
Like Tongueless Men

Silence at Fushun Coalmine

Like tongueless men, without uttering a word, they [coolies] kept ascending to the third floor and descending from there, carrying these heavy sacks of beans on their shoulders. Their silence, their regular movements, their patience, and their energy are almost like the shadows of fate.

(Natsume Soseki “Travels in Manchuria and Korea,” 1909) ¹

1. Like Tongueless Men

“Country of the Dawn” ² is a documentary film, which happens to contain scenes of the “Cultural Revolution” between August 1966 and February 1967. The film crew intended to show “daily life” in the New China, along with its rapid technological progress. They did not understand what they were shooting at that time.

“Country of the Dawn” opens with a scene showing young Red Guards arriving from throughout China and gathering in Tian’an men Square. In the following scene a train appears with a plate indicating “*Wansui Maozhuixi* [long live Chairman Mao];” it is an express train traveling from Beijing to Shanhai Guan. The narrator of the film tells us that the young people clustering around Shanhai Guan station are tourists going to see the Great Wall. However, Tsuchiya Masaaki suggests that

1. Natsume Soseki, “Travels in Manchuria and Korea,” in *Soseki Complete Works*, vol. 12: 266.

2. “Country of the Dawn:” Iwanami film, in 1967. The director is Tokieda Toshie.

these young people teeming around the station are not tourists, but are going to Tian'an men Square to see Mao Zedong.

It must be easy to reach such an understanding if we could comprehend the meaning of August 1966, or at least if we could grasp the meaning of the opening scene of the young Red Guards gathering in Tian'an men Square. However, the film presents the opening scene like a picnic or a school excursion, when they take souvenir photos and write their names in Mao notebooks and exchange them. It is "daily life" in the New China, which is regarded as being similar to daily life in Japan where people enjoy having fun. Following this line, the second scene at Shanghai Guan station is to be understood as showing tourists going to the Great Wall. Likewise, if we go to the third scene, it shows people bathing in the Songhua River in Ha'erbin City. In short, "Country of the Dawn" is edited to make the unusual event of the Cultural Revolution become normal and understandable to a Japanese audience.

Let us stop and think about what connects the three scenes at the beginning of "Country of the Dawn:" Tian'an men Square in Beijing, Shanghai Guan station, and Ha'erbin City. The connection is a railroad. If we recall history, we realize that this railroad was the oldest main line operated by Mantetsu [South Manchu Railway Company, founded in 1906].³

In 1909, Nakamura Yoshikoto,⁴ the second president of Mantetsu, invited Natsume Soseki to travel in Manchuria. Soseki's travel essays "Travels in Manchuria and Korea" and his diary tell us that he visited major cities along the Mantetsu railroad such as Dalian, Lühun, Yingkou, Shenyang, and Fushun.⁵ Colonists in those cities, Soseki reported, enjoyed evening parties, dance parties, baseball, and rowing. In Dalian, an amusement attraction powered by electricity and named "Electric

Park" was in course of construction.⁶ Chinese slave labor, who were regarded as being "dirty," were behind construction of this "amusement" attraction.⁷ It is noteworthy that Soseki represented them as being "quiet," "never uttering a word," and having "expressionless faces."

For example, when Soseki wrote a scene in which an old Chinese man was struck by a coach, seriously injuring his leg,⁸ he described both the man and the bystanders around him as silent or expressionless men. Soseki wrote: "I was happy to feel that I could finally get rid of the cruel Chinese," when he returned to his hotel after leaving those expressionless Chinese.⁹ The voices of the Chinese men never reached Soseki, who was a close friend of the president of Mantetsu, and a colonist also in another coach. Soseki did not yet realize that his own colonial *Ear System* divided people into two groups, i.e., people who spoke the imperial language and the tongueless people to whom Soseki refers in the epigraph.

The last scene of his travel essays is located at Fushun Coalmine. Soseki accompanied his friend to visit Fushun Coalmine, a big source of profits for Mantetsu. He happened to meet two Englishmen in the office there. However, Soseki did not try to speak to them. He explained the reason as follows. "Englishmen basically have a proud spirit. They hardly ever speak to others unless they are introduced. Accordingly, we [never speak to them because we] are as proud as Englishmen."¹⁰ At that very moment, Soseki should have been expressionless as well as speechless. He had unconsciously shifted from the side of the colonist to that of the colonized.

