Alternative Diplomacies: Writing in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai, Istanbul, and Beyond

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Xiang, Alice. 2017. Alternative Diplomacies: Writing in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai, Istanbul, and Beyond. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts &amp; Sciences.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citable link</td>
<td><a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:41140229">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:41140229</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Use</td>
<td>This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alternatice Diplomacies:
Writing in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai, Istanbul, and Beyond

A dissertation presented
by Alice Xiang

to
The Department of Comparative Literature
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
Comparative Literature

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

April 2017
Abstract

This dissertation presents rich grounds for comparison between Chinese and Turkish literary contexts in the early twentieth century, an academic dialogue which has hitherto been nearly non-existent. Writers in these two contexts were faced with comparable challenges and stimuli: the turbulent end of a once-glorious empire, accompanied by a profound cultural crisis along with radical modernisation and nation-building efforts. Meanwhile, these processes of change unfolded in particularly fraught ways in the cosmopolitan crucibles of Shanghai and Istanbul, cities which respectively embodied the complex contradictions of Chinese and Turkish modernity. By examining the work of literary figures who were shaped by their experiences of Shanghai/Istanbul—such as Kang Youwei, Nazım Hikmet, Shao Xunmei, Halide Edib, and Lin Yutang—this dissertation presents such figures as groundbreaking synthesisers of a stunningly cosmopolitan range of intellectual and cultural resources across ‘East’ and ‘West’. In addition, this project positions these writers as ‘alternative diplomats’: from explicit critiques of western-centric power politics and diplomatic norms, to fictional narratives offering boldly re-imagined transnational networks and solidarities, I explore the ways in which these figures were deeply engaged in the creation of alternative discourses to official inter-state diplomacy. Through the supple and charismatic medium of literature, they endeavoured to influence broad reading publics, and to fashion new horizons of possibility for
cross-cultural reflection and dialogue. By forming literary and ‘diplomatic’ linkages across Shanghai and Istanbul—and thus, in a larger sense, China and Turkey—this dissertation seeks to re-frame the landscape of early twentieth-century literary cosmopolitanism as well as international affairs.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ vii
Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1

I. Kang Youwei and Virginia Woolf: Comparatists in Constantinople
   → Istanbul through foreign eyes: a diplomatic intervention ........................................ 17
   → Comparatists in Constantinople ............................................................................. 26
   → Imagining the world ............................................................................................... 53

II. The *Mona Lisa* in Shanghai: Nazım Hikmet’s imaginative diplomacy
   → Imaginative diplomacy ......................................................................................... 69
   → Charismatic narratives ......................................................................................... 75
   → Re-worlding the *Mona Lisa* .............................................................................. 76
   → Foreign forms ....................................................................................................... 83
   → Mobility in exile ................................................................................................... 96

III. Shao Xunmei and Emily Hahn: Salon diplomacy in semi-colonial Shanghai
   → Diplomacy, hospitality, and semi-colonial Chinese modernity ............................. 103
   → Salon diplomacy .................................................................................................. 115
   → Salon hospitality .................................................................................................. 136
   → Magazine diplomacy: From *Candid Comment* to the *New Yorker* .................. 147
   → Going native, turning foreign ............................................................................. 158

IV. Between Orient and Occident: The civilisational diplomacy of Halide Edib and Lin Yutang
   → Being civilised ...................................................................................................... 163
   → Civilising the West: inventing Turkey and China ................................................ 172
   → From Wilsonians to ‘Europe’s gadflies’ ................................................................. 189
   → Beyond the ‘East-West problematic’: pan-Islamic solidarity from India to Japan ... 207
   → World literature for a world civilisation ............................................................... 221
   → ‘Who is who and what is what?’: Concluding thoughts ...................................... 236

V. Bibliography ................................................................................................................ 241
For my parents
who didn’t ask me to study Economics instead
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It goes without saying that I owe a great debt of gratitude to my committee, David Damrosch, David Der-wei Wang, and Cemal Kafadar. To benefit from such a brilliant and generous audience is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I will always be inspired by their kindness and erudition. I am deeply grateful, too, to Karen Thornber, in whom I have had an exemplary mentor to turn to for support as a graduate student and teaching fellow.

Dissertation-writing can be a lonely business, but I have had the fortune of having great company along the way. Thank you to my dissertation group — Julianne VanWagenen, John Welsh, and Lusia Zaitseva — whose feedback and encouragement proved a very pleasant means of keeping on track. I couldn’t imagine my graduate school years without my delightful cohort — Guangchen Chen, Raphael Köenig, Miya Qiong Xie, and Lusia — and the other friends who have added so much warmth and whimsy to my time in Cambridge: Mithila Rajagopal, Maria Gloria Robalino, George Yin, Wei Chen, Ren Wei, Sungho Kimlee, and others. I am also grateful to my students, who pushed me to be a better, fuller scholar, and through whom I had the luxury of re-discovering the wonder of literature. Meanwhile, without the pedagogical patience and wizardry of Himmet Taşkömür, Eda Özel, and Efe Murat Balkçoğlu, who introduced me to the ins and outs of the Turkish language, I would not have had the linguistic courage to tackle this project at all. I am also grateful to Ban Wang and Burcu Karahan for making me feel welcome during my exchange year at Stanford as I completed this work. And I owe Isacre Mignotte many thanks for all her kind administrative assistance throughout my time as a student.

Finally, this dissertation would have been both far less likely and far less meaningful without my family. My sister Katty’s kindness and support have been unwavering, and I am constantly reminded of how lucky I am to have her in my life. To my dear parents I owe more than I can say. With each passing year, I have only become increasingly struck by their love, generosity and open-mindedness. I hope to dedicate something worthier to them one day. And with my husband Doğuş — aşkim — by my side, all obstacles have seemed trivial, all joys magnified. I have him to thank for curious conversations, dumpling adventures, and happiness.
INTRODUCTION

In 1929, after seven years in Moscow steeped in Marxism-Leninism and avant-garde artistic movements, the Turkish modernist Nazım Hikmet (1902-1963) had newly returned to Istanbul, the city of his childhood and youth. It was then that he produced the remarkable Gioconda and Si-Ya-U (Jokond ile Si-Ya-U), a long poem which features the Mona Lisa—referred to as ‘Gioconda’—and her infatuation with a Chinese revolutionary. When her beloved is deported from France for participating in anti-imperialist protests at the Chinese embassy, Gioconda escapes from the Louvre and heads off in cross-continental pursuit of him via monoplane and steamship; upon reaching Shanghai, she mocks the authority of the extraterritorial French military court, which ultimately sentences her to death by burning. Full of exuberant poetic antics, from typographic playfulness to polyphonic registers to a brief appearance of the poet himself (as the monoplane-pilot who helps the Gioconda escape from the Louvre!), what remains most striking about the poem is the audacity of its cosmopolitan imagination. By formulating—in an innovative Turkish poetic idiom inspired by Soviet modernism—passionate attraction as well as political alliance between an icon of Western artistic heritage and a Chinese anti-imperialist activist, Nazım’s poem pushes the boundaries of transnational solidarity and aesthetic identification. It was Gioconda and Si-Ya-U, so vibrant and capacious, yet simultaneously so critical and political, which first made me wonder if there was more meaningful common ground to be found between Turkey and China during this time period than the (essentially non-existent) academic conversation thus far implied. It also made me eager to look for ‘more’—to situate this poem as one glittering node in a cosmopolitan network of texts by writers boldly re-imagining the early twentieth-century world, working to
expand the possibilities of transnational critique and alliance through the flexible and charismatic medium of literature, their perspectives shaped by the weight of non-Western and Western histories and identities alike. The meeting of these two lines of inquiry forms the focus of this dissertation.

Becoming ‘China’ and becoming ‘Turkey’ in the early twentieth century were both deeply traumatic, cosmopolitan, and creative processes. Traumatic as, in each case, a once-glorious, dominant, and relatively decentralised Qing/Ottoman empire found itself forced to come to terms with the fact that it was now ‘backwards’ and on the verge of being extinguished by formerly ‘lesser’ powers, leading to a profound identity crisis — was decline rooted in one’s very culture and way of life? — and an obsession among its intellectuals with regenerative nation-building, sparking radical modernisation initiatives. Just as early Republican Turkish leaders implemented, for example, a wide range of language policies in the 1920s intended to consolidate a homogeneous nation and to “create a sense of Turkishness”,¹ so too did their Chinese contemporaries hotly debate the reform (and even discarding) of their written script in order to form a suitable linguistic foundation for a modern and unified nation. Just as various intellectuals such as Qian Mu 钱穆 (1895-1990) critically re-assessed Chinese historiography with the conviction that any nation with a hope of progressing into the future must be aware of and have a “feeling of pride and respect (溫情與敬意)” for its past,² so too did emblematic Turkish thinkers such as Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924) seek to cultivate a reverence for, and

---

¹ Yilmaz, Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey (1923–1945), 2-3.

² Saussy and Ge, “Historiography in the Chinese Twentieth Century.”
investment in, a ‘shared consciousness’ based on a carefully formulated narrative of Turkish cultural and historical unity. Traumatic as they were, becoming ‘China’ and ‘Turkey’ were also deeply cosmopolitan and creative processes, as these intellectuals and reformers sought out an expansive range of cross-cultural resources, and engaged in various kinds of experimental cultural synthesis and critique, in their efforts to revitalise their native cultures as a basis for ‘a nation among nations’. Gökalp, often referred to as the forefather of Turkish nationalism, melded an understanding of Islamic legal and social institutions with his readings of Émile Durkheim and Friedrich Nietzsche, whilst Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), widely perceived as the preeminent modern Chinese writer, synthesised his distinct brand of “modernist angst” by synthesising Nietzsche and Max Stirner along with ancient poets such as Qu Yuan 屈原 (340–278 bc) and Tao Qian 陶潛 (395–427). In addition, many of Turkey and China’s most vocal reforming intellectuals studied abroad for extensive periods of time, most commonly in France, Germany, the United States, and, in China’s case, Japan, and became diligent mediators between the various discourses of knowledge they encountered.

