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SOMEWHERE TO BELONG: SHANGHAI, TAINAN, AND TOKYO IN LIU NA'OU'S 1927 DIARY

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In 1927, Liu Na'ou劉吶鷗 (1905–1940), a modernist writer born in Taiwan during the Japanese colonization (1895–1945), kept a one-year diary as he contemplated his future in Shanghai, Tokyo, or Tainan. Rediscovered only in the 1990s, the diary offers valuable insights into Liu Na'ou's experiences in Shanghai, his travels throughout China, Japan, and Taiwan, and his literary and editorial endeavours, facilitating a renewed exploration and in-depth analysis of the author. Moreover, it provides glimpses into the context of 1920s semicolonial China and into the complex relationship between Japan and Taiwan during the Japanese colonization period. Over the past twenty years, scholars from Taiwan and abroad have extensively researched Liu Na'ou, defining his role as a pioneer of Chinese modernism who introduced Japanese and Western literature to Shanghai in the late 1920s. His 1928 magazine, *Trackless Train* (無軌列車 *Wugui lieche*), the two bookstores he established in Shanghai, his translations of modernist Japanese novels, and his anthology *Urban Scenes* (都市風景線 *Dushi fengjing xian*) are well-known contributions to modern Chinese and Taiwanese literature. However, Liu's case study also enables a better understanding of the experiences of Taiwanese writers in the early 20th century, struggling with identity issues, feelings of displacement, non-belonging, and nostalgia. The paper seeks to explore Liu's depictions of Shanghai, Tainan, and Tokyo in his diary to shed light on how a young 1920s Taiwanese writer perceived these cities while searching for a sense of belonging and career development. By analyzing the emotions conveyed during his stays in these urban centres, the study also aims to uncover and examine Liu's vision of semicolonial China, the Japanese Empire, and colonial Taiwan.

Key words: Liu Na'ou, Semicolonial China, Japanese Empire, Taiwan, Displacement, Diary Writing, Taiwan Literature.

НАЛЕЖАТИ ДО ЧОГОСЬ: ШАНХАЙ, ТАЙНАНЬ І ТОКІО В ЩОДЕННИКУ ЛЮ НА'ОУ ЗА 1927 РІК

С. Скіаві

У 1927 р. Лю На'оу (1905–1940), письменник-модерніст, який народився на Тайвані під час японської колонізації (1895–1945), вів однорічний щоденник, розмірковуючи про своє майбутнє у Шанхаї, Токіо чи Тайнань. Щоденник, віднайдений лише у 1990-х роках, пропонує цінну інформацію про життя Лю На'оу в Шанхаї, його подорожі Китаєм, Японією та Тайванем, а також про його літературну та редакторську діяльність, сприяючи новому дослідженню та поглибленому аналізу творчості автора. Окрім того, він дає уявлення про контекст напівколоніального Китаю 1920-х років і про складні відносини між Японією і Тайванем у період японської колонізації. Протягом останніх двадцяти років науковці з Тайваню та з-за кордону активно досліджували творчість Лю На'оу, визначаючи його роль як піонера китайського модернізму, який представив японську та західну літературу в Шанхаї наприкінці 1920-х років.

Його журнал 1928 р. *Потяг без колії* (*Wugui lieche* 無軌列車), дві книгарні, які він заснував у Шанхаї, його переклади модерністських японських романів та антологія *Міський пейзаж* (*Dushi fengjing xian* 都市風景線) є відомим внеском у сучасну китайську та тайванську літературу. Однак приклад Лю також дає змогу краще зрозуміти досвід тайванських письменників початку XX ст., які боролися з проблемами ідентичності, почуттям переміщення, неприналежності та ностальгії. У статті зроблено спробу дослідити зображення Шанхаю, Токіо і Тайнань у щоденнику Лю, щоб пролити світло на те, як молодий тайванський письменник 1920-х років сприймав ці міста у пошуках відчуття приналежності та кар'єрного зростання. Аналізуючи емоції, передані під час його перебування у цих міських центрах, дослідження також має на меті розкрити та дослідити бачення Лю напівколоніального Китаю, Японської імперії та колоніального Тайваню.

Ключові слова: Лю На'оу, напівколоніальний Китай, Японська імперія, Тайвань, вигнання, письмові щоденники, література Тайваню.

