

Undermining Capitalist Pedagogy: Takiji Kobayashi's *Tōseikatsusha* and the Ideology of the World Literature Paradigm

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The last decade has seen the institutionalization of world literature as an aesthetic category. World literature has been the focus of both regional and international conferences and has been canonized by various publishing houses, most notably in the form of the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*, which just released the Third Edition in 2012 in 6 volumes.¹ The attractiveness of the contemporary world literature paradigm stems largely from David Damrosch's theorization that it should be considered "a mode of circulation and reading," rather than a model for comparison/contrast which would reiterate Eurocentric cultural hierarchies. Moreover, the supposed impartiality of the world literature concept is intended to counter the homology of globalization by restructuring cultural production according to a revolving door of perspectives that highlights the dialectic of locality/globality, what Damrosch refers to as a process of "transculturation" in which "foreign" works can "take shape in their local manifestations."² Similarly, the scholar Longxi Zhang locates what he calls the "unexpected affinities" along the West-East spectrum of literary production through the lens of comparative hermeneutics, showing that the rigorous re-reading of texts can rebuild what he terms "cultural homogeneity" within the disjunctive spaces of transnational culture.³ The postmodernist *aestheticism* of such views can be summed up in Damrosch's definition of world literature: "Works of world literature can very well be understood as windows on the world, so long as we

¹ The theme of the *American Comparative Literature Association Annual Conference* of 2009, held at Harvard University, was "Global Languages, Local Cultures," organized in part by David Damrosch, and focused on the issue of world literary culture. See also the recent symposium held at the University of Maryland, "Rethinking World Literature/Other Literatures" at <http://www.english.umd.edu/OWL>. This paper is less concerned with the canonical issues of world literature and more with the theoretical and political implications of the world literature category.

² David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). The sample chapter of Damrosch's book can be seen here: <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7545.html>

³ Longxi Zhang, *Unexpected Affinities: Reading Across Cultures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).



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understand that they serve as windows on two worlds at once: the world beyond us, and our own world as well. Attending to this double refraction can help us in bringing works—both more creatively and less destructively—into our own cultural space.”⁴

From a political perspective, the world literature paradigm has been sanctified at a crucial juncture in global history; that is, the apolitical and apathetic character of “world literature,” as theorized by Damrosch and Zhang, among others, can also be understood as a process of mediation in which systemic critiques of globalized capitalism are relegated to the background of cultural production. How does the institutionalized critique of world literature deal with the hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan who have been killed by the U.S. military for the purpose of retaining hegemony in the unravelling rivalry among the dominant imperialist powers, such as China, or the millions living in slums as a result of the systemic inequalities of globalized capital, not to mention the insurgent response to the unabated crisis of capital from Tunisia to the Occupy Movements? The omission of such concerns may not be a conscious decision on the part of theorists or editors, but rather a reflection of the larger reformist consciousness when it comes to discussions about the relationship between global capitalism and its effects on cultural formations. For Peter Hitchcock, world literature “is the twenty-first century ghost of nineteenth-century aestheticism that at once announces the best that has been thought and said...without the nasty taste of social struggle in which a reader’s own cosmopolitanism may be at stake.”⁵ As Hitchcock rightly points out, by erasing the hierarchy of the center/periphery model of Eurocentrism through which global cultural forms have been determined, the assumed “neutrality” that constructs the world literature category is offered as a cure to the ills of globalization, without addressing or criticising the systemic functioning of globalized capital and the ways it deepens inequalities through racism, sexism, and inter-imperialist war.

What is central to the world literature paradigm, in this sense, is that it legitimates what Paulo Freire labels the “limit-situation” by which ruling-class ideology induces passivity and conformity to the system-as-is, through what Freire argues is the institutionalized dependence on the version of the world constructed and managed by the oppressors, or the “conquest” of liberating “reflective-action”:

The desire for conquest (or rather the necessity of conquest) is at all times present in antidialogical action. To this end the oppressors attempt to destroy in the oppressed their quality as “considerers” of the world. Since the oppressors cannot totally achieve this destruction, they must *mythicize* the world. In order to present for the consideration of the oppressed and subjugated a world of deceit designed to increase their alienation and passivity, the oppressors develop a series of methods precluding any presentation of the world as a problem and showing is

⁴ Damrosch, “What is World Literature,” <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7545.html>

⁵ Peter Hitchcock, *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 5. For a complete review of some of the debates in world literature theory, see *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004). See also Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) in which she argues for a remapping of world literary discourse and provides a critical account of the unequal relations between cultural capital in the historical centers and periphery literary models.

rather as a fixed entity, as something given—something to which people, as mere spectators, must adapt.⁶

In order to sustain the hegemony of ruling-class ideology, Freire argues that our perceptions of external reality must be managed through the mythicization of the “world” itself, a process that is structured and legitimized according to the irrationality of the profit-driven system. For the purposes of the current argument, I maintain that the ideology of the world literature paradigm is symptomatic of how capitalist pedagogy manipulates discourse so that the global system and its everyday dysfunctionality are not questioned but rather reconfirmed as an *absolute* of shared experience, particularly as globalized capital attempts to regroup in the wake of crisis. As such, my intention in this article is to investigate further the relationship between the world literature paradigm and the process of mediation (subsumption) embedded in the safeguarding of capitalist social relations globally. As a means for developing sympathy for the peripheral “other” in the global sphere, the ideology of the world literature category condenses globality into usable and controllable boxes of world culture, yet in the same moment, to use Freire’s own language, it increases alienation and passivity by adjusting the “oppressed” to the fixed reality of globalized capital. The mechanism of cultural management implicit in the ideological formation of the world literature category is simultaneously a means of hijacking revolt against the injustices against ruling-class ideologies and its imperialist extensions, as it reaffirms the impossibility of collective revolt due to the pre-arrangement of the world-as-is ideology, what Herbert Marcuse argues is the primary motivation of the counter-revolution which is always at work at the core of capitalist logic.⁷ Through a concluding analysis of Takiji Kobayashi’s novel, *Tōseikatsusha*, or *Life in the Party*, published in 1932 at the height of the Japanese Proletarian Literary Movement, I contend that the teaching of proletarian fiction can be used to reclaim spaces for revolutionary politics and as a model for international class-solidarity against super-nationalism, racism, and inter-imperialist war.

