in creative literature lay more in expressing the self (*ziwo* 自我) than in probing into the self (2011: 139). Qian added that the self-knowledge of personality could be improved consciously through

learning and life experience, but the expression of unique personality was the core to creative artistic production and was hard to achieve.

Although Qian did not investigate the notion of the self when explaining his translation, it would be helpful if we were familiarised with the discussions on the self between different scholars. Zhang Junmai 张君勱 (1887–1969) deemed the self as the central focus of life, and regarded the focus of the self as being on subjectivity and free will which should not be governed by utilitarian and positivist concerns (1981: 998). Lydia Liu furthered the discussion on the self by locating this term in the beginning of China’s modernising process, and argued that the translation of Western concepts including the self, individual, personality into Chinese had awakened the masses and enlightened the mass culture to the authentic, free pursuit of individual goals (1999: 85).

Differing from Zhou Zuoren who took *xingling* as an incentive of his self-isolation, Lin Yutang amplified the counter-utilitarian sense of *xingling* and employed this term as a starting point to challenge the politicisation of literature as upheld by The League of Left-wing Writers (zuoyi zuojia lianmeng 左翼作家联盟) who treated literary production as a tool of ideological propaganda in the name of national strengthening and national salvation. In “Lun wen”, Lin contended that the assessment criteria of works of art would be ludicrous if utilitarian goals were taken into account, and that such a control of aesthetics would lead to the fabrication of false individuality (1994: 149).

I will further accentuate the counter-utilitarian connotation of *xingling* developed by Lin in the 1920s and 1930s, and translate *xingling* as “authentic expression of individuality”. In this translation, I highlight authenticity and individuality as two critical criteria for the quality of expression, to echo Lin’s words in “Lun wen” that *zhen* enabled writers to give full play to their nature and individuality. According to Lin, the respect held for a writer’s individuality endowed *xingling* with a “grandeur of universality” (Sohigian 1991: 276). It is worth mentioning that the association between *xingling* and universality is pivoted on Lin’s reinterpretation of *xingling* as the essence of humanism. In *The Importance of Living*, one of his best-received works in English, Lin expounded the idea that, in their purest form, traditional Chinese values could touch the human heart and move people across the globe (1937: 1). *Xingling* was recognised as one of these fundamental Chinese values. As we shall see in my subsequent analysis of *FCSS*, Lin placed high hopes on the universal potential of *xingling*, which guided his selection, rewriting and modernisation of traditional Chinese tales with the ultimate goal of “touching the human heart”.

### *Xingling* as an Agent of Modernity in *FCSS*

While much of the cultural-aesthetic debate since the May Fourth era focused on the contradictions between tradition and modernity and the tensions between China and the West, Lin’s reinterpretation of *xingling* highlighted the affinity between traditional Chinese culture and Western modernity by linking *xingling* with Croce’s and Spingarn’s aesthetic theories. This link underscored Lin’s recognition of the value

of traditional Chinese culture and its potential to contribute to universal humanistic endeavours in his cross-cultural work. In this section, I will demonstrate how Lin's approach to reworking traditional Chinese texts responded to his promotion of the *xingling* ideal in 1920s and 1930s China. As my analysis of *FCSS* will show, Lin's selection and re-organisation of traditional Chinese folk tales, as well as his varied and sensitive rewriting strategy, all echoed his interpretation of *xingling* as an authentic expression of individuality that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers.

*FCSS* consists of Lin's retelling of twenty traditional Chinese stories in English. The Chinese stories range from Tang dynasty *chuanqi* 传奇 [classical tales of the marvellous], Song dynasty *huaben* 话本 [vernacular scripts of a story-teller], to the minor genres such as *xiaoshuo* 小说 [short stories] and *biji* 笔记 [jottings]. In Lin's English renditions, the original genre distinctions are erased and a thematic organisation is adopted. The twenty stories are categorised into six thematic groups—"Adventure and Mystery", "Love", "Ghosts", "Juvenile", "Satire" and "Tales of Fancy and Humour". While one or two of the themes ("Ghosts", "Adventure and Mystery") may have their roots in the Chinese narrative tradition, the other themes ("Love", "Juvenile", "Satire" and "Tales of Fancy and Humour") are predominantly of Western origins or influenced by Western genres. On one hand, Lin's re-organisation of the tales constitutes a reinvention of Chinese cultural legacy by bringing generically heterogeneous and previously unrelated tales into the same frame; on the other hand, his adoption of certain abstract and Western-influenced themes reveals his attempt to align traditional Chinese stories with values and ideals that he deemed modern.

Although in the title of this book, *Famous Chinese Short Stories: Retold by Lin Yutang*, "retold" was highlighted to suggest the rewriting strategy Lin adopted in producing this work, as opposed to literal translation, not all the traditional Chinese elements in the originals were erased or underwent drastic modifications in Lin's rendition. Based on my comparison between the original tales and Lin's English rendition, eleven of the twenty stories remained similar to the original with only minor adjustments, while the remaining nine were significantly modified in terms of plot, setting, characterisation, and thematic focus. In addition, some traditional Chinese elements were maintained formally and visually in *FCSS*, such as the Chinese titles of stories printed in the Chinese calligraphic forms on the contents page. As Lin mentioned in the introduction of *FCSS*, the reason he selected traditional Chinese tales as the source of (re)writing for Western readers was that those tales had a universal appeal (1952: 11). Lin went on to say that the universal appeal meant those tales were able to help Western readers gain a particular insight into human character, deepen the knowledge of life, and awaken pity, love, or sympathy for a human being. It can be seen from Lin's words that traditional Chinese tales were a vehicle for Western readers to perceive a common humanity which has universal appeal. *Xingling*, reinterpreted by Lin as the core of humanity, untainted by any utilitarian concerns, became a guiding light for Lin's selection and rewriting.

Humanistic concerns permeated the traditional Chinese tales that Lin selected for *FCSS*. In many tales, the struggles against Confucian orthodoxy and the striving towards individual freedom were so strong that Lin had little to change in terms of plot and characterisation. In these cases, his English renditions remained "faithful" to the

Chinese originals because the core of humanity in these stories already aligned with Lin’s *xingling* ideal. Yet it is in the nine stories that Lin chose to substantially rewrite that his reinterpretation of *xingling* most prominently and actively manifested itself. I will focus on three stories, *The Stranger’s Note*, *The Jade Goddess* and *Jealousy*, as their differences from the Chinese originals most vividly illustrate how Lin’s rewriting is shaped by his understanding of *xingling* as the authentic expression of individuality. I list the main textual changes of these three stories from the Chinese originals to Lin’s English renditions as below (see the table following over page).

In the Chinese original of *The Stranger’s Note*, entitled *Wuming xin* 无名信 [An anonymous letter], a monk who is a thorough cheat and villain fabricates a note, which insinuates that the wife of a high official is likely to cheat on her husband. The official believes it and his wife is repudiated. However, it turns out that the wife is blameless. The Chinese story ends with the wife going back to her husband, and the monk being punished with flogging. By contrast, in the ending of Lin’s English rendition, after the wife is proven blameless, the previously suffering, submissive woman decides to stay with the monk instead of going back to the high official, because the monk treats her much better than her husband, who mistrusts her.

The core issue of *The Stranger’s Note* lies in whether the official’s wife should go with the monk instead of her husband. The wife’s choice reveals her neglect of the Confucian moral codes in which a wife should stick to her husband even though she was treated unfairly. In the Confucian social hierarchy, women occupy a far inferior position to their husbands, and women are supposed to act and fulfil responsibilities in accordance with their husband’s will (Gao 2003). In this sense, the anti-rational, norm-bending choice by the wife in Lin’s ending demonstrates her individuality and freedom to reject the binding of the Confucian moral codes, and to make independent decisions based on her own will. The wife’s transgressive and non-conformist individuality, which challenges the subordination of women to their husbands in pre-modern society, corresponds to Lin’s modern reinterpretation of *xingling*. By endowing the wife with the agency to express her individuality, a key connotation of *xingling*, Lin highlighted the potential for Chinese culture to transition from tradition to modernity through his rewriting.

*The Jade Goddess* is another story where Lin substantially changed the plot and thematic focus. The Chinese original *Nianyu guanyin* 碾玉观音 [Carved jade goddess] revolves around an artisan couple who serve a high official. The male protagonist is a jade carver, being selected as a servant due to his incredible jade goddess sculpture that greatly impressed the official, and his lover is selected due to her outstanding embroidery skills. However, the couple blunders badly and then escapes. In the Chinese original, the male protagonist goes into hiding and the woman is put to death and becomes a vengeful ghost. In Lin’s rewriting, however, the jade artisan resumes his livelihood in jade carving, and his products are so extraordinary that the official recognises them and traces him. Facing the threat to his life, he is determined to abide by his artistry and continues to work, and is arrested by the official in the end. The Chinese original offers a stark criticism of social injustice in pre-modern China where the ruled class did not have the freedom to determine their own fate. In Lin’s rewriting, by contrast, the theme is shifted to the predicament of an artist torn between artistic integrity and mere survival.

Table 1: Main Textual Changes Made from the Chinese Originals to the English Renditions in *FCSS*.

Textual Changes	Changes in Titles		Other Textual Changes		
	Chinese Titles in <i>FCSS</i> created by Lin	Chinese Titles of the Chinese Originals (Author/Collection/Time period)	Plot	Setting and Characterisation	Thematic Focus
<i>The Stranger's Note</i>	<i>Jiantie heshang</i> 简帖和尚 [A monk who sent a short note]	<i>Wuming xin</i> 无名信 [An anonymous letter] (Anonymous/ <i>Qingping shantang huaben</i> 清平山堂话本/the Song dynasty)	A monk abducts the high official's wife, and is ultimately punished by flogging → A monk saves the high official's wife from an unsatisfactory marriage, and they live happily thereafter	The descriptions of the monk's appearance: a snub nose and a wide mouth which indicate he might be an evil person → the facial features which indicate the monk might have a good fortune	To uphold the values that evil conducts will finally be punished → To encourage individuals to prioritise individual happiness to Confucian moral codes
<i>The Jade Goddess</i>	<i>Yu guanyin</i> 玉观音 [Jade goddess]	<i>Nianyu guanyin</i> 碾玉观音 [Carved jade goddess] (Anonymous/ <i>Jingben tongsu xiaoshuo</i> 京本通俗小说/the Song dynasty)	A jade carver and his lover elope because they may not get married due to their distinct social positions → A jade carver and his wife elope because they have illicit intercourse deemed unacceptable by Confucian orthodoxy	N/A	To criticise the fact that members of the ruled class in pre-modern China do not have the agency to determine their own fate → To discuss whether it is worthwhile to pursue artistic achievement at the cost of personal safety
<i>Jealousy</i>	<i>Jidu</i> 嫉妒 [Jealousy]	<i>Xishan yiku gui</i> 西山一窟鬼 [Ghosts of the western mountain cave] (Anonymous/ <i>Jingben tongsu xiaoshuo</i> 京本通俗小说/the Song dynasty)	N/A	The ending in the Chinese original where a Taoist priest is called to exorcise the spirits is omitted in the English rendition.	N/A

Qian Suoqiao has used *The Jade Goddess* as an example to illustrate that Lin’s rewriting undermines the original flavour of the traditional Chinese folklore tales to suit the reading practices of the West. According to Qian, Lin appropriated traditional Chinese literary resources and twisted the theme in *The Jade Goddess* to suit the Western fixation on art and artist. Qian continued that Lin’s appropriation was conducted with his Orientalist intention to cater to the Western audience and in turn to enter the Anglo-American mainstream literary marketplace through his satisfaction to the Western taste. In Qian’s assessment, Lin’s cross-cultural literary activities are not a successful representation and transfer of Chinese culture, and *FCSS*, in particular, is so target culture-oriented that Lin is suspected of a certain complicity with the colonial powers of the West (2011: 195).

Qian Suoqiao is not the only scholar who has criticised Lin’s Orientalist perspective as betrayed by his appropriation of Chinese tradition. In a similar vein, Charles Laughlin compares Lin’s rewriting of traditional Chinese stories to the conduct of a “native informant” to the English-speaking world (2015: 38). The “native informant”, as explained by Gayatri Spivak, is often used as a derogatory term to indicate an indigenous person who works as a collaborator with the colonial or invading power and discloses native information to the coloniser/invasion in their expected manner (1999: 6). Laughlin deemed Lin a native informant because Lin packaged the images of the Orient as strange, exotic and remote, in accordance with the manner expected by the Western readers to satisfy their curiosity. In Laughlin’s view, Lin overlooked whether his rewriting distorted the intention of the authors of the Chinese originals.

To critically engage with Qian’s and Laughlin’s accusation of Lin as an Orientalist, it is necessary to briefly revisit the conception and evolution of Orientalism. The notion of “Orientalism” was firstly problematised by Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* in 1978. According to Said, the images of the East were invented by the West as those of romance, exoticness, and haunting memories, and the East of those images was designated by the West as the Orient (1978: xii). Vukovich expanded on Said’s theory by maintaining that the existence of the Orient was designed by the West to contrast with the images of the West itself, and to constitute the Orient as the Other. In doing so, the West effectively assimilates the Orient and makes the Orient a subordinate component of itself (2013: 25). Arif Dirlik further developed the notion of Orientalism and applied it to Asian intellectuals in the East (1996). In a process of what Dirlik has termed Self-Orientalism, some Asian intellectuals served the colonial intentions of the West and imparted the geopolitical awareness of the Orient as the Other into the East. Those intellectuals internalised and consolidated the Orientalist knowledge built by the West in which the Orient was inferior to the West, and disseminated the knowledge within the East. In this sense, those Asian intellectuals facilitated the Western conquest of the East.

Given Lin’s position as a Chinese writer operating in the Anglo-American world at the time, Qian’s and Laughlin’s accusation of Lin’s Orientalist perspective can be better understood against the notion of Self-Orientalism. However, even the label of Self-Orientalism can seem reductive as a descriptor for Lin’s cross-cultural work.



While Lin might have exhibited an outward inclination of catering to Western taste, his rewriting of traditional Chinese stories in English does not capitalise on the strange, the exotic, and the remote. Quite the contrary, Lin sought to downplay aspects of the stories that might be considered traditionally Chinese while reinforcing those aspects that appear enlightened, modern, and universal.

With the admission that Lin could have internalised some Orientalist tendencies given his upbringing and social milieu, I propose to describe Lin as a “partial” Orientalist whose literary activities did not facilitate the Western conquest of the East, but rather facilitated the reception of traditional Chinese culture in the West. In *FCSS*, Lin made a significant amount of textual changes to traditional Chinese tales, and his rewriting betrayed his desire to ease the cultural differences between China and the West. Lin admitted that his rewriting involved narrating Chinese stories with the pace and techniques of modern short stories of the West, with the aim to bridge the gap between the Chinese and Western worlds in terms of language, custom and cultural practice (1952: 16–17). Such rewriting is no doubt interventionist. Yet, to extend from Yifeng Sun’s idea of displacement and intervention in cross-cultural translation (2007), I submit that Lin’s interventionist rewriting, unlike the Orientalist gaze, works on both source and target cultures, leading to ruptures and readjustments on both sides of the cultural transaction.

In my interpretation of Lin as a “partial” Orientalist, “partial” could be understood as Lin’s selective approach to the transmission of Chinese cultural tradition. Lin’s presentation of traditional Chinese culture in English is fragmentary rather than comprehensive or systematic. However, this fragmentation is strategic rather than haphazard. Different from an over-sweeping Orientalist perspective which portrays pre-modern China as the passive cultural Other vis-à-vis the West, Lin’s selective approach to Chinese tradition energises it with his partiality to those aspects of Chinese tradition that are conducive to its transition to modernity. On the other hand, Lin’s position as a “partial” Orientalist also suggests that Lin’s literary activities had the potential to fragment Orientalism as a coherent system of thought.

Lin subverted the tropes of Orientalism largely through the adoption of rewriting strategies that might be described as “narrative framing”. According to Mona Baker, narrative indicates the stories which may shape people’s understanding of or behaviour towards certain issues, and framing sketches the process of shaping through transmitting the connotation in the narrative to readership. In this process, framing also plays the role of an interpretative device which explains the author’s motivation behind establishing the narrative (2007). Baker further pointed out that, through cross-cultural rewriting, the connotation embedded in the narrative of the source text may be accentuated, undermined or modified in the target text.

Sometimes, omission can be as effective a framing device as augmentation or modification. I will use the story *Jealousy* as an example to illustrate how Lin uses the technique of omission to generate a space of the Other, which becomes a symbolic gesture of his partial Orientalist stance. In the Chinese original *Xishan yiku gui* 西山一窟鬼 [Ghosts of the western mountain cave], the male protagonist tries to find a

woman to marry, but it turns out that all the women around him are ghosts. A Taoist priest turns up and tells the protagonist that he is condemned to the company of ghosts because of his indulgence to worldly pleasures in his previous life. The story ends with the Taoist priest restoring the order by exorcising the ghosts.