Introduction: Liu Na'ou and His Diary

In 1927, the writer and filmmaker Liu Na'ou 劉吶鷗 (1905-1940) composed a diary recording his modern life in Shanghai, hobbies, and travels across China, Taiwan, and Japan while capturing his reflections and feelings. This work provides direct access to the author's thoughts and interests, shedding light on the events of his brief existence, which intertwined with the Sino-Japanese history and politics of the early twentieth century.

The discovery of Liu Na'ou's diary in Taiwan during the late 1990s led to a better understanding of the writer, encouraging new studies and publications. It was Liu Na'ou's family who uncovered the manuscript in a drawer of their residence in Xinying, Tainan County, and entrusted it to the Taiwanese scholar and professor Peng Hsiao-Yen for future research and publication in 1997. As Peng recounts [2010, 56], given the author's tragic demise–murdered at 35 under circumstances that remain unclear–and the censorship imposed on his works, the family hesitated to bring the diary to light. At that time, they were unaware of Liu Na'ou's influential role in the literature and cinema of the 1930s. It indeed took over thirty years to rehabilitate Liu's reputation in mainland China and more than fifty for academic studies to commence in Taiwan.

Born in Taiwan in 1905, Liu Na'ou, the pen name of Liu Canbo 劉燦波, lived during the Japanese colonization of the island (1895-1945), experiencing the hardships and limitations of being a colonial subject. He belonged to a wealthy family in Tainan, where he attended primary and middle school from 1912 to 1920, receiving a Japanese education. Like many other young Taiwanese students from affluent families, Liu moved to Japan to pursue his studies at the Aoyama Gakuin Academy in Tokyo, where he took French and English courses, developing a strong interest in modern foreign literature.

Once in Japan, he encountered a very different cultural environment compared to Taiwan. Japan, having opened to the West in the mid-19th century and undergone the Meiji Restoration in 1868, had transformed into a modern nation with a dynamic intellectual and cultural landscape that attracted students from China and Taiwan. Tokyo, in particular, had experienced a process of modernization and Westernization after the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake, evolving into a cosmopolitan metropolis with modern entertainment such as dance halls, movie theatres, cafés,

and a multicultural population visiting the city from all over the globe. In Tokyo, Liu became acquainted with the new developments of Japanese literature and was strongly influenced by the modernist fiction of the School of the New Sensibilities (新感覚派 *Shinkankaku-ha*). The group's leading members, Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1898-1947), Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899-1972), and Kataoka Teppei 片岡鉄兵 (1894-1944), fostered new subjective and sensorial writings drawing inspiration from Surrealism, Dadaism, and Futurism, and the aesthetics and immediacy of modern Soviet and Hollywood cinema.

After graduating in 1926, Liu wished to continue his studies in France, but his mother prevented him from moving to Europe, fearing the outbreak of new wars. Eventually, he decided to relocate to Shanghai, at the time a semicolonial city hosting an International Settlement and a French Concession. He enrolled in French courses at the Jesuit Université l'Aurore located in the French concession, where he met fellow aspiring writers such as Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905-1950), Du Heng 杜衡 (1907-1964), and Shi Zhecun 施蟄存 (1905-2003). Liu and this coterie of like-minded friends, which was later joined by China's most prominent modernist, Mu Shiying 穆時英 (1912-1940), began planning literary and editorial activities to promote modernism in China. Owing to his multicultural and multilingual education and "linguistic and cultural sensibilities" [Shi and Amory 2023, x], Liu succeeded in introducing Japanese and Western modernism to Shanghai, playing a pivotal role in the emergence of the so-called Chinese School of the New Sensibilities (中國新感覺派 *Zhongguo Xin ganjue pai*).[1]

Nonetheless, following the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Liu began collaborating with Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883-1944)'s puppet regime, thus his literary and film career gradually came to an end. He served as a director for the official newspaper *National Subjects' Daily* (國民新聞*Guomin xinwen*), hoping to continue promoting his modernist interests even in such perilous and politicized times. However, in September 1940, he was assassinated for unknown reasons. Three months earlier, his friend and colleague Mu Shiying, the former director of *Guomin xinwen*, was also mysteriously murdered. As Xu explains [2010, 28-32], Liu was ambushed by an unidentified man wearing traditional Chinese clothing, who shot him three times on the stairs of a restaurant in Shanghai. The author went to the venue to attend an official luncheon, including members of the collaborationist government, politicians, and Japanese directors. The event was specifically organized to mark the transfer of the editorship of the *Guomin xinwen* newspaper to Liu after the premature death of Mu Shiying.