Capitalist Pedagogy and the Ideology of World Literature

The function of the world literature category is to resolve the historical dispute between the center/periphery hierarchy by focusing on the indeterminate process of “reading,” a kind of healing through aesthetic reproduction which Neil Lazarus in another context labels “a thoroughgoing culturalism.”⁸ This is the thesis in the work of David Damrosch, perhaps the most well-known theoretician of the world literature system in the contemporary period. For Damrosch, world literature “should unfold the varied processes and strategies through which writers have individually and collectively furthered the long negotiation between local cultures and the world beyond them.”⁹ By opposing both the precincts of national boundaries and the

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1993), 120. Much the present article will revolve around Freire’s theory of radical pedagogy. As a point of clarification, I also use the term “oppressors” and “oppressed” to signify the polarization between the working class and the capitalist class.

⁷ See Herbert Marcuse’s *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 1-59.

⁸ Neil Lazarus, “The Fetish of the ‘West’ in Postcolonial Theory,” in *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Larsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 49.

⁹ David Damrosch, “Towards a History of World Literature,” *New Literary History* 39:3 (summer 2008)

limitlessness of “breathless globalism,” Damrosch offers a reading of world literature through the dialectic of the local/global in which neither is either privileged or denied a viable space in the breadth of world literary form, as he writes:

The opportunity that world literary history offers the national traditions is something better than their dissolution into a globalized hyperreality. Equally, a global literary history could do as much to combat the insistent presentism of so many discussions of globalization, and it could underscore the longstanding and continuing importance of the local and the national within the global. By opening up the *longue durée* of literary history, a global history could reveal the broader systemic relations between literary cultures, not opposing world literature to national literatures but undertaking to trace the cocreation of literary systems that have almost always been mixed in character, at once localized and translocal.¹⁰

What Damrosch seeks to undo is the mechanism of cultural homogenization that reinforces globalization by shifting the weight from the either/or of localized/global relations to a montage structure in which both national and global boundaries are inscribed equally. Through the prism of global history, or the comparativism associated with the world literary form, Damrosch hopes to revitalize the cultural complexities and multiple foundations of world literature to displace the hierarchy between the West and its imagined “other” embedded in conventional Eurocentrism and replace it with a transgressive multiculturalism in which the dialogue between local and global realities gives shape to an overarching yet undifferentiated pattern of *translocality*. The circulation of works from the point of origin to the world and back signals the primary function of the world literature category, which intends to reach beyond Orientalist hierarchies, or the finite definitions associated with globalized cultural hegemony, as Damrosch emphasizes: “My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material.”¹¹

While on the surface the category of world literature seeks to erase the historical disjunctions ensconced in Eurocentrism, the multicultural disguise of world literature discourse, which renders all cultural formations transparent, ends up purging the “world” of its symbiotic relation to the interests of globalized capital, which it serves through the ideological codification of acquiescence to the dictates of globalized capitalist social relations. As a reflection on the context of globalized capital and the systemic inequalities by which it justifies its existence, the ideology of world literature projects an assumed externality to the voracious mechanism of cultural appropriation at the core of globalization, yet one which seeks submission to the established doctrine of capitalist hegemony. To utilize Jameson’s theoretical classification of the *ideologeme* of mass cultural forms in the present context, the aestheticization process that is conferred by the world literature category, as Damrosch hypothesizes it above, is symbolic of the ways in which liberal reformism attempts to resolve social contradictions within the hierarchical levels of globalized capitalism, what Jameson sees as a way of “inventing imaginary or formal

¹⁰ Damrosch, “Towards a History of World Literature” 490.

¹¹ Damrosch, “What is World Literature,” <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/7545.html>

‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions.” The “false consciousness” of the world literature category (or to phrase it in Jameson’s terms, the *political unconscious* of world literature as ideology) is that it offers an aesthetic interventionism within the confines of capitalist ideology as an inducement towards passivity and the acceptance of the assumed hegemony of capitalist predominance.¹² The ideology of the world literature category functions according to the logic of internalization and appropriation, particularly as it relates to the dialectic between aesthetic production and political alignment: as global capital expands, bringing with it permanent war, inter-imperialist rivalry over key resources such as oil, and deepening rifts between the have and the have-nots, we need to question the rationale of cultural systems which neglect critical involvement in exposing and changing the irrationalities that structure capitalist social relations. That is, as an *epistemology* which has been determined as a renegotiation of the world-as-is paradigm, the category of world literature can only articulate a reformist political outlook, hence its inability to forge a vision of insurgent knowledge beyond the limitations of ruling-class ideology.