These complex processes and dramas of change unfolded particularly spectacularly on the stages of China and Turkey’s most cosmopolitan cities, Shanghai and Istanbul. With their dazzling array of dancehalls, coffeehouses, booksellers and everything in between, they teemed with activity and allure. Charles King writes thus of life in interwar Istanbul:

> Circles of radical nationalists held meetings in the same districts where socialist agents plotted world revolution. New music drifted up from quiet neighbourhoods: orchestral

---

3 Wang, “Chinese Literary Thought in Modern Times: Three Encounters.”
jazz, slithery and daring … You could have a drink at Maxim, a club owned by a black Russian American, or dance to the Palm Beach Seven playing nightly at the Garden Bar.⁴

The following list of a writer’s favourite haunts paints a similarly vibrant picture of the options available to him in the 1920s-30s ‘treaty port’ city of Shanghai, deemed the “cultural matrix of Chinese modernity” by Leo Ou-fan Lee:\(^5\)

...Sullivan’s, a justly famous chocolate shop; Federal, a German-style café at Bubbling Well Road; Constantine’s, a Russian café; Little Man … across the street from the Cathay Theatre (where ‘the décor is splendid and the waitresses young and pretty’); D. D.’s Café, and Café Renaissance on Avenue Joffre.⁶

From the dazzling nightlife, to the density of vying political factions, to the diversity of their denizens —from Russian refugees to German architects— Istanbul and Shanghai could each hold their own in comparison to Paris or New York. At the same time, their very hybridity, and the unabashed imperialist presence of extensive western political and economic influence in both—formalised most notably in the post-WWI Allied occupation of Istanbul (1918-1923), and the French Concession and International Settlement in the semi-colonial Shanghai, which reached the peak of their prominence during the 1920s— caused both cities to be regarded with suspicion as not quite ‘Turkish’ or ‘Chinese’ enough, and even as bastions of decadence or a “constant reminder of national humiliation.”⁷ These cities, as fascinating and contradictory embodiments of ‘modernity’, were often the milieus which stimulated, shaped and inspired the cosmopolitan conceptions and practices of the writers discussed in this dissertation.

⁴ King, Midnight at the Pera Palace: the Birth of Modern Istanbul, 5.
⁵ Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945 p.xi.
Meanwhile, the standard story of cosmopolitanism runs something like this. It tends to begin with

…Greek Cynicism and Stoicism; examines the Roman adaptation of these ideas; jumps to the eighteenth century, where the name of Kant is above all invoked as the greatest of all Enlightenment philosophers of cosmopolitanism; identifies a decline in the nineteenth century of cosmopolitical concerns, as European thought succumbs to the siren songs of nationalism; sees a rejuvenation of cosmopolitical concerns after World War II, as political theorists and others identify post-war, putatively global institutions like the United Nations as embodiments of Kantian concerns; with the story ending with the remarkable flourishing and diversification of the cosmopolitan intellectual field in recent times.⁸

Or, in David Inglis’s particularly compact nutshell: “Greece/Rome/Enlightenment/1945/now”. As Inglis notes, though this narrative is poised to ossify into orthodoxy, it is a far from satisfactory one, and fails to do justice to the plural histories of the ideas and practices of cosmopolitanism.⁹ Such a narrative frames cosmopolitanism as a largely Euro-American affair, with largely European and American concerns and contributions. This is far less interesting than cosmopolitanism deserves. As a useful shorthand for the self-reflective, “creative interaction of cultures and the exploration of shared worlds” and “the extension of the moral and political horizons of peoples, societies, organisations, and institutions”⁰, ‘cosmopolitanism’ can be more productively viewed as a kind of orientation toward self and world that exists potentially in all cultures, while manifesting in a diversity of concrete forms across time and space.¹¹ Rather than settle on a restrictive definition of the term ‘cosmopolitanism’, this

---

⁹ ibid., 12.
¹¹ ibid., 5.
dissertation is interested in studying the multi-faceted meanings of what being ‘open to the world’ meant in practice to the writers discussed herein. For them, ‘cosmopolitanism’ was always an ongoing project rather than a set term, a constant negotiation between *cosmos* — the world or even universe — and *polis* — the city or national political community. Their texts allow us to delve into cosmopolitanism not as an abstract, universalising philosophy, but as concrete experience and praxis. Rather than simply describing or evaluating these writers as ‘cosmopolitan’, this dissertation is interested in asking: what did being ‘cosmopolitan’, or ‘cosmopolitanism’, mean to each of these writers?

‘Cosmopolitical concerns’ were, in fact, particularly dynamic in the period leading up to 1945, rather than after, for many of the writers who lived in or travelled to Shanghai and Istanbul in the early twentieth-century. The intense combination of a cultural identity crisis, fermented by these hybrid metropolises, spurred such writers to read widely — across genres, languages, epochs — and think broadly. For them, the wider world was insistently relevant; and their literary practices show a far deeper and broader engagement with cross-cultural resources than most, if any, of their European or American counterparts. As Shu-mei Shih remarks critically, “When applied to Third World intellectuals, ‘cosmopolitanism’ implies that these intellectuals have an expansive knowledge constituted primarily by their understanding of the world (read: West), but when applied to metropolitan Western intellectuals there is a conspicuous absence of the demand to know the non-West.”

While it is true that the application of the term ‘cosmopolitan’ can reveal problematically differing criteria, it is also true

---

that the other side of this coin is a positive one. Due to such systemic asymmetry, the cosmopolitan literary practices of the non-Western writers discussed in this dissertation were undeniably path-breaking and pioneering rather than derivative or belated. Their imagined ‘worlds’ were far fuller and more complex as a result of their compounded exposure to both Western and non-Western intellectual traditions. In addition, their works show—as we shall see—that the ‘worlds’ they reached out to were not equated with the ‘West’, but instead often included rich engagements with other potential models and allies in the ‘non-West’.

As cosmopolitanism is invested in an openness towards the wider world and its possibilities, Gerard Delanty points out that it is “more likely than not to be exemplified in opposition to prevailing conditions and thus signalling in some sense the exploration of alternatives to the status quo.” \(^{13}\) Literary cosmopolitanism —cosmopolitanism as explored or experienced through the works and practices of writers— is especially interesting in this regard for its charismatic power and sheer narrative flexibility. For Pheng Cheah, “as something that is structurally detached from its putative origin and that permits and even solicits an infinite number of interpretations, literature is an exemplary modality of the undecidability that opens a world.” The ‘world-making power’ of literature resides not in some spiritual, transcendent plane from where it critiques the ‘real’ world on high, but rather is “a process that keeps alive the force that opens up another world, a force that is immanent to the existing world.”\(^{14}\) The unique contribution of cosmopolitan texts like *Gioconda* and *Si-Ya-U*, then, lie in their sense

\(^{13}\) Delanty, “Introduction: the Emerging Field of Cosmopolitanism Studies,” 2.

that “we can belong in many ways, and that quivering beneath the surface of the existing world are other worlds to come.”\textsuperscript{15}

Following from this, the remarkably complex and ambitious cosmopolitan work engaged in by the writers which form the focus of this dissertation can, I suggest, be seen as a form of alternative diplomacy. As the following chapters will explore, these writers often positioned themselves as alternative diplomats — as forgers of transnational solidarity and alliances, crafters of alternative narratives and possibilities, in (often explicit) opposition to the power politics of official inter-state diplomacy. If ambassadors have throughout history “allowed the world to meet itself”,\textsuperscript{16} then these writers were equally, if not more, enmeshed than the traditional ambassador in the business of the world ‘meeting itself’. At the same time, due to their non-official status, they were less restrained and more experimental, freer and more fluid agents in the landscape of transnational connections. Boldly cosmopolitan, they were nevertheless deeply rooted in the issues and stakes of their national contexts, with each critically mediated through the prism of the other. Through their ‘alternative diplomacies’, these writers sought to collect and synthesise diverse cultural sources, influence broad reading publics, and to fashion new horizons of possibility and cross-cultural identification through their texts.

The writer-as-alternative-diplomat holds a special significance in the Turkish and Chinese contexts, in which diplomacy and modernity had a deeply interlinked and fraught relationship.

\textsuperscript{15} ibid., 147.

The First Opium War (1839-1842) between Britain and China, for example, was partly due to direly mismatched conceptions of inter-state relations — and was also a loss for China that led to severe encroachments on its sovereignty, including the establishment of treaty ports such as Shanghai. This dynamic was no less pronounced in the early twentieth century. Traumatic crises in cultural identity, as well as catalysts for radical and systemic change, often arose in direct response to perceived diplomatic injustice (on the part of external powers) and diplomatic ineptitude (on the part of the reigning government), specifically the signing of treaties perceived as humiliating or insulting. China’s May Fourth Movement, for example, which begun in 1919, and Turkey’s War of Independence (1919-1923), definitive moments in the formation of both nations, were galvanised by the signing of such treaties: in China’s case, the Treaty of Versailles, which transferred German concessions in the Shandong peninsula to Japan (rather than returning them as promised); and in that of Turkey, the Treaty of Sèvres, which began the partition of the Ottoman Empire as well as imposed various financial and military restrictions. Furthermore, in the wake of the collapse of the Qing and Ottoman empires, the unstable and contested nature of the Chinese and Turkish official governments in the early twentieth century created an environment which amplified the importance of such alternative, non-official modes and means of diplomacy.

