

Preface

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Age of Comparison? This was a title of an NYU Graduate Student Conference held between the 27th and 29th of March, 2008. According to the opening remarks by Professor Zhang Xudong on the 27th, this phrase was excerpted from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Human, All too Human*. Nietzsche put an exclamation mark at the end of the phrase: "this is the age of comparison!" He faced a new age of modernity, when people were freed or uprooted from their own places. They acquired a new standpoint from which to compare morality, customs, world views, and cultures. This was their pride and sorrow at the same time. They could never return to their previous stage, because a decisive break had been inscribed. There was nothing to do but make comparisons.

Nietzsche described a similar image of "comparison" in his *Beyond Good and Evil*. Criticizing "moral philosophers," he introduced "comparison" for the "Science of Morality" by saying that "they [moral philosophers] never confronted at all the essential problems of morality, all of which come to the surface only with a comparison of several moralities." To compare moralities is a new and also the only possible form of morality in an age of comparison.

But are we still in the Nietzschean "age of comparison!?" Is the "age of comparison!" not aging? Nevertheless, if we cannot exclaim that we still belong to the "age of comparison!" it seems difficult to say that we do not belong to the age of comparison. In other words, we are still trapped by modernity, but not by "modernity!" Where are we then? In regard to this, I have tried to understand what Zhang Xudong was aiming to explore in the title, "Age of Comparison?" It is that we all belong to the "age of comparison?" in its question mark form. We need to compare and to question the intensity of compara-

bilities that the exclamation mark in the “age of comparison!” pretended to constitute. In sum, comparability has become critical today, but the enormous task is needed to grasp the meaning of “?” as critical.

My keynote address “Critical Comparability in the Age of ‘Classical Turn’” delivered on the 29th was a response to Zhang Xudong’s problematic. By comparing two phenomena of Confucian Revival, in prewar Japan and in current China, I tried to understand them as similar products of modernized Confucianism in the “age of comparison!” and to point out that it is necessary to find the comparability between the two in order to grasp and criticize the meaning of “morality” both of them try to constitute through “comparison!”

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Before my keynote address, the conference schedule was as follows:

Friday, March 28

Panel 1: “Variations on the Other”

Moderator: Jenny Lee

Lauren Grundhofer (School of the Art Institute of Chicago)

“Murakami’s Orientalism”

May-yi Shaw (Harvard University)

“Hometown Abroad: Reconsidering Cultural and Linguistic Identity in Japan through Hayashi Kyoko’s Shanghai”

Lorraine Wong (NYU)

“More than/Not quite the Ethnic Other: The Incomparable Other in Levinas’s Ethics?”

Panel 2: “Opening Eurocentric Concepts to Comparative Critique”

Moderator: Jeannie Miller

Shawn Callanan (University of California, Berkeley)

“Unsettling Modernity in Sitti Nurbaya”

David Larsen (University of California, Berkeley)

“Ma’na, Sign and Affect in Classical Arabic Thought: Towards a Comparative Semiotics”

On Barak (NYU)

“Periodicalizing Egyptian Periodicals: Towards a Comparative Notion of Comparison”

Panel 3: “Utopia: Here and There”

Moderator: Ellen He

Hirakura Kei (University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy)

“Utopia through Likeness: Godard’s Logic of Similarity”

Dennitza Gabrakova (University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy)

“Reverberations of a Utopian Utterance: Lu Xun, Kenzaburō Ōe, Masahiko Shimada”

Hashimoto Satoru (Harvard University)

“‘Chinese Modernity’ in Modern Chinese Aesthetics”

Yoshida Kei (University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy)

“Comparing and Explaining Different Cultures: The Case of Captain James Cook”

Ido Misato (University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy)

“Gilded Spaces: Creating Spaces with Gilded Folding Screens”

Saturday, March 29

Panel 4: “Traveling Genre: World Literature and Disciplinarity”

Moderator: Tara Mendola

Fares Alsuwaidi (Harvard University)

“Arid Grounds for Comparison: On the Arabic Desert Novel”

Dwaipayana Banerjee (NYU)

“Transactions of Affect in a Indian Folk Epic”

Stephanie Frampton (Harvard University)

“The Afterlife of Guaman Poma de Ayala: New Directions in World Literature”

Panel 5: “Interpreting Histories in Comparison”

Moderator: Pu Wang

James Chappel (Columbia University)