My point here is not meant to deny the potentiality of working within the pre-existent ideologies of capitalism for the purposes of revising and reworking them in the name of social justice, particularly as it relates to the historical reinscription of hitherto marginalized subjectivities. Rather, through the lens of culturalism, the ideology of world literature is presented as a divergent form of egalitarianism from the model offered by globalization yet which simultaneously privileges aesthetic production without addressing the contemporaneity of inequality that resides at the core of globalized capital. In this sense, I would argue that central to the process of aestheticization in the world literature category is an implicit attack on the so-called the master-narrative fallacies, particularly those associated with dialectical materialism and the class-based perspectives that emerge from Marxist analysis. Here, we can engage the affinity to postmodernism by which the world literature category functions in theoretical terms, yet also in relation to the processes of aestheticization and de-historicization that I argue structure its ideology. For indeterminacy, as Damrosch argues, is what designates the world literature category, since such non-specifications of “place” prevent an overarching (hegemonic) cultural configuration that would situate one locality over another, or what has hitherto structured Orientalist and Eurocentric paradigms overall. Like the anti-foundational critique that lies at the core of postmodernism, the ideology of the world literature category contests foundational concepts which are designated as reductive, economic, utopian and the like, and instead seeks to celebrate what E. San Juan, Jr., labels “the cult of the hybrid and heterogeneous, the indeterminate and the fragmented.”¹³ As David Harvey writes, “Postmodernism has us accepting the reifications and partitionings, actually celebrating the activity of masking and cover-up, all the fetishisms of locality, place, or social grouping, while denying the meta-theory which can grasp the political-economic process (money flows, international divisions of labor, financial markets and the like) that are becoming ever more universalizing in their depth, intensity, reach,

¹² Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 287.

¹³ E. San Juan, Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 71. See also Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism, *Critical Inquiry* 20 (winter 1994): 328-356.

and power over daily life.”¹⁴ Harvey acknowledges that postmodernist thinking is complicit with globalized capital, as it concerns itself with the surface reality of things, rather than search for solutions to existing inequalities ingrained in the system. As Harvey emphasizes, postmodernism “seeks a shameless accommodation with the market” to the extent that it borders on a type of “reactionary neoconservatism.”¹⁵

In particular, from the point of view of how cultural production functions in the flexibility model of globalized capitalism, we can see that questions of class struggle in the restructuring of the world literature category are subsumed by the “consensus” of existing class relations under capitalism, which I would argue is part of the continuing postmodernist aversion to so-called “master narratives” and the claims of foundational structures, which theoretically unites the relational and elliptical spaces that operate in the world literature category. The retreat from history and the claims of an intractable universality of cultural hegemony that have emerged as a result of globalized capital signals that the postmodernist attack on the master-narrative fallacies are still quite alive, despite the eruption of revolt across the globe directed at the systemic inequality that capitalism breeds.¹⁶ For Samir Amin, liberalism forces us to “submit” to the dictates of globalized capital, both in economic and cultural terms and has been ushered in as a consequence of the institutionalization of postmodernist discourse. The contemporary form of liberalism, for Amin, is organized as an anti-systemic critique of the current global situation, yet one that structurally controls all obstacles to the capitalist market. This includes subverting radical alternatives to capitalist domination, as we have seen from the U.S. response to revolution in Cuba, Chavez in Venezuela, or the response by the Indian State to the Maoist uprisings in Chhattisgarh, Orissa, and other areas of Central India, or through the hypocritical attempt to “liberate” through imperialist war, as we see in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.¹⁷ “The offensive of liberalism,” writes Amin, “strives, in fact, to overcome, through brutality, the growing contradictions of capitalism, which has had its day and has no perspective to offer humanity other than self-destruction.”¹⁸ To reiterate my argument here, while the internationalist vision and transnational power of Damrosch’s theoretical investigation is encouraging, what underlies his conception is not only the management of revolutionary organizational models against the existing economic and social structures of globalized capitalism, but also the absence of any engagement with questions related to class struggle, since such reductive elements need to be erased through what Samir Amin calls the “liberal

¹⁴ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 82.

¹⁵ Harvey, 116.

¹⁶ For a concise historical analysis of postmodernist discourse and its attack on Marxism, see Barbara Foley, “Marxism in the Poststructuralist Moment: Some Notes on the Problem of Revising Marx.” *Cultural Critique* (Spring 1990): 5-37.

¹⁷ In the case of India, I am referring to Operation Greenhunt, launched in 2009 by the Indian State to quell the insurrection by Maoists who have made significant advances in Central India. For a sharp analysis, see Arundhati Roy’s *Broken Republic* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011).

¹⁸ Samir Amin, *The Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World*, trans. James R. Membrez. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 19.

consensus” of existing ruling-class formations, which “assumes that all subversions can be diluted and ultimately absorbed.”¹⁹

The paradox of the world literature category, like postmodernism, is that it utilizes the rhetoric of literary utopianism while simultaneously marking a critical distance from the ostensible dogmatism associated with Marxism and the “master-narrative” directives it has come to be associated with, a result of what I would argue is the anti-communist rhetoric inscribed in postmodernist institutionalization.²⁰ Writing from a different perspective, Samir Amin argues that the structural relationship between the center and periphery paradigm associated with so-called “classic” theories of Eurocentric forms of cultural hegemony is reproduced through what he terms “inverted Eurocentrism,” which proposes to resolve systemic inequality from the perspective of culture, rather than through the rigorous critique of globalized capital and its corollary effect on the restructuring of the world in its sanitized image. Contrasting sharply with Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism, which through the *mytho-logic* of imperialist pre-eminence the Orient is transformed into “a system of rules, exclusions, and prohibitions” by which it controls colonized subjectivity, inverted Eurocentrism operates through the hyper-awareness of global cultural difference, offering a perspective that simultaneously acknowledges the historicity of Eurocentric intentionality, yet filters the pitfalls of cultural premeditation through the lens of a liberal comparativism based on the word-as-is doctrine. I argue this de-politicizes class struggle in favour of aesthetic appropriation in the multicultural presentation of world literary ideology.²¹ Here we can also make a distinction between the ideology of world literature and the concept of worldliness, which Said argues “is anchored in real struggle and a real social movement” unconfined by “cosmopolitanism or intellectual tourism.”²²

In other terms, the heterogeneous generosity, which Damrosch argues is central to the world literature category, opposes what Herbert Marcuse calls the praxis of “radical sensibility” which “stresses the active, constitutive role of the senses in shaping reason, that is to say, in shaping the categories under which the world is ordered.”²³ The genealogy of the inverted Eurocentric model stems from the institutionalized acceptance of the economic supremacy of globalized capital and its relentless drive towards accumulation on a world scale, which we are forced to accept as a historical imperative, as a fact of “the end of history” ideology espoused by the political “right.” In this way, inverted Eurocentrism, despite its façade of equality, corrects the center/periphery model, and yet by doing so also obfuscates the interior mechanisms of globalized capital by which the world is organized. As Samir Amin writes, “The reconstruction of social theory along truly universalist lines must have as its base a theory of actually existing

¹⁹ Samir Amin, *The Liberal Virus*, 20.