In Lin’s English rendition, however, the exorcist ending is omitted. This omission reframes the narrative and sheds an entirely different light on the ghost-human relationship. By acknowledging the ghost’s desire to dwell among human beings, Lin’s rewriting shifts the narrative focus to the predicament of ghosts, a theme that is often evaded or denied in mainstream philosophical discourse. Luo Hui has described this denial as the suppression of the feminine, non-ancestral and non-human forces embodied by the ghosts in traditional Chinese culture, and the exercise of power to control or tame the ghosts in Chinese folklore, as in the form of Taoist exorcism, symbolises the struggle between the dominant ideology and the counter-discourse of the Other (2009: 49–50). In the context of this discussion, Lin’s narrative framing not only reactivates the ghosts’ critical potential against Confucian orthodoxy, but also creates a space for a discourse of the Other in his own struggle against the dominant discourse of Western modernity.

Lin’s discourse of the Other in 1950s America echoed his championing of *xingling* literature in 1920s and 1930s China, when his counter-utilitarian approach to literature was deemed inappropriate, or even unpatriotic, for the political environment at the time. One could even argue that the very approach of rewriting was a demonstration of *xingling*. However, a discourse of the Other when the US was at the height of its power was bound to be marginal, dismissible, or irrelevant. As a less successful example of Lin’s cross-cultural undertakings in the US, *FCSS* would have to be assessed in a different frame of cultural and historical references to reveal its true significance.

### Chinese Tradition in the Pursuit of Modernity

In *FCSS*, Lin’s promotion of *xingling* as an important value of Chinese tradition challenged what is widely understood as the Eurocentric discourses of humanism and modernity (Kow 2014). Yet the significance and impact of his work lies not in its moment of encounter with the West, in 1950s America, but in the longer timeframe of China’s pursuit of modernity. In 1920s China, Western modernity was held as a banner by the mainstream May Fourth intellectuals. They advocated the total Westernisation of Chinese society as the sole approach to Chinese modernity, and dismissed traditional Chinese culture as unfit for the modern world (Ouyang 2016: 90). In this sense, Lin’s championing of Chinese tradition challenged the mainstream May Fourth discourse on Chinese modernity.

Differing from mainstream May Fourth thinking, Lin believed that Chinese traditions were not necessarily incompatible with the pursuit of modernity. Advocating a Chinese-Western synthesised approach to Chinese modernity, Lin held that modern Chinese culture should be one in which traditional Chinese culture and modern culture of the West are balanced and fully integrated (Qian 2011: 60–61). According to him,

Chinese tradition and Western modernity should contest and coordinate on the Chinese pathway to modernity. Instead of contemplating a radical rebellion against Chinese tradition, Lin thought that part of the Chinese cultural heritage could be passed down and preserved for a modern Chinese society. In this respect, Lin's championing of the position of traditional Chinese culture in Chinese modernity was more proactive than the mainstream May Fourth camps, because Lin aspired to decentre the dominant discourse of Western modernity in Chinese society, while Lin's Chinese peers were still following the Eurocentric paradigm of Western modernity.

Lin's defending of the value of Chinese tradition in the pursuit of modernity narrowed the gap between Chinese tradition and modernity. His rewriting strategy in literary production, in particular, suggested a potential pathway for Chinese society to transition from tradition to modernity. Lin was not the only 20th-century writer who attempted to bridge the gap between Chinese tradition and modernity through rewriting traditional Chinese tales. The interplay between tradition and modernity can also be detected in the rewriting works of other prominent short story (re)writers, in particular Lu Xun, Wang Xiaobo and Wang Zengqi. Each of these (re)writers attempted to investigate the most appropriate paradigm for Chinese literature to transform from traditional to modern forms, and their rewritings revealed their unique perspectives on the pathways between Chinese tradition and modernity.

As a pioneering figure of May Fourth "new literature", Lu Xun was fairly ambivalent about his connection to Chinese tradition. In 1923, Lu Xun produced *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中国小说史略 [A brief history of Chinese fiction] as the first systematic treatise on traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo*. It is not hard to detect the tension between Lu Xun's vision of modernity and his retrospective act to reassess traditional Chinese literature. Lu Xun's project was to narrate the trajectory of *xiaoshuo* from its early origin in the minor genres of "petty talk" to its modern transformation into the Chinese equivalent of the Western novel. This transformation was aided by Lu Xun's application of modern aesthetic criteria. Those aesthetic criteria, especially the one highlighting the role of authorship in literary production, were in effect fairly recent imports from the West. Thus Lu Xun's systematic re-evaluation of traditional Chinese *xiaoshuo* was regarded as an attempt to create a modern paradigm for Chinese literary production and criticism.

The motivations and strategies of Lu Xun's endeavour to modernise traditional Chinese literature can be gleaned more directly from his rewriting work *Gushi xinbian* 故事新编 [Old tales retold]. Produced between 1921 and 1935, this collection included Lu Xun's adaptations of traditional literary texts including myths and legends, ancient records and historical documents. In Lu Xun's rewriting, the heroic figures who enjoyed high status in the original stories were all afflicted by disgraceful figures, whereas the disgraceful always had an unshakable position in society. According to Xudong Zhang's analysis, Lu Xun's rewriting mirrored the cultural milieu in the wake of the May Fourth Movement (2014: 377). Zhang argues that Lu Xun's intention to allow the present to leave its mark on traditional literature constituted a modern literary strategy through which traditional literature and the conditions of Lu Xun's own time became inter-referential and mutually implicated.

Lu Xun’s literary strategy to modernise traditional Chinese literature, namely borrowing traditional literary resources to hint at the flaws in contemporary society, was amplified in Wang Xiaobo’s *Tangren gushi* 唐人故事 [Tales of the Tang people]. In *Tangren gushi*, produced in the 1980s and included five modern stories adapted from Tang dynasty *chuanqi* tales, Wang incorporated the narrative of imaginative Tang tales with his depiction of the factual to contrast the past with the present and achieve an aesthetic effect of distance (Wang 1997: 124). The characters he portrayed – vagabonds, prostitutes, monks, and the otherwise disenchanting and disenfranchised – were not those recognised in mainstream writing, and through his selection of protagonists Wang indicated his resistance to the submission to authority and his rebuke of the passive obedience to conventions (Xu 2014: 141).

Compared with Wang Xiaobo who boldly experimented with the strategy of modern fiction in his rewriting, another contemporary Chinese writer Wang Zengqi put more emphasis on the role of Chinese tradition in his rewriting work of *Liaozhai xinyi* 聊斋新义 [New interpretations of *Liaozhai*]. Wang Zengqi’s *Liaozhai xinyi* was produced in the late 1980s and contained adaptations of a selection of stories from *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊斋志异 [Strange stories from a Chinese studio] authored by Pu Songling 蒲松龄 (1640–1715) in the Qing dynasty. According to Wang Zengqi, he did not forsake the original literary techniques in Pu’s stories with modern techniques of the West; on the contrary, the narrative methods of traditional stories were retained as much as possible (1998: 239). Although Wang Zengqi incorporated modern themes and aesthetics into his rewriting, such as self-identity and the tension between individual artistic ideal and social and literary conventions, he endeavoured to highlight the characteristics of traditional Chinese stories and give them a fresh, modern presentation. In this sense, Wang Zengqi’s rewriting corresponded to his advocacy of “turning back to Chinese tradition” as an alternative to modernising Chinese literature in the 1980s (Wang 1998: 300).

A comparison of the modern literary strategies employed in the rewritings of Lin Yutang, Lu Xun, Wang Xiaobo and Wang Zengqi reveals two distinctive stances on the dichotomy between Chinese tradition and Chinese modernity. Lu Xun and Wang Xiaobo share certain similarities in their rewriting strategies, as they both treated the traditional Chinese stories allegorically to launch their criticism of the present day. By contrast, Lin and Wang Zengqi downplayed the socio-political contexts of the traditional stories and infused them with humanistic and aesthetic concerns. The differences in the rewriting strategies between these two pairings embody the (re)writers’ distinct stances on the role of Chinese tradition in the construction of Chinese modernity. Lu Xun and Wang Xiaobo utilised traditional resources as a tool to reflect the flaws of modern society awaiting resolution, while Lin Yutang and Wang Zengqi emphasised the modern potential of traditional Chinese literature to cushion the impact of Western modernity on Chinese culture. However different the perspectives of these four (re)writers were, we can see their agreed attempts to define and negotiate the position of Chinese tradition in its irrevocable encounter with modernity.

### The Soft Power of Chinese Tradition

It must be acknowledged that the encounter between Chinese tradition and Western modernity, in Lin's case, took place in English, in the USA. This distinctive feature sets Lin's rewriting in *FCSS* apart from those of Lu Xun, Wang Zenqi and Wang Xiaobo. The bilingual and cross-cultural dimensions of Lin's rewriting further complicated his mediating role between tradition and modernity, as he had to simultaneously deal with his role as a "cultural ambassador" between China and the West. To account for Lin's work of cultural diplomacy in the US without losing sight of the kinds of cultural politics he engaged with during the heydays of the May Fourth movement, I propose a retroactive application of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power to the days before China's rise in contemporary geopolitics, when the power relations between China and the West were extremely unbalanced.

According to Joseph Nye in *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, a country's soft power indicates its ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction to and persuasion of others, rather than by coercion and payment as indicated in hard power. In other words, the core of soft power relies on the capability of one country to shape the preferences of others (Nye 2008: 94–95). Nye added that, in international politics, the culture and values of one country play an indispensable part in producing soft power, and when employing public diplomacy as an instrument, the government of one country is actually mobilising the resources of culture and values to communicate with and attract other countries. In terms of the use of public diplomacy, Nye further points out that the efficacy of public diplomacy would be enhanced if one country understands the outcomes other countries hope to obtain and the way other countries process the messages encoded in the public diplomatic policies. It is worth mentioning that Nye emphasises the significance of credibility and self-criticism as significant sources of soft power, and believes the self-criticism of a government, though difficult to practise, is an effective way to establish its credibility because the criticism implies the openness of a society.

How do we talk about a Chinese soft power when China was clearly in a powerless position vis-à-vis the West, when China as a nation was geographically and ideologically divided, and when, in his diasporic existence, Lin's own affiliation with "homeland" became increasingly ambiguous and metaphoric? To apply the notion of soft power to Lin's literary activities in mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century USA is also to retune and recalibrate it. Nye promoted the notion of soft power to resist the abusive use of hard power between countries and to denounce the zero-sum game in which one country's gain necessarily becomes the other country's loss. Lin's efforts to write English books on China for readers of the West during the war years no doubt had an immediate goodwill effect that suited the times, improving China's standing among its international allies. In the post-war context, Lin's continued efforts to transmit the value of Chinese tradition to the US are best understood as part of a long-term historical project, as a renewed attempt to address China's cultural deficit vis-à-vis the West in the modern era. The difference between Nye's and Lin's notion of soft power is that, while Nye emphasised the role of official policies in improving international relations, Lin focused on cultural dialogue as a preferred approach to mediating the power dynamics between China and the West. In the absence of a clear national or political affiliation, Lin's take on soft power transcends the narrow interests of the modern

nation-state and elevates it to the realm of universal humanism, an enlightenment ideal to which Chinese culture both aspires and contributes.

During his long stay in the US from 1936 to 1966, Lin established his reputation as a wise promoter of Chinese culture with over 30 English works ranging from novels, biographies, as well as translations and rewritings of traditional Chinese texts.<sup>4</sup> Collectively these works secure a place of Chinese tradition in the English language textual field. Facing the gap between the two culture, Lin did not conclude hastily on whether traditional Chinese culture is superior to Western culture in spiritual terms, or Western society is more advanced in material terms, as commonly discussed in the “spiritual China – material West” dichotomy promoted by Chinese reformers such as Liang Qichao 梁启超. In contrast with the fighters for China’s spiritual and national salvation, Lin assumed the role of a cultural ambassador and resorted to less confrontational means to create a space of dialogue with the West.

Due to his Christian upbringing and Westernised education in his formative years, Lin’s knowledge of traditional Chinese culture did not hold much sway in his thinking until he taught at Tsing-hua University in his late 20s. His cross-cultural background endowed him with the vantage point to observe Western culture at close range, as well as a critical distance to reflect on traditional Chinese culture. In Lin’s English works, we can perceive his internal gap with Chinese tradition which fostered self-reflection and resisted uncritical assimilation. Much as Nye’s two ingredients – self-criticism and credibility – that are necessary to the success of a nation’s soft power, Lin’s capacity for self-criticism, from what I have described as his partial Orientalist stance, is also largely responsible for the credibility of his soft power of Chinese tradition.

Therefore Lin’s soft power of Chinese tradition does not mean that he blindly extolled all aspects of Chinese tradition. Lin can be relentlessly critical of Chinese culture, both past and present, as exemplified in *FCSS* as well as earlier works such as *My Country and My people* (1936: 5). Lin’s self-criticism was regarded by some critics as a strategic move to cater to the stereotyped images of the Orient in the eyes of the West. Edmund Wilson lamented that Lin was Americanised and sarcastically called him a “Professional Chinese” in the US literary market (1945: 73–74). Madalina Yuk-Ling Lee attributed Lin’s success in the American book market to his pandering to the taste for “Chinese problems” among his elite-populist American readership (2009: 126–27). Other scholars are more sympathetic. Sohigian regarded Lin’s self-criticism as attributes of frankness and broad-mindedness in his interpretation of Chinese tradition to the West (2015: 141–42). Similarly, Joe Sample acknowledged the sincerity in Lin’s self-criticism and considered it essential for different cultures to work through their incongruities before common ground can be established (2015: 199).

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4 Lin’s cross-cultural English works are categorised into “the wisdom series” including *The Wisdom of Confucius* (1938), *The Wisdom of China and India* (1942), *The Wisdom of Laotse* (1948) and *On the Wisdom of America* (1950); “the novel trilogy” including *Moment in Peking* (1939), *A Leaf in the Storm* (1940), and *The Vermillion Gate* (1953); biographies including *The Gay Genius* (1947) and *Lady Wu* (1957); and rewriting or translation works, including *Six Chapters of A Floating Life* (1939), *Widow, Nun and Courtesan: Three Novelettes from the Chinese, Translated and Adapted by Lin Yutang* (1951), *Famous Chinese Short Stories, Retold by Lin Yutang* (1952), and *The Importance of Understanding* (1960).

In my view, Lin's self-criticism was neither a gesture catering to Western appetite for "Chinese problems", nor was it a patronising posture towards Chinese tradition in the manner of Self-Orientalism. It must be appreciated at its face value, as self-criticism rooted in authentic self-expression. The aim of this self-criticism was not immediate success in the book market, but rather the prospect of a forward-thinking yet self-reflexive Chinese culture. To quote Lin's own words, as in his preface to *My Country and My people*, the reason he boldly disclosed the troubles of Chinese society to the West was that he hoped Chinese people could realise those problems and make improvement (1936: 5).

Not only did Lin point out the problems and signal the pathways for improvement in his English works, he actively experimented with these pathways through his rewriting strategies. Taking *FCSS* as an example, the textual changes Lin made in his English rendition of traditional Chinese stories pinpointed the flaws in Chinese tradition while simultaneously reframing that tradition so that the desirable attributes of a modernising Chinese culture could emerge. These attributes included the authentic expression of individuality, tolerance and respect for the Other, and universal humanism. Lin's soft power of Chinese tradition is ultimately an expression of his *xingling* ideal.

## Conclusion

By analysing Lin's rewriting in *FCSS* through the lens of his reinterpretation of *xingling*, I have attempted to portray a Lin Yutang who stood at the crossroads between China and the West, between tradition and modernity. At this crossroads, Lin could be seen from the many critical perspectives at different historical junctures, as a cultural ambassador, a liberal cosmopolitan, or a *partial* Orientalist.

In his mediating role between China and the West, Lin engaged in a form of cultural diplomacy that generated what I call a soft power of Chinese tradition. This soft power is not merely concerned with increasing the likeability of Chinese culture in the West, although Lin's literary activities in the US were no doubt conditioned by his immediate audience at the time. However, by linking Lin's *FCSS* with similar rewritings of classical texts throughout the 20th century, I have demonstrated that the more enduring context of Lin's work has proven to be China's on-going pursuit of modernity vis-à-vis the dominant discourse of Western modernity. As Lin's English works gradually fade out of American public view and become revived in the Chinese-speaking world through back-translations and film adaptations in the last few decades, the relevance of this context remains strong.

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## CERAMIC EXCHANGES BETWEEN NEW ZEALAND AND JAPAN: JAMES GREIG (1936–1986)

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### Abstract

James Greig (1936–1986), an eminent New Zealand potter, died in the morning of his major exhibition in Kyoto Japan, gained unique access to the Japanese ceramic world in the 1980s. Greig received the Japan Foundation Fellowship to write a book on Kawai Kanjirō (1890–1966) during 1982/3 and became a NZ cultural ambassador to Japan in 1985. (Pearce 2008) Greig's engagement with Japanese pottery allowed him to steer his success as a ceramic artist exploring the power of concepts writing. This article will illustrate how Greig's successful penetration into the Japanese market juxtaposes institutional support and spirituality as vehicles for cross-cultural relations. This essay combines methods from archival research and oral history, fieldwork, text and visual analysis, as well as insight from my own creative practice in ceramics, to understand what guided Greig in his destined encounter with Japan through Kawai. The first part will illustrate Greig's creative biography along personal and public milestones, leading up to his interest in Kawai. Second, I explore Kawai's artworld in order to establish the historical features that contributed to Kawai's visibility. My aim is to identify patterns of cross-cultural exchanges resonating with the aesthetic philosophy explored in Greig's manuscripts along the lines of growth, polarity and void, as 'plasticity' in cultural diplomacy.