In recent years, international relations scholars have begun to urge a broader conception of diplomacy. Noé Cornago highlights the essence of diplomacy as “a way of dealing and engaging with otherness.”\textsuperscript{17} In a similar vein, Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian

\textsuperscript{17} ibid., 1.
argue in _Sustainable Diplomacies_ that if we insist on conceiving of diplomacy “as merely an intergovernmental affair, as management of inter-state relations or as primarily the pursuit and negotiation of national interests”, then we risk losing out on the re-discovery of diplomacy as “a venue for human understanding, political reconciliation, and social justice … in various expressions of everyday life practices of diplomacy.” Instead, diplomacy should not be concerned only with state-level initiatives and policies, “but also — and more crucially — with innovation and creativity, experimentation in finding ways and terms under which rival entities and ways of living can co-exist and flourish.”

If there is “the need to restore the long time interrupted continuity between the undisputable relevance of diplomacy as _raison de système_ — in a world which is much more than a world of States— and its unique value as a way to mediating the many alienations experienced by individuals and groups,” to “rediscover the hidden continuity existing between professional diplomatic intercourse and everyday life,” then studying these writers’ transnationally engaged works as a form of alternative diplomacy is one means of restoring this continuity.

A comparative look at the literary cosmopolitanisms generated by Istanbul and Shanghai, and by Turkish and Chinese writers, thus provides particularly fruitful and understudied terrain for not only re-assessing the contours of cosmopolitanism in the early twentieth century, but

---

18 Constantinou and Derian, _Sustainable Diplomacies_, 68.

19 ibid., 90-91.

20 ibid., 2.

also for exploring what a diplomacy unbound from the interests and prerogatives of nation-states might look like.

The dissertation begins with two distinguished figures otherwise rarely associated with one another: the Qing China statesman and reformer Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and, as a counterpoint, English writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), each a household name to this day in their country of origin, and who happened to visit Istanbul/Constantinople in roughly the same period, 1906 and 1908 respectively. Whilst Kang and Woolf arrived in Istanbul from deeply dissimilar contexts, they were each interested in Istanbul as the capital of an empire that called their own into provocative comparison. Both sought to ‘report back’, through their writing, to a ‘home audience’ their travel-inspired experiences and reflections; both produced texts that were the result of creative and critical reflections upon their time there, and each would also go on to publish a work advocating for profound societal reforms, with a remarkable shared emphasis on social equality, pacifism, and critique of the state. I explore how Kang—a would-be constitutional monarchist exiled for his political ambitions—draws upon the Ottoman Empire’s transition to constitutional monarchy as a potential blueprint for China’s political framework. From his admiration of the Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya) as a monumental palimpsest to his poetic outpouring at the tomb of Suleiman the Magnificent, to his fastidious touring of social institutions from schools to factories, Kang assiduously forms historical, social, and aesthetic resonances between the Turkish and Chinese contexts. Woolf, on the other hand, is jolted out of her Eurocentrism by the vibrant panoramas of Constantinople, which later serves as the site of radical transformation for the protagonist—who serves as the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire—in her novel Orlando. In this chapter, diplomatic concepts and
frameworks, such as Constantinou and Cornago have provided, help illuminate Kang and Woolf’s work as creative attempts to engage with and reflect upon forms of difference across national and cultural boundaries, pushing both themselves and their readers to critically reflect upon the meaning of ‘self’ and ‘other’, and to engage with more complex and encompassing notions of attachment, which allow for both belonging and critique. Reading Kang and Woolf in this manner also shows their shared emphasis on an engagement with aesthetic, historical, and ethical dimensions of difference as necessary to a compassionate and sustainable practice of diplomacy.

The following chapter focuses on the poem mentioned earlier, Nazım Hikmet’s *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U*, and draws upon international relations scholar Hussein Banai’s discussion of the potential for creative diplomacy to mediate between ‘estranged publics’. Through a discussion of the work’s modernist strategies of representation, and its historical context — such as the poet’s friendship with Chinese communist Emi Siao (a childhood friend of Mao Zedong), whom he met in Moscow— I present Nazım Hikmet as a groundbreaking practitioner of ‘imaginative diplomacy’. By sending a passionate, eloquent and irreverent Gioconda off in fearless pursuit of a Chinese beloved who is ultimately executed for his anti-imperialist activism, Nazım transforms the *Mona Lisa* from an icon of Western high art and culture into a hybrid subjectivity drawn to the aesthetics and ideologies of the East. His charismatic narrative draws vivid and compelling connections between publics who are not just estranged, but perhaps ‘strange’, to one another. The chapter also explores the various ways in which Nazım reworks various influences, such as the cross-media and cross-cultural artistic experimentation of Soviet theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), in staging his
poem, which lends the work—a testing-ground for various kinds of stylistic difference—an intriguingly paradoxical feel of being a modernist ‘Turkish Chinoiserie’. Also discussed are the linguistic politics of Nazım’s work, which celebrates heterogeneity, vis-à-vis the Kemalist state, which was intent on fashioning linguistic homogeneity, as well as the later exilic existence of the poet and his work. Nazım’s exile only adds further poignance to his lyrical modernist project of forging transnational conceptions of justice and belonging intertwined with a vivid critique of imperialist politics.

The third chapter explores how the literary salon in early twentieth-century Shanghai functioned as an alternative embassy—in contrast to its more bureaucratic and formalised official counterpart—in which deeply cosmopolitan gatherings of writers, artists and foreign visitors regularly socialised, collaborated, and exchanged information. The chapter zooms in on the dapper figure of publishing magnate and writer Shao Xunmei (1906-1968), a Cambridge-educated voracious reader of modern literatures, whose distinct panache and unparalleled connections in a city known for its many social interdictions made him a vivid embodiment of Shanghai’s charm and allure. Inspired by his time in Paris, and, like Gertrude Stein, a “networker extraordinaire”, Shao was a staunch believer in the intimate relationship between the quality of a nation’s social life and its intellectual thought. The chapter explores how Shao should be viewed as a distinct practitioner of ‘salon diplomacy’ in a complex setting of semi-colonial power dynamics, through which he strategically navigated a spectrum of cultural stereotypes and social identities, as well as extended hospitality to prominent international visitors such as G.B. Shaw, Miguel Covarrubias, and Rabindranath Tagore. Meanwhile, the

---

chapter also examines how Shao’s intense relationship with a globe-trotting and witty American journalist, Emily Hahn (1905-1997), led to the production of a range of fascinating texts for magazines such as the New Yorker as well as Shanghai-based bilingual periodicals aimed at critiquing and providing an alternative discourse to official diplomatic rhetoric, including the first English version of Mao Zedong’s classic essay, Prolonged War (1938). Shao Xunmei and Emily Hahn were thus one of the earliest and most influential practitioners of a transnationally collaborative alternative diplomacy, using the fora of magazines and other writings to further cross-cultural dialogue.

The final chapter places in conversation with one another the work of Lin Yutang (1895-1976) and Halide Edib (1884-1964), who were each deeply committed to the Chinese/Turkish national modernisation project, yet intriguingly chose to compose much of their most significant work in English and for Anglophone, rather than Chinese or Turkish, audiences. This choice forms the basis for a comparative analysis which helps to highlight some of the common concerns of early twentieth-century Chinese and Turkish literary cosmopolitanisms, as well as the ways in which these two writers sought to counter, and provide alternatives to, the narratives of ‘Turkey’ and ‘China’ produced in the West, as well as Western-centric discourses of ‘civilisedness’ and ‘civilisation’. They were impressively impactful in their own ways: Halide Edib was regularly referred to by the Anglo-American press as ‘Turkey’s Joan of Arc’, and held high-profile conversations with figures such as the prominent historian Arnold J. Toynbee; and Lin Yutang’s books, besides topping 1930s national bestseller lists in America,
have been found in the personal libraries of figures as diverse as e.e. cummings and Herbert Hoover. Meanwhile, their reflections and responses form concrete and fascinating intersections: to the promise and collapse of US President Woodrow Wilson’s global vision, for example; in the form of gestures of cultural alliance with India; and various configurations of pan-Islamism, from, in Halide’s case, the Khilafat movement among Indian Muslims to, in Lin’s, Turkic and Muslim uprisings in Northwestern China. The chapter explores how writing in English provided an effective, if fraught, linguistic medium which allowed Halide Edib and Lin Yutang to negotiate between ‘civilisational’ and ‘national’ perspectives, following in the footsteps of other cosmopolitan thinkers who had preceded them such as Namık Kemal and Gu Hongming. Their negotiations between the preservation of difference and the claim of commensurability led them to engage in what can be termed ‘civilisational diplomacy’—an engagement with foreign publics centrally concerned with the collaborative construction of an equitable and inclusive world society, founded on an awareness of, and attention to, the complexity and intertwinement of cultural histories.

Throughout this dissertation, the role of comparison is a central one for both the figures and works studied, as well as the project itself. My project tries to balance the “dialogic pull back and forth between commensurability and incommensurability that lies at the heart of all comparison”, to both preserve and define difference and specificity, as well as articulate and

---

23 David Damrosch has noticed that Harvard University’s Widener Library copy of *The Wisdom of China and India* belonged to cummings and contains substantial marginal notes.