²⁰ For an analysis of anti-communism and academic discourse, see Grover Furr, “(Un) Critical Reading and the Discourse of Anti-communism.” *Red Critique* 11 (winter/spring 2006) at <http://www.redcritique.org/WinterSpring2006/uncriticalreadingandthediscourseofanticommunism.htm>

²¹ Edward Said, *Power, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 37.

²² Said, 141.

²³ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 63.

capitalism, centered on the principal contradiction generated by the worldwide expansion of this system.”²⁴

One way to rethink the category of world literature within the context of Eurocentrism and its corollary in the inverted form is to situate it in the framework of postcolonialism, which historically has offered the most piercing critique of colonialist modernity and its claims to universal legitimacy, while revising the historical legacy of colonized subjectivity that has been erased as a result of imperialism. That postcolonialism has offered resistance to the hierarchies of the imperialist center/periphery model is apparent; what is unclear is whether postcolonial discourse, in its institutionalized form, defies the ideology of the world literature category or if it also pacifies and subverts radical challenges to such institutionalizing processes through aesthetic maneuvering that carries with it the illusion of subversive privilege. Robert Young, for example, argues that postcolonialism, with its focus on marginality, hybridity, and alterity, overturns the hegemony of Eurocentrism through “the reorientation towards the perspectives of knowledges, as well as needs, developed outside the West.”²⁵ For Young, postcolonialism represents “insurgent knowledges that come from the subaltern, the dispossessed, and seek to change the terms and values under which we all live.”²⁶ The praxis of postcolonial knowledge is that it forces us to recognize marginalized and dispossessed voices that have been excluded from global discourse, what Fanon in a similar context labeled the “literature of combat.”

The reorientation of global discourse that has resulted from postcolonial intervention is vital to the overall transformations in global history, from the Bandung Conference to the present era, and has radically changed the prevailing discourse of colonialist practices in a place like Palestine, among other localities. And while the radicality of postcolonial thought is intrinsic to the rethinking of world culture, as Young rightly points out, I would argue here that the institutionalized form of postcolonialism reflects the indeterminacy and political interstitiality of postmodernism and, thus, the ideology of world literary form itself, which seeks to solve colonial modernity by ascribing significance to peripheral formations that are somehow external to the processes of imperialism, something which also reinforces the center/peripheral model of unevenness, yet with a view towards celebrating the framework of asymmetrical development as a sign of political intelligibility. Like the ideology of the world literature category, institutionalized postcolonialism often abandons its intrinsic relationship to the “classic” Marxist critique of globalized capitalism while offering a reading of historical marginality in terms of hybridity, alterity and the like, rather than on forming concrete explanations to expose the inter-imperialist rivalry over the remnants of Third World spaces in our own time.²⁷ Writing on the apoliticality of postcolonialism, E. San Juan, Jr., writes, “What postcolonialism ultimately tries to do is to reify certain transitory practices, styles, modalities of thought and expression that arise as attempts to resolve specific historical contradictions in the ongoing crisis of moribund

²⁴ Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 206.

²⁵ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6. See also Young’s pivotal work, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990).

²⁶ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 20.

²⁷ I would argue that the convergence of postcolonialism and Marxist thought is inevitable in light of the Arab Spring and other revolutionary movements and something I hope to be drawing attention to here.

transnational capitalism.”²⁸ That is, instead of addressing the materiality of exploitation, racism, and gender inequality at the core of the systemic conditions of capitalism, this line of postcolonialism and its expression in the ideology of world literature seeks to accommodate capitalist social relations, rather than integrate revolutionary models that could contribute to the commonality of struggle against globalized capital and its extension into imperialist violence and domination, especially against the historical Third World. As such, the ideology of the world literature category imprisons postcoloniality in a reified version of liberation through the dispossession of the tools according to which the vital struggle against imperialism should unfold. It is also for this reason that “fundamentalist postcolonialism” often discounts the infusion of Marxism and postcolonialist revisionism in the intellectual history of anti-imperialism and the project of decolonization, which writers and activists such as Mao, Gramsci, Amílcar Cabral, CLR James, Aimé Césaire, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Jacques Stephen Alexis, Ousmane Sembene, Roque Dalton, and Ghassan Kanafani have often emphasized in their work and activism.²⁹ To state my argument in other terms, subsumed by the fallacy of impartiality of the world literature category, the revolutionary subjectivity that is truly needed in order for the *subaltern* to “speak” has been reified, manufactured, packaged, and expedited, thus disarmed of its radicality through the aesthetic maneuvering by which globalized capital mystifies and appropriates radical sensibility for its own regeneration. This fallacy, according to my argument here, lies at the core of the world literature category. It is only by attending to the configurations of the world-as-is system, through a narrative of the relationship between the emergence of globalized capital and the formation of *subalternity* itself, that all the world’s oppressed will be able to restructure an egalitarian globality, a revolutionary process that is emerging as a consequence of the Arab Spring and other movements that are linking together to create authentic, systemic change.³⁰

To state my argument in other terms, the ideology of world literature reflects the counter-revolutionary mechanism inherent in globalized capitalism, one that presents itself as an aesthetic alternative to existing social and political conditions while simultaneously enforcing complacency with ruling-class hegemony. While I would agree that in the era of capitalist crisis we need to reconnect and rebuild spaces of hope for a world beyond capital, and in the process eradicate the residual forms of Eurocentrism, the ideology of world literature inhibits the radical criticality that is needed to develop the tools for the purposes of genuine liberation. With this in mind, the next section of this article will address how to change the mechanistic view of globality by offering a re-reading of the world literature paradigm through the radical prism of Takiji Kobayashi’s proletarian novella, *Tōseikatsusha*, thereby also suggesting some of the ways we can become active participants of radical change, rather than spectators in the postmodernist carnival of the world literature archetype.