After lunch, a mining engineer took Soseki and the other visitors inside a pit. As they descended an incredibly long tunnel, they were all lost for words. "Everyone stood silently. No one sat down. We traveled in silence. That was remarkable."¹¹ What compelled Soseki and the Englishmen to be at a loss for words? It should have been the "cruel" silence of a tunnel dug by Chinese workers. In the heart of darkness of the Coalmine, Soseki eventually faced Colonial imperialism, which sounded through the silence of the "tongueless people."

3. Cf. Kobayashi Hideo, *Mantetsu: birth and death of think tank*: 11–22.

4. Nakamura Yoshikoto, Goto Shinpei's right-hand man, continued to oversee the Taiwanese Government-General and Mantetsu together with Goto. See, Kobayashi Hideo, *Mantetsu*: 38 ff.

5. Soseki traveled in Manchuria and Korea between September 2 and October 17, 1909. He stopped writing his travel piece at Fushun, but he continued his travels all the way to Pusan, through Changchun, Ha'erbin, Andong, Phyongyang, and Seoul.

6. "Travels in Manchuria and Korea:" 244.

7. Ibid: 234.

8. Ibid: 336–37.

9. Ibid: 337.

10. Ibid: 350.

11. Ibid: 351.

From this point, Soseki stopped using a flippant tone in his writing. And, a few pages later, all of sudden, he ends his travel essays, even though he had not yet described his travels in Korea. He said: "I have still something to write about, but it is already New Year's Eve today, so I will stop writing."¹² This is indeed a strange way to close the essays. He could not utter a word after the "cruel" silence of Fushun Coalmine.

2. In front of the Innumerable

Let us turn back to "Country of the Dawn." We can find the same scene at Fushun Coalmine in the last part of this film. Takeuchi Yoshimi referred to it in his cinematic review.

Along an inner slope of an open-pit mine at Fushun, there are laid almost innumerable rails, on which long trains of freight cars travel this way and that as if they were superimposed on each other. Such a natural landscape (there is no other way to say it) itself impresses me. I admit that I am sentimental, but then my impressions are out of control, and it is difficult to explain their content.¹³

As mentioned above, Fushun Coalmine was never a "natural landscape." It was a man-made place where Soseki was lost for words and where the sweat and blood of "tongueless" Chinese "coolies" infiltrated. Takeuchi, as a leading Sinologist, should know this better than anyone else. Moreover, he criticized Japanese *naturalism*, which reduced human experiences including war, politics, and morality to a natural process, and regarded them as a fatal consequence [even Soseki referred to the "fate" of tongueless men]. He should know the danger of naturalistic literature manipulating human emotions and impressions. Contrary to such *naturalism*, he emphasized the dimensions of norms such as "responsibility," "morals," and "law" as resisting powers, through which we could barely make our "war experience" a "true experience." Man-made revolution in literature, he believed,

12. Ibid: 351.

13. Takeuchi Yoshimi, "Country of the Dawn," November 1967, in *Takeuchi Yoshimi Complete Works*, vol. 4: 424.

was ineluctable for the realization of that true experience.

We cannot help but wonder why Takeuchi, an anti-naturalistic critic, said that his impressions were moved by a *natural landscape*, and stated: "I was overwhelmed by a flood of emotions." There should have remained an inextirpable inclination towards *naturalism* in Takeuchi. Or it seems that the strength of Japanese *naturalism* was so insistent that even Takeuchi could not resist it. However, before rushing to a conclusion, we are going to examine how Fushun Coalmine is represented in "Country of the Dawn."

Like the experience of Soseki, the scene at Fushun Coalmine in this film is abruptly put into silence. First, it shows "traces of an overmine from a previous time"¹⁴ with the narrator saying: "Those who have been working since Japan's militaristic era never utter a word about the Japanese period." Then, the narration is suspended for a long moment. We face a silent scene of freight cars traveling on rail tracks and endless grave mounds. The narrator resumes here, saying: "these grave mounds are called 'myriad graves,' because myriad means innumerable." The silence in this scene is symbolic. Overall, the narration in this film is either excessive or too loud to allow us to hear the voices of the Chinese people. However, it is in this silent scene at Fushun Coalmine that the film "Country of the Dawn" faces up to the reality of the past. We are not allowed to give any ready-made meaning to the enormity of the past when confronted by the innumerable.