When the author was rediscovered in the 1990s, in mainland China, up to that point, he had been considered a traitor (漢奸 *hanjian*) for his collaboration with the Wang Jingwei regime. His name had fallen into oblivion, and his works had been banned because they deviated from the literary standards of the Yan'an Talks of 1942 and for their Westernized style. His contribution to modern Chinese literature and the development of a modernist movement inspired by Japanese and European fiction was thus lost. Neither were his endeavours in the field of cinema known,

[1] On the process of introduction and sinicization of modernism in China by Liu Na'ou and the School of the New Sensibilities, see Schiavi 2022. The School of the New Sensibilities is also commonly referred to by the following names: New Sensationism, Neo-Sensation, or New Sensationalist School.

which also included directing a film documentary released in 1933, entitled *The Man Who Has the Camera* (持攝影機的男人*Chi sheyingji de nanren*).

In Taiwan, on the other hand, the author faced persecution under the literature ban imposed by the Nationalist government, which ruled the island since 1945. Liu Na'ou's works were censored because they belonged to literature produced in China, and, as was the case on the mainland, because he was labelled a traitor. Additionally, as a Taiwanese author who lived through the Japanese colonization period, his writings were categorized within the literature of that colonial era, and thus rejected by the decolonization and sinicization policies enforced by the nationalists.

After the diary's unearthing, several studies on Liu Na'ou finally emerged, leading to the publication of the text in 2001, edited by Peng Hsiao-yen and Huang Ying-zhe, with the collaboration of Xu Qinzhen and Kang Laixin. As stated in the preface, these scholars aimed to offer a fresh perspective on Liu Na'ou and examine his significant contribution to Taiwanese literature and cinema. The rediscovery of the author corresponded with a period of renaissance and affirmation of Taiwan literature and history, previously marginalised by the *Guomindang* policies and the former Japanese rule. This period of affirmation has its origins in the Nativist literature of the 1970s, a movement focused on the people of Taiwan, their history, and their traditions, and gained momentum in the late twentieth century following the abrogation of the Martial Law in effect on the island since 1947. As explained by Shi and Amory [2023, xiv], the study of Liu Na'ou intended to "welcome home a wandering son," and, as Ying adds [2011], to assert the writer's Taiwanese identity and investigate his potential role as a precursor of modernism on the island.

The diary was published by the Tainan County Cultural Affairs Bureau as part of an eight-volume collection encompassing the author's work – fiction and essays – his biography, and studies on his literary and filmmaking endeavours. [2] Additionally, in 2005 and 2011, the National Museum of Taiwan Literature held two international conferences on Liu Na'ou, with proceedings published afterward.

The diary was written over the course of twelve months and published in two volumes, each covering six months. The first volume is introduced by three articles: "Welcoming Liu Na'ou back home" (迎接劉吶鷗返鄉 *Yinjie Liu Na'ou fanxiang*) by Chen Tangshan, "The Legend of Liu Na'ou" (劉吶鷗傳奇*Liu Na'ou chuanqi*) by Ye Jiaxiong, and "Wandering the World: Liu Na'ou's 1927 Diary" (浪蕩天涯：劉吶鷗一九二七年日記*Langdang tianya: Liu Na' ou yijiuerqi nian riji*) by Peng Hsiao-yen.

On the other hand, the second volume concludes with two appendices: the article "Liu Na'ou's Old Friends and New Acquaintances" (劉吶鷗日記中的舊雨新知 *Liu Na'ou riji zhong de jiuyu xinzhi*) by Qin Xianci, and a table listing people mentioned in the diary along with information about their background, education, and relationship with the author. Among these are Taiwanese, Japanese, and Chinese friends of Liu Na'ou, as well as siblings. Women are rarely mentioned, especially the numerous Shanghainese dancers, with whom the author socialized and who often appear in the early months of the diary [Peng and Huang 2001b]. These women would later be amongst the main protagonists of his fiction.

[2] Currently, there is no complete translation of the Diary, only some passages (May 8th and 9th , July 1st , and November 1st) were translated into English by Edward M. Gunn. See Chang, Yeh and Fan 2014.

Overall, the structure given to the diary by Liu Na'ou remained unchanged, with entries opening with the date in Chinese, followed by the Japanese one in parentheses, and a detailed list of the author's readings at the end of each month. From the work, one can discern Liu Na'ou's meticulous personality, as he often hastened to catch up on days when he was unable to write or to add reflections to those previously described. For instance, in February, when he was hospitalized for about two weeks due to stress, repeated headaches, and a probable venereal disease, he recounts that he rose solely to update the diary [Peng and Huang 2001a, 122].