²⁸ E. San Juan, Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 9.

²⁹ It is only in the latest edition of the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* (3rd edition, 2012) that the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish has been included, after his untimely death in 2008 and despite his worldwide reception and recognition.

³⁰ For an analysis of subaltern history and its relation to global capital, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Marx after Marxism: History, Subalternity, and Difference,” in *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, ed. Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karl (New York: Routledge, 1996), 55-70.

Radical Pedagogy and Takiji Kobayashi's *Tōseikatsusha*³¹

If social conditions are what determine consciousness, as Marx and Engels argue in *The German Ideology*, then the function of the world literature paradigm blunts the possibility of the revolutionary response necessary to change existing social relations, since what it projects is a re-negotiation of the terms by which the world-as-is is structured. To paraphrase Freire's work at this point, we can see how the ideology of world literature provides the oppressors with the tools to acclimate the oppressed to the reality of capitalist domination, which must remain intact and inevitable, despite the facade of a judicious alternative model like the one Damrosch proposes.³² The ideology of world literature reiterates what Freire calls "education as the practice of domination," which "anesthetizes and inhibits creative power" needed to recreate the praxis of liberation in radical forms of education, in order to radically challenge the institutionalization of established doctrine.³³ The radicalization of the world literature paradigm, then, requires the reframing of its postmodernist underpinnings, modalities, and commonalities in order to construct a revolutionary comparativism, one through which the dialectic of the aesthetic and political may lead to demonstrable "acts" of liberation, or the transformative capabilities needed to combat the ostensibly permanent reality of globalized capital.

In order to reconstruct the world literature paradigm, we can utilize Mao's analysis in his "Talk at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art" through which the dialectic of aesthetics and politics is manifested as an evolving locus of struggle. As Mao writes:

In literary and art criticism there are two criteria, the political and the artistic.... There is the political criterion and there is the artistic criterion; what is the relationship between the two? Politics cannot be equated with art, nor can a general world outlook be equated with a method of artistic creation and criticism....What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form....On questions of literature and art we must carry on a struggle on two fronts. [Our purpose is] to ensure that literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine as a component part, that they operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying [imperialism], and that they help the people fight the enemy with one heart and one mind.³⁴

³¹ My inclusion of an explicitly political work is meant to demonstrate how the world literary paradigm can be revised, as well as how it can be used as a vehicle for a rigorous critique of globalized capitalism, which is part of what I mean by "radical pedagogy." I would say here that any work could be used for this purpose, even in the avant-garde tradition, which particularly has favored artistic experimentalism over socialist realism. For an analysis of this history, see my *Rethinking the Vanguard: Aesthetic and Political Positions in the Modernist Debate, 1917-1962* (New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

³² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, chapter 3.

³³ Freire, 62.

³⁴ Mao Tse-tung, *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970), 248. Part of the quotation, which also comes from Mao's "Talk," is taken from the online source here: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch32.htm>.

It is crucial to quote Mao at length here in order to pinpoint some of the critical weaknesses of the world literature paradigm, which ultimately serves the interests of capitalist social relations by emptying out of its framework the inescapability of class struggle that emerges in the process of aesthetic reproduction. For, what is central in Mao's dialectic is the internal process of reflection and action by which the relationship between art and political consciousness comes into being; what Mao points out is the convergence of the "two criteria" of the aesthetic and the political dimensions. Contrary to the knee-jerk anti-communism that often enters into discussions about Mao's dialectic, the unity of art and politics is the unconditional outcome in the process of awakening the "reader" to the systemic functioning of the external world in the hope of creating spaces for liberation, rather than for reflecting on the surface affinities that link one cultural space to another or for dictating an absolute political directive. The dialectical praxis of Mao's "revolutionary machine" signals that aesthetic intervention is an internal mechanism which needs to be manipulated in the process of creation in order to bring critical consciousness to a higher level in the political struggle, a process which also involves bringing art itself to a higher state of collective being. Contrary to the process of aestheticization in the world literature paradigm, which contextualizes the systemic forces of globalization as a backdrop according to which world culture can be interpreted, Mao's revolutionary praxis of global culture operates by confronting modalities of globalized capital, a reformulation which, to quote Fredric Jameson, "radically calls into question the commodified daily life, the reified spectacles, and the simulated experience of our own plastic-and-cellophane society."³⁵

Furthermore, we can see how the historicization of global culture relates to what Freire calls "Education as the practice of freedom" that "denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world," the very ideology by which radical pedagogy emerges as *critical intervention*, rather than as a simple reflection of the existing world-as-is doctrine that justifies globalized capital.³⁶ The substance of radical pedagogy, which finds its corollary in the dialectical form of art that Mao articulates above, lies in its ability to challenge the rationality that underlies systemic conditions, for the purposes of evoking not only the intellectual response needed for understanding historical dimensions of oppression and inequality, but also for developing and sharpening class struggle, which Freire argues symbolizes the process of *renaming*: "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*."³⁷ In order to explicate further the reformulation of global cultural forms in the context of what I am calling radical pedagogy, I would like to analyze Takiji Kobayashi's proletarian novella, *Tōseikatsusha*, translated as *Life in the Party*, from a historical perspective, yet one that will also draw attention to the contemporary crisis of globalized capital and the revolutionary responses to its welcomed demise.