“The Strange Case of William Playfair: Political Arithmetic,

Vision, and the Graphical Method in 18th Century Political Economy”

Andy Liu (Columbia University)

“Living Comparatively: On the comparisons of India and China in the works of Kang Youwei and Zhang Taiyan”

Scott Paul McGinnis (Washington University in Saint Louis)

“Historiography and the Shi ji? An Ancient Chinese Text and the Problem of Universal Genre”

This booklet comprises Panel 3: “Utopia: Here and There” which was assigned for UTCP members: Hirakura Kei, Dennitza Gabrakova, Hashimoto Satoru, Yoshida Kei, and Ido Misato. It turned out to be an ideal model for international academic exchange.

The outlines of their speeches are as follows:

Hirakura Kei exposed the logic of Jean-Luc Godard as “similarity” through overlapping various images in Godard’s works.

Dennitza Gabrakova compared three books (Lu Xun’s *A Madman’s Diary*, Ōe Kenzaburō’s *Is a Man for Sacrifice Necessary?* and Shimada Masahiko’s *Save the Children!*) in order to understand the reverberation of Lu Xun’s utterance, “Save the Children.”

Hashimoto Satoru, following the “national allegory” of Frederic Jameson, tried to think about a possibility of locality of others in the age of globalization. His concrete reference was *Shilun* of Zhu Guangqian.

Yoshida Kei critically examined a dispute on the apotheosis of Captain James Cook between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere and argued for the necessity to consider “degrees of rationality.”

Ido Misato showed us a space gilded by a golden folding screen in the Japanese pre-modern period. This space is an alternative utopia where equality among people appeared, though temporarily.

Their stimulating speeches induced active reactions and discussions. The conference room seemed to become an academic utopia for a moment.

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The last part of the booklet is dedicated to the joint-seminar enti-

tled “Workshop ‘On the Epoch’” with Zhang Xudong, Kobayashi Yasuo, and Nakajima Takahiro at NYU, held on March 25th. Here I excerpt Dennitza Gabrakova’s report in the UTCP Blog.

The workshop started with Kobayashi Yasuo’s opening remarks on the problematic of “the epoch.”

Following his introduction to Viren Murthy’s seminar of the previous day, he linked the necessity for a new type of thinking in order to face the new reality of the age of networks. Referring to Negri’s concept of the multitude and the Empire, Kobayashi diagnosed the age with a state of “general neuroses” and introduced the question of “how to describe the time that we live in,” one of the indications of which may be found in Murakami Haruki’s literature. Kobayashi approached this question through the idea of “topography,” thus defining our being as a landscape configuration. In this vein he redefined the necessity for a new way of thinking as a “topographical survey” or “a renewal of the mapping of our being.” Description of these landscapes is profoundly connected to the new philosophical activity that operates in a vertical direction, reified in the image of the “hole” (or Murakami’s well) and reaching out at a “polar star” pointing towards an outside beyond our human values and meaning. Transcending Murakami’s metaphor of the person at the bottom of the well, Kobayashi described our being as never isolated, “ours” by definition, “being together” and already coexisting through the landscape.

Kobayashi’s talk was followed by two brief presentations by Dennitza Gabrakova and Wang Qian from UTCP. Gabrakova’s presentation was concentrated on the possibilities for creation of new image-concepts by introducing her work on the conceptualization of Lu Xun’s “yecao” (wild grass, weeds) in order to cover Japan’s modernization. Wang called for reevaluation of the relevance of Maruyama Masao’s discussion on modernity, revealing the latter’s apt understanding of Western modernity, on the one hand, and of Maruyama’s view about the crisis in the humanities brought by extreme specialization, on the other.

Nakajima Takahiro made valuable comments on these presenta-

tions, referring to Tosaka Jun's thought of drawing a tangent to the epoch and the idea of morality. The emphasis on spatiality in the approaches of the presenters to the issue of time, noted also by Thomas Looser, was associated in the end to W. Benjamin's idea of the dream. One of Kobayashi's concluding remarks was that awakening might be attained only by force of dreaming. To Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro's asking for precision of the crisis in the humanities, Kobayashi replied by pointed out the lack of a broader concern for the "human" to counterbalance the discourse of brain sciences.

(Dennitza Gabrakova)

Thanks to Zhang Xudong, we have the opportunity to include in this booklet the discussion at the workshop as well as the prepared talks. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all participants.

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