While the diary addresses various interesting themes, this study focuses on Liu Na'ou's portrayal of China, Taiwan, and Japan, with particular reference to the most significant passages depicting the cities of Shanghai, Tainan, and Tokyo. Through a close reading of the descriptions, imagery, and emotions associated with these urban spaces, the primary objective is to shed light on how a young Taiwanese writer of the 1920s perceived semicolonial China, the Japanese Empire, and colonial Taiwan. Concurrently, the paper also aims to assess the diary's value as research material for exploring Liu Na'ou's sense of displacement and non-belonging and examining his perception of his complex Taiwanese/Japanese/Shanghainese identity.

Building upon Peng's studies, which adopt a transnational and transcultural approach, this analysis will finally consider Liu Na'ou as a "transcultural artist" [Peng 2010, 22], navigating between three national spaces in pursuit of a place for developing his artistic career, all the while shaping a modern and cosmopolitan identity that transcends national and cultural boundaries.

Representations of Shanghai

Liu Na'ou wrote his diary during a defining moment of his life. In 1927, he was in China, specifically Shanghai, contemplating whether to settle permanently in the city, return to his hometown Tainan, or relocate to Tokyo. Having just completed his studies at the Université l'Aurore, he dedicated much of his time to laying the groundwork for his future literary and editorial pursuits. Meanwhile, he savoured his experiences in Shanghai, a city that underwent significant modernization and Westernization following the Opium Wars (1839-1842; 1856-1860). By the late 1920s, Shanghai had transformed into a modern and cosmopolitan metropolis, boasting a thriving publishing market, a burgeoning film industry and a vibrant entertainment scene, including dance halls, cafés, movie theatres, public parks, shopping centres, and foreign bookstores.

The representations of China within Liu's journal predominantly revolve around Shanghai, whose modernity and Western influence are vividly depicted in several entries. As revealed in the diary and later in his fiction, the author experienced ambivalent feelings towards the city. Shanghai is depicted as a bustling metropolis brimming with opportunities that promised literary success and a career in cinema. Yet, it is also portrayed as an intoxicating environment with its beautiful women and luxury, which appears to cloud Liu's judgment and diminish his desire to write and study.

On January 12th, he reflects on the city's charm on its inhabitants by directly addressing Shanghai, a deceptive place that "poisons" its citizens and tourists:

Oh, Shanghai! Enchanting Shanghai! Tell them, those who run along the boulevards, tell them that the wind you blow is cold and will numb their bones,
that the fog you spread is poison and will bring tuberculosis… [Peng and Huang 2001a, 52]

Within the first three months of the diary, Liu frequently explores the conflicting emotions stirred by the city and meticulously documents his urban experiences, seemingly gathering material for future works that reveal the disorienting impact of modernity. He also critiques the proliferation of Western-imported consumerism and capitalism, noting the emergence of a frivolous and superficial urban culture. On January 5th, for instance, he writes that the city is a despicable place, whose inhabitants think of nothing but money and showing off [Peng and Huang 2001a, 38].

His days in Shanghai were bustling. In the late morning, he would meet his Chinese friends or Taiwanese fellows who had moved to China in search of fortune. They spent afternoons exploring new cafés, scouring local bookstores for foreign literature, and evenings dancing in ballrooms, often returning home as the sun rose. Liu enjoyed drinking, frequently indulging in Western drinks, with Old Tom being a particular favourite. On January 8th, after spending the day with two acquaintances referred to as E. and L., he recalls becoming "so intoxicated that I could not walk"; on February 7th, he recounts heavy drinking with friends and staying out all night [Peng and Huang 2001a, 44; 110].

Liu was fully aware of his lifestyle, recognizing its futility and repetitiveness. He often lamented feeling trapped in a monotonous routine marked by "indulging in Western cuisine, driving around, watching films, and entertaining girls." Concerns about his declining health, neglected studies, now akin to "a mist-veiled realm" [Peng and Huang 2001a, 106], and mounting financial obligations, including rent for his accommodation, weighed heavily on him. Sleepless nights and heavy drinking left him alienated and disoriented, occasionally prompting him to question the reality of his experiences [Peng and Huang 2001a, 90]. On February 6th, he ponders his frivolous lifestyle as follows:

Saying that I am letting myself go is reasonable; I cannot even do one useful thing. Every day, I watch [movie], eat, dance, and drink [...] Early this morning when I woke up, I felt a terrible pain in my eyelids. If I am not more careful, I will go blind, that is how it unfortunately is [Peng and Huang 2001a, 108].