### Introduction

In a recent volume on cultural diplomacy, the editors suggest a nuanced appreciation of the interconnectedness of the cultural sphere in support of, or supported by, foreign policies:

Despite the significant role of culture in a nation's presentation to the overseas public, scholarly attention has hitherto overwhelmingly focused on the political or economic dimension of soft power. [...] there has recently been increasing academic recognition of the important role of culture in the success of soft power strategies (...)

(Beattie 2019: 2).

Throughout the 1970s, Japan demonstrated successful economic growth and welcomed the world as a host with a newly-gained universalist cultural confidence. The Expo 70 in Osaka was the zenith of the cultural exchanges between New

Zealand and Japan, ceramics providing symbolic representations. Numerous ceramic exchanges between New Zealand and Japan were illustrated by Dianne and Peter Beatson's *The Crane and the Kotuku*, Bruce Martin's *The Heron Migrates*, Elliott and Skinner's *ConeTenDown*, Chitham's *Crafting Aotearoa*, along with *New Zealand Potters* journals. Vic Evans' critical analysis of the life of Nelson potters in the 1960s also shows Japanese influence. (Beatson & Beatson 1994; Chitham, 2019; Elliott & Skinner 2009; Evans 2007; Martin 2013)<sup>1</sup> New Zealand pottery pieces displayed at the Expo 70 in Osaka, Japan symbolized the close ties between the two nations. (Chitham 2019 : 213–17, 74) Roy Cowan (1918-2006) presented a large-scale ceramic mural, depicting a large map of New Zealand and Japan.<sup>2</sup>

The interest in Japanese pottery started in 1947 when Ray Chapman-Taylor visited Japan and brought back a collection of Japanese pots after having read the narrative of a British potter embracing Japan's folkcraft movement (Bernard Leach's *A*



Figure 1: *Mural for the Expo 70 in Osaka*, by Roy Cowan. Dominion Post Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library. Reference: EP/1969/4846.

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- 1 Mirek Smíšek, the first NZ studio potter, stayed in Kyoto with his family in 1961 for six months. He spent most of his time at the Industrial Arts and Textile University Faculty of Industrial Arts, where he was given free use of all the facilities. He was encouraged to rebuild one of their kilns into a drip feed oil burner for salt glazing, which was new to Japan as an exchange of knowledge. (*NZ Potter* vol. 4-2 1961: 40)
  - 2 This mural is now permanently installed in Suita library in Osaka as a token of friendship.

*Potter's Book*). By the end of the 1960s, Japan had become part of New Zealand potters' circles through individual engagement in ceramic exchanges: Terence Barrow, Doreen Blumhardt, Helen Mason, Mirek Smíšek, Len Castle, and Margaret Milne. (Beatson and Beatson 1994: 14-31) Among these, Greig was the first to aspire to writing a book on a Japanese potter in New Zealand, exemplifying a different dimension in artistic pursuits and the exploration of cultural exchange.

Greig's engagement with Japan presents a case study of cross-cultural communication through contemplation and 'touch of clay' as a non-utilitarian model of inclusivity in the face of economic and social challenges, as well as opportunities. As Greig put it, the proposed book on Japanese potter Kawai Kanjirō, which was one of his objectives in Japan, represents a series of questions that sensitize us to the self-transformative powers of cultural alterity. He was a trailblazer who created a spiritual path, reshaping channels of 'soft power.'

Fire in my hand,  
A cold ball of fire,  
Fire which has changed its shape  
Hidden in the clay  
... pottery  
(Kawai Kanjirō, trans. Yoshiko Uchida, 1953)

### James Greig (1936–1986), a New Zealand potter

James Greig (1936–1986) was born in Taranaki and moved to Featherston where his father, John (Jack) Alexander Greig (1909–1994) worked as a guard at the Japanese POW camp.<sup>3</sup> Greig remembers the Japanese prisoners' eagerness to meet him over the fence on the occasion of visiting his father. This first Japanese encounter was symbolic to his future relationship with Japan.<sup>4</sup> (Coates 1987: 53 '14: 40–14: 52)

Greig was studying architecture at the Auckland University when he first saw pots made by Len Castle (1924–2011) and became Castle's student between 1959–1961 (Greig 1982a). Castle's ceramics, glazed with the vivid colours of volcanic mountains, must have provided the freedom from the sculptural forms taught at architecture school in New Zealand at the time. Castle, with a background of teaching science at a secondary school, demonstrated superior glazing technique. Castle was influenced by the idea of originality argued by Bernard Leach (1887–1979). Leach emphasized that 'pottery has its own language' to communicate in public and praised *Mingei* (Japan

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3 Jack Greig left a manuscript and oral history interviews on his empathic interactions with Japanese prisoners at Featherstone, mentioning high quality craft skills and disciplines. He also mentions the later association with James Greig and Japanese embassy. (Greig 2001)

4 Peter Coates, an artist and the former head of art unit of TVNZ; produced *Spark of Life* (1987) as an homage to Greig's death in 1986. His material and oral historical interview are an important source for this research, including letters regarding the project and instructions of this autobiographical film.



Figure 2: *Japanese POW Camp in Featherston*, Jack Greig, *Spark of Life* 1987 (14:02-06). Film directed by Peter Coates.

Folkcraft) philosophy in *A Potter's Book*. (Leach 1940: xxv) Castle's teaching with its focus on artistic uniqueness was essential to the building of Greig's creative identity at the early stages of his pottery education. (Coates 2019)

The Japanese *Mingei* (Japanese Folkcraft) movement was initiated in the 1920s by Japanese philosopher Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961), along with Bernard Leach, Hamada Shōji (1894–1978) and Kawai Kanjirō. Historical research by Brian Moeran, Kim Brandt and Kikuchi Yūko have extensively addressed the complexities and contradictions of *Mingei* against the backdrop of Japan's modernization, industrialization and imperial expansion. However, it had a strong connection with the foundation of New Zealand studio pottery during the mid-1960 to mid-1970s, and arguably became representative of Japanese clay aesthetics.

One of its key philosophical pillars was 'the beauty found in functionality' (用の美, *yō-no-bi*). This can be appreciated in the vitality of ordinary domestic ware in earlier times and later – the enhancement of the spirituality of Japanese tea-culture after the 1950s. 'Crafting brings joy in life,' Kawai stated in one of his many poems written in Japanese. (Kawai 1968) Kawai converted his house in Kyoto to a workplace with an enormous kiln in the backyard (currently this house remains as a museum named Kawai Kanjirō's House). The Kawai Kanjirō's House, as well as the *Mingei-kan* (Japan Folk Crafts Museum) in Tokyo, are like sites of pilgrimage for New Zealand potters when visiting Japan, including Greig in 1978. Visitors to Kawai Kanjirō's House are able to gain an evanescent sense of 'cosmic world' of Kawai's pottery and poetry in the living room. Although neither Kawai Kanjirō, nor the founder of *Mingei* movement, Yanagi Sōetsu, ever set foot in New Zealand, New Zealand potters who visited Japan realised the importance of these key people.

Greig first visited Kawai Kanjirō's House in Kyoto as part of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand's Senior Travel Award in 1977–78. This attests to the importance of institutional support in the growth of his interest. Established in 1963, the QEII's mission was to develop artists' professionalism, foster appreciation of the arts and public education. Japanese crafts-art found a favourable role within this institutional effort in developing New Zealand's internationalising cultural self-awareness (Oka 1979). Greig was sent to learn about global craft movements and



Figure 3: Kawai Kanjirō's House (河井寛次郎記念館) 2016. Photograph by author.

visited Japan, Korea, Nepal, Mexico, UK and Thailand where he studied Yao, Akha, Meo, Lisu and Karen Hill tribe crafts.<sup>5</sup> Castle, along with five other potters, was sponsored to visit famous pottery sites in Japan, Korea and China as New Zealand's cultural ambassadors in 1974. (Castle 2008: 228) Castle trailblazed the case for potters to collaborate as cultural ambassadors for the New Zealand government. Greig followed his path.

At the same time, ceramics were themselves one of the first cultural ambassadors as portable and transferrable items. For centuries, they were circulated over vast geographical areas. The Japanese government supported traditional pottery, amongst other arts, through guaranteeing an annual income of 2 million yen for skilled traditional artists, under the 'Living National Treasure' (人間国宝, *ningen kokuhō*) or 'important intangible cultural treasures' accreditation, established in 1955 by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Hamada and Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886–1963) were the first to receive this status.<sup>6</sup> Kawai was nominated as a 'Living National Treasure' at around the same time as Hamada. However, Kawai refused the honour. (Sagi 2016: 288) Kawai, like Hamada, also refused to sign his pieces. In so doing, he may have been displaying his 'earnest admir[ation] for old unsigned crafts' (Yanagi, 224).<sup>7</sup> By

5 In Japan, Greig visited museums and potters in Kyoto, Tokyo, Bizen and Mashiko. In 1974, he visited New Mexico, USA and saw Indian Pueblo Pottery (Greig's CV). In 1972, the Mexican Pottery Collection (representing a time span beginning at 1500 B.C. to the present) toured New Zealand, which may have inspired Greig to apply QEII to study Pueblo Pottery. (Potter 1973: 22-23)

6 The original advocates of *Mingei* movement, Hamada Shōji and Tomimoto Kenkichi (1886–1963) received the first 'Living National Treasure' (人間国宝, *ningen kokuhō*) accreditation from the government, at the same time as the establishment of the Japan Craft Association (Nihon Kōgei Kyokai) in 1955. <https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkazai/shokai/mukei/>

7 Yanagi's *The Unknown Craftsman*, adapted by Leach in English (Yanagi, originally printed 1972) discussed the beauty in the bowl of Yi dynasty as utmost beauty. He stated the need for anonymous '*Mingei*' potters to achieve 'the golden age of craft' as a utopian 'abandonment of the self' and quoted 'one finally finds real self-affirmation in the abandonment of self.' (Yanagi, 223)



declining the official designation as a Living National Treasure, Kawai may have wanted to express his confidence as an artist echoing his words '[M]y work itself is my best signature.' (Yanagi 1989: 224) The tension between political support and creative activities, is what actually makes Kawai stand out. This gesture of Kawai as an artist-potter may have attracted Greig's eye in contrast to other potters.

During his visit to the museum, Greig may have recognized common bonds of modesty and determination in the eyes of Kawai, as shown in the photograph. Kawai's original artwork, free from the round wheel forms, mixing both Japanese and foreign techniques with colourful decorations, had captured Greig's interest in hand-building. Kawai was famous for his earlier (1920s) perfect realization of Korean glaze technique. However, his works after the Second World War changed completely to display a provocative boldness. His works incorporated English 'slip' techniques and Chinese colours of '*Tang Sancai*,' whereas his usage of iron oxide glaze for the red colours expressed solemn personal strength. Greig was motivated to return to Japan, applying for a year-long grant to write a book on Kawai in 1982–1983 for his 'Japan Foundation Fellowship', a scheme established in 1972 to assist international cultural exchange in promotion of Japanese culture.



Figure 4: Kawai Kanjirō circa 1950. Photograph by Shigeru Tamura. Courtesy of Kawai Kanjirō's House.

Greig commented explicitly on Kawai's influence on the direction of his work:

I discovered a Japanese potter, Kawai Kanjirō, his work embodied essentially similar concerns about life and form which I'd been struggling at the time to work through my work. And this was a very significant discovery for me and surprising and has led to my later connection with Japan developing in the way it has. (Coates 1987 4.46–5.05, Interview of Greig in the film)

Greig's dedication to Kawai was a risky challenge, pausing his production against a growing demand in 'good handleability pots.' This started in the 1970s in response to the stringent trade restrictions on foreign goods. Unlike the earlier potters in the 1950s, few potters were concerned with philosophy. The gap (or a distinction) between contemporary potters and artists in New Zealand is controversial. I interviewed several potters as oral history. A 'potter,' 'ceramic artist' or 'ceramicist' is not the same as 'artist,' according to New Zealand potters I have interviewed. It reveals the fact that 'potters' often disassociated themselves from 'artists.' Greig attempted to cross the boundaries. Greig struggled to situate himself outside of potter/artist binary.



Figure 5: James Greig, circa 1977, New Zealand. Photograph by John Daley. © Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (F.012345/4) (<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/1344023>).



He probably projected his quest onto Kawai's 'excess' as deviation from *Mingei* traditionalism. Greig showed his interests in the possibility of Kawai's 'excess' as a pathway to transformation, which he translated later into the concept of his exhibition called *Transformation*. (Greig 1982: 20)

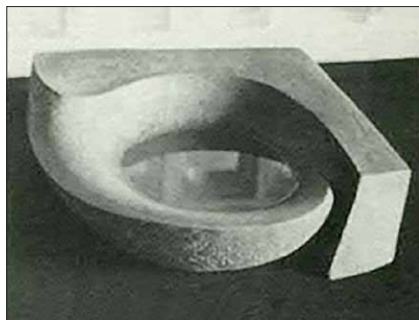


Figure 6: Greig's work at Tokyo's Green Gallery, October 1983 (Witten 1984, *NZ Potter* vol. 26 no.1: 30)

Greig found a niche subject, 'Kawai Kanjirō,' which contributed to the forging of an identity in his artwork. An episode about a pot of Kawai's presented the curator and ethnologist at the Dominion Museum, to Mr. Terrence Barrow (1923-2001), by the Japanese Prime Minister Ikeda on his official visit to New Zealand in 1963 shows that Greig's identification of Kawai was not entirely intuitive.<sup>8</sup> Kawai himself never came to New Zealand; however, his nephew, Kawai Takeichi, did. He was the first Japanese potter to visit New Zealand in 1964 following Bernard Leach in 1962 after the relaxation of private international travel in Japan.

Greig's project funded by the Japan Foundation was built on an idea of cultural comparison. Greig justified the selection of his research subject as 'a good bridge of East and West,' while also demonstrating the originality of his approach as introducing a 'Western viewpoint' to Kawai's work. (Greig 1982d: 5) Greig dramatized the challenge as his 'spiritual journey' and showed awareness of the connection between art and the political economy from the perspective of ceramics. (Greig 1982d: 12) Greig was highly perceptive of, and receptive to, Japanese cultural expressions and forms. During his stay in Japan, Greig absorbed new skills, working with the great

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8 The Japanese Prime Minister Ikeda mentioned: 'although I had seen a good collection of pots by Hamada Shōji, the Kyoto potter Kawai Kanjirō was not well represented,' and further added that he happened to have a sample of Kawai's most recent work in his hotel that he intended to present to the collection which he did in the next day via the embassy staff. (Barrow, *NZ Potter* v6 n2 1963: 70-74) The story behind how the Prime Minister received Kawai's pot is unknown; however, this episode shows Kawai's high-quality potter status.



Figure 7: Vase, circa 1960, Japan, by Kawai Kanjirō. Gift of Prime Minister Ikeda, 1963. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. © Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (CG000213). (<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/52073>)

masters like the Living National Treasure Fujiwara Kei and his son Yū, who visited New Zealand in 1980, at *Bizen*, Okayama, to learn the techniques of reduction firing by controlling the oxygen air flow to create natural patterns (Witten 1984). These firing techniques produced unintentional fired patterns and imperfection, called ‘scenery’ (景色, *keshiki*) which was highly valued in Japan. (Greig 1984)

Greig’s later sculptural works show this technique, with some iron oxide, the red glaze, which are often used in *Bizen* ware (備前焼, *bizen yaki*). Greig also visited *Mashiko*, near the *Kanto* region, Hamada’s home ground, which showed the strongest influence on New Zealand stoneware domestic pots. *Mashiko*, a tourist spot created around Hamada’s ‘Living National Treasure’ status, shows little of the artistic identity which Greig sought. Greig sensed the challenge of uniformity in studio pottery as ‘[E]verywhere in Japan has a danger of falling into formalism... we find masses of mediocre genre works of little depth... [P]ots embody a philosophy that creates a unifying purpose.’ (Greig 1984: 28-29 *NZ Potter*, Vol 26, No2) Greig discerned questions about Japanese spirituality caught in an ambiguous state between commodification and traditionalism through Kawai’s art. This spirituality, however, found access to the formal channels of cultural diplomacy.