24 The copy of Lin’s *Vigil of a Nation* at Stanford University’s Hoover Library was a personal gift from Lin Yutang to Hoover, with the following dedication: “To Herbert Hoover, an untiring worker for humanity.”

highlight resonances and parallels. Through careful attention to both the contexts of their production as well as the expansive and imaginative capacities and aims of these literary works, this dissertation seeks to add new dimensions to our understanding of ‘actually existing’ practices of diplomacy and literary cosmopolitanism in the early twentieth-century, by presenting these writers, working in Turkish and Chinese contexts, as some of the era’s boldest and most innovative practitioners of both.
I.

KANG YOUWEI & VIRGINIA WOOLF: COMPARATISTS IN CONSTANTINOPLE

Istanbul through foreign eyes: a diplomatic intervention

The continent-straddling city of Istanbul, formerly known as Constantinople, has long been a tectonic locus of clashing narratives and worldviews. “Constantinople and the narrow straits upon which it stands,” wrote English civil servant Leonard Woolf in 1917, “have occasioned the world more trouble, have cost humanity more blood and suffering during the last five hundred years, than any other single spot upon the earth.” Meanwhile, how one makes sense of the city’s chequered past is largely dependent upon one’s cultural orientation, as the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk reminds us: “You can often tell whether you’re standing in the East or in the West,” he points out, “just by the way people refer to certain historical events. For Westerners, May 29, 1453, is the Fall of Constantinople, while for Easterners it’s the Conquest of Istanbul.” Yet the ‘Easterner’/‘Westerner’ dichotomy at the heart of this litmus test falls apart when applied to the city itself; after all, Pamuk later adds, “Istanbul’s greatest characteristic is its people’s ability to see the city through both western and eastern eyes.” As the only city in the world situated half in Europe and half in Asia, Istanbul simultaneously invites, and contradicts, dichotomous generalisations from the many who have attempted to describe it.

---

26 The Future of Constantinople, 11.
27 Istanbul: Memories and the City, 172.
28 Istanbul: Hatıralar ve Şehir, 243.
It is small wonder, then, that Pamuk holds a tender fascination for foreign representations of Istanbul, finding in them a trove of different ways with which to ‘see’ his beloved city and to access its complex past. “Whether as communities or as individuals, we all worry to some degree about what foreigners and strangers think of us,” he writes in *Istanbul: Memories and the City*. The opinions of foreigners and strangers, meanwhile, are not ‘worried’ over equally; some carry more weight, cause more distress or anxiety than others. A quick glance at the writers Pamuk is most preoccupied with suffices to show a clear focus: Gérard Nerval, Théophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert. Pamuk is well aware that his attentiveness to these figures is fraught, inflected with the pathos of the Ottoman Empire’s struggle to modernise in the image of France and other European rivals: “My interest in how my city looks to western eyes,” he writes, “is—as for most Istanbulites—very troubled; like all other Istanbul writers with one eye always on the West, I sometimes suffer in confusion.”

Even as Pamuk is drawn to these visitors’ perspectives from the late 1800s and early 1900s as precious fragments of Istanbul’s past, he perceives acutely the callousness and superficiality of many of their observations:

Ignorance embroidered their pretensions and creative presumption prompted them to say exactly what they thought; even ‘cultivated’ writers like André Gide saw no need to bother with cultural differences, the meaning of local rituals and traditions, or the social structures that underpinned them: A traveller, in his view, had the right to demand that Istanbul be amusing, distracting, upbeat. … For them, the west set the standard for all humankind.

29 *ibid.*, 221.

30 Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, 234.

31 *ibid.*, 238.
I would thus like us to swerve our attentions away from this chain of distinguished French writers in the spotlight, towards the edges and shadows, which will allow us to espy two intriguing figures waiting in the wings: two other writers who visited Istanbul half a century after Flaubert (in 1850) and less than a decade before Gide (1914) — two writers far less present, perhaps, in the considerations of late Ottoman or early Republican Istanbulites, but deserving of ours, in their keen attunement to Istanbul’s existence beyond a touristic attraction, and above all, to the city’s potential to unsettle or re-inform one’s notions of ‘East’ and ‘West’, one’s assumed ‘standard for all humankind’.

In July 1908, the eminent Chinese reformer Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) arrived in Istanbul, where he was to stay until April of the following year. After his failed push in 1898 for the Qing dynasty to transition into a constitutional monarchy, Kang was forced into exile, during which he visited some twenty countries, from India to Sweden. Among these extensive travels, Kang’s nearly year-long stay in Istanbul left a deep impression. (For one, he seemed to have particularly enjoyed the food: “Neither French, Spanish, nor Portuguese cuisine can compare,” he remarks in his travel notes. Kang’s visit confirmed for him what he had earlier only been able to surmise from afar: that there were significant parallels between the ailing Ottoman Empire and imperial China. Perpetually on the lookout for pertinent models of modernisation, Kang noted that both the ‘sick man of Europe’ and ‘sick man of Asia’ were once-glorious empires in crisis, reeling from the shock of an aggressive, technologically superior West, and suffering from comparable systemic issues. Both had made themselves overly aloof from

32 Kang, Lieguo Youji — Kang Youwei Yigao (列國遊記 康有為遺稿), 560.
the rest of the world, he observed, and were now in the painful process of re-evaluating their most fundamental cultural values and societal institutions, particularly vis-à-vis the western European powers of France and Britain.

Two years earlier, in October 1906, English writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) — whose husband wrote *The Future of Constantinople* quoted at the beginning of this chapter — had also visited the city, having chosen to include it as part of her ‘Grand Tour’. The twenty-four-year-old Woolf had yet to publish her first novel (*The Voyage Out*, 1915), making her travel diaries from this time samples of her writing from a formative stage, in which she travelled widely and her proclivities for writing fiction were still inchoate. “At six I was on deck,” the first entry for Turkey in her diary runs,

& suddenly we found ourselves confronted with the whole of Constantinople; there was St Sophia, like a treble globe of bubbles frozen solid, floating out to meet us. For it is fashioned in the shape of some fine substance, thin as glass, blown in plump curves; save that it is also as substantial as a pyramid. Perhaps that may be its beauty. But then beautiful & evanescent and enduring, to pluck adjectives like black berries – as it is, it is but the fruit of a great garden of flowers.  

Fragile, monumental; ephemeral, eternal; from her very first view of it, Woolf already intuits a need to deal in contradictions in her efforts to convey something of the city, revealing a canny awareness that this was a place where supposedly incompatible qualities and entities could coexist.

I bring together these two distinguished traveller-writers, otherwise rarely associated with one another, for far more reason than the fact that, as an English woman and a Chinese

---

33 From this point on, ‘Woolf’ will refer to Virginia Woolf, rather than Leonard Woolf.

man, they happen to both lie beyond the purview of Pamuk’s essay. While Virginia Woolf and Kang Youwei arrived in Istanbul from deeply dissimilar contexts, they were each interested in Istanbul, not just as an exotic gallery of amusements, but as the capital of an empire that called their own into provocative comparison. Both produced texts that were the result of creative and critical reflections upon their time there. Most evidently, Woolf’s experiences crucially shaped her 1928 novel, *Orlando*, in which Constantinople features significantly (the passage just quoted from her diary, in fact, shows up there in transmuted form: “At this hour the mist would lie so thick that the domes of Santa Sofia and the rest would seem to be afloat; gradually the mist would uncover them; the bubbles would be seen to be firmly fixed; …”35; and Kang’s writings on Istanbul, which he later published in a 1913 issue of his self-founded periodical *Compassion* (Buren Zashi 不忍雜誌), rank among his most detailed and thought-provoking travel commentaries. At the same time, Woolf and Kang’s observations of the city show starkly different concerns; as such, they also provide fertile ground for comparison, offering between them a fuller picture of the diverse landscape of Istanbul-inspired writing. In addition, Kang and Woolf would each go on to publish a work advocating for profound societal reforms, with a remarkable shared emphasis on social equality, pacifism, and critique of the state; in Woolf’s case this was her *Three Guineas* (1938), and in Kang’s his *One World* (*Da Tong Shu* 大同書), begun in 1884, revised throughout the early 1900s, and finally published in 1935. Whilst Woolf and Kang’s trips to Turkey were far from the only sources which fed into these two later works, they played a part in enabling these radical re-imaginings.

For international relations scholar Costas M. Constantinou, the term *theoria* holds important clues to an intertwined relationship between contemplative seeing, purposeful travel, and constructive self-critique. To this end, Constantinou points us to the first known occurrence of the word, in the work of Herodotus, who uses it to refer to legendary lawmaker Solon’s journey from Athens to Egypt;\(^{36}\) and to the richness of the term’s forgotten etymologies, as elucidated by the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

*theor* Gr. Antiq  Also in L. form the’orus [mod. ad. Gr. theor-os spectator, one who travels in order to see things, also an envoy, ambassador: see THEORY.] An ambassador or envoy sent on behalf of a state, esp. to consult an oracle or perform a religious rite (Cf. THEORY).

*theoria* rare.  [a. Gr. *theoria* a looking at, contemplation, f. *theorein* to look at.]
2. The perception of beauty regarded as a moral faculty.

Through these etymological excavations, the word *theoria* regains diplomatic, aesthetic and critical dimensions. Journeying afar and attentive seeing are linked as two integral components of *theoria*, a significant function of which

lies in the survey of new and unknown things, the inspection of the doings of other peoples … The information and knowledge acquired by such theorias is then to be communicated to the citizens of the model polis to confirm the rightness of its laws or to amend the deficient ones. Theoria is of absolute importance, ‘for without it, or in misconducting it, the polis will not remain perfect’ … Theoria is therefore charged with the discovery of the good and held responsible for the perfect condition of the polis.\(^{38}\)

\(^{36}\) *On the Way to Diplomacy*, 54.