The charm of Shanghai and its inebriating effect is also due to the personification of the city as a seductive modern woman. As Peng noted [2010, 55], this association is well depicted at the conclusion of the 12 January entry, when Liu describes the city as a hybrid figure "with bare knees and short hair," owning an elusive gaze and overwhelming charm. The hybridity reflects Shanghai's semicolonialism and multiculturalism and it is a feature one often finds in the fiction of the New Sensibilities School. The modern woman emblematic of Shanghai thus exerts a dual appeal on men, amplifying the allure of the city. This is the case of the 29 January entry, where Liu recounts spending the night with Yuriko, a dancer from a night club known as the Blue Bird in the Japanese concession of the International Settlement.

After departing from the girl, the author gazes upon the city streets and claims to have discovered a "new Shanghai" [Peng and Huang 2001a, 86].

Despite its modernity and allure, Shanghai is also portrayed as the semicolonial city it was at the time. There are references to its political situation and the foreign settlements established after the Opium Wars. At times, Liu reveals his infatuation with the atmosphere of the settlements, especially the French Concession, where he rented an apartment during his studies at the Université l'Aurore. Additionally, we often see him engaging in conversations with tourists or businessmen from afar and showing fascination with Shanghai's multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

Yet, concurrently, he is often bothered by the presence of Westerners, particularly by the British. On February 1st, he visits a Western bookstore on Nanjing Road and purchases two books, paying more than expected. This greatly upsets him, and he writes down that most of the bookstores in the International Settlement, under British and American rule, are "places run by bandits." The presence of *bairen* 白人(Caucasians) irritates him, to the extent that even the English saleswoman's polite "Thank you" seems to annoy him [Peng and Huang, 2001a, p. 98]

In the journal, there are also occasional allusions to the historical context of China. In the 8 March entry Liu refers to the Northern Expedition of 1926 and the tensions within the First United Front (1923-1927) between the Nationalist and Communist party. On February 19th, he learns from his friend Lin Dengshui 林澄水 (1899-?) that Hangzhou had fallen and that the National Revolutionary Army had entered the city of Shanghai [Peng and Huang 2001a, 134].

The situation was very tense; all activities were suspended due to the state of alert, including the publication of magazines, transport was halted, and additional troops were sent to the foreign settlements to maintain public order.

Nevertheless, Liu does not seem particularly concerned about the political situation. Instead, he appears irritated by the chaos in the city, the disruption of his routine, and the inability to continue his social life in Shanghai. As an aspiring writer, he was aware that the turmoil would affect the development of his literary and editorial pursuits. He was also vexed by frequent encounters with foreign troops patrolling the streets of Shanghai. On April 3rd, he recounts being searched by a "disgusting British soldier," and on the 9th, being checked several times by a Japanese sailor [Peng and Huang 2001a, 228; 240].

Liu's lack of tolerance for foreign troops, a symbol of Western countries' control and imperial ambitions in China, may also be due to his Taiwanese origin and status as a colonial subject. While captivated by Shanghai's multiculturalism, the presence of foreigners, particularly the military, appears to remind him of his homeland under Japanese rule. A critique of the abuses perpetrated by the colonial powers thus emerges from the episodes in which he is stopped and controlled. Similarly, his hostility towards the British, a prominent imperial power, may be viewed through this lens, suggesting a disdain for their actions in Shanghai.

As Peng concludes [2010, 55], there is a "genuine resentment towards foreign exploitation and colonial expansion, while on the other [hand] he undeniably enjoys the cosmopolitan atmosphere and luxurious foreign products".

Finally, Liu also portrays Shanghai as the "land of his future" [Peng and Huang 2001b, 446], a representation closely linked to the job opportunities and cultural stimuli the city offered during that period. Shanghai eventually became Liu's

"adopted city", where he started his career as a writer and filmmaker while also engaging in local real estate business [Shi and Amory 2023, viii]. In the diary, he describes his local literary and editorial activities and the encounters with fellow Université l'Aurore classmates, Dai Wangshu and Shi Zhecun, to discuss the opening of a bookstore and the publication of an illustrated magazine called *Modern Heart* (近代心*Jindai xin*). In the 18 January entry [Peng and Huang 2001a, 64], he drafts the six-point manifesto of the magazine, envisioning translations of Japanese authors, along with photographs and illustrations. Eventually, *Modern Heart* was never published, but it paved the way for future editorial undertakings.