At the end of his term in Kyoto, he approached the New Zealand Embassy to organise his exhibition in Tokyo. Sir Maarten Wevers, who was second secretary at

the New Zealand Embassy in Japan and knew Greig by name through his journalist brother, helped to introduce Greig to Shigenori Itoh (1919-2008) of Green Gallery. Greig was the first foreign ceramic artist to exhibit at such a prestigious venue and made a case for cultural diplomacy between these two nations. (Ansell 1983). The bond between Greig and Itoh continued until Greig's death, with art providing them with a common language (Itoh, Ono and Moroyama 2018 : 27).<sup>9</sup>

### Greig's Motivation

Greig was motivated to promote his concept of being a philosophical potter by incorporating his interpretation of Kawai's artwork. Upon his return from Japan in 1982, Greig organized a major exhibition *Transformation* at the Wellington City Art Gallery (April 29th May 23rd, 1982). His exhibition retraced the history of his 12 years' of association with ceramics with a detailed catalogue of 52 pages. Greig framed this exhibition with an analysis of Kawai through comparisons with the German philosopher J.W. von Goethe and Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (Greig 1982f: 2, 7). Greig's work appeared to have absorbed some of Kawai's later style of nonconformist, even eccentric forms. A total of 112 pieces included his representative 'Emblem,' 'Solid & Void,' and 'Transformation' which resonated with Kawai's abstract sense of life.<sup>10</sup> Here Greig essentially presented his own creative biography through a reinterpretation of Kawai's insights on the experience of metamorphosis.

Greig did not publish the book on Kawai. However, this exhibition and his catalogue demonstrated the conceptual importance of Kawai for Greig's artistic identity with an accent on his expertise on Japan. An introduction by Michael Volkerling (1948-2014), the director of the QEII Arts Council, framed the initiative within official cross-cultural exchange (Greig 1982b, Volkerling 1986). Greig was selected as New Zealand's 'cultural ambassador'<sup>11</sup> to Japan in 1985 and he received a congratulatory message from the Prime Minister of New Zealand, David Lange, for his second exhibition at the Green Gallery in Japan (Lange, 1985). This sparked a synergy between his ambition to

9 In 2004, Mr. & Mrs. Itoh moved to New Zealand and opened the third gallery in Waiheke island, and acted as significant advocate of NZ-Japan ceramic exchange. Even after Mr Itoh's death, his advocacy will never be forgotten with the ceramic donation to the War Memorial Museum in Auckland. ([https://www.auckland.nz.emb-japan.go.jp/culture/events\\_list/greengallery\\_collection\\_e.html](https://www.auckland.nz.emb-japan.go.jp/culture/events_list/greengallery_collection_e.html))

10 The catalogue *Transformation* depicts small to large pieces, unusual forms outside the trend of New Zealand pottery of wood fired plates and cups. It contained geometric lines and wave-like and cloud-like curves. (*Transformation – James Greig Exhibition*, ed. City Gallery Wellington, 1982. [https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations\\_catalogue.pdf](https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations_catalogue.pdf))

11 Greig was one of the 40 cultural ambassadors and 23 honorary cultural ambassadors overseas under the New Zealand Sports and Recreation Department scheme in December 1984, according to the *Evening Post* dated March 10th 1985. According to the Creative NZ website, 'the term cultural ambassador is used often associated with youth within a limited timeframe (i.e. Ka Hao Te Rangatahi – Youth Ambassador Leadership Programme,) it connotes depoliticized activities of an idealistic nature' (Evening Post 1986).

act as a bridge based on art between New Zealand and Japan. He emphasized his belief in ‘art as a means of peaceful international communication and universal language’ (Greig 1984). Greig was proactive in communicating with the media and his reputation attracted corporate sponsors.<sup>12</sup> (Fahey, 1985). A public image as ‘cultural ambassador’ suited him. In this role, he was able to validate the role of Japan as creatively forging new cultural frontiers. He emphasized his expertise in matters pertaining to Japan as an opportunity to portray his exploration of its culture at a ‘deeper level.’ Greig combined New Zealand’s economic interests with his art. In an interview in 1985, Greig stated:

Japanese connoisseurs readily experience the underlying artistic values in a poetic way, on a deeper level than just stylistic or aesthetic appreciation. Japanese look to prospective partners or customers in long-term relationships. They prefer to build relationships with companies that have community status and cultural dimensions, long term viability, and who demonstrate commitment to long-standing association with Japan...that the Japanese see arts and culture as a component of international relationships is demonstrated by their own massive use of arts to promote: by Japanese corporations in the same way. (Greig’s interview; Fahey 1985: 3)

The credentials from ‘leading art authorities’ in Japan, such as Hasebe Mitsuhiro, the chief curator of the Crafts National Museum of Modern Art, also saliently promoted Greig’s ‘major breakthrough.’ (Thomas 1985) Umehara Takeshi (1925-2019), a



Figure 8: (left) Greig in *Spark of Life*, 1987 New Zealand. Film directed by Peter Coates.



Figure 9: (right) *Spiralling Form Vase*, circa 1980 by James Greig. Courtesy of Art+Object.

<sup>12</sup> Greig made a proposal for a demonstration at the Commonwealth Arts Festival in 1982, with his detailed biography. His letters were type written. Greg Fahey, Artist Administration handled press release for him may have helped his administrative work. James Greig, ‘Craft Demonstration Proposal at the Commonwealth Arts Festival 1982.’ Greig’s 1985 exhibition was sponsored by Borthwicks, Japan Lines, QEII Council, Japan Foundation. His ballooning activity was sponsored by Bernia.

leading Japanese philosopher, spoke about how Greig's work evoked the image of *Jōmon* in the film *Spark of Life* directed by Coates.<sup>13</sup> (Coates 1987; Umehara 1994)

Greig was noted as a pioneer in New Zealand, achieving an intrinsic artistic language of cross-cultural sensibility between New Zealand and Japan. Greig carved out an 'artistic space' within, yet exceeding, diplomatic investment to bridge the two nations in trades.

### Kawai Kanjirō (1890–1966), a Japanese potter

Kawai was born in the Meiji period (1868–1912) as the second son of a carpenter family from Shimane prefecture, where Izumo Shrine, the core of Japanese Shintō religion is located. He surprised fellow students with this choice of going to the Tokyo Kōto Kōgyo Gakkō (a vocational school) in 1910 at the expense of moving onto the top career-oriented Tokyo University. Kawai's artistic style and 'cosmic world' displayed exuberance for Greig's special gaze. Itaya Hazan (1872–1963), the teacher of Kawai at the Tokyo Kōto Kōgyo Gakkō, studied under Okakura Kakuzō (1863–1913), a Japanese art historian at the Tokyo Art School, who popularized tea culture internationally. (Okakura 1964, original publication 1906). Kawai's life-long attachment to tea culture, a source of 'social prestige' in modern Japan, may have been passed from Okakura via Itaya (Brandt 2007: 12). The reinvigoration of tea culture in modern Japan is closely related to the conceptualization of *Mingei*. The English 'translator' of *Mingei*, Bernard Leach, was so inspired by a traditional Raku *chawan* (tea bowl) at a tea ceremony in 1911 that he decided to become a potter (Leach 1940: 28).<sup>14</sup>

The interest in traditional Japanese aesthetics was embedded in Japan's industrialization, and crafts education promoted modern design *zuan* (図案) for mass production (Inaga 2016: 284). Tokyo Kōto Kogyo Gakkō (Tokyo Higher Polytechnical School) was one core institutions to promote modern skills. Kawai was unique in his aim to be an 'artist' potter in contrast to the majority of other students who aspired to work in ceramic factories and participate in industrialization. To understand the importance of the influence on Greig of Kawai's art space, I will now situate Kawai within the traditional and modern world of ceramics in Japanese history.

In the 16th century, Sen-no-Rikyū (千利休 1522–1591), a tea-master to the military unifiers of the country, established Japanese minimalist aesthetics of Zen Buddhism in the tea ceremony '*chano-yu*' (Sen 2003: 10). He emphasized the qualities of '*wabi-sabi*' ('侘寂' austere refinement and imperfection) and '*mu-sakui*' ('無作為' unintentionality). Rikyū's tea room was the quintessence of a space of peaceful

13 Umehara Takeshi was the core member of the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies established in 1987 with a mission to devote interdisciplinary and comprehensive research on Japanese culture from an international perspective.

14 A traditional Raku '*chawan*' tea bowl was made in the so-called, '*tezukune*' (手捏ね) method. This requires a few days to form by curving with traditional aesthetic details. This was against the trend of machine modernization that enabled only a few minutes for production of a tea bowl.

meditation against the turbulence of the age. Rikyū's motto '*ichigo-ichie*' (一期一会) treasure each encounter) focuses on treasuring each encounter. This is symbolized by the time shared between the host and guests of the tea room. The tea room served as a place to appreciate art in proximity to politics. Rikyū cultivated a special gaze for the austere refinement of '*Raku-chawan*' (楽茶盃, tea-bowl) by potter Raku Chōjiro (?–1589) with its black glaze fired at low temperature (Raku 2013: 7). The imperfect surface appreciated as 'scenery' (景色, *keshiki*) or a crack mended by lacquer with gold decoration as '*kintsugi*' (金継ぎ) to preserve the unique piece were among the most striking innovations in the appreciation of pottery in a poetic way.

Preserving tradition by lineage is the foundation of the Japanese ceramic world. For example, the Raku lineage has continued to make tea-bowls since 1574 according to the one-heir policy (一子相伝, *isshisōden*), continues to 16th generation. Zen Buddhist ideas, embodied in the tea ceremony, such as beauty created by 'other power' or 'external forces' or '*tariki-no-bi*' (他力の美), naturalness '*jinen-honi*' 自然法爾, 'emptiness' or '*ma*' 間, have deeply permeated Japanese ceramic aesthetics. The adaptive application of Buddhist ideas into the conceptualisation of *Mingei* traverses a convoluted route to reflect Kawai's interest in Zen Buddhism. This is achieved by reading Zen Dialogues (公案 the *Kōan*), which was part of his interpretation of creativity. (Kawai Kanjirō's House 2014: 88).

Kawai grew up in the Meiji period during the frenzy of the Western industrial revolution. The collapse of feudalism triggered the organization of the new commercial law and financial system based on Western ideas. The government-owned core industries, such as shipping, steel and silk, were privatized to create the foundation of *zaibatsu* capital plutocrats (e.g. Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Sumitomo). Among these new wealthy merchant families, some men became eminent art collectors, called *sukisha* (数奇者), who enjoyed tea culture aesthetics which was a symbol of wealth and pride in their traditional heritage. Kawai's ceramics may have attracted these new-rich merchants as a re-discovered 'modern' Japanese art tradition (Kanashima 2019: 87). 'The *Mingei* movement in the early 1930s gained momentum as certain key collectors and artists sought to achieve greater influence for their ideas by joining with new constituencies, including local elites and the representatives of government agencies' (Brandt 2007: 5).

The Japanese word for art, '*bijutsu*' (美術) is an imported concept of fine art. The term (literally "beautiful techniques") first appeared in Japan when the Meiji government prepared for the World Expo in the late 19th century as a major diplomatic initiative. The Japanese eyed ceramics such as *Arita*-ware as potential trade commodities. Philippe Burty (1830–1890), a French art critic, coined the term 'Japonisme' to express the emergence of a Western gaze on Japanese art (Imai 2016:

592–93).<sup>15</sup> This imported Western idea of ‘fine arts’ provoked a reconceptualization of Japan’s traditional aesthetics. The flamboyant porcelain of *Arita* and *Imari* became a priority based on Western taste. The artisanal lineages of Japanese tradition from the 16th century were usually excluded from mainstream art historiography. Amidst the new reconfiguration of modern art praised by the West, the prestige of Japanese traditional art was placed in a complicated position.

Japanese military industrialization enhanced the country’s rapid economic growth and imperial expansion. The establishment of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1923) facilitated the visit of Bernard Leach in 1909 (Wilkinson 1996: 11). Kawai’s ceramic work around that period focused on perfect ‘imitation’ of Chinese and Korean masterpieces for high-end markets. One day in 1912, Kawai visited an exhibition which included one of Leach’s pots. Impressed by Leach’s originality, Kawai purchased Leach’s pot and met him for the first time. Hamada Shōji (1894–1978) was studying at the same school as Kawai and introduced him to Yanagi who later established the *Mingei* (Japan Folkcraft) movement in 1926. Kawai, Hamada, Leach and Yanagi became life-long collaborators through the *Mingei* movement. These encounters illustrate a destiny that led to Greig’s discovery of Kawai.



Figure 10: From left, Yanagi Sōetsu , Kawai Kanjirō, Bernard Leach, Hamada Shōji, circa 1950, Japan, (Shikama 2019). Courtesy of Kawai Kanjirō’s House. (<https://discoverjapan-web.com/article/12413>)

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15 Britain created a Japanese section in South Kensington Museum in the mid-1800s. The Japanese participation in the International Exhibition ‘*Exposition Universelle*’ in Paris first occurred in 1867 and the Japan’s government officially displayed a Japanese Garden in Vienna World’s Fair in 1873. In 1893, Japan participated in Chicago World’s Columbian Expo, by building a Japanese pavilion ‘Ho-ō-den’ (鳳凰殿 Phoenix hall) which demonstrated minute craftsmanship. (Yamada 2010) <https://www.ndl.go.jp/exposition/e/s1/1873-2.html>



### Kawai's Success

One of the driving factors of Kawai's success were his social networks. The fellow members of the *Mingei* movement, Hamada, Leach, and Yanagi, were sources of exuberance for him. Greig observes: 'Hamada – big robust person – full of life – was in some ways relevant for Hamada to be a champion practitioner of *Mingei*' (Greig 1982d: 12). Like Rikyū's ruling class patrons in the 16th century, Kawai had a number of eminent supporters. Yamaoka Sentarō, a corporate advisor at the Kuhara mining conglomerate, was one of them. He supported the purchase of the Shokeiyō kiln in Kyoto, which became Kawai's working residence in 1920 (Kanashima 2019: 87). Another significant supporter was Kawakatsu Ken'ichi (1892–1979), a marketing general manager and later the general manager of the Takashimaya Department Store Group.

The Japanese department store was an important point of dissemination to Japanese urban middle-class households as new art collectors in the 1920s (Oh, 2019). Since Kawai's first exhibition at the Takashimaya department store in 1921, Kawakatsu became Kawai's life-time promoter and organized numerous exhibitions at the store. Kawakatsu collected Kawai's pots himself, one of which he submitted to the Paris Expo in 1937 without telling Kawai. The pot subsequently won the 'grand-prix.' The 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake triggered great social uncertainty, but Kawai continued to attract enthusiastic philanthropists. Financial supporters included Yamamoto Tamesaburō (1893–1966), the first president of Asahi Beer and founder of Ōyamazaki Sansō Museum in Kyoto and Ōhara Magosaburō (1880–1943), the founder of Kuraray chemical conglomerate from Kurashiki, Okayama. Yamamoto supported Kawai over his life-time and his museum, Ōyamazaki Sanso Museum in Kyoto, continues to exhibit Kawai's art. Ōhara proposed to build a *Nihon Mingei-Kan* (Japan Folk Crafts Museum) in Tokyo in 1930, and later proposed the second *Mingei-Kan* in Kurashiki in 1948. The motives of these philanthropists need further investigation. However, Kawai's encounter with these eminent philanthropists in the political and economic background was indispensable to his career (Kanashima 2019: 89).

Kawai's philosophy was appreciated by people around him. His philosophy seemed to be based on the concept of 'other power' (*tariki* 他力) in Buddhism, so as to find fulfilment within predetermined life destiny. Due to Japan's economic and political turmoil in the early 20th century, Kawai's 'preaching' about life and beauty comforted people. Kawai's writing shows stories based on Buddhist influence, creating a visual metaphor of house-roofs as hand palms pressed together as a Buddhist prayer, emphasising life's impermanence (Kawai 1968: 135). Umesao Tadao (1920–2010), a Japanese anthropologist, described Kawai's art as spiritualistic animistic art (Kawai Kanjirō Museum 2014: 12). Sagi Tamae, Kawai's grand-daughter and art historian, claims that Kawai's art may represent the cosmic world within the Mandala matrix, the ideal form of universe in Buddhism (Kawai Kanjirō's House 2014: 4). Kawai's aesthetic was impractical to the point of incomprehensibility. Kawai and Len Castle, Greig's mentor, were both charismatic and attractive people, possessing the similar epitome of personality which mixed philosophy with creativity.





Figure 11: Kawai Kanjirō's House 2016, Japan. Photographs by author.