\(^{37}\) ibid., 51-2.

\(^{38}\) ibid., 59.
We can understand the essence of *theoria* to be the re-shaping of one’s knowledge of self and world against the grain of one’s travels, followed by sharing the resulting reflections with one’s fellow citizens in pursuit of the ‘greater good’. The rich reflections and literary output inspired by their travels, together with their bold re-imaginings of society, thus lead me to put Kang and Woolf forward as literary practitioners of *theoria*, as aesthetically informed and critically reflective ‘diplomatic’ figures of a kind. Each strove, through their writing, to communicate to a ‘home audience’ their travel-inspired experiences and reflections in a manner that was mindful both of the original context (Turkey) and their own intended (largely British/Chinese) audiences. Both sought to formulate a vision of society, nation and world that could transcend the limitations and issues their travels had helped them better identify and express. If, at its core, *theoria* is a “freelance or ecumenical embassy of prominent citizens of the polis … a mission of problematisation to bring back new knowledge (a prophesy, alternative views, revaluations, strange ideas) that can then be used to think and reinvigorate the Self, to reconsider dominant norms and provide new frameworks for deliberating political actions”, then Woolf’s *Orlando* and *Three Guineas*, and Kang’s Istanbul travelogue and *One World*, are very much in keeping with its task and spirit.

By bringing in *theoria* and restoring its etymological fullness, Constantinou hopes to spark a broadening in our understanding of diplomacy more generally. Observing that the plurality of unofficial diplomatic contributions is gravely overlooked in the field of diplomacy studies, Constantinou argues that the nature of diplomacy is “fundamentally the knowledge of the Self – and crucially this knowledge of the Self as a more reflective means of dealing with

---

39 Constantinou and Der Derian, *Sustainable Diplomacies*, 69.
and transforming relations with Others.” Following Constantinou’s logic, if we insist on conceiving of diplomacy through the narrow lens of “…approaches that view diplomacy as merely an intergovernmental affair, as management of inter-state relations or as primarily the pursuit and negotiation of national interests”, then we risk losing out on the re-discovery of diplomacy as “a venue for human understanding, political reconciliation, and social justice … in various expressions of everyday life practices of diplomacy.” While both Woolf and Kang were on the fringes of diplomatic circles proper — Woolf through her husband, as well as her close friend and sometime lover Vita Sackville-West, wife to diplomat Harold Nicolson, who was stationed in Constantinople from 1912-14; and Kang by dint of his prominent social status in Chinese circles, with the preface to his Turkey travelogue, for example, containing a reference to China’s ambassador to Germany — the fact that neither was an official diplomat or agent of the state makes their role in the project of cross-cultural representations and reflections all the more fascinating. Examining them in this light helps to, in the words of Noé Cornago, “restore the long time interrupted continuity between the undisputable relevance of diplomacy as raison de système —in a world which is much more than a world of States— and its unique value as a way to mediating the many alienations experienced by individuals and social groups.” International relations scholars such as Constantinou and Cornago thus present the core of diplomacy as a critical approach to dealing with and representing ‘difference’. This forms the very warp and weft of Woolf and Kang’s writing, as they seek to interpret, negotiate,

40 ibid., 18.
41 ibid., 68.
42 ibid., 90-91.
43 Plural Diplomacies: Normative Predicaments and Functional Imperatives, 1.
and communicate cultural difference in a meaningful manner from the unfamiliar context of Constantinople to their own. This is also where travel-inspired writing dovetails with practices of everyday diplomacy, in its endeavour to thoughtfully verbalise encounters with difference, to (in Woolf’s own words) “achieve a symmetry by means of infinite discords, showing all the traces of the mind’s passage through the world; & achieve in the end, some kind of whole made of shivering fragments…”

Kang and Woolf’s writing, along with these interventions into diplomacy studies, thus refract compellingly through one another. On the one hand, diplomatic concepts and frameworks, such as Constantinou and Cornago have provided, help illuminate Kang and Woolf’s writing as fundamentally concerned with self-critique via reflections on cultural difference, and as projects of theoria, of ‘everyday life practices of diplomacy’, in their efforts to create spaces and possibilities for ‘human understanding, political reconciliation, and social justice’. On the other hand, Kang and Woolf show that engaging with aesthetic, historical, and ethical dimensions of ‘difference’ are necessary to a comprehensive and reflective practice of diplomacy. It is important to note here that I am not offering Woolf and Kang as exemplary ‘diplomats’ —indeed, their writing shows them to be far from immune to error, stereotyping, prejudice, exoticising, and so on— but rather that in their approach and their aims, their work can be explored as significant attempts to engage with and reflect upon forms of difference across national and cultural boundaries, and to ultimately push both themselves and their readers to critically reflect upon the meaning of ‘self’ and ‘other’. In light of this, let us proceed to examine their works side-by-side with the following questions: as they each ‘look’ intently

at Istanbul, what do Woolf and Kang each ‘see’? What are their approaches and strategies when encountering and negotiating difference?

Comparatists in Constantinople

In one of the most striking sections from Virginia Woolf’s Istanbul travel diary, she describes the sensation of sitting in her room and looking out over the bustling city:

From this position you see over the town … & that is enough to give you some idea that Constantinople is to begin with a very large town. … you felt yourself in a metropolis; a place where life was being lived successfully. And that did seem strange, & - if I have time to say so - a little uncomfortable. For you also realised that life was not lived after the European pattern, that it was not even a debased copy of Paris or Berlin or London, & that, you thought was the ambition of towns which could not actually be Paris or any of those inner capitals. As the lights came out in clusters all over the land, & the water was busy with lamps, you knew yourself to be a spectator of a vigorous drama, acting itself out with no thought or need of certain great countries yonder to the west. And in all this opulence there was something ominous, & something ignominious - for an English lady at her bedroom window.”

At first, one might see this as a textbook case of the imperious western gaze surveying the local scene from above. Travel writing in the Anglo-American tradition has long been a genre mired in suspicion, deemed by some critics to be not only “a minor, somewhat middle-brow form”, 46 but a fundamentally unethical one, accused of “… reinstating a firm sense of the differences that pertain between cultures, regions and ethnicities, and by dealing in stereotypes that are frequently pernicious … it is suggested, the genre usually delivers a consoling, self-congratulatory message to the privileged, middle-class Westerners who are its principal readership”. 47 Critics observe in addition that travel writing often “proceeds by a logic of

---

45 ibid., 348.

46 Thompson, Travel Writing, 2.

47 ibid., 2.
differentiation, whereby the Other is constructed in some subtle or unsubtle way principally as foil or counterpoint to the supposedly heroic, civilised and/or cultured protagonist.” A closer look at Woolf’s account, however, shows that it delivers a far from self-congratulatory or self-consoling message; quite the opposite. Rather than engaging in subtle self-aggrandisement, we find her grappling with the fact that the world she is familiar with is not, after all, at the centre of things — indeed it is only one of at least several different models or ‘patterns’ of living; one ‘drama’ among many, and perhaps even a relatively less spectacular one at that. The use of adjectives such as ‘uncomfortable’, ‘ominous’ and ‘ignominious’ further dramatise the impact of this realisation. Woolf goes out of her way to emphasise not only her discomfiture, but that it is well deserved. Her previous conception of the world — that life and civilisation outside of Europe was a paler, poorer imitation of it — is revealed as having been naïve and presumptuous. The insistent repetition of ‘you’ accentuates the faintly accusatory tone of the sentences: you felt yourself in a metropolis… For you also realised… and that, you thought…
Many years later, in Orlando, when the protagonist finds herself in a particularly ambivalent situation, she describes it as “a most bewildering and whirligig state of mind” in which the “comforts of ignorance seemed utterly denied her.” Surely, when Woolf was re-visiting her Constantinople travel notes, this passage would have recalled vividly to her that moment when the ‘comforts of ignorance’ were for her suddenly ruptured.

48 ibid., 119.
49 Woolf, Orlando: a Biography, 122.
Like Woolf, who through Istanbul begins to unspool the threads of her Anglocentrism, Kang’s writing on Istanbul also involves a kind of mobilisation against civilisational solipsism. His comments on the city’s museums, for example, are particularly interesting, especially when considering the museum as a synecdochic stand-in for the aesthetic or cultural achievements of a particular civilisational tradition. “There are two museums,” he observes,

both of which are in Stamboul. European and American museums are all more or less the same; one grows tired of them after a certain point. As for the museums of Australia, Java, and Myanmar, these are but primitive collections with nothing much to see. The only other museums worth seeing are the ones at Kolkata [Calcutta], for Indian artefacts; Cairo, for Egyptian ones; and these ones at Constantinople, for their rich and refreshing collections of Turkish and Islamic artefacts. Whilst the museums of this capital are small in size, with a modest number of objects, particularly in comparison to the Egyptian and Indian ones, they suffice to offer one a glimpse of the splendour of the Turkish and Arab civilisations. Though I have yet to travel to Persia, their customs are similar to those of the Turks; just as, if one sees Paris, though one has yet to go to London, one nevertheless is afforded a sense of European customs. Therefore, for those who have travelled throughout Europe and America, it is a must to visit the museums of these three regions [India, Egypt, and Turkey] in order to fully experience the greatness of the world, and to have no regrets in this regard. 50 51

While Kang could certainly be accused of making broad-brushed statements in this passage, its standout message is his insistence that museums be placed into a global context, and that anyone who is serious about ‘fully experiencing the greatness’ that the world has to offer must get their act together and see the collections of not just Europe and America, but also India, Egypt and Turkey; a cross-continental, cross-civilisational breadth of perspective is of vital

50 In cases where English translations are not available and are thus my own renderings, I also include the original text for reference.
51 Lieguo Youji — Kang Youwei Yigao (列國遊記 康有為遺稿), 548.
importance. This is the antithesis of the Sinocentric intellectual, convinced that the ‘Middle Kingdom’ basks supremely aloof in the inimitable resplendence of its past.