In 1928, the year after the diary's writing, Liu launched his first magazine, *Trackless Train*, which, according to Yan Jiayan, marked the beginning of the Chinese New Sensibilities School [2011]. That same year, he gathered his translations of modern Japanese fiction in the anthology *Erotic Culture* (色情文化*Seqing wenhua*), which featured works by Kataoka Teppei, Yokomitsu Riichi, and Iketani Shinzaburō池谷信三郎 (1900-1933) (1900-1933). In 1930, he published his first and only anthology, *Urban Scenes* (都市風景線*Dushi fengjingxian*), comprising eight short stories all set in the city, where the spectacle of modernity is expertly dissected. This spectacle is described in his diary during his stay in Shanghai and is also captured in some scenes of the aforementioned film documentary he released in 1933.

The Colony and the Empire: Taiwan and Japan in Liu's Diary

Shanghai serves as the backdrop for the first three months of the diary. Later, Liu Na'ou had to leave the city, resulting in a decrease in his writing. On April 12th, he departed for Taiwan, where he stayed until May. Following, he sojourned in Tokyo until September, made an extended visit to Beijing from October to December and eventually returned to Shanghai. In the 12 April entry, he reports boarding a ship to Tainan after receiving a telegram from his mother urging him to return home. His grandmother was seriously ill, and as the eldest son of the family, he was requested to organize the funeral arrangements. Thus, bidding farewell to his friends Dai Wangshu, Shi Zhecun, and the dancer Yuriko, he left for Taiwan along with Cai Aili 蔡愛禮 (1905-?), a close Taiwanese friend also heading home.[3]

Unfortunately, the author did not make it to see his grandmother, as she passed away while he was on the journey. In the pages written after arriving in Taiwan, there are constant references to this event, and Liu's regret and sadness are evident as he fondly recalls the woman he seems to truly admire and respect [Peng and Huang 2001a, 258].

He does not extensively document his days on the island; most of his time was occupied with assisting in his grandmother's funeral, meeting relatives, and visiting the graves of the ancestors. He often found himself bored and sought solace in staying at home, reading modern Chinese magazines, including the *Creation Monthly* (创造月刊*Chuangzao yuekan*), or local newspaper like the *Taiwan Daily News* (台灣日日新報*Taiwan nichinichi shinpō*), an official Japanese publication established in 1898. Additionally, he immersed himself in classical literature, such as the *Water Margin* (水滸傳*Shuihu zhuan*), and modern fiction like Yu Dafu 郁達

[3] In particular, they stopped in Nagasaki and in the city of Beppu, before embarking for Taiwan on April 17th.

夫 (1896-1945)'s *The Past* (過去*Guoqu*) and Zhang Ziping 張資平 (1893-1959)'s *Taili* (苔莉).

Through the pages written on the island, one can sense Liu's frustration and impatience as he eagerly awaits the opportunity to resume his life in China. He appears well aware that Taiwan lacks the cultural stimulation and opportunities of Shanghai or Tokyo. Consequently, the idea of leaving the country and relocating elsewhere gradually becomes more prominent, although there remains a hint of nostalgia and affection towards Taiwan, particularly his hometown, Tainan. In the 26 April entry, Liu tenderly describes his native city as "the paradise of the south", while on April 19th, during a visit to his ancestors' grave, he gets captivated by the untouched beauty of the local countryside: the rice straw and starry sky provide solace, offering a brief escape from the bustling rhythms of city life to which he was accustomed [Peng and Huang 2001a, 274; 260].

However, Taiwan is more often depicted as a backward country, and this seems particularly marked when Liu discusses his mother and wife. Chenhen 陳恨, the former, plays a significant role in the diary. She was a traditional woman with whom Liu Na'ou had a complicated relationship since, as Peng reports, she epitomized a tradition and a "feudal system" still deeply rooted on the island [2010, 22]. Following her husband's death, she undertook the responsibility of supporting the family, adopting a stern and uncompromising behaviour toward her children. The early loss of her husband and, later, her youngest daughter at just three years old, drove her to forbid Liu Na'ou and his brother Liu Yingjin 劉櫻津 (1909-1940) from studying in Europe. Moreover, in 1922, she compelled Liu Na'ou into an arranged marriage with his cousin, Huang Suzhen 黃素貞, further straining their relationship.

In his diary, the author deals with conflicting emotions toward his mother. While in Shanghai, he occasionally expresses a sense of longing for her, as on January 4th when he envisions Chenhen waiting by the door of their Tainan residence for his return. Yet, at other times, he's annoyed by receiving requests to handle family matters or insufficient funds [Peng and Huang 2001a, 36].