However, Takeuchi interpreted this silent scene as a mere continuation of the previous form of representation in this film.

Current movie fans, who love extremes, might feel hypothermal to this scene. They would say that it is nothing compared to Auschwitz. I admit this too. However, I stand in opposition to this view of humankind, which advocates that we can only grasp humankind in an extreme situation. On the contrary, I fully assent to a view of humankind affirming that a human being is human in daily life, thus love and hate would be exercised to the fullest in daily life. In this regard, I endorse the producers

14. Ibid: 425.

15. Ibid.

of this film who seem to have a common viewpoint with me.¹⁵ He reaffirmed this hypothermal scene as representing daily life. However, how can we understand the extreme silence of Fushun Coalmine and the old Chinese workers as hypothermal or normal? Takeuchi's impression and tears¹⁶ dulled the extremity, and made it acceptable like daily life or a natural landscape.

3. *Daily Life*

What did daily life mean at that time in China? As mentioned above, the film crew had tried to understand it in a similar way to daily life in Japan, but that was rather out of focus. Tokieda Toshie, the director of "Country of the Dawn," testified to an extraordinary daily life during an interview.

But there were other problems as well. One time we went location hunting to plan for the next day's shoot. When we brought all of the equipment to the site—a factory—the next day, the *sayings* of Chairman Mao were hung on all of the machinery. I told them, "Maoist philosophy should be realized in practice. This stuff is in the way of the lighting so please take it down." I guess I said too much (laughs). The workers stood in front of me sobbing, saying that they had spent all night preparing it. What a mess.¹⁷

As this testimony says, what should be shot as "daily life" is not just a scene for which everyone has had a haircut and smartens up their appearance, but also scenes where the *sayings* of Chairman Mao were hung on all of the machinery. That is, the director faced a *daily life* in which it was carefully calculated how one should be represented. To be sure, we do not want to say that a documentary film has to shoot a kind of naked daily life that is not representative. It is noteworthy that people sponta-

16. Ibid: 425.

17. *Documentarists of Japan*, #19 Tokieda Toshie, Interviewer: Imaizumi Ayako. Cf. <http://www.yidff.jp/docbox/21/box21-1-1-e.html>.

neously came to be shot in a way that showed their happiness [the name of the "Happiness/happy People's Commune 幸福人民公社" is symbolic]. The scene with the *sayings* of Chairman Mao hung on all of the machinery is necessary for them to fulfill the meaning of their lives, and to prove them to be happy.

The Cultural Revolution aimed to touch the hearts of the people. It founded itself on people's *spontaneity*. In other words, the Cultural Revolution was the politics of representation, which governed the interiority of the people through their *self-representation*. In this sense, it is crucially important to shoot people's self-representation in a film. However, this will not bring out what the Cultural Revolution was about, because cutting out daily life from *self-representation* could never lead to a grasp of the system of the Cultural Revolution. The system of the politics of representation was on the blind side of daily life.¹⁸

4. *China is Immeasurable*

Tokieda Toshie and her film crew, nevertheless, became aware that daily life in China was different from daily life in Japan.

That's right. Kobayashi Isamu had wanted to do this project for a long time, following Iwanami Shigeo's wishes. Since there were no diplomatic relations, for over twenty years after the war, and seventeen years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, nobody had seen the real China. There was one film made by an Italian team, called "*Behind the Great Wall*" ("La muraglia cinese," 1958), but that didn't show the real lifestyle of the Chinese people. Watching it as Asians, the film seemed to be stuck in a point of view that emphasized an attraction to a foreign culture. For our film, I got to go to a country I wouldn't have been able to see otherwise, and I just wanted to record everything

18. For example, we can find a Chinese camera crew shooting a demonstration in Changchun. The film of the demonstration must have been used in performing the politics of representation. Shooting with camera is a performative revolution *per se*. For the Cultural Revolution, even a Japanese film crew is a part of this politics of representation. "Country of the Dawn" is integrated into it.