Meanwhile, Constantinople’s most iconic of landmarks, the Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya), leads Kang to wax critical upon his home country. Kang heaps praise upon the structure, describing it as as spectacular and peerless; but it is not its soaring minarets or majestic domes which capture his close attention. Rather, it is the traces of its Byzantine Christian mosaics, still faintly visible centuries after the conversion of the building from a church into a mosque, that pique his interest. After making note of these traces, he goes on to critique the treatment of historic religious buildings in China: “In my country there currently exist those who wreak harm to Buddhism by destroying its temples, such as Yangcheng’s Longevity Temple, which was the grandest and most beautiful of all temples in all of Guangdong Province. Would it not have been ideal to have it converted into a museum?”

For Kang, the palimpsest of different religions and empires embodied by the Hagia Sophia provide a point of departure for a model of cultural heritage based on coexistence, one in which the ‘new’ does not have to come in at the expense of complete destruction of the ‘old’. This also, to some extent, mirrored Kang’s stance as a reformer, given his wish to preserve China’s monarchy while modernising it for the twentieth century. One finds unexpected echoes with Kang’s comments in the words of the Tanzimat-reform monarch Sultan Abdülmecid (1823-1861), who commissioned two Italian architects to conduct a large-scale restoration of the Hagia Sophia in the 1840s, and is supposed

52 今吾國人有惡佛教者，乃並廟而毀之，如吾粵羊城長壽寺，實為全粵寺觀之最偉麗而古者，若改為博物院，豈非至善?

53 ibid., 544.
to have said, upon seeing the newly uncovered figural mosaics which had been plastered over by his predecessors: “Elles sont belles, cachez-les pourtant puisque notre religion les défend; cachez-les bien, mais ne les détruisez pas: car qui sait ce qui peut arriver?”

( Abdülmecid was, incidentally, the first Ottoman sultan to speak fluent French.) Kang and Abdülmecid’s desired approach, then, is one of strategic preservation and integration. Both would likely have been pleased to learn that, a little over a decade after the founding of the Republic of Turkey, the Hagia Sophia was indeed officially converted into a museum in 1935, showcasing to the public its “classical Mediterranean language of forms creatively synthesised with the Islamic-Ottoman heritage”. Kang’s comments on another facet of the building — its sumptuous marble — reveal his awareness of this ‘language of forms’ at play, as he admires its multidimensional hues, veins and swirls: “[The Papal Basilica] Saint Paul too excels at the same effect of [richly patterned marble] of five shades and six patterns, of rolling waves and wispy clouds; but Saint Paul is only apprentice to this master. In fact, Venice’s Parliament Building, Louis XIV’s Versailles, the Louvre in Paris, along with all the palaces of Europe which employ this effect, originally took this example as their model.”

Kang’s description of the marblework resonates with that of another sultan, Mehmed II, who “wandered through the ‘paradise-like’ Hagia Sophia … contemplating the vastness of its celestial dome, its patterned marble floors resembling the wavy sea, and its artistic gold mosaics.” It is clear, then, that Kang conceives

54 Necipoğlu, “The Life of an Imperial Monument: Hagia Sophia After Byzantium,” 221.

55 ibid., 197.

56今保羅廟專以此制勝，五色六章，波起雲詭，皆祖師於此。而啡尼士之議院、法路易十四之花賜喇宮、巴黎之擄華宮，及歐土各國宮廟之以五色文石砌花者，亦皆取法此廟。

57 Lieguo Youji — Kang Youwei Yigao (列國遊記 康有為遺稿), 544.

of these various iconic structures, dotted across Europe, as part of a dynamic architectural and
cultural dialogue with one another, unfolding across centuries. It is a conversation that he
wishes China would participate in: “… my countrymen do not know to preserve the things of
the past, leaving our civilisation in tatters; thus we have nothing with which outsiders who visit
can authenticate [their impressions], and nothing which may pique the interest of posterity.
Such a strange situation is not to be found even amongst the most primitive of nations, yet the
elites and intellectuals of China are not only unaware of this issue but exacerbate it — how
abhorrent!”59 We thus see Kang engaging in critique of his home society by bringing to bear a
mix of aesthetic, historical and critical sensibilities upon the act of comparison.

Diplomatic figures — figures of *theoria* — are quintessential comparatists. Comparison,
informed by these various sensibilities, is presented as an antidote to pernicious egotism. In
*Three Guineas*, for example, Woolf writes of a hypothetical Englishwoman who

probably ... will have imbibed, even from the governess, some romantic notion that
Englishmen, those fathers and grandfathers whom she sees marching in the picture of
history, are ‘superior’ to the men of other countries. Thus she will consider it her duty
to check by comparing French historians with English; German with French; the
testimony of the ruled—the Indians or Irish, say—with the claims made by their
rulers…. Then she will compare English painting with French painting; English music
with German music; English literature with Greek literature ... When all these
comparisons have been faithfully made by the use of reason, the outsider will find
herself in possession of very good reasons for her indifference.61

59甚矣吾國人不知保存古物，故文明掃地，令外人遊者無可憑證，後人起者無可感興，此俗之奇，
乃野蠻國之所無，而中國學士大夫，乃不知而甘蹈之，真可恨也!

60 *Lieguo Youji* — *Kang Youwei Yigao* (列國遊記 康有為遺稿), 544.

Woolf is unequivocal here that it is through the labour of attentive and thoughtful comparison that one can attain an informed ‘indifference’. By ‘indifference’, Woolf does not mean to issue a rallying cry for us to dullen our senses to beauty; rather, she wants us to be in the position of possessing a solid critical foundation to reject claims of absolute superiority, worth, or validity, particularly if they are claims made by those in positions of power.

This is where Woolf and Kang’s paths in Istanbul begin to fundamentally diverge. If Woolf hopes, through comparison, to reach a sort of well-rounded, clear-eyed indifference, for Kang such indifference is a luxury. As mentioned earlier, Kang viewed the Ottoman and the Qing empires as in comparably dire straits, both struggling to maintain political stability and integrity in the face of intense pressures from within and without. He readily applied the metaphor of ‘sickness’ to both, and saw the troubles that the Ottoman Empire faced as ‘symptoms’ similar to China’s, which therefore could, through careful ‘diagnosis’, be used to help ‘cure’ China of her own ills. Like many late Qing intellectuals, Kang viewed the act of comparing China to other nations as a necessary means to China’s salvation. Fixated on gleaning applicable lessons and insights from what was taking place in Turkey, Kang’s travelogue contains an extensive list of woes that he perceives to be common to Beijing and Istanbul, from distressing scenes of poverty, to deficiencies in urban infrastructure and cumbersome taxation systems, to political and economic subjugation through the concrete presence of multiple foreign powers. He is acutely sensitive to the dominant presence of the city’s foreign embassies, for example, which crop up several times in his travelogue, and are never mentioned by Woolf:

‘Turkey must daily pay debt to six nations — a thousand pounds to Russia, six hundred to Britain, four hundred to France, three hundred to Italy, five hundred to Austria-Hungary, one hundred to Germany. Upon learning this, I realised that we and the Turks
are similarly afflicted. Gazing upon these embassies, I think back to Yanjing [*Beijing] — we are truly patients with mutual sympathies [*tongbingxianglian*], burdened as we are with the same illness!  

Kang uses the Chinese phrase *tongbingxianglian* (同病相憐) to striking effect here, establishing a sense of the Ottomans and the Chinese as not just similarly ‘ill’, but moreover mutually sympathetic and understanding. At the same time, Kang was eager to point out admirable aspects of Constantinople that were worthy of study by the Chinese, such as the impressiveness of its military academies and ministry buildings. And while Woolf sticks to the classic tourist attractions and scenic spots, Kang includes tours of schools and factories in his itinerary, of which he keeps fairly detailed records — even recording the costs of attending a particular primary school (four piastres a month), the number of pupils in attendance there (one hundred and sixty), and the length of their summer holiday (two months) — evincing a keen interest in the systemic, institutional and socio-political workings of the Ottoman Empire.

Woolf in fact explicitly states that she feels “out of pocket” when it comes to “those observations upon manners or politics with which all travellers should ballast their impressions … The truth is that travellers deal far too much in such commodities & my efforts to rid myself of certain preconceptions have taken my attention from the actual facts.”  

62 蘇時春議於此，蘇丹甚畏之，六國人之橫行，突人無如之何也。突又負六國債，每日分償之，俄千鎊，英六百鎊，法四百鎊，意三百鎊，奧五百鎊，德百鎊，吾聞之既病突人，亦自病也。望此公館，回首燕京，真所謂同病相憐者矣！

63 ibid., 549-550.