In order to discuss the novella in detail, I would like to draw attention to the historical dimension of Takiji's work. By 1930, financial and political crises set in motion the intensification of repressive mechanisms that would enclose Japanese society by the end of the

³⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, Volume 2* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 175.

³⁶ Freire, 62.

³⁷ Freire, 69.

decade, culminating in World War. Multiple shocks of the global financial crisis gave impetus for the increased exploitation of workers, while the organized labor movement that had gained momentum in the early 1920s began to be taken over by elements of the political right, which aligned itself with the Japanese ruling class.³⁸ The Manchurian “incident” of 1931 paved the way for imperialist expansion in China and the eventual invasion of the entire Asian Continent, and the imperialist drive for war gave rise to the militarization of industry and the expanded, centralized control over the economy by the ruling elite.³⁹ Most notably, imperialist expansion abroad was met with internal repression of “dissident” activists, artists, writers, thinkers, and union leaders legitimated firstly through the enactment of so-called “protective” laws, such as the Peace and Preservation Law of 1925 (*Chian Iji Hou*), specifically designed to control the activities of leftist radicals who had made strong ties to organized labor by the 1920s, and followed by the National Mobilization Law of 1938 (*Kokka Soudouin Ho*), which gave vast powers to the state to deploy human and material resources “in times of emergency” through bureaucratic legislation that would not need the Japanese Diet’s approval, an enactment that came on the heels of the full-blown Japanese invasion of China in 1937.⁴⁰

It is in the tumultuous historicization just described that Takiji Kobayashi writes his *novella Tōseikatsusha*, or *Life in the Party*, published in 1932, which offers one of the most critical insights into the trajectory of Japanese fascism, in particular the convergence of state power, internal political repression, and the ultranationalist militarism that legitimated the expansion of imperialist war in Asia. Historically, the work is written on the verge of the transformation from the period of imperial democracy by popular and institutional forces that challenged oligarchic rule by Meiji elites who came to power in the 1870s to what would become the Japanese fascism by the late 1930s, which initially began with the systemic repression of artists, writers, thinkers, and labor organizers sympathetic to communist ideas. As Germaine Hoston notes, by 1930 the Japanese Communist Party had been infiltrated by the Japanese Special Higher Thought Police, or *Tokko* for short, followed by mass roundups and imprisonment of anyone suspected of being a communist, which was in violation of the Peace and Preservation Laws.⁴¹ This repression would become the bedrock of Japanese ruling-class power throughout the prewar period and until the end of the war. Takiji’s⁴² work is considered a staple of the

³⁸ See Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) for an analysis of the labor movement, from 1900 to the 1930’s.

³⁹ See Yoshihisa Tak Matsusaka, *The Making of Japanese Manchuria, 1904-1932* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Louis Young, *Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); for an analysis of the rise of Japanese fascism, the drive towards imperialist war, and the repression of leftists in Japan, see Germaine Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1986), pp. 251-293.

⁴⁰ For an analysis of the repression in Japan and its relation to the Proletarian Literary Movement, see Heather Bowen-Struyk’s “Rival Imagined Communities: Class and Nation in Japanese Proletarian Literature.” *Positions* 14:2 (fall 2006), 373-404.

⁴¹ Hoston, 251.

⁴² While Japanese authors are usually referred to by their family names, Takiji is used by his followers as a way of remembering his sacrifice and murder at the hands of police in 1933, thus my usage here. See Heather Bowen-Struyk’s personal essay about her sojourn to attend the annual memorial celebration of Takiji’s death and work, “Why a Boom in Proletarian Literature in Japan? The Kobayashi Takiji Memorial and The Factory Ship,” at

Japanese Proletarian Literary Movement, which flourished in the 1920s and reflected the emergent internationalism of movements that criticized capitalism, colonialist and racist oppression of expanding empires and the super exploitation of workers, with a view towards building working-class solidarity through cultural production. The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), the Surrealists in France, and the “Popular Front” activism that swept across Europe and the United States in the mid-1930s are a few movements that come to mind in this context.⁴³

Unlike his celebrated *Kani Kosen*, translated as *The Crab-Canning Ship*, Takiji’s *Tōseikatsusha* is not only composed of realist accounts of the economic and ideological super-exploitation of Japanese workers, the drive towards imperialist war, and the emergence of repressive state power; this work also functions as a semi-autobiographical narrative of Takiji’s life “underground,” his dedication to non-public political work as a writer and organizer for the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), and his daily existence on the run until his arrest, torture, and murder at the hands of the police in 1933. Written in the first person singular (*Watashi*), *Tōseikatsusha* chronicles the life of a communist organizer who infiltrates a military-industrial plant that has rapidly increased the production of war materials, primarily gasmasks and parachutes, on the brink of the imperialist expansion into Manchuria in 1930-31. Along with two other comrades, a male character (Suyama) and a woman (Ito), the three attempt to build an anti-war and anti-imperialist movement in the rank and file of the 400 munitions workers. These employees are forced to work in unsafe and unfair conditions, while the compulsory status as “temporary worker” (*rinjikou*) is put on them in the absence of progressive labor organizations. As the main character states, “At the start of the war, we decided to put our organizing work at the center of our party. The clearest meaning of the work we do is the sacrifice of our personal lives for the sake of our class, the organizing efforts, and especially for the liberation of the proletariat as a whole.”⁴⁴ Throughout the nine sections of Takiji’s work, the three characters devise methods for building solidarity among the splintered factory workers using leaflets and an anonymously published communist newspaper called *Mask* in which the connections between working-class exploitation in Japan, imperialist war, and capitalism are emphasized; not only that, they also attempt to expand and rebuild the communist movement from within the confines of the factory space. In the end, they decide to go for a short-lived strike, sparked by the premeditated dismissal of half of the factory workers, which ultimately fails. The collapse of the strike, however, does not discourage the main character: that is, while the organizers couldn’t stop the firing of the temporary workers, they were able to “protect the work of the vanguard” and “widen the spores of working-class struggle.”