During his stay in Taiwan, however, despite sporadic displays of concern, his irritation with his mother's manners and attitude grows. The two disagreed over the arrangements for the grandmother's funeral and Liu often records feeling misunderstood and controlled like he was a puppet. He frequently reflects on the generation gap between himself and his mother, attributing their many misunderstandings to her incarnation of customs and rituals from which he seeks liberation [Peng and Huang 2001a, 272]. On April 23rd, he even contemplates publishing a book titled "Taiwan Family's Revolution", condemning his mother's controlling behaviours and, more broadly, the conservatism of Taiwanese society where young people struggle to assert their independence against familial expectations. This discussion appears to have started on the 21 April entry, where Liu observes the difficulty of breaking old habits. Despite acknowledging some changes in Taiwan, he ultimately concludes that they have not yielded any tangible benefits. Individuals still find themselves unable to "escape that monstrous thing called society" [Peng and Huang 2001a, 268; 264].

Liu displays ambivalent feelings also toward his wife Huang Suzhen, who rarely appears in the diary. Like his mother, she is depicted as a traditional, unenthusiastic, and uninspiring figure with whom he shares no common interests. Huang Suzhen

came from a rural background; she was educated at home by private tutors and struggled with Japanese, primarily expressing herself in Taiwanese.

Yet, interestingly, peculiar descriptions of her are also found in the diary, reminiscent of the modern and emancipated women of Shanghai Liu would later depict in his fiction. In the 18 May entry, Huang Suzhen is portrayed as a *femme fatale*, a vampire thirsty for Liu's blood and driven only by carnal desires and pleasures [Peng and Huang 2001a, 322]. She thus becomes a prototype of the low regard and misogyny Liu holds for women, often represented as primitive creatures seemingly devoid of intellect [Peng 2010, 29].

However, unlike the female figures found in the Shanghai entries, which often enhance the author's fascination with the city, both his wife and mother seem to intensify the sense of boredom and oppression he experiences on the island. Liu frequently expresses annoyance with his mother's insistence that he remain in Taiwan to manage family affairs, and with his wife, who serves as a reminder of the constraints of their arranged marriage. These two women, being bound by traditional customs that confine them to domestic roles, contribute to the portrayal of Taiwan as a backward country lacking stimulation, particularly when compared to Japan and China, specifically Shanghai.

Liu's stay on the island was brief. On May 21st he moved to Tokyo, where he remained until September 10th to attend French and Latin courses at the Athena-Français Language School. However, he immediately complained about the teaching methods of the institution and attended classes sporadically. We often find him spending his time in bookstores and dreaming of returning to Shanghai, where his friends Cai Aili, Dai Wangshu, and Shi Zhecun awaited and urged him to return.

During his time in Japan, Liu diligently documents his daily activities, including visits to bookstores, boat and plane rides, and meetings with relatives and friends. However, despite his constancy in diary writing, there seems to be little enthusiasm for his life in the country.

Not even in the accounts of his frivolous experiences, particularly in Osaka and Tokyo, do we find more passionate records. For instance, in the 24 May entry, he reports attending a disappointing party at the Black Cat dance hall in Osaka. His initial enthusiasm appears to fade significantly due to irritating Japanese regulations that forbid guests from consuming alcohol inside the club. Similarly, on June 9th, he spends the night at a dance hall in Tokyo, complaining about the "awful" music and the presence of "ugly" women who fail to match his dancing skills [Peng and Huang 2001a, 334; 370]. [4]

On June 17th, he writes of feeling withdrawn and weary of the Japanese lifestyle [Peng and Huang 2001a, 386]. On July 3rd, he appears sad and apathetic as he wonders if he is slipping into depression due to the absence of friends in the city, possibly referring to Dai and Shi. His former companions from his time studying in Tokyo often bore him, and he seems unable to find anyone interesting to converse with [Peng and Huang 2001b, 428]. He also complains about the food and is occasionally annoyed and subtly critical of the Japanese air of superiority and arrogance. In the 2 June entry, for example, he recounts going to a library in Komagome, a district

[4] As Peng reported, it seems that Liu excelled in Tango and earned the nickname "The Dancing King" in Shanghai. See Peng 2010.

of Toshima, Tokyo,[5] to pick up some catalogues and encountering a "disgusting academic" atmosphere, as if the library gathered "the best scholars in the world" [356].