In the alcove of Kawai's house in Kyoto, a scroll with a line from the Confucius Analects, '樂在其中' ('happiness within' or 'find pleasure in it') is displayed like a scroll in an alcove of the tea room. This writing was a gift from Yanagi. The poem reflects Kawai's aesthetic ideals and his work ethics resonating with the content of the original:

子曰：飯疏食，飲水，曲肱而枕之，樂亦在其中矣。不義而富且貴，於我如浮雲。

In eating coarse rice and in drinking water, in using one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as the passing of clouds. (Lunyu 7:16, D.C. Lau (trans.) 1998: 93)

Kawai's philosophy created a welcoming space without any boundaries for guests. He was respected and welcomed his guests with the same heartfelt hospitality one is expected to perform at the traditional tea ceremony. Kawai's preaching on the virtues of life attracted diverse guests including academics during the Japanese turmoil of the Second World War (Kawai 2009: 34-35).<sup>16</sup> Greig noted that Kawai's visitors included people from various religions, business leaders and intellectual and

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16 Kawai's leading supporters were Kuroita Katsumi (1874–1946), a Japanese historian from the University of Tokyo, Naitō Torajiro or Naitō Konan (1866–1934), a Japanese historian and Sinologist, the founder of the Kyoto School of historiography, Iwasaki Koyata (1879–1945) from Mitsubishi Zaibatsu, Hosokawa Moritatsu (1883–1970) from the House of Peers, Iwai Taketoshi, the Kyoto branch manager from Mainichi Newspaper. (Kaneshima 2019: 87)



Figure 12: Kawai with the supporters of the Mingei Movement: (L to R) Kawai Kanjirō, Kawakatsu Kenkichi (Takashimaya Department Store), unknown, Munakata Shikō, Yamamoto Tamesaburō, unknown, Yanagi Sōetsu, Iwai Taketoshi (Mainichi Newspaper), unknown. Circa 1930. Courtesy of Kawai Kanjirō's House. (<https://discoverjapan-web.com/article/12413>)

he observed, '[W]e listened to his [Kawai's] word which was like water from a clear fresh spring' (Greig 1982d: 52).

Kawai also mentored younger potters. Kawai Takeichi (1908–1989), his nephew, was his student from 1927 till 1954 (Sagi 2016: 279; Chappel 1964: 2). Greig must have sensed Kawai's generous welcome as a version of Rikyū's words 'treasure each encounter' (一期一会) in Kawai's house.

Kawai welcomed a number of foreign visitors although he did not travel to the US and Europe unlike Hamada or Yanagi. The interior of his house was not a typical Japanese Kyoto house. Its European atmosphere may show the influence from Yanagi, his *Mingei* colleague. Yanagi visited the Nordiska Museet (the Nordic Museum) in 1921, which he described to Leach as 'the biggest museum of peasant arts in the world.' This became the model for the *Mingei-kan* (Japanese Folk Crafts Museum) established in 1936 and perhaps also influenced Kawai's interior design (Kikuchi 2004: 70–71). Kawai constantly hosted foreign guests and apprentices: his nephew Kawai Takeichi, Son Toshou 孫斗昌 from Korea in 1934, Leach in 1935, and Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999) who was invited by the Japanese government to teach design for the Western market in 1940. (Sagi 2016: 280–83)

Kawai received finance in 1937 to renovate his entire house. He incorporated the smart use of Danish hand-craft furniture suitable for the age, introduced by Leach, Hamada and Yanagi (Yanagi 1989: 96). Kawai's furniture featured 'functional beauty,' fit for a mini-*Mingei* museum. Kawai's elaborate interior representation can be compared to the modern projections of the refined simplicity of a tea house. Okakura

wrote, 'the tea room is the result of profound artistic forethought, and the details have been worked out with care perhaps even greater than that expended on the building of the richest palaces and temples' (Okakura 1964: 31–32, originally published 1906).

The Japanese environment and values were forced to radically adapt, culminating in Japan's 'total war' (総力戦, *sōryokusen*) effort to reverse Western hegemony. During the wartime 'lockdown,' when all resources were mobilized towards the military effort, Kawai was left with little means for kiln firing. In 1944, Kawai received financial support from his business friends and paid all his house loans, which allowed him to stop firing for the next four years (Sagi 2016: 284). He then turned to 'writing,' which was atypical for a potter, to explore answers for a new perspective on art and creativity. Kawai wrote a diary with ink and brush during these four years, that lead to his book publication after the war. Kawai's aberrant expression of art, including his poetic writings, unintentionally embedded a political message, whether to deny or to accept the social circumstances. Jacques Rancière, a French philosopher, argues that 'the politics of art is not a struggle for power, but for a configuration of a specific space, a conflict over the existence of that space' (Rancière 2009: 24). A distant co-existence of art and politics are evident in Kawai's career. Kawai had been aloof from political power but closely connected with his financial supporters who were often associated with politics.

With the end of the war in 1945, Japanese social values, beliefs, and myths, adapted to a new era of recovery. Against this economic and political backdrop of the postwar recovery, Kawai's writings, in particular, reveal his thoughts on the era through the prism of polarity. He wrote, 'a machine is an extension of hands,' which implied that people should accept mechanization. Further, his comment, 'it is normal for a leaf to be eaten by insects' suggested that Japan should accept its loss as an

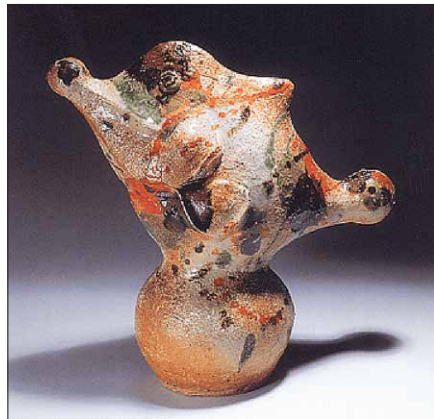


Figure 13: Fish with a splashed three-color glaze, Kawai Kanjirō. Circa 1960s. Courtesy of Robert Yellin Yakimono Gallery. <http://www.e-yakimono.net/html/kawai-Kanjirō-jt.html>

organic reality. (Kawai, 1975, 2006) Kawai proposed accepting life's continuity by 'other power' (*ta-riki* 他力) as 'non-duality' (*juni* 不二), a Buddhist term, which shows a way to come to terms with the historical rupture of Japan's defeat in the war. His artwork around that period illustrates an inexplicable state of mind and resulted in his pieces, a mix of the traditional Japanese techniques with Asian and English techniques in uniquely dynamic forms. Kawai's interaction with Leach revived after the end of the war, in 1953. Kawai's pots show an acceptance of the new era with a contradictory trust in recovery. The techniques applied in his pots were with three colors of *Tang Sancai* from China, with an English 'slip' decoration with a Japanese brush onto sculptural forms. Greig was particularly attracted by this phase of Kawai's creativity.

### Greig's Manuscript on Kawai

Greig left four hand-written manuscripts on Kawai, a record of his spiritual journey towards the 'East.' His aesthetic search is evident throughout his manuscripts with several key terms emerging. Greig's interpretation of Kawai and Japanese aesthetics was built on the philosophical duality between East and West with numerous comparisons. His inscribed differences from Christianity to Buddhism seemingly walking in the footsteps of Orientalist ideas of essentialization of the East and West. At the same time, he compared Japanese philosophy to European Romanticism, suggesting there is a common ground that would undermine the cultural dichotomy (Greig 1982f). As recorded in his notes, Greig found Kawai's 'deep feeling for overcoming duality' bearing a mystic, 'prophetic' dimension, exuberant in 'mana' (Greig 1982d: 2, 37, 52, 56).<sup>17</sup>

Greig entitled his project 'Prophetic Potter.' He intended to include a discussion on the *Mingei* archetype,<sup>18</sup> the aestheticism, and the religious foundations which bridged views ranging from *Shingon* Buddhism (which he understood as being one of Kawai's sources) to European Romanticism. The 'prophetic' aspects, which Greig was attempting to conceptualize through a combined biographical, art historical and cross-cultural analysis, are expressed in two main ways. One is Kawai's spiritual dimension in the evolution of his work fulfilling *Mingei* archetypes and the other is the silent struggle accompanying his artistic quest. Regarding the archetypes identified in Kawai's work, it can be deduced that for Greig, this was primarily associated with 'growth' or 'life force,' and stylistically manifested in exuberance and excess.

He was also attempting to follow closely how the concept of growth, or the perception that the ceramic piece may be 'alive' with plasticity. Clay is modelled on

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17 Mana of philosophy – revealed. Visitors by religions, leaders and intellectuals. 'we listened to his word which was like water from a clear fresh spring'. (Greig 1982 MS-Papers-6521-2 Kawai 1: 52)

18 Greig compared Kawai's work spirit with 'archetype' by noting 'Kawai is a perfect example – to archetype through moral wind,' 'direct influence, but open to same universal source of archetypes' symbolizing exuberance (Greig 1982d: 2, 31, 39).

processes of metamorphoses and shifting dichotomies (contraction of dual structures). In the void enclosed in ceramic piece, he attempted to show how the essential notion of a spatial enclosure ('negative space') inherent in the making of clay containers may be perceived through exposure to the 'outer space,' to use Greig's term. Greig photographed every artwork piece of Kawai and wrote separate notes – analyzing its technique and decoration – formulating the metamorphosis of Kawai (Greig, 1982d). Greig incorporated this idea into his series of 'Solid & Void' (Greig 1982f: 20). Greig seemed to seek a balance between form and decoration, which would destabilize the preconceived ideas of 'surface and volume.'

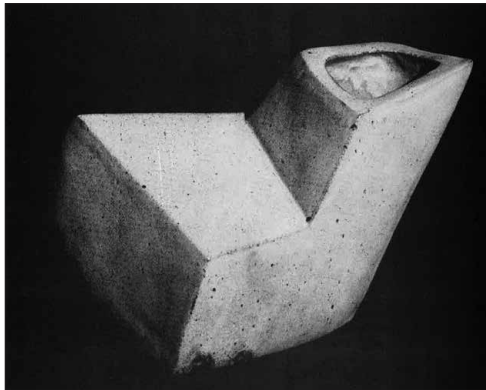


Figure 14: *Solid & Void* by James Greig: *Transformations*, Exhibition Publication, 1982: 26. Wellington City Art Gallery. Courtesy of Rhondda Greig. ([https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations\\_catalogue.pdf](https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations_catalogue.pdf))

Notably, Greig was aspiring to create a book that has 'grown' out of Kawai's artwork. Even though Greig may not have had a reading knowledge of Japanese, it is important to point out the existence of Kawai's philosophical writings (essays and poetic prose) alongside his artworks. Greig created his version of Kawai in cultural transfer like translating a foreign language as an experience of struggle at the limits of understanding. Greig noted Kawai's reluctance to speak directly of the message in his work (Greig 1982d: 54), yet he also discerned through his biographical project that words constitute another dimension of the potter's universe. Greig was visualizing his book as a 'living work,' which in terms of format could be achieved not through statements and prescriptions, but through 'questions' dynamically immersing the readers (Greig 1982e: 41). There appears to be an overarching question within Greig's project, suggesting the profundity of his quest as a New Zealander, attempting to achieve a 'Western viewpoint' on Kawai. This overarching question also addresses the role of destiny in Greig's link to Japan from the POW camp to Kawai's world. His responsiveness to Buddhist ideas of transcending polarity combined with his celebration of the secular dimension of lived practice and experience: 'We are born out of the cosmos.' (Greig 1982d: 47) Greig seemed to be on the cusp of crossing a boundary within his homage to Kawai.

New Zealand celebrated counterculture in the 1970s and many were attracted to the eastern religions (or spiritualism) despite a general conservative attitude on religion. Greig apparently understood the contexts of *Shingon* and Zen Buddhist thought as touchstones to the uncharted terrain of humanistic universality and unity. This could be interpreted as the esoteric version of his advocacy for ‘art as a significant vehicle for international understanding.’<sup>19</sup> His responsiveness to the ‘other power’ of Buddhism’s idea of non-self was also a form of struggle rather than resignation. Greig refers to Kawai’s life as a Buddhist ‘treatise,’ which he ‘struggles to translate.’ (Greig 1982e: 42) The struggle, of which Greig speaks in this passage, overlaps with his entire project and, one could argue, accessing a core of cultural translation (exchange) as a struggle at a deep and poetic level. With the same approach, as he assesses Kawai’s struggle ‘away from the *Mingei* tradition’, Greig visualizes Kawai as ‘[struggling] forward in unknown waters’ (Greig 1982c: 31). Greig’s entire project, one could argue, signifies the struggle of cultural translation to access a type of transcendence, submerged in the ‘unknown waters’ of the cultural ‘other’ beyond history and ideology. It is appropriate to say that the two artists’ struggles merged in Greig’s project. The poem of Zen master Shūhō Myōchō (aka. Daitō Kokushi 1282–1338 大燈国師), inspired both Greig and Kawai, shares with us a glimpse of a ‘living road,’ a vast terrain in which the transformative forces of life and growth ‘reroot’ cultural identities and practices. Greig, known as a certified balloonist, offers a view from the sky, which poignantly substantiates the two initial lines he noted on his manuscript. (Greig 1982d: 33).<sup>20</sup>

Having once penetrated the cloud barrier [kan],  
The living world opens out north [East] [South] [and] [West].  
In the evening resting, in the morning roaming, neither host nor guest.  
At every step the pure wind rises. (Greig 1982d: 33)<sup>21</sup>

### Greig’s Endeavour with Plasticity and Void

Greig’s cross-cultural encounter could be developed into a cognitive metaphor of the pottery process. Pottery starts by the digging of clay. The work requires strength, similar to Greig’s laborious efforts to absorb Kawai’s Zen Buddhist philosophy. Forming clay is done by hands, the direct touch of clay’s plasticity. This core of pottery making requires skill to find the right balance of plasticity to form a shape without losing too much moisture. Building a new relationship also requires plasticity

19 Greig quoted in Evening Post article interview by Sue Thomas. ‘Japanese companies are closely involved in supporting cultural events and expect other companies to have similar values.’ ‘Art forges better link between NZ and Japan,’ *Evening Post* (New Zealand), 1985.

20 Greig explained his artwork no. 24 & 25 Land Form bowl at the *Transformation* exhibition as ‘a feeling of the undulating and uplifting of the earth, experienced while floating above it in a hot air balloon – an experience of freedom and balanced opposites which I was fortunate enough to have’ (Greig, 1982f: 14). [https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations\\_catalogue.pdf](https://citygallery.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Transformations_catalogue.pdf)

21 His notes obviously reflect the poem of Daitō Kokushi, the founder of Daitōkuji (Poem by Daitō Kokushi, cited by Dumoulin, Heinrich 1988: 186). <https://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/daito-kokushi.html>



Figure 15: Plasticity model. ©2020, Kumiko Jacolin.

to accept difference, to find the right balance, a negotiation on the limit between two cultures and a displacement from a familiar to a foreign culture. Greig's interpretation stretched like the plasticity of clay through the shapes of his idea moulded by the 'other power.' Plasticity received and reshaped Greig's sentient thought without direct access to Kawai's literature.

The next process is patient drying of the pottery. This tedious step is similar to the patience needed for cultural encounters. Greig's year-long stay in Japan to study Kawai was like an endurance-test: like the clay, could he tolerate the necessary investment of time? Likewise in pottery, we fire twice, first at a lower temperature (700–900C) as a bisque. Most unsuitable forms will explode at around 200–300C and only a durable pot will be preserved for the final stage. Greig passed this one-year test and succeeded in exhibiting his artwork. He formed a precious friendship with Japan after a year.

In Catherine Malabou's analysis of the psyche, plasticity pre-empts the gap, the trace of struggle or trauma, by receiving, giving and even annihilating form (Malabou 2009: 44). Malabou's phrase 'the permanence of form' evokes Greig's comments on the irreversibility of the fired object; however, this irreversibility can be also understood as plastic in the sense of destroying form. This pottery process accounts for a certain plasticity essential to approaching cross-cultural relations. Greig idealised clay as a living form transforming from amorphous to an irreversibly congealed shape, all the while retaining the 'spark of life' (the title of his autobiographical film). Greig's quest for the relationship between 'life and form' was empowered by the 'visual and invisible' concept of clay. The 'living work,' which Greig strived to conceptualize





Figure 16: *Sentient Souls*, 2020. Ceramics with kintsugi (joinery with lacquer and gold), ©2020, Kumiko Jacolin. Photograph by Colin McDiarmid.

in his illustrated biography of Kawai seamlessly metamorphosized into an engaged questioning of Greig's own life and legacy. The intercultural dimension in pottery exchanges between New Zealand and Japan did not only fill a void in cultural resources, amidst the political or economic dimension of soft power, but encouraged the preservation of a 'void' (or a negativity) as an enabling polarity.