64 ibid., 540.

spends keen efforts on documenting the social and political characteristics of the Ottoman capital, Woolf sounds weary of authoritative observations, finding them more a hindrance than a help in her attempts to experience the city on its, and her, own terms. Woolf did have more to be weary, and wary, of. Given Britain’s longer and denser diplomatic relationship with the Ottoman Empire in relation to that with China, with official links established since the 1500s—indeed, by the late 1800s, “the Foreign Office appears to have had a greater volume of correspondence with the embassy at Constantinople than with any other diplomatic mission” 66—there was a much greater corpus of Constantinople-related texts accessible to Woolf, including those penned by several Englishwomen, the most famous among them Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) and Julia Pardoe (1806-1862); not to mention the many guidebooks and similar texts widely circulated among British travellers. Shortly before her visit to Turkey, while in Greece, Woolf writes: “Baedecker will count the statues; a dozen archaeologists will arrange them in a dozen different ways; but the final work must be done by each fresh mind that sees them.” In the same entry, she later adds (clearly in a bit of a rush): “The pediments of the temple line the two sides of the museum; [] but we wont write guide book .” 67 Woolf stops herself from ‘laying out the scene’ à la Baedecker; she wishes to write against the expectations and stylistics of the generic guidebooks, as well as other travel accounts, she has read. There is something irreducibly individual, she implies, in the act of viewing, in each encounter; one that should not, and cannot, be wholly shaped by someone


else’s interpretation. Amidst the clamour of one’s guidebooks and predecessors, one should deploy one’s own senses, one’s own sensibilities.

Kang, on the other hand, must have felt as if he were writing in something of a vacuum, particularly in light of the rich literary traditions of east Asian travel composition dating back to the Song dynasty (960-1279), in which, as one Japanese literature scholar puts it, “writing a poem about a famous place meant not just facing a present landscape but also the historic accretions that surrounded it like a discursive shell.”68 As a highly accomplished classical scholar, this was a tradition that Kang would have been intimately familiar with. As such, writing in and about Constantinople, a place for which Kang had no other Chinese travel texts as reference, must have seemed like both an exhilarating opportunity as well as an accentuation of his isolation in exile. En route to the city from Romania, Kang writes: “Arriving at the Turkish capital at noon on the 29th. Who knows the number of Chinese who have crossed the Black Sea to this day?”6970 The rhetorical question comes off as tinged with both pride as well as a forlorn quality. The poignancy is intensified when Kang employs allusions to classics of Chinese travel literature in his efforts to describe his first views of Constantinople’s waterways from aboard the ship: “Houses and dwellings dot the mountain slopes; steamships, sailboats and brilliant green waves bask in each other’s beauty; the picturesque landscape calls to mind that of Wuchang on the Yangtze, or Yellow Crane Tower at Hankou, the blue of sky and water just

68 Fogel, Traditions of East Asian Travel, 22.

69 二十九日十二時到突京，未知中國人渡黑海者有幾？

Yellow Crane Tower is one of China’s scenic spots most strongly associated with literary creation, forming, among others, the setting of one of preeminent Tang dynasty poet Li Bai’s (701-762) most famous works, *Seeing off Meng Haoran for Guangling at Yellow Crane Tower* (黄鹤楼送孟浩然之广陵).

This strategy, “by which the traveller must seek to attach unknown entities to known reference points, and to familiar frameworks of meaning and understanding”, has been termed the ‘principle of attachment’ by political science scholar Anthony Pagden. Originally applied to Europeans in the New World, the strategy has been seen as an objectionable one, guilty of over-energetically smoothing over unfamiliar phenomena in an effort to classify and subsume ‘alien’ encounters into a normative framework, often resulting in an ‘illusion’ which “did not acknowledge the ways in which these new sights and sounds blew apart the comfortable conceptions of an insular European civilisation”. In Kang’s case, however, while some degree of nuance is certainly lost in the parallels he draws — between the Bosphorus and the Yangtze, no less — the overtones of his strategy are rather different from Pagden’s original example. Kang’s comparisons rest on expressing and establishing sentiments of empathy and connection between the Turks and the Chinese, and particularly in his desire to acknowledge the ways in which the sights and sounds of Constantinople could help ‘blow apart’ conceptions of an insular

---

71 人家樓閣，彌山上下，汽舟帆樯，映帶碧潯，風景之美，略似長江之武昌、漢口黃鶴樓前，晴川閣外。

72 ibid., 537.

73 Thompson, *Travel Writing*, 67.

Chinese civilisation. Moreover, Kang goes so far as to express the opinion that the Turks and the Chinese historically were of the same race, or the same ‘kind’ (tongzhong, 同種). As foreign relations scholar Dongyang Dai 戴東陽 points out, Kang’s choice of the term Tujue (突厥) to refer to the Turks and to Turkey, rather than the more standard phonetic translation Tu’erqi (土耳其), is a significant one, given that the former is an ancient Chinese name for the Turkic peoples active in medieval Central and Inner Asia, roughly corresponding to ‘Göktürks’, or the ‘Celestial Turks’. By using this term throughout his travelogue, Kang hoped to emphasise the historical links between the Turkish and Chinese peoples, and therefore strengthen his argument that the Chinese could stand to learn much of value about themselves by studying the Turks. Kang began pursuing this line of inquiry in the late 1890s, and was perhaps singlehandedly responsible for identifying and advocating for the Ottoman Empire as a ‘sick ally’ of China’s—an argument later reiterated by his prominent disciple Liang Qichao—when he went so far as to submit an official report concerning Turkey to Emperor Guangxu (1871-1908), entitled Jincheng Tujue Xiaoruojing Ouruji (Report on the Demise and Weakening of Turkey). Rebecca E. Karl notes that the “geographical and tropological tongzhong ['same-kind'] relationship between the two [Turkey and China]” formed a “hopeful site for mutually dependent healing and regeneration through state reform”. Unrelatedly, Sultan Abdul Hamid had actually sent a committee to China at the request of the German Kaiser Wilhelm II, who found the Qing Dynasty’s Muslim troops, ‘Gansu Braves’, alarmingly fearsome and anti-foreign;

---


76 Karl, Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, 39-40.
The Kaiser had hoped that these Ottoman Muslims would dissuade the Gansu Braves from harming foreigners in China, but the committee arrived in 1901, far too late to be of any use. In addition, a Chinese Muslim leader travelled to Istanbul by invitation in 1906, resulting in the opening two years later of a Muslim school in Beijing, named the ‘Abdul Hamid School of Science/House of Learning’ (and which flew the Turkish flag!). In light of his high-profile efforts to highlight the parallels between the two empires, then, and in the absence of any steady formal relations between the Chinese and the Ottomans, Kang can be seen as part of these piecemeal, groundbreaking ‘diplomatic’ efforts between the two empires at the turn of the twentieth century. Kang’s arrival in Constantinople, nearly two decades after he had submitted this report to the Guangxu Emperor, was thus in many ways a culmination of a long-term interest and affinity he had held for this distant empire. Meanwhile, the year that Kang visited the city, 1908, was the year that a beleaguered Sultan Abdul Hamid II was successfully pressured by Young Turk rebels into restoring the shortlived constitution of 1876-1878, and reviving the parliament.

As it turns out, Kang Youwei arrived in Constantinople on the very day of the official restoration of the constitution, when the city was replete with public festivities — an incredible arrival scene for a would-be constitutional monarchist in exile. Even from the ship, he writes, “it was already possible to hear the cries of celebration from the shore; once at the capital, crescent flags created shade for every street; from dawn to dusk there was drinking, the playing of drums, singing and dancing in large groups, and cries of ‘Long live the Sultan!’,

77 Karpat, The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State, 237.
everywhere from the streets to parks to embassies to public areas — the elation was readily apparent. Unexpectedly, Kang provides us with several different versions of these events, which included an appearance made by Sultan Abdul Hamid II. The accounts are placed unceremoniously at different points in the text, with no commentary concerning their overlap or repetition in subject. Each version provides certain details that the other does not. The least stylised one focusses on describing each component of the ceremonial appearance, from the carriages (black lacquered), to the female consorts (adorned with white veils and gold and purple embroidery), to the musicians (dressed in red), to the sultan himself (sixty-two years of age, seated in the sole four-horse carriage appointed with golden harnesses, sporting white whiskers, a red fez, a black western-style wool coat with gold shoulder-pads, a sword, and stately bearing...); we are also told, in this account, that “palace aides handed out tea-cakes, coffee, and lemon water to soothe the audience; all and sundry eagerly procured their share of these before dispersing, as did I.” (One is glad to learn that Kang managed to get hold of some of the lemonade and pastry.) Another version, on the other hand, is written in the style of classical Chinese poetry. Due to its rhythmic cadence and poetic economy of form, it sketches impressions in broad, vivid strokes rather than provides minute details, and contains highly emotive language, with an emphasis on dramatic storytelling rather than documentation. By

78吾以詔開立憲之日，適到君士但那部京，自車中船中，已聞聞報者歡呼聲，至京則半月之旗蔽道，飲酒擊鼓，聯隊歌舞，歡呼萬歲者，旬日[十天]盡夜不絕，凡道路公園公館公地之中皆是也，可謂極歡幸之至矣。

79*Lieguo Youji — Kang Youwei Yigao (列國遊記 康有為遺稿)*, 562.