Tokyo seems to have lost all allure for him. The author's perception of the city changes drastically and negatively, as he tacitly compares it with Shanghai, where he had experienced modernity, acceptance, and freedom never felt in Japan.

Thus, on June 28th, after only a month in the country, he wrote to his family asking to spend the rest of the summer in China. On July 12th, he received the awaited response from his mother granting him permission to return to Shanghai. In the same entry, he concludes that Tokyo no longer holds anything stimulating for him, neither in terms of women, friends, nor academic pursuits [Peng and Huang 2001b, 446].

The urge for escape that emerges from the pages written in Taiwan and Japan, that is to say the colony and the Empire, is clearly influenced by the historical and cultural context of the time and the delicate issue of the author's identity. As evidenced by the diary, Liu did not truly feel part of either Taiwan or Japan. Additionally, he often struggled when asked about his origin. As explained by Cutivet [2005, 27], during his days on the island, the problem of defining his nationality became an overwhelming issue that made it unbearable to remain in his homeland, the symbol of his dual Taiwanese-Japanese identity.

Concurrently, he could no longer integrate into Japan either, a place towards which he seems to have developed a very different perception compared to the years when, very young and full of hopes, he went to the country to continue his studies. As Wang [2005, 449] states, at that time, he had a strong interest in Japanese culture and the modern environment of Tokyo. Later on, however, through critiques of food, uninteresting Japanese acquaintances and old friends, and disappointing entertainment, the author seems to express his resentment towards Japan and his awareness of being a colonial subject within the Empire.

For this reason, Shanghai became Liu's adopted city – a multicultural metropolis where he could blur his origins and feel like "a citizen of the world" [Shi and Amory 2023, vii]. In Shanghai, he went by the name Liu Na'ou, concealing his true identity as Liu Canbo. He claimed he was from Fujian to justify his Minnan accent and avoid any mention of his actual origins, as being Taiwanese in China at that time could invite suspicions of being a Japanese spy [Wang 2005].

This concealment partly had its psychological repercussions; the author experienced depression, insomnia, and loneliness, grappling with a profound sense of displacement and nostalgia. However, it was also a strategic necessity to gain access to local literary circles and pursue his artistic aspirations, freeing himself from the burden of defining his nationality. As Peng brilliantly suggests, understanding this writer hinges on perceiving him as "a transcultural artist who aspires to artistic freedom and perfection while transcending national, linguistic, [colonial] and cultural boundaries" and who ultimately "resorts to art to defy the predicament of identity" [2010, 22; 23].

Conclusions

As Lee argues, beside the "trivial day-to-day documentations", Liu's diary is rich in contents which enable a better understanding of the author's stand on literature, art and cinema [2020, 196], as well as of his sense of non-belonging and displacement.

[5] The library mentioned within the 2 June entry of the diary is the Tōyō Bunko or Oriental Library, established in 1917.

Liu appears lost and disoriented, torn between three countries and between familial and social obligations, and his desire for freedom and a modern career as a writer and filmmaker. While he acknowledges Shanghai as the land of his dreams, Taiwan and Japan represent, respectively, a constraining colonial reality and the colonizing empire where he will always be considered a second-class citizen.

As demonstrated, the emotions tied to these three distinct geographical contexts can be reinterpreted to explore the author's quest for a sense of belonging to resolve his identity predicament. Thus, the boredom and feelings of confinement experienced in Japan and Taiwan contrast with the eager anticipation of returning to Shanghai, the city where he could finally be free to "be himself" [Wang, 2005, p. 455], despite the city's frenetic rhythms weighing him down.

Additionally, such emotions are somehow mirrored in the diary's writing style. As Lejeune explains, diaries often exhibit discontinuous writing across various entries yet maintain consistency as they are kept daily [Lejeune, 2009, pp. 177-179]. However, in Liu's work, the tendency towards discontinuity seems influenced also by the places he finds himself in and the feelings they evoke. While some discontinuity is evident in entries written in Shanghai as well, it appears more pronounced when the author is in Taiwan and Japan.

The diary, finally, bears witness to the author's process of reflection and identity growth in a critical year of his existence, from the realization of not wanting to return to Tainan or Tokyo, to the maturation of a sense of belonging to Shanghai, where he could shape his modern and cosmopolitan identity. As explained by Popkin, referencing Lejeune's studies [2009, pp. 2; 5], the diary "allows for change and growth." This, I would argue and conclude, appears to be precisely the case and scope of Liu Na'ou's 1927 diary.

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