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### Bibliographical Note

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BYPASSING BICULTURALISM:  
CHINESE-MĀORI CONNECTIONS IN RENEE LIANG'S  
THE BONE FEEDER

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*The land here is tapu – protecting the bones  
of many ancestors, not just your own.*

– Renee Liang, *The Bone Feeder*

**Introduction**

In 1902 the SS Ventnor, an English steamer chartered to take nearly 500 Chinese bodies from New Zealand back to their ancestral home, sank off the coast of Hokianga. All crew and passengers perished. Some of the coffins were washed ashore and taken in by local iwi, Te Roroa and Te Rarawa. This tragic event remained buried in New Zealand history until a century later, when Chinese-New Zealanders began to recover and retell the story. The story triggered a decade-long journey for the poet and playwright Renee Liang, who wrote *The Bone Feeder* in 2007, a play that went through several versions and was subsequently adapted into an opera in 2017.<sup>1</sup>

Liang's *The Bone Feeder* takes up the story in the present day, when Ben, a fifth-generation Chinese-New Zealander, travels to Hokianga to search for the bones of his great-great-grandfather Kwan, lost to the sea when the SS Ventnor sank. His mission is to recover the bones and return them to China, where he hopes to reconnect with his ancestral roots and “find himself”. On the Hokianga harbour, he encounters a

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1 In August 2007, at the NZ Going Bananas International Conference, Renee Liang heard a talk by Nigel Sew Hoy about the sinking of the SS Ventnor and the tragic “second death” of his great-great-grandfather Choie Sew Hoy, amongst many others. The story left a deep impression on Liang and inspired her to take a postgraduate diploma in theatre and playwriting at the University of Auckland that year, in order to write the story. The first version of *The Bone Feeder* became her graduation project. In 2009, Liang directed the play at the University of Auckland. The play was subsequently performed three more times – at the Hamilton Gardens Arts Festival in 2010, a Poll Tax-funded production in Palmerston North, also in 2010, and a 2011 production directed by Lauren Jackson at TAPAC Theatre in Auckland. Each new production involved some rewriting. Liang rewrote scenes for the Hamilton Chinese Garden production, directed it and added a dance element and the role of a spirit guide in this version (played by herself). The 2011 version, the first professional production of the play directed by Lauren Jackson, is the third and final version of the play (The manuscript is archived at Playmarket).

Māori ferryman and meets some strange characters who turn out to be ghosts. Ben's insistence on digging up the bones clashes with the sanctity of Māori burial grounds, and his words and actions, largely ignorant of Chinese and Māori traditions, lead to vehement protests from both human and ghost, and ultimately, from nature itself. Ben is destined to experience a metaphorical death in order to understand his own heart and find his place in the world.

In its various iterations as play, theatre, libretto and opera, *The Bone Feeder* is demanding as a work of literary creativity as well as cultural diplomacy. A second-generation Chinese New Zealander of Cantonese background, Liang had to obtain the trust of the descendants of the early Chinese settlers who were at the centre of the tragedy, as well as the Māori iwi where the subsequent events unfolded. As an English speaker, she had to meet the linguistic and cultural challenges of incorporating Cantonese and te reo Māori into her play. And she had to build and collaborate with a multicultural and multinational team of artists to put her work on stage.

This essay will bypass the familiar framework of Chinese-Kiwi identity formation pivoted on the status of Chinese immigrant communities within mainstream Pākehā New Zealand, and instead approach Liang's work as a critical response to New Zealand biculturalism. Against the background of Māori-Pākehā biculturalism which "is increasingly unable to describe the actual relations of contemporary culture and society" and "has inhibited consideration of ethnicities other than those in the bicultural pairing" (Williams 2009:300), *The Bone Feeder* takes us through to less familiar and less visible trajectories of cultural diplomacy, highlighting Chinese-Māori connections, tensions, and affiliations. By demonstrating the ways in which Liang's creative recovery of a lost chapter of New Zealand history might disrupt and challenge existing cultural patterns and hierarchies, I seek to uncover new approaches to intercultural relations that go beyond current discourses of biculturalism and multiculturalism.

I begin with an account of the critical reception of the 2017 opera production of *The Bone Feeder*, drawing attention to a critical inertia that seems to privilege Pākehā/European perspectives and perpetuate the marginal status of the Asian other. Through an analysis of the ritual aspects of the opera, informed by first-hand interview with Renee Liang as well as the broader social and cultural contexts, I delineate the mechanisms of Liang's cultural diplomacy and aesthetic interventions that have brought a Chinese-Māori story to main-stage New Zealand. I conclude by assessing the potential of Liang's intercultural work as a form of "cultural diplomacy beyond the national". As a critical position, "cultural diplomacy beyond the national" takes departure from the nation-based approaches to cultural diplomacy in Australasia, as exemplified in a recent edited volume *China in Australasia: Cultural diplomacy and Chinese arts since the Cold War* (Beattie, Bullen & Galikowski 2019), and contributes to a broader critical effort to liberate the discussion of cultural diplomacy from an over-emphasis on national interests. (see Ang, Isar & Mar 2015)

### Critical reception: “too Western” and “not enough Māori”

Commissioned and produced by the Auckland Arts Festival and presented in association with New Zealand Opera, *The Bone Feeder* premiered in the ASB Waterfront Theatre in Auckland on 23-26 March 2017, with four performances. The show was hailed as the first New Zealand opera that features Chinese-New Zealanders as its protagonists and explores Chinese-New Zealand history and identity as its core theme. The breakthrough opera has generated considerable excitement amongst the critics and audiences. Alice Canton describes herself as being “incredibly moved” when the protagonist Ben (played by Henry Choo) first appeared on stage because “the implications of seeing a Chinese English-speaking male protagonist [who isn’t rendered into a stereotype] are so great”. (Canton 2017) Lamenting the dearth of leading Asian protagonists in New Zealand stage productions, Nathan Joe remarks that “an opera with a primarily East Asian cast is a big deal”. Referring to Jaewoo Kim, the tenor who performs the role of Kwan, singing in accented English, Joe asks: “How often do you hear an Asian character speak (let alone sing) and be taken seriously?” (Joe 2017)

Such positive and enthusiastic responses, while celebrating the belated diversification of mainstream New Zealand theatre, underline the fact that New Zealand opera, or opera in general, does not have a good track record of being sensitive to non-European cultures. Never mind that the two Chinese protagonists in *The Bone Feeder* were both played by Australian-Korean singers – the lack of cultural representation is so severe that any Asian face is already a step forward. *The Bone Feeder* is a major triumph for Asian representation in contemporary New Zealand culture.

Both Alice Canton and Nathan Joe are New Zealanders with Chinese heritage. Their euphoria towards the opera, which highlights theatre’s role in effecting political progress and social change, is imbued with what Dorrine Kondo has called “racial affect” (Kondo 2019). From the artistic perspective, however, the critical reception of *The Bone Feeder* is more mixed. David Larsen comments that there is much to commend in this opera, but not a lot to “enjoy”. Larsen describes Gareth Farr’s music as all texture and mood – “music to drift into” – but with no memorable melodies or standout solos. (Larsen 2017) More pointed criticism emerged in a “conversational review” of *The Bone Feeder* by Alex Taylor, Francis Moore and Alice Canton. Canton calls the opera “pleasant and mild rather than moving or wild” and attributes this creative deficiency to the “risk averse, timid” nature of high-stakes art making. Moore asks the question “why in a work that is specifically cross-cultural, all the theatrical and musical conventions are still mostly Western”. Responding to Canton’s musing on “the potential for Cantonese opera to influence this show”, Taylor admits to not knowing enough about Cantonese opera to make any judgment in that regard, but still echoes the “too Western” critique with the remark that “the cultural intersection points *felt* like they were treated very traditionally, from a Western perspective” (Taylor, Moore & Canton 2017, my emphasis).

Taylor is correct in suspecting that there might be more to the music than the superficial impression of it *feeling* “Western”. The composer Gareth Farr is not new to non-European music. For years, he has been a champion of Indonesian music,

leading one of the prominent gamelan ensembles outside of Indonesia, based at the New Zealand School of Music. Prior to composing for *The Bone Feeder*, Farr, along with Renee Liang, undertook a month-long research trip to Guangdong province, where Farr immersed himself in Cantonese music. At the suggestion of the Chinese-New Zealand composer Gao Ping, Farr devoted attention to the tonal features of the Cantonese language and incorporated them into his score. (Radio New Zealand, 2017)<sup>2</sup> These tonal features are particularly salient in the opening and concluding Cantonese choruses, although such tonal inflections may not sound apparent to audiences who are not conversant in Cantonese.<sup>3</sup>

Canton considers the need to find commonalities a hindrance to artistic expression, and maintains that “the merit of diversity is in the difference”. (Taylor, Moore & Canton 2017)<sup>4</sup> However, in this particular discourse on difference, the frame of reference is Pākehā/Western culture, and the quest for difference seems to stop at some vague notion of “Asianness”. Whilst the critics consider the multicultural dimension of the opera as something laudable and that should really be the norm rather than the exception in contemporary New Zealand, the “too Western” critique of *The Bone Feeder* can be a double-edged sword: on one hand, it is a well-meaning call for artists dealing with cross-cultural material to be daring and different, to provoke and to challenge the status quo; on the other hand, it can become an imposition on artists, particularly those of ethnic minorities, to accentuate or exoticise their cultural difference, which may serve to further ghettoise minority cultures.

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- 2 For an extended study of the application of Cantonese tones in contemporary compositions, see Xuelai Wu’s dissertation, *The Fusion of Cantonese Music with Western Composition Techniques: “Tunes from My Home” Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano by Chen Yi*, Arizona State University, 2017.
  - 3 In contrast to Farr’s restraint, Liang took a more “colorful”, attention-grabbing approach to the earlier theatrical productions of *The Bone Feeder*. In Liang’s press release for the Poll-tax funded Palmerston North production in 2010, the director Simon Zhou is quoted as saying “We are drawing inspiration from Asian theatre forms such as shadow-play, use of vibrant fabrics and puppetry” (Liang 2010). In a review of the Lauren Jackson-directed TAPAC production in 2011, James Wenley contends that “Martial Arts seem somewhat shoehorned into the story. Each time the wire was used, I felt immediately taken out of the world of the play”. (Wenley 2011) The opera version, under Sara Brodie’s direction, eschews such exotic flavouring and takes a more subtle, evocative and minimalist approach to cross-cultural story-telling.
  - 4 On commonality/difference there appears to be a generational divide within immigrant communities, with the older generation seeking common ground for acceptance and the younger generation embracing difference. In a recent article profiling the flourishing of new Chinese-Kiwi literary talent, Renee Liang notes this difference between herself as a second-generation, slightly older Chinese-Kiwi and the “young, hip” Chinese New Zealand writers who have emerged in the last few years. (Tay 2020) The younger generation may feel more comfortable in their own skin, and also have the benefit of enjoying and building upon the hard-earned acceptance through the endeavours of their predecessors. For most older Chinese Kiwis and new Chinese immigrants, however, accentuating and celebrating their difference may still be a luxury.

Critics have also taken issue with the opera's subdued treatment of Māori culture, although on very different grounds from their dissatisfaction with its subdued Chineseness. Michael Hooper notes that "[t]he weaving through of tikanga Māori is a little less overt than the Chinese traditions, in terms of depth and balance". Hooper attributes the opera's lack of strong emotion and dynamics not so much to Liang's writing, which he finds moving, but to the restrained and perhaps over-reverential staging. (Hooper 2017) Echoing Hooper's sentiment that the taonga pūoro was treated reverentially, Alex Taylor points out that the Māori elements were used only for transitional passages in the opera, and felt underdeveloped in terms of how they related to the whole. He then notes the more general tendency to flatten out cultural differences in cross-cultural production. (Taylor, Moore & Canton 2017)

In a country that abides by the policy of biculturalism, reverentiality towards Māori is officially mandated and indeed, deeply ingrained in the psyche of every culturally sensitive New Zealander. For artists who deal with historical material that directly involves Māori, such as the creators of *The Bone Feeder*, the political implications of the work can be truly "high-stakes". It is therefore ironic that critics have picked up on the reverential treatment of historical content as a limiting, rather than a winning, feature of *The Bone Feeder*. The quibble with reverentiality may have its rationale on aesthetic grounds, and being culturally irreverent can be a badge of honour for many a politically engaged artist. In the context of *The Bone Feeder*, however, the imperative to be irreverent may imply an endorsement of certain exaggerations, or even stereotypes, of ethno-racial attributes – for example, the noble savage image of Māori, or the exotic otherness of Chinese.

The critical reception of *The Bone Feeder* highlights the fact that, a cross-cultural work that falls outside the orbit of New Zealand biculturalism can disrupt the existing template of ethno-cultural relations in this country and expose the limitations of its conception and vocabulary. The "not enough Maori" critique, though as well-meaning as the "too Western" critique, can betray a certain tyranny of Māori-Pākehā biculturalism that perpetuates the othering of non-Māori and non-Pākehā cultures, thus denying their presence and diminishing their relevance to New Zealand history and contemporary culture.

New Zealand's cornerstone policy of biculturalism is not without its critics. As Manying Ip has pointed out, an obvious flaw in this concept is that "it does not define the place of anyone who is non-Māori and non-Pākehā, such as the Chinese". (Ip 2003:227) Mark Williams has argued that it is time New Zealand got beyond the bicultural framework of Māori-Pākehā relations, partly because biculturalism reinforces its colonial legacy rather than overcoming it. (Williams 2009: 300) But the question is, how? Can we speak of a Māori-Chinese New Zealand history that parallels, and complicates, Māori-Pākehā biculturalism? Can we be reverential towards Māori without reinscribing Māori-Pākehā biculturalism? How might the reverentiality that fosters Māori-Chinese connections be reinterpreted as a healthy irreverence towards New Zealand biculturalism?

It is important to remember that through writing *The Bone Feeder*, Liang is revisiting a chapter of New Zealand history that preceded the rise of biculturalism



in the 1980s and the more recent flourish of multiculturalism. The fledging Māori-Chinese friendship in the SS Ventnor story can be aptly summarised in Williams's words, as "arrested encounters", in a cultural history that had been suppressed by a preferred narrative of biculturalism (Williams 2009). Therefore, instead of celebrating *The Bone Feeder* as a high point of Asian culture in a multicultural mosaic decorating a Pākehā centerpiece, I propose to explore the potential of the Māori-Chinese connections highlighted in Liang's work as an antidote to Māori-Pākehā biculturalism, or as an envisagement of what the New Zealand cultural landscape could have been, without subjecting it to the prerogatives of biculturalism. This critical exercise is not to negate the historical importance of biculturalism to New Zealand nation building, but to challenge its narcissism and to posit a more inclusive, and dynamic, model of interculturalism.

### Chinese-Māori connections: a critique of biculturalism

It is equally important to be cognizant of the fact that, whilst dealing with historical material on ethno-cultural relations dating back to the early 20th century, Liang also has to navigate New Zealand cultural politics and race relations of the 21st century. From the very start, Liang has been acutely aware of the need to negotiate and secure the right to tell the story about the sinking of the SS Ventnor, a story that involves both Chinese and Māori communities. As a second-generation Chinese-Kiwi, Liang has had to overcome several social, cultural and linguistic hurdles in order to work with early Chinese settler material. She talked with the Hoy family to gain their trust and obtain permission to write "their story".<sup>5</sup> Her work is entitled "The Bone Feeder". Liang admits that the title merely refers to Ben's quest to retrieve the bones of his ancestors, and it is a good title for "grabbing attention". (Liang 2020) However, there is no denying the fact that for over a hundred years since the sinking of the SS Ventnor, the Māori had been the de facto "bone feeders". The oral history of Te Roroa and Te Rarawa tells the secret of bones found and kept safe until their families came for them.

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5 Although not the focus of this article, it is important to note that the writing and production of *The Bone Feeder* highlighted the tensions and dividedness within the Chinese diaspora communities, and a certain amount of "intra-cultural diplomacy" was necessary to reconcile the competing and conflicting cultural positions on the telling and staging of the SS Ventnor story. Liang worked with an intimate group of collaborators, from Cantonese translators to Chinese musicians, to ensure the "authenticity" of her work. Although fiercely protective of her Cantonese heritage, Liang is not averse to associating and collaborating with Mandarin speakers. In fact, one of her earliest and most enduring collaborators on *The Bone Feeder* project is a Mandarin speaker, Xiyao Chen, a musician specializing in the traditional Chinese instrument guzheng. Yet the multicultural makeup of contemporary New Zealand often challenged any pre-conceived notion of cultural authenticity, and Liang's negotiations and compromises reflect the diversity and dividedness of the Chinese immigrant communities in New Zealand. In the Palmerston North production sponsored by the Poll-tax Fund, the Cantonese part of the play was performed in Mandarin because the actor who played Kwan could not speak Cantonese. This "cross-over" raised objection from an audience member (affiliated with the Poll Tax Fund), who reportedly walked out during the show. (Liang 2018)

Before the surge of interest from the Chinese community to recover this hidden history and make it known to the world as part of their story, the bones had already been woven into the local iwi history.<sup>6</sup>

Liang directed meticulous attention to Māori cultural protocol throughout the different phases of the making of *The Bone Feeder*. In the earlier stages of her writing, Liang's approach to working with Māori actors was consultative and collaborative, and she asked them to check if the writing was in line with their iwi. (Liang 2018) In her role as the librettist for the opera, Liang treaded some sensitive ground whilst working with her Māori collaborators.

The opera opens with a mōteatea sung by the Ferryman, as a strong gesture towards the Māori pedigree of the story. Mōteatea is a time-honoured Māori tradition of chanted poetry. Composed for many purposes and reasons, often by great poets, mōteatea has the power to call on gods and ancestors, who manifest in the world through music and the human voice.