I saw. But, China is really big (laughs). We brought a huge platform by boat from Japan and tried to use it to take extreme long shots in a farming village. Usually, if you put together seven or eight platforms you can get enough height to take extreme long shots. But, even when we put the platforms on the flatbed of a truck and shot from up there, the view didn't change a bit (laughs). Fujise Suehiko, the cameraman, said, "the effect of the lens is totally different when you use it in Japan!" The first 5,000 feet of film we shot was all useless. The scene was so vast; you couldn't tell what we had filmed in any of the shots. That was a truly strange experience. We had brought a 600 mm telescopic lens as well, but we couldn't get faraway objects to come any closer. The Chinese staff insisted, "Telescopic lenses are for when you are filming the enemy. Filming (so far away) that you can't be seen is a very hostile approach." We debated that point day after day.¹⁹

Tokieda looks back on her first impressions of China: "we wouldn't have been able to see otherwise," China appeared to be an immeasurable "object:" "China is really big;" "The scenery was so vast;" "We had brought a 600 mm telescopic lens as well, but we could not get faraway objects to come any closer." In another interview, she also said that it was hard to measure China with a Japanese ruler, because it was too vast and its Nature was too severe.²⁰

On the one hand, if we do not regard China as a dream country from the point of view that emphasizes its attractions to a foreign culture, we should shoot its daily life, which is similar to daily life in Japan. On the other hand, Chinese daily life must be different from Japanese daily life, because China is vast and immeasurable. If "Country of the Dawn" was just constituted by this reasoning, we would just find Japanese *naturalism* in it again. We could paraphrase Japanese *naturalism* in "Country of the Dawn" as follows. The point of view that cuts out daily life from an object is like a telescope that just looks upon an object in a natural process, while keeping a distance from it. In other words, this point of

19. *Documentarists of Japan*, #19 Tokieda Toshie, Interviewer: Imaizumi Ayako.

Cf. <http://www.yidff.jp/docbox/21/box21-1-1-e.html>.

20. Association of China, "On the film of 'Country of the Dawn,'" in *China*, vol. 58, 1968: 13.

view treats the object like an enemy. It is not willing to become involved in a relationship with others as equal friends, to whom I or we had already been deeply related, at least ever since the dawn of modernity. If we use Takeuchi's terminology, there should be a moment of "responsibility," "morality," and "law." However, we hardly find the dimension of the norm or the effort to step into a dialogue in this film.

Nonetheless, we had better call the silent scene at Fushun Coalmine to mind. The film "Country of the Dawn" has another possibility of touching "responsibility," "morality," and "law" in front of the common history of China and Japan. It might be better for us to think about a failure of the naturalistic representation of the immeasurable China in this film.

5. *The Dream of Goodwill Colonists*

It was Takeuchi who sniffed out the failure of the naturalistic representation of the immeasurable China.

The producer intended to describe how to accept unskilled agricultural workers in a People's Commune as one of the main spotlights of this film, but it is hard to say that she succeeded in grasping the overall picture of this vast farm village, as is to be expected. Nonetheless, once a huge tractor, which was many times as big as a Japanese one, appeared on screen, I caught my breath. It was a wide tractor with a monstrous claw driven by a single young girl. The surrounding area is an uninhabited plain as far as one can see. Oh, Manchu! Allow me to call it "Manchu." I can't help thinking that the dream of goodwill colonists (not of colonialists) has come true in a splendid way.²¹

For Takeuchi, China should be bigger than that represented in this film. The film "Country of the Dawn" could go further to grasp the overall picture of this vast farm village, but in vain. However, Takeuchi did not open the dimensions of "responsibility," "morality," and "law" from the

21. Takeuchi Yoshimi, "Country of the Dawn:" 426.

failure of naturalistic representation, even though he referred to the history of the colonization of Manchu. From his naturalistic eyes, historical facts are accepted through beautification. His admiration of the dreams of *goodwill* colonists is crucial. He consciously chose the word *goodwill*. Takeuchi continued: “Although their dream has come true, their dream was too small when I think it back now.”²² In front of the immeasurable Chinese natural landscape, human affairs and human will do not matter anymore. There is no critical dimension against historical facts. We have to cite Maruyama Masao’s criticism of Kobayashi Hideo here.

In a country without universality, Kobayashi Hideo finished peeling away universal designs, when he faced the absolute of Facts utterly unmoved by “interpretation” or “idea”—there is only a way of going ahead toward things (Motoori Norinaga). Even Kobayashi with his fierce individuality had no choice but to silently bow his head in front of this Fact (things).²³

Takeuchi as well as Maruyama criticized the *naturalism* of Kobayashi Hideo in order to open a modern dimension of norms. That is why Takeuchi insisted on “responsibility,” “morality,” and “law.” However, he himself is strongly entangled in the absolute of Facts. He lost a method to see historical events from a modernist viewpoint, that is to say, from an allegorical viewpoint.