In a general sense, the *bildungsroman* construction of *Tōseikatsusha*, in which an emergent political consciousness unfolds through the particularities of subjective experience, is a distinctive feature of the socialist realist form that became dominant in the 1930s’ work of

http://japanfocus.org/-Heather-Bowen_Struyk/3180

⁴³ See Bowen-Sturyk, “Rival Communities.” For an analysis of labor solidarity between Japanese and Korean workers, see Ken Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁴⁴ I am using the original text from the online source; all translations in the article from this text are mine: http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000156/files/833_28260.html

writers such as Michael Gold, Jack Conroy and Meredith Le Suer. The universality of the socialist realist *bildungsroman* is that it allowed for a fluid exchange between the personal and the political, and it facilitated the means for creating a revolutionary praxis for art, one through which a formative understanding of the systemic conditions of capital could be analyzed and used as a basis for fueling revolutionary struggle. The underlying intentionality of the socialist realist form is that political consciousness should unfold in the interiors of aesthetic production, giving way to the dynamic of revolutionary optimism that legitimates the dialectic of radical transformation that emerges outside of the text as a tool for widening class struggle and for building revolutionary solidarity.

On a slightly different level, by narrating the fictional life of an underground communist activist, Takiji simultaneously explores the conditions under which he must survive in his actual life, on the run as an outlawed member of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and foregoing his personal desire for the good of the party and the struggle of the working class. And, here, the expression of solidarity is seen most explicitly: building revolutionary consciousness through art inside Japan unites him with international struggle to ignite global revolution, despite the dire threat to his physical freedom, as doing so in Japan in the 1920s made activists a target of fascist repression. The semi-autobiographical structure of *Tōseikatsusha* reveals a critical dialectic at work that I call here “historicizing the personal”: that is, rather than compose a work which simply reflects the conditions of Japanese workers within a developing fascist context, Takiji’s work puts forward the view that Japanese imperialist aggression abroad and the everyday political oppression at home are part of the same evolution towards the complete fascist state. In the course of the novel, the more the police pursue the protagonist and his comrades, the deeper we see how the dialectic at work in the novel functions through the continual unfolding of the interiority of oppression that valorizes Japanese fascism and the constituents of the military-industrial complex that became predominant in Japan after 1931. By historicizing his daily existence, the lines between the personal/political, the state apparatus/the capitalist drive for profit, working-class exploitation/colonialist policy, the ethnocentrism of *Minzokushugi* or innate Japanese identity/colonial racism, and localized struggle/international solidarity are re-historicized in what Harry Harootunian calls “reality of unevenness” that defined the crisis of Japanese politics after 1930 and is the means by which the development of fascism in Japan can be analyzed historically.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the distortion between the internal/external elements defines the materiality of struggle to which Takiji/the protagonist and his comrades have dedicated themselves, which becomes the primary drive of the overall narrative.

Much of the novel reveals the everyday struggles of the factory workers and the strategies by which the organizers attempt to build political consciousness among them; however, the main character also ponders what I would call the existentiality of his condition, where his individual aspirations and the obligations to his political work come into conflict. Here, we may also engage what some may argue are the “didactic” moments of the proletarian literary work, through what I would argue concretize radical pedagogy. In other terms, although these moments reflect the coming-into-being of the main character in the course of the work, what we see here is a narrative of self-reflection on the part of the writer, Takiji, whose struggles to maintain an

⁴⁵ Harry Harootunian, “Constitutive Ambiguities: The Persistence of Modernism and Fascism in Japan’s Modern History,” in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, ed. Alan Tansman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 80-115.

underground life are made apparent. In this sense, I would like to analyze two aspects of *Tōseikatsusha* to investigate the relationship between working-class oppression inside the borders of Japanese society from the late 1920s and Japan's imperialist directives in East Asia, which really begin in 1910 with the annexation and colonization of Korea. I would then like to make some final comments on the question of revolutionary commitment that is crucial to my own interpretation of the work in the context of radical pedagogy. Briefly, while the “brand” of fascism that developed in Japan is different in political, social, and legal terms than what occurred in Italy, Germany, or Spain, all of these countries shared essential cultural ideologies implemented to legitimate the political praxis of the fascist nation. If we consider the classic definition of fascism—that it is a process that is intensified in moments of crisis, that crisis itself drives the obligatory consolidation of class power in the name of overcoming the crisis moment, and that there is a symbiotic relationship between the implementation of fascist policies and the systemic imperatives under capitalism—what occurred in Japan is emblematic of how financial and political crises became the basis for promoting a cultural politics aimed at disarming working-class movements for economic and social justice through the use of racism, anti-communism, and the encouragement of Japanese ethnocentrism. The cultural mechanisms at work in Japan—including the emphasis on racial superiority through the “Japanism” movement, the systemic use of anti-communism to root out labor organizers to demonize working-class struggle as selfish and anti-nationalist, the mass censorship of radio, TV, newspapers, comic books, films, photographs that increased at a rapid tempo after 1937, and the celebration of imperialist war in the pursuit of economic superiority—were vital in the formation of the type of fascist rule that emerged in Japan in the 1930s.⁴⁶