In the opera, the mōteatea is sung in Māori. The libretto provides the Māori text, followed by the English version in brackets. During performance on stage, the English text is projected onto the background and artfully incorporated as a part of the set design. In both scenarios, the English text serves as a translation for people who have no knowledge of te reo Māori. In the actual writing process, however, the mōteatea was first written in English by Liang, and then translated into Māori by Hone Hurihanganui. It was a case of translation where the line between the "source text" and the "target text" is collapsed or at least becomes blurry. In the writing process, the English text is the original and the Māori is the translation. In the intended use of the texts, in both the printed libretto and the stage production, the Māori version acquires the status of the "original", whereas the English takes a more secondary, translational role.

Liang's original writing of the mōteatea in English can be interpreted as a simultaneous act of homage and appropriation. She had to walk a fine line that required the exercise of considerable cultural diplomacy. In the opera programme, Hone Hurihanganui is included in the credits as translator, but on a separate list, he is also credited as the creator of the mōteatea. By giving sole authorship of the mōteatea to the Māori translator, Liang gives up a part of her own rights to authorship. This is clearly an act of "over-reverentiality" towards Māori because the same honour was not extended to Henry Liu, the translator who produced the Cantonese text for the opera in a similar collaborative procedure. However, the special status given to the mōteatea may reflect more than a superficial concession to ingratiate the Māori collaborators. Recognition of the crucial Māori dimension of the story and the gravitas of the mōteatea within that dimension, rather than a politically correct adherence to New Zealand biculturalism, may be the greater impetus behind Liang's over-reverentiality. Part of the librettist's humility may also have to do with the sanctity of the mōteatea

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6 For an account of the history of the SS Ventnor's sinking from the local Hokianga point of view, see NZ Chinese Association: Ventnor Project (URL: <https://ssventnor.wordpress.com/history/>).

ritual, something that should not be “touched” by a non-Māori person. It is paradoxical that in the desire to heighten a sense of authenticity, the creative process has involved some artistic license in representing quotidian truth.

This pursuit of authenticity at all costs renders Liang’s work susceptible to the ills of political correctness, a symptom of the kind of over-reverential, risk-averse theatre-making that Canton, Moore and Taylor are critical of. In diaspora studies, authenticity has been repeatedly debunked by critics, such as Rey Chow, as a straight-jacket imposed on diaspora communities from the dual oppressors of their “mother culture” and the host culture that they have adopted. (Chow 1998)

In dealing with a cultural source, no matter how distant or intimate, is it possible to be reverential and critical at the same time? Although musically the opera has been criticised for its over-emphasis on commonality and harmony, Liang’s dramaturgical treatment of ritual is not without its critical edge. The main narrative arc of the opera is Ben’s quest to uncover his great-great-grandfather’s bones and return them to China, thus reconnecting them to their ancestry and cultural roots. This quest is driven by the underlying values of Chinese ancestral worship and familial lineage, which in many ways find sympathetic echoing in Māori cultural practice. However, to accomplish this task Ben has to dig up the bones now buried at Mitimiti cemetery, which clashes with Māori burial practice and belief.

Before proceeding to dig up the bones, Ben sings an aria to express his pent-up feelings:

***Ben***

Your light is all I see now no direction needed  
 I’m close, I can feel it  
 your bones now beneath my feet –  
 I am here, your wings singing, trembling against my skin: Mitimiti, Mitimiti  
 find him at Mitimiti  
 from this graveyard of Maori bones I’ll take you, I’ll take you home –  
 a shipwreck disinherited my family through our years of shame  
 my father and my father’s father rootless, drifting  
 never felt at home  
 I want to claim my stories reconnect my family  
 my task must be completed  
 to take these bones to China and find myself  
 (Liang 2016)

Ben’s words also serve as a dramaturgical device to explain the reasons for his actions, which may not be so apparent to non-Chinese audiences. This is meant to be the emotional climax of the opera. However, much of its emotional resonance is lost on the audience who might find it difficult to identify with Ben’s desire to “take these bones to China and find [him]self”. And it is not just the non-Chinese audience who may not share the notion that one’s identity and sense of belonging reside in one’s ancestral

origin. It is unlikely that a fifth-generation Chinese-New Zealander would look to China as the destination of their cultural belonging. On some level, Ben's outpourings here work better as a dramaturgical device than as an expression of emotional truth. However, if Ben's impulse to "find himself in China" were understood metaphorically, it could become a potent expression of grief and grievance from a racial minority youth who does not feel *at home* in the country of his birth.

Ben's willful act of breaking the skin of the earth to dig up the ancestral bones triggers immediate protestation from his Māori guide:

*Ben picks up a spade. The sky and earth react.*

**Ferryman** Stop. Wait, don't dig

The land here is tapu – protecting the bones  
of many ancestors, not just your own.

(Liang 2016)

Tapu, in te reo Māori, means "sacred". The Ferryman's objection is driven by the communal interest to safeguard the sanctity of Māori burial grounds. However, in this case, the Chinese conflict with Māori belief and practice also serves as a reminder of the spiritual and moral limitations of Chinese ancestral worship. The collective, communal nature of Māori burial practice is foregrounded, in sharp relief against the narrower conception of Chinese ancestral worship based strictly on familial lineage. That the Chinese bones have been salvaged by the Māori iwi and buried in their own cemeteries testifies to the fact that Māori belief and practice can go beyond, and have gone beyond, racial boundaries as well.

The Ferryman's words of wisdom hold much critical potential for reimagining New Zealand ethno-racial relations. In the most immediate sense, they are a critique of Ben's selfishness, and the exclusivity of Chinese ancestral worship. Although directly addressed to Ben, these words were also addressed to the audience, and by extension, to all in New Zealand. Thus, *The land here is tapu – protecting the bones of many ancestors, not just your own*, can be reinterpreted, perhaps in ways that are unintended in the original work, as a much broader critique of all forms of parochialism, including New Zealand biculturalism.

Ancestors abound in *The Bone Feeder*, and so do ghosts. On many levels, the story can be read as a Chinese ghost tale in a contemporary New Zealand setting. The Ferryman's precaution about "many ancestors, not just your own" echoes Arthur Wolf's definition of ghosts as "other people's ancestors". (Wolf 1974) As I have previously argued, much of the Chinese ghost tale tradition could be understood as an attempt, on the part of the cultural elite, to accommodate and come to terms with the non-ancestral ghost, or other people's ancestors. (Luo 2009) Then, in what sense is *The Bone Feeder* a collective effort, in the high-stakes, elite form of opera, to accommodate, literally and symbolically, the Chinese ghosts? And what does it mean to accommodate the Chinese, the ubiquitous racial other, in the context of bicultural New Zealand?

In *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Cheng conceptualises racial melancholia as a theoretical model of identity that provides a critical framework for analysing the constitutive role that grief plays in American racial and ethnic subject formation. Cheng reinterprets Freudian melancholia in racial terms, which manifests itself as a constitutional blind spot, and as an ailment that inflicts the psyche of both white America and its racial other. Cheng describes a relationship of mutual dependence within which the white American subject secures its identity through the melancholic introjection of racial others that it can neither fully relinquish or accommodate. Thus the racial other becomes a persistent yet ghostly presence in the American psyche. An inverse mechanism of melancholia also plagues the racial other, whose sense of subjectivity is gained, paradoxically, through a perpetual loss. (Cheng 2001: xi) This dynamic of racial melancholia mirrors the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of Chinese presence in New Zealand's bicultural paradigm, a ghostliness that is perfectly captured by the trope of the Chinese ghost tale.

In contrast with Cheng's model of melancholia, which forecloses any possibility of accommodation and offers little in the way of respite or catharsis, the Chinese ghost tale is characterised by an imbricated process of disenfranchisement and accommodation. This narrative pattern propels *The Bone Feeder* out of melancholia to contemplate the move forward. Thus we see the intercultural encounter between Ben and the Ferryman going beyond grief and grievance to effect a series of personal and cultural transformations.

After the Ferryman's warning, a more direct and forceful objection to Ben's digging comes from the ghost of Kwan, the very ancestor that Ben is trying to honour and appease. Appearing before Ben and reminding him that "the Ferryman was right", Kwan sings an aria to reveal his identity to Ben and to convey that his sense of belonging has now been transformed because of Ben's presence:

**Kwan** How I've longed for this  
the moment I finally meet my family  
and you're here – your eyes, your face  
this jade cicada led you here  
not to bring me home  
but to bring home to me, here  
(Liang 2016)

On his journey, Ben carries a jade cicada that once belonged to Kwan, his great-great-grandfather. A symbol of the cycle of life and resurrection in traditional Chinese culture, the cicada is not only a family heirloom that helps Ben and Kwan find each other, it also serves as an emblem that connects the world of the dead with the world of the living. The cicada/te tarakihi also features prominently in Māori folksong and decorative arts, its delirious summer singing revered as a source of immense strength. (Anderson 1923) In *The Bone Feeder*, the carved jade cicada thus becomes a shared symbol of connection between Chinese and Māori traditions. However, such symbolism is all but lost on Ben, who appears fixated on his single-minded mission.

**Ben** If you really were my ancestor  
you'd know how duty drives me  
how I owe this to my family –

**Kwan** I am your elder, I forbid you –

**Ben** How would you know how it feels  
have you ever been alone  
not knowing where you belong?

**Kwan** You know nothing. You are fake Chinese.

**Ben** Let me pass!

(Liang 2016)

*You know nothing. You are fake Chinese.* is probably the one line that carries the most emotional punch in the entire opera. However, the term “fake Chinese” is not to be taken as an entirely negative description of Ben’s identity. Kwan’s words are both admonition of a misguided self-centeredness in Ben’s quest and affirmation of his Kiwi-ness. Yet these words fail to wake up Ben from his willful pursuit. He digs up the sand amidst the protests from both human and ghost, and above all, cosmic retribution in the form of a violent storm that engulfs and drowns him. Ben dies a metaphorical death that parallels the experience of his ancestor’s bones that were lost to the cold waters of the Hokianga harbour more than a century before. As his body is washed ashore and he regains consciousness in the presence of the Ferryman, Ben is a transformed man. The old Ben who insisted on finding himself in China against all odds is now gone. We see a new Ben who has learned his lesson from his intercultural and inter-generational encounters, now at peace with his place in the world.

Yet another transformation comes when Ben proceeds to perform the Chinese ritual of Bai-san, or “feeding the bones”. Instead of following the protocol of Chinese ancestral worship, the ritual starts with the Māori practice of hongi between Ben and the Ferryman. The Ferryman’s participation in the ritual goes beyond the role of the Māori host. He also initiates the bowing and offering of incense, key gestures in Chinese ancestral worship. As Ben takes his turn and goes through the ancestral rites himself, the originally separate Māori and Cantonese choruses at the beginning of the opera become layered and overlapping, providing an analogous soundscape for this intercultural commingling, with Chinese and Māori traditions accommodating and transforming each other. If the opera’s opening mōteatea as expression in language has necessitated the claim of authorship, its concluding ritual, expressed in gesture and in music, creates a more open and fluid space of intercultural communication, where the verbal and non-verbal can interact, and words that are otherwise mutually unintelligible can transcend ownership and generate meaning.

The spiritual and emotional impact of the opera’s final scene is nothing short of that of a communal ritual, one that the audiences observe, and also participate in. This communal ritual space is achieved through well-considered dramaturgical and staging arrangements. The opera highlights the transcultural significance of music by weaving the sounds of Chinese, Māori and European musical instruments into the score. In the staging, the communal, participatory spirit of the work is further heightened by

incorporating the music ensemble, including the conductor, into the main stage, rather than half-hidden in an orchestra pit. Julian Wong, the musician who plays the dizi (bamboo flute) also performs as the cicada dancer. Symbolising the cycle of life and resurrection, the cicada dancer rises to dance across the stage at several intervals, serving as an important linchpin between the realms of the dead and the living, between past and present, and between ritual and performance.

The final scene of the opera also echoes the broader communal efforts towards the recovery of the SS Ventnor, a lost vessel of New Zealand history anchored on Māori-Chinese connections. In many ways, Liang's creative work in theatre has paralleled and intersected with the communal initiatives to restore and preserve this chapter of New Zealand history. In 2009, as Liang put her play *The Bone Feeder* on stage for the first time, a delegation of Chinese, the descendants and kin of those lost, travelled north to thank the iwi for their guardianship. There, a Bai-san ceremony was performed to "feed the bones" and finally appease the wandering ghosts. In 2017, as *The Bone Feeder* premiered as a new opera, the NZ Chinese Association launched the Ventnor Memorial Project through various commemorative events and fundraising efforts. As of May 2020, ground has been broken on the planned memorial site in Opononi, near the Hokianga harbour where the SS Ventnor sank over 110 years ago. (Wenman 2020)

### Cultural diplomacy beyond the national

It takes a village to make an opera. The production of *The Bone Feeder* vividly illustrates the multicultural and transnational realities of contemporary New Zealand. Apart from Renee Liang, the Chinese-Kiwi librettist, other key members of the creative team include Gareth Farr as the composer and Sara Brodie as the director. Like Farr, Brodie has been noted for her work with cross-cultural material in New Zealand and international theatre, particularly her collaborations with Chinese composers and performers. The cast is a multicultural and international assembly of singers and musicians of Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Chinese-Kiwi, Māori, Pākehā, Māori-Pākehā, and Australian-Korean heritage. As Liang has humbly acknowledged, the opera was less "her work" (Liang 2018). However, it must be equally acknowledged that Liang remains the heart and soul of the opera, and her tireless and nimble cultural diplomacy has played an instrumental role in "mainstreaming" the Chinese-Māori story in the relatively insular world of opera.

The success is not without compromises. As I have noted earlier, in the critical reception of the opera, the tendency to speak of a collective, undifferentiated "Asian identity" remains strong. This collectivism is reflected in the casting of the main characters. Both male leads – Ben and Kwan – are played by singers of Korean heritage. Whilst these casting decisions may have been determined by logistical and economic factors, they do raise some thorny questions about ethnic and cultural identity. Tension and rivalry amongst the different Asian ethnic groups are a well-known fact in both international politics and diaspora cultures. Yet, similar to her flexible and eclectic approach to collaborating with Mandarin-speaking actors and

musicians in the earlier play productions, Liang is open-minded about the cross-ethnic casting in the opera production. She comments: “The Korean singer who played Kwan [Jaewoo Kim] went to Australia as a young adult and totally understood Kwan’s journey”. (Liang 2018) Liang’s approach to multiculturalism evokes Mark Williams’s conception of “strategic pluralism”. (Williams 2009) There is the suggestion of an intercultural alliance that is based on altruism and shared interests, rather than narrowly defined ethnic identity politics.

In a special issue of *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (2015: 20:4), the editors challenge the predominant view that a unifying national narrative is the precondition for effective cultural diplomacy. They argue that, in a globalised world characterised by intensifying, multidirectional transnational flows, “the attempt to impose a unifying national narrative on the intrinsically diverse range of cultural diplomacy/relations activity may prove an elusive pursuit” (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015). In an effort to liberate cultural diplomacy from the grip of nationalistic soft power projection and top-down cultural policy making, the editors advocate the adoption of more dialogic, collaborative approaches to cultural diplomacy that underscore culture and its legacy as an ongoing, relational, and social process of co-production of meaning. (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015)

Liang’s *The Bone Feeder* provides an entry point for reinvigorating the discussion of cultural diplomacy beyond the national. Unlike the usual critique of the national from the standpoint of the transnational, Liang’s work points to rather different trajectories of cultural diplomacy beyond national interests and nationalistic thinking. The work reveals that there is much cultural diplomacy to be done *within* the cultural sphere of a multicultural nation state – between its dominant culture and its cultural minorities, between its various minority cultures, and between the subgroups within a cultural minority. The cultural diplomacies conducted primarily beyond and *below* the national present vital counterexamples of cultural diplomacy as being not necessarily bound to a unifying national narrative. At the same time, cultural diplomacies amongst different cultural and racial groups within a nation resonate and fluctuate with the complex cultural flows amongst the nations in the world at large. *The Bone Feeder*, although ostensibly a contemporary New Zealand play/opera, involves “border crossing” on multiple levels in its writing, production and reception, from physical, textual, musical, to ritual, communal and political.

By mainstreaming a story of Māori-Chinese affiliation and friendship that goes beyond New Zealand biculturalism, or a configuration of multiculturalism that orbits a Pākehā majority, Liang’s making of *The Bone Feeder* suggests a multi-nodal cultural diplomacy with strategically shifting cultural positions and alliances, one whose trajectories are no longer possible to be drawn along nationalistic lines. Whilst this *inter-cultural* diplomacy lays bare the many blind spots in the discourse of a bicultural New Zealand, it is, ultimately, in the service of contemporary New Zealand culture, or a New Zealand culture of the future, in which various memories of the past are kept alive.