6. Method of Superimposing Different Aspects and Moments

As mentioned above, Takeuchi was convinced that it was necessary by any means to find a method to make the Japanese war experience a true experience. If we had this method, we could have had an opportunity to bridge the gap between the different viewpoints, such as of interested parties, bystanders, and postwar generation. This is a method of reliving the experiences of someone else.

22. Ibid.

23. Maruyama Masao, *Japanese Thought*: 120.

Regardless that it depends on generational or individual differences, it is undeniable that there exist two parties: those who stick to the war experience and those who declare they wish to break away from it. Each of them, I think, has its own *raison d'être*. So, what is a common term that covers the two parties? There is no doubt that the question is a burning issue for the experiential discourse of War. I do not have any ready-made answer, but I imagine that the key might be to find a method of reliving the experiences of someone else. Such a method would derive from neither the tradition of the I novel 私小説 nor the tradition of repeating the discourses of our ancestors. A new framework is necessary. In order to find a method to grasp the evacuation of schoolchildren through the eyes of teachers, parents, and schoolchildren at the same time, I place my hope on a young generation that is going to start from the experience of evacuation.²⁴

In order to relive the experiences of someone else, this method should be an allegorical one, grasping the event from different viewpoints at the same time. In other words, it is necessary to superimpose different aspects and moments in a relevant event: superimposing several eyes like those of teachers, parents, and schoolchildren; superimposing temporal moments such as past, present, and future.

If the allegorical method had been applied in this film, we could superimpose some other voices of the silent people behind the heroic leader of the People’s Commune, the evacuated young people, and those who were forced to parade around wearing conical hats. Or, we could superimpose some other moments such as Soseki’s Manchuria, Man’ei [Manchu film company]’s Manchuria and the goodwill colonists’ Manchu to Manchuria at the very moment of the Cultural Revolution.

However, “Country of the Dawn” hardly stepped up to this level, excluding some exceptional scenes including the silent scene at Fushun Coalmine. The main reason might be a lack of a historical consciousness about a common past. The film crew seemed to unconsciously avoid shooting any traces of Japanese colonialization in Manchu. They were

24. Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Miscellaneous Impressions on the Experiential Discourse of War,” *Takeuchi Yoshimi Complete Works*, vol. 8: 221–22.

too innocent for the previous Manchu. This resulted in their failure to grasp the overall picture of this vast farm village. Meanwhile, Takeuchi was rather conscious of the historical moment. But, he did not try to relive the experiences of others, especially those of the Chinese workers. He sank into a sea of impressions where he seemed to be integrated into the absolute of Facts.

7. *Silence at Fushun Coalmine*

“Like tongueless men.” In order to resist this terrible phrase of Soseki, we have to return the voices to others by changing our *Ear System*. Soseki himself finally realized the fact that he was also a tongueless man when he stopped writing. However, we need to start writing again from the point of Soseki’s abrupt break, and return the voices to the Chinese as well as the Japanese.

In this way, the silent scene at Fushun Coalmine in “Country of the Dawn” has a chance of returning these voices. Even though the film was too naive to close in what was happening and what had been happening in China, it is certain that it was overwhelmed by the innumerable eyes that looked back towards the camera: suspicious eyes of children at play; gloomy eyes of young men near the fine faces of the leaders of the People’s Commune; the eyes of an exhausted young women in the transportation team carrying film equipment on a mountain.

How can we find a method to relive the experiences of someone else? This is an eternal question, which has been asked since Soseki’s silence for almost a century. Without sinking into *naturalism*, we are demanded to invent a new method to return voices to the silence at Fushun.

References:

1. Maruyama Masao, *Japanese Thought*, Iwanami Shoten, 1961.
2. Takeuchi Yoshimi, *Takeuchi Yoshimi Complete Works*, vol. 4 and vol. 8, Chikuma Shobo, 1980.
3. Natsume Soseki, *Soseki Complete Works*, vol. 12, Iwanami Shoten, 1994.
4. Kobayashi Hideo, *Mantetsu: birth and death of think tank*, Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1996.