What is clear is that the ideological authority of fascism was used initially to subvert the labor movement in the years immediately after WWI, when Japanese workers and rural farmers who originally participated in the activities of mainstream politics began to question the existing structures of power; some of whom also demanded radical changes to the emergent institutions that had led to class inequality and the asymmetrical sharing of material goods. During the period of what Andrew Gordon calls “imperial democracy,” from the turn of the century to the late 1920s, the ruling class often gave in to demands of organized labor while simultaneously using the cultural dimension of anti-communism to subsume labor struggles in order to form a new order of labor organization which could be easily manipulated by state power. By 1931, in fact, well-funded elements of the political right began to hijack the established unions, converting many members to the racist “Japanism” movement, eradicating leftist forces through public red-baiting, and making close ties with capital. As Gordon notes, “By carefully policing the boundaries of legitimate discourse the state revealed its own political vision. Within the military and bureaucracy, a decision was being made to promote the unity of officials and people in a new way. The state would place itself in the role of political mobilizer, not mediator, of diverse groups in society; it would not undertake to ‘represent’ the imperial and popular wills . . . but to mobilize and direct the will of the people in service to an emperor whose will the state defined.”⁴⁷ Gordon draws attention to the fact that such mechanisms of control became an

⁴⁶ See Kevin M. Doak's analysis of the Japanism Movement in the emergent fascist state in his “Fascism Seen and Unseen: Fascism as a Problem in Cultural Representation,” in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, 31-55.

⁴⁷ Gordon, 320.

essential part of the rapid progression towards imperialist war through fusing ruling-class forces and the state itself. Japan's mission to "stabilize" Asia required a long-term strategy to mobilize sentiment at home, which meant, in other terms, the liquidation of radical elements that could make the connection between the capitalist drive for profit, meaning the super-exploitation of systemically unorganized workers, and the imperialist agenda, which was intended to assuage the economic crisis that had taken root in Japan by the mid-1920s.

Through an analysis of Takiji's work, some key elements for rethinking the world literature paradigm become clear: first, reflecting on Takiji's language in the context of the current global movements for social justice, including Arab Spring, the Occupy Movements, the Maoist struggle in Central India, and other forms of radical organizational models that break with reformist conceptions serving ruling class interests, we can see how the dialectic between aesthetic production and political alignment that Mao argues fuels the relevance of art's presence in such movements also signals the radical rethinking of the world literary ideology; this is based on the conscious participation of struggle, which in Takiji's novella is the controlling idea guiding us through the work itself. Opposed to the alienated subject in the postmodernist *world-as-is* indeterminacy form, what also informs the revolutionary imagination of a writer like Takiji—whose work I use here as a prime example of how to radicalize and transform the institutionalized perception of globality in the ideological structure of the world literature category—is the inevitability of those struggles. Through the validity of that historical experience, one can say that committed art is often "written" prior to its becoming a text, sort of the gathering point for the reproduction of politically conscious art. In that sense, I would argue that the value of *Tōseikatsusha* is reflected in the constancy of revolutionary value in committed art itself: while the capitalist system has persistently super-exploited workers, expanded its imperialist girth, deepened racism and sexism across the globe, and produced, reproduced and mended economic crises, what also has not changed is the unrelenting desire to create a system based on the dedication to human need. Committed art and its extension in the radical pedagogical model should measure the historical foundations of this struggle, to inform us again and again about how it can be used to shatter the ideology of anti-communism and the systemic mystifications of radical politics.

Tōseikatsusha, in this context, should be read not only as a semi-autobiography, but also as a blueprint for understanding the trajectory of Japanese fascism from the 1930s onward; it also reflects the repeated hijacking of radical political outlets by ruling-class forces and the constituent elements of inter-imperialist war, the possibility of fascism as a response to the current crisis, as well as the revolutionary optimism to combat such forces in our own time. The historicity of Takiji's work is revealed in the extent to which he can penetrate into the dialectic of globalized capitalism and the volatility of state power. He does so in order to render apparent the connections among varying, ambiguous components that define both the period in which he wrote as well as the intimate relationship between internal political repression and the drive toward imperialist war generally. Takiji's life and work are instilled in this text and reflect the insistence on revolutionary commitment to which many writers of the 1920s and '30s adhered even if they often possessed limited views on the transformative capabilities of radical political alternatives. As Barbara Foley notes, the question of literary commitment "hinges upon the representation of an intrinsically optimistic reality," even in the face of immensely powerful

forces, like the ones Takiji fought in emergent fascist Japan.⁴⁸ Here, the difference between political alignment, which can simply become an ornament in the artwork as an act of solidarity with political struggle, and the configuration of revolutionary optimism can be made: not only should revolutionary commitment consist of the reflection of external reality, but it also must use the aesthetic dimension for the purposes of recreating radical alternatives beyond reflection itself. This is a distinctive aspect that comes through Takiji's work and should become the focal point in the development of a radical pedagogy, one that could be used for both reflection and action, to frame it in Freire's dialectic. *Tōseikatsusha*, in this sense, symbolizes the continual presence of insurgent art, particularly in our own time of capitalist crisis when inter-imperialist struggle over the control of global resources, as we see happening in East Asia in the continuing rivalry between Japan and China, is increasing rapidly.⁴⁹ As such, the critical insight into the workings of capital, combined with the vital message of hope in Takiji's aesthetic production overall, resonates in Alain Badiou's recent work in which he argues: "For a politics of emancipation, the enemy that is to be feared most is not repression at the hands of the established order. It is the interiority of nihilism, and the unbounded cruelty that can come from its emptiness."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 160.

⁴⁹ For a contemporary analysis of inter-imperialism in East Asia, see my article, "Inter-Imperialism and Neo-Fascism in Japan" at http://axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/Article_61334.shtml

⁵⁰ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macy and Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2010), 32.