It remains to be seen whether this recognition of intercultural affiliation and belonging between Māori and Chinese in *The Bone Feeder* signals a tidal change



in Māori-Chinese cultural relations. It could be just a flash of optimism amidst the darker realities of ethnic relations in contemporary New Zealand, as Manying Ip has documented. (Ip 2003) However, there is growing evidence in recent developments in the arts to suggest that *The Bone Feeder* is not an isolated phenomenon. As Liang worked to present her play in various stage productions, the Christchurch-based poet David Howard wrote his long poem, “The Mica Pavilion”, in 2010. Inspired by the 16th-century Chinese play, *The Peony Pavilion*, Howard’s poem tells the star-crossed love story between a Chinese miner and the daughter of a Māori elder in late 19th-century South Island. In 2015, during the time when the Auckland Arts Festival commissioned the opera *The Bone Feeder*, the Māori-Chinese playwright Mei-Lin Te Puea Hansen’s *The Mooncake and the Kūmara* debuted as part of that year’s Festival. If literary arts were the harbinger of cultural currents and social change, we might say that new intercultural perspectives and sensibilities beyond the frameworks of biculturalism and multiculturalism are already afoot in Aotearoa.

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### Bibliographical Note

Luo Hui teaches at Victoria University of Wellington and conducts research in modern and contemporary Chinese literary and visual cultures, with particular interest in cross-cultural production and reception. Recent publications include an essay on Chinese ghost tales in the *Blackwell Companion to World Literature* (2019), and an entry on the poet Zheng Danyi in the *Dictionary of Literary Biographies* (2020). He is co-director of the New Zealand Centre for Literary Translation.



## Review Articles

James Beattie, Richard Bullen, Maria Galikowski (eds.) *China in Australasia: Cultural diplomacy and the arts since the Cold War*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2019, 190 pp. ISBN 9780815384786, (hardcover and eBook).

Maria Galikowski, James Beattie and Richard Bullen's *China in Australasia Cultural Diplomacy and Chinese Arts since the Cold War* is a very timely collection, and it contributes to our knowledge of the China's relations with Australia and New Zealand between 1950 and present (around 2019—when the book was published). In 2019, People's Republic of China (PRC) is both Australia and New Zealand's largest trading partners. Scholars have previously focused on studying the two nations' economic and political ties with PRC, but have paid little attention to the cultural aspects of the relations between China and Australasia. Thus, *China in Australasia Cultural Diplomacy and Chinese Arts since the Cold War* has made a significant contribution to the development of our knowledge of recent and current Sino-Australian/New Zealand relations.

This book tells the little-known story “of the loan, exchange, and gifting of Chinese art, museum exhibitions—and the use of Chinese arts more broadly—in growing diplomatic relations with Australia and New Zealand, from 1949 to the present day [2019]”. It also discusses how, for their part, Australians and New Zealanders worked to enhance understandings of their powerful northern neighbour within changing political contexts. Australians and New Zealanders, are often facing to make choices based on China's internal and/or historical events. Chris Elder's chapter ‘Better late than never: New Zealand and China, 1949-2016’ is a study on New Zealand and PRC's changing political relations. As a former New Zealand diplomat to China, Elder has offered its readers some valuable accounts. For example, both Australian and New Zealand governments (between 1949 and 1951) carefully considered recognising the PRC, but they were often under internal political and international pressures. In other words, Australia and New Zealand's official relations with China was (and still is) part of larger Sino-Western relations (Duncan M. Campbell, Chapter 8, p.123). The PRC's relations with the United States and the United Kingdom could strongly influence the PRC's relations with Australia and New Zealand (Maria Galikowski, Chapter 6, p.88). For Elder, although New Zealand did not recognise the PRC in the 1950s, it was always preparing for diplomatic relations with China (*Better late than never*, p.19). Elder's Chapter 2 has laid a foundation for the rest of the book.

Australia and New Zealand's cultural connections with China also closely intertwined with the two nations' identity issues. Historically, Australia has strong links with Europe, especially Britain. However, geographically Australia is much closer to Asia, and its economy is largely depended on China. China's official relations with Australia and New Zealand began as early as 1909 [Tiger Zhifu Li, *Dancing with the Dragon: Australia's Diplomatic Relations with China (1901–1941)*, MA thesis, 2018, p.9]. When there were no official relations between the PRC and

Australia/New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s, people-to-people cultural diplomacy played significant role (Henry Johnson, Chapter 7, p.107 and p.110). Claire Roberts has reminded her readers that Chinese students came to Australia to study as early as 1930s (Chapter 5, p.67). Since then, Chinese international students have always played significant roles in the Sino-Australian/New Zealand cultural diplomacy. Nicholas Thomas's chapter 'From friendship to fear? Australia-China relations, 1950s-2000s' has shown the exchanges between the two nations in sports, academia, and cultural institutions. Thomas also mentions the large number of Chinese international students studying in Australia. The Chinese students not only have become a 'significant economic force for the domestic Australian economy' (Nicholas Thomas, Chapter 3, p.36), but also have played a strong role in terms of the people to people diplomacy between the two nations. However, Thomas also suggests that since the early 2000s, there seems to be a growing anti-China feeling in Australia. A poll conducted by the Lowy Institute in 2017 points out that some Australians (46% of respondents) would see China as a major threat (Nicholas Thomas, Chapter 3, p.40). Similarly, there is also a growing anti-Australia feeling among the Chinese population in mainland China (Nicholas Thomas, Chapter 3, p.39). I think this is partly because the current Australian government chose to follow Donald Trump's administration closely, and therefore adopted a tough policy towards China.

However, some individuals admired Chinese culture and played positive roles to the Sino-Western relations. Rewi Alley (1897–1987), a Christchurch-born New Zealander, spent 60 years in China, 'the last 30 years of which in the employment of the PRC' (James Beattie and Richard Bullen, Chapter 4, p.47). James Beattie and Richard Bullen have suggested that, as a friend of the PRC, Rewi Alley's 'idea of using art to encourage appreciation of China overseas had developed in Shandan' (Chapter 4, p.47). Shandan county is a county in the Gansu Province, and it is a place not many Chinese people have visited. Beattie and Bullen have shown Alley and Canterbury Museum director Roger Duff's contributions to the development of cultural diplomacy between China and New Zealand. In this chapter, however, I wish James Beattie and Richard Bullen to use more Chinese primary sources. Similarly, it would be good to see many other authors (except Campbell) in this book to use more Chinese primary and secondary sources. However, one of the strengths of Duncan M. Campbell's writing is that he used some Chinese sources. Campbell described the Chinese garden as something by way of 'a structured platform for the interactions between cultures' faces (and has faced) to immediate objections, those of authenticity and of agency (Chapter 8, p.126). In cultural diplomacy, Chinese garden can play a role similar to a museum or a gallery (Ibid). In this chapter, I wish Campbell to write more on Chinese Scholars' Garden in Hamilton and the impacts it may have on Sino-New Zealand relations. David Bell's chapter *White Rabbit, contemporary Chinese arts and soft power in Sydney's Chippendale* is another intriguing part of the book. For Bell, White Rabbit's soft-power capacity is richly resourced and well-equipped to inform "Sydney visitors' appreciations of diverse Chinese cultural worlds" (David Bell, Chapter 9, p.138). Bell's writing leads me to a key question, do you have to criticize mainland China (or Chinese central government in Beijing) to be considered as Chinese art in Australia or in the West in general?

For both Australia and New Zealand, the relations with the PRC are among their most important international relations. I think politicians, policy makers, scholars (especially historians and international relations scholars), and the general public whom are interested Sino-Western relations would welcome this book, and enjoy reading it. However, there is a lack of consistency with Chinese names in this book. Sometimes, the author put Chinese family name first, and sometimes they would put Chinese family name last. A writer could put Chinese family first, and then put Chinese family last in the same chapter. This can confuse readers to follow the more important discussions in the writings. If the central theme of this book, is about China's cultural diplomacy with the nations in Australasia since the Cold War, then I think Sophie McIntyre's chapter may not fit well with the book. In Chapter 10, McIntyre writes about the soft power and the role of art in the development of mainland China and Taiwan relations, but it discusses neither China's cultural connections with Australia nor New Zealand. Instead, if the editors would use the final chapter of the book to summarise the key themes and arguments of book, I think it would then make the structure of the book more logical. Further, there are many smaller Pacific Island nations in Australasia, and the writers of this book mention little about China's cultural connections with them (for example, Fiji and Samoa). I have written elsewhere that, China appointed its first consul to Western Samoa in 1908 (Li, *Dancing with the Dragon*, 2018, p.9). Thus, future scholars should focus more of China's official and/or cultural relations with these Southern Pacific nations.

Today, perhaps Australia and New Zealand should take China more seriously culturally! If I have learnt anything during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is that cultural diplomacy still matters in the current global climate. Indeed, China's cultural connections with Australia and New Zealand are extremely important growing nationalism among these nations. Personally, a key takeaway from this book, is that it is hard to separate cultural diplomacy from political/official diplomacy. In this sense, the writers of *China in Australasia Cultural Diplomacy and Chinese Arts since the Cold War* have started an important conversation.

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James Beattie, Richard Bullen, Maria Galikowski (eds.) *China in Australasia: Cultural diplomacy and the arts since the Cold War*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2019, 190 pp. ISBN 9780815384786, (hardcover and eBook).

The authors of the ten chapters in this edited volume address the uses of the arts in Chinese cultural diplomacy in Australia and New Zealand. The book is the fruit of a conference held in Christchurch in 2016 and one of a series of studies published by Routledge on the modern history of Asia. The backgrounds of the contributors and the contents of the chapters highlight fluid boundaries among the disciplines of history, politics, art history, visual culture, museum studies and performance.

Several of the terms used in the title of this book immediately drew my attention. Editors James Beattie, Richard Bullen and Maria Galikowski address the meaning of the term cultural diplomacy in the first chapter. They define it as a subset of soft power

where culture and the arts are deployed in the service of the foreign policy goals of a state. The authors of subsequent chapters draw attention to the interface between formal diplomatic interactions between states and other kinds of diplomacy, variously characterised as people's diplomacy, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and soft power. Responses to the manifestations of Chinese cultural diplomacy from Australia and New Zealand have come from a variety of sources, ranging from government-to-government diplomacy to the initiatives of individuals who are not associated with the institutions of the state. Although Australia and New Zealand have sponsored reciprocal initiatives in cultural diplomacy, their number and scale have not been comparable to those that have come from China.

The question of the geographic and cultural boundaries of Australasia is one that is worthy of exploration, but the book deals only with China's relations with Australia and New Zealand. The editors do not refer to Papua New Guinea or the island nations of the Pacific, where China's soft power diplomacy is also very much in evidence. The reference in the title to the Cold War is also puzzling. The term evokes the period between the end of the Second World War and the dismantling of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Relations between the United States and China were also tense during this period, but Australia and New Zealand, though constrained by their relationship with the United States, experienced fewer difficulties in dealing directly with China. The chapters in this volume are primarily concerned with the period from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the present, but they also reference events within a time frame of about a century, starting in the 1920s and 30s. The entry of the PRC into the United Nations and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s, seem more pertinent to the content of the chapters in this book than the Cold War.

Nicholas Thomas's chapter traces relations between Australia and China in the years from 1949 to the 2000s. Thomas identifies a number of key institutions in both countries that fostered this relationship. An early instrument of Chinese soft diplomacy outreach was the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. This body worked closely with the newly formed Australia China Friendship Society and Australian China Council. In New Zealand, the New Zealand China Friendship Society was founded in 1956 and the New Zealand China Council in 2012. Reciprocal student exchanges with China began in Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s and both countries experienced rapid growth in the numbers of people of Chinese descent who make their homes here. The provision of a timeline drawing together information garnered from this and the other nine chapters in this book would have made it easier for the reader to relate the developments in cultural diplomacy that are the principal focus of this book to the "hard" diplomacy of evolving diplomatic relationships.

Exhibitions of Chinese objects have been a major aspect of the operation of Chinese cultural diplomacy. The most politically prominent of these have been Chinese government-sponsored exhibitions of paintings, ceramics, bronzes, jades and other objects. Benchmarks for such exhibitions included major exhibitions in London in 1935 and 1973. In New Zealand, Chinese government-sponsored exhibitions have included the Huxian peasant paintings in 1978, the Terracotta Warriors from the tomb

of Qin Shihuang in 1986–87 and again in 2003, the Throne of Emperors exhibition in Wellington in 2014 and the return of the Terracotta Warriors to Wellington in 2019. Other exhibitions have featured objects that were collected privately and then donated or loaned to public museums and galleries for display. Chris Elder's, Richard Bullen's and James Beattie's chapters document Rewi Alley's collections of ceramics which were donated to the Canterbury Museum. Claire Roberts' chapter deals with the exhibition of forty traditional Chinese ink paintings in the National Gallery of Victoria in 1974. The majority of these paintings came from the private collections of academics Pierre Ryckmans and Harry Simons. Furthest from the foreign policy goals of any state is the exhibition of private collections of objects in private spaces. David Bell's chapter on Judith Neilson's White Rabbit gallery is the sole example of an arrangement of this kind. Predictably, the differences in each of these three different kinds of structural arrangements for the sponsorship of collections and exhibitions are reflected in the kinds of curatorial decisions and interpretive material that accompany them.

In his chapter on Chinese Gardens, Duncan Campbell identifies gardens as spaces where many of the potentially conflictual issues of interpretation can be resolved more readily than in state-sponsored exhibitions of objects. Writing eloquently of the Dunedin Lan Yuan, the Huntington Library's Liu Fang Yuan and the Hui Yuan planned for Wellington, he argues convincingly that the dynamic, protean, constantly evolving nature of gardens uniquely suits them to be vehicles for communication across cultures which, by their very nature, share these characteristics.

One of the great pleasures of this book is the chronicling of the contributions of the individuals who negotiated and drove the collection of Chinese objects, the mounting of exhibitions, the exchange of cultural troupes and the establishment of museum collections of objects from China. For New Zealand, this is engagingly described by former NZ Ambassador to China, Chris Elder, who introduces readers to the words and deeds of diplomats, Alister Macintosh, Foss Shanahan and MP Warren Freer. Maria Galikowski reminds us of the public responses of Rob Muldoon and Bill Rowling to the death of Chairman Mao in 1976. Nicholas Thomas notes the observation of Stephen FitzGerald, Australia's first ambassador to China that local Chinese communities were key to the success of cultural diplomacy. Claire Roberts discusses the hopes of Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam that cultural exchanges would lay a firm foundation for increased understanding of China by the people of Australia.

Despite the importance of governments and their representatives in cultural diplomacy, in chapter after chapter, the importance of the actions and initiatives of private individuals is highlighted. We meet New Zealanders Rewi Alley, Canterbury Museum director Roger Duff, farmer, film-maker and activist, Bill Youren and farmer and Member of Parliament, Ormond Wilson. We find Professor of Music Frederick Page welcoming a Chinese opera troupe to Wellington in 1956 and Evelyn Page attending Beijing Opera performances featuring Mei Lanfang night after night on a three-week visit to China. While Chris Elder, Nicholas Thomas and Henry Johnson all acknowledge the importance of the local Chinese communities in cultural diplomacy, none of the chapters highlight their contributions.



Of all the individuals whose work is described in this book, Rewi Alley and Pierre Ryckmans stand out. Rewi Alley was among an early group of foreigners including Edgar Snow and Agnes Smedley who lived in China in the decades after 1949 and made it their mission to interpret China to the English-speaking world. Pierre Ryckmans took a different tack in his approaches to Chinese politics and Chinese arts. He spent his youth and early career engaged in a passionate study of Chinese language and Chinese art, aiming to become both a practitioner and a connoisseur. We find him studying painting with the cousin of the last Chinese emperor and talking things over with Han Suyin. Both Alley and Ryckmans seemed to position themselves as privileged insiders and as curators and interpreters of Chinese culture to audiences in New Zealand and Australia.

The chapters in this book evoke a multiplicity of images of Chinese objects that have featured in exhibitions from the 1930s to the present day. They include the Flying Horse and the jade funeral suits from the 1973 Genius of China exhibition, thirty-two intricately carved ivory balls encased within each other, Xu Bing's 1988 Book from the Sky, Ai Weiwei's non-functional bicycles and Cai Guo-Qiang's exploding cars exhibited at the Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in the 2000s. Despite the enormous variety and number of objects in many media that are discussed, the book contains only thirteen images and eight of these illustrate the works of twenty-first century artists. As the authors of the chapters in this book repeatedly demonstrate, works of art have meanings that can lend themselves to a wide range of interpretations in an equally wide range of political and cultural contexts. Readers whose memories are not already populated with such images would find the meaning of the chapters easier to interpret and recall if more images had been provided. It would have been invaluable, for example, to have seen more of the objects collected by Rewi Alley, some of the Terracotta Warriors that have been exhibited in Wellington and Auckland, one or two of the works of Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi and the other artists exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1974 and one or more of the vibrant and colourful Huxian peasant paintings that were exhibited in Wellington in 1978.

In her chapter on the Huxian peasant paintings, Maria Galikowski reminds us of Chairman Mao's famous dictum that art can never be above politics. Sophie McIntyre's chapter on art and the development of relations between Taiwan and the PRC explores the particularly intense connection between art, museum exhibitions and politics in that politically super-charged environment. Though it would be hard to argue with Chairman Mao's view in general terms, the relationship between art and politics is never static. Through its explorations of the interconnections between art and a range of cultural and political issues in a dynamic process of evolution, this book makes a significant contribution to the history of China's cultural diplomacy in Australia and New Zealand.

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