80蘇丹鴨都哈密第二乘四馬車，金繮靷出金門，冠者皆免冠，山呼萬歲，其聲動天，蘇丹亦起立點首答禮。蘇丹年六十二，白須紅絨冠，而歐服黑絨衣，金肩，仗劍，遂馳入廟，遂有衛士陳【】持茶餅、架非、檸檬水以勞觀者，人皆爭領，吾亦取焉，乃散。

81 ibid., 552.
including several versions, Kang points to an awareness of the different descriptive possibilities tied to style and form. The various versions also draw upon different dating systems: the Guangxu calendrical system (in which events are dated in relation to the Guangxu Emperor’s reign), the Gregorian western calendar, and the sexagenary cycle, a traditional Chinese system dating back to the Shang dynasty (~1760-520 BCE). There is one version, for example, in which Kang mentions the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78); this is dated as ‘the fourth year of Guangxu’. In so doing, Kang emphasises the developments of the Ottoman Empire as relevant to a Chinese political framework. (In fact, Kang is known for having proposed a calendrical system based around the birth of Confucius, similar to what the West had done with the birth of Jesus; his choice of dating system would thus have been a highly self-conscious one.) In the version written in the idiom of classical poetry, however, the date is given according to the Chinese sexagenary calendar. In this version, Kang focusses on, rather than the ceremony itself, the build-up of the events within the Ottoman Empire that led to the restoration, namely the military revolt instigated by Ahmed Niyazi Bey (1873-1912), the popularity of which led to Abdul Hamid II capitulating to the demands to restore the constitution from 1876. Kang presents these events to us in the manner of a tragedy, with lines such as “The speechless sultan weeps and snivels in fear / and drafts documents through a dreamless night”. In this version in particular, we see Kang using poetic license to re-imagine and re-fashion for a Chinese audience this tumultuous series of events in Turkey’s history.

82 蘇丹無言，悚懼涕漣。一昔不寐，親草制書。
83 ibid., 565.
This brings us to the fictional universe of *Orlando*, through which Woolf is similarly invested in the impact of form and style upon what we think of as ‘history’. Like Kang, she explores multiple versions of a grand, ceremonial event in Constantinople, presided over by her protagonist Orlando, who is in fact the English ambassador to Turkey. Our sense of the event unfolds through several staggered accounts in contrasting voices, from an English naval officer’s diary, who comments matter-of-factly about things such as “the superiority of the British” and whose main concern during this entire event is the threat that the “native population” poses to the nerves of the “English ladies in the company”; to the letter of a General’s daughter to a friend, whose entire consciousness is occupied by Orlando’s charms — “But the sight of all others, the cynosure of all eyes … was the Ambassador himself. Such a leg! Such a countenance!! Such princely manners!!!”; to an unspecified newspaper: ““From the gazette of the time, we gathered that ‘as the clock struck twelve, the Ambassador appeared on the centre Balcony which was hung with priceless rugs…” 84 If Kang offers his reader starkly contrasting representations of the sultan—from polished and stately in a lavishly appointed carriage before a cheering crowd of thousands, to an isolated man, defeated and tearful in his private quarters — here too we are afforded very different viewpoints of Orlando, with one instance more concerned with status symbols such as the costly rugs on display, and another more fixated upon the shapeliness of Orlando’s physique. The extravagant disparities in tone and focus of these three sources, all supposedly describing the ‘same’ historical event, relates to Constantinou’s claim that “employing the hetereorealisms of art and literature … is a means to reading diplomacy and world politics differently.” 85 If diplomacy and politics centre around the

84 *Orlando: A Biography*, 99.

85 “Diplomacy, Grotesque Realism, and Ottoman Historiography,” 221.
negotiation and representation of ‘events’ and of ‘history’, then Woolf shows it is crucial to have an awareness of form and narrative style, not as ornamental trappings of language, but as the very medium through which we are apprised of what ‘happened’. What we call ‘history’ in this instance is shaped by one witness’s racist machismo, and by another’s over-exuberant punctuation. The contingencies of the narratives left to us are myriad and beyond our grasp. Orlando’s tenure as ambassador in Constantinople, for example, while impressive — for he “had a finger in some of the most delicate negotiations between King Charles and the Turks” — nevertheless suffers from “lamentably incomplete” documentation, due to the unfortunate ravages of fire and the chaos of revolution. “Often the paper was scorched a deep brown in the middle of the most important sentence,” explains the narrator, “…We have done our best to piece out a meagre summary from the charred fragments that remain; but often it has been necessary to speculate, to surmise, and even to use the imagination.”

Woolf’s novel thus probes the necessary role of the imagination in constructing history, for every narration is incomplete and contingent, and it is the imagination which must serve to stitch these narrative fragments together as best as it can.

What exactly does Orlando do in his capacity as ambassador to Constantinople? We are told that he is “kept busy, what with his wax and seals, his various coloured ribbons which had to be diversely attached, his engrossing of titles and making of flourishes round capital letters, till luncheon came - a splendid meal of perhaps thirty courses.” After taking luncheon, Orlando is then escorted on official visits to other dignitaries by “purple Janissaries running on foot and

---

86 Woolf, Orlando: a Biography, 90.
waving great ostrich feather fans above their heads”, and afterwards to the palace, where elaborate and delicate protocols dictate the fluctuations of trivial conversation (about weather, and sweetmeats, and so on). Constantinou argues compellingly that, through these examples of excess and pageantry, Woolf underscores the “inescapable comic dimension of a reverential profession … and in the end, significantly, diplomacy itself as an absurd performance”; and that as such, Orlando can be read on one level as Woolf’s “provocation … to the conventional (Western) vision of diplomacy as the rational and fully representational dialogue between sovereign states.” It is undeniable, of course, that there are comic intentions behind these Oriental tropes of feathers, Janissaries, and elegantly labyrinthine conversation. In addition, however, Woolf wryly makes clear that the Brits are equally enamoured of pageantry and spectacle themselves (Orlando’s official title is ‘Ambassador Extraordinary’, after all). For starters, the most dramatic chain of events in the novel begins with the arrival of the Order of the Bath —again, a title which Woolf must have selected with some relish— in Constantinople by frigate from England, for which Orlando makes “the occasion for an entertainment more splendid than any that has been known before or since in Constantinople.” Clearly, it is not the Ottomans who are the ones going over the top here. The ceremony is described by Woolf in highly ritual terms, showing the extremely fine line between pomp and circumstance and the comic and ridiculous: “Sir Adrian Scrope, in the fall dress of a British Admiral, advanced; the Ambassador knelt on one knee; the Admiral placed the Collar of the Most Noble Order of

87 ibid., 92.

88 ibid., 94.

89 “Diplomacy, Grotesque Realism, and Ottoman Historiography,” 213.

90 Orlando: a Biography, 96-7.
the Bath round his neck, then pinned the Star to his breast.” We shall see Woolf continue to pursue this train of thought in far greater detail years later in *Three Guineas*, which has a remarkable extended commentary on the elaborate sartorial codes of upper-class male professionals, only a sliver of which I shall excerpt here: “How many, how splendid, how extremely ornate they are—the clothes worn by the educated man in his public capacity! … Even stranger, however, than the symbolic splendour of your clothes are the ceremonies that take place when you wear them. Here you kneel; there you bow; here you advance in procession behind a man carrying a silver poker; here you mount a carved chair; here you appear to do homage to a piece of painted wood; here you abase yourselves before tables covered with richly worked tapestry.” In other words, Woolf’s literary project of *theoria* reveals that the perceived ‘absurdities’ of others can be wonderfully effective in helping reveal those of our own.

Orlando, though accomplished and successful, hates his official duties; while he carries them out to the letter, “he was undoubtedly fatigued by them, and often depressed to such a pitch of gloom that he preferred to take his dinner alone with his dogs.” We begin to grasp that Orlando longs to escape from the rarefied world of dignitaries and court life, with its social rituals and minutiae of etiquette, and to live among the everyday folk of the city. Rumours abound that he would secretly “mingle with the crowd on the Galata Bridge; or stroll through the bazaars; or throw aside his shoes and join the worshippers in the Mosques.” If we extend

91 ibid., 99.
92 ibid., 94.
93 ibid., 95.
Constantinou’s reading of *Orlando* as a critique of normative diplomacy, then Orlando’s behaviour in this regard intensifies a critical stance towards traditional modes of state-level diplomacy. The climax of Orlando’s time in Constantinople, and indeed the entire novel, is his sex change, in which our middle-aged male protagonist falls into a deep slumber and awakes as a woman. Orlando then flees the city amid the chaos of a revolt, and joins the company of a community of gypsies before eventually returning to England. For Constantinou, Orlando is the ultimate transgressive figure of diplomacy, for s/he

transgresses essentialist interpretations of male and female, occidental and oriental, public and private, political and literary, historical and fictive,” and moreover, “Istanbul, the place where s/he comes to practise diplomacy is itself a topos of ambiguity—a civilisational hybrid as much as an imaginary meeting point of East and West. … More than a representative of sovereignty, therefore, Orlando exceeds formal identity to become an intermediary of opposites, mediating worlds of our making, while recalling the equivocality of diplomatic reality and of the conceptual media chosen to produce and investigate it. 94

Understandably, much of the discussion surrounding this climactic event in the novel has dwelled upon gender, particularly the fluidity of male/female as mapped onto the hybridity of Constantinople as East/West. In addition to her gender, however, it is Orlando’s entire value system and comparative framework that undergoes change as well. Every aspect of her identity becomes fluid and open to question, including her Englishness: “But even the bones of her ancestors, Sir Miles, Sir Gervase, and the rest, had lost something of their sanctity since Rustum el Sadi had waved his hand that night in the Asian mountains.” 95 She felt herself “only in process of fabrication … High battlements of thought, habits that had seemed durable as

94 “Diplomacy, Grotesque Realism, and Ottoman Historiography,” 224.

stone, went down like shadows at the touch of another mind and left a naked sky and fresh stars twinkling in it.”

The project of *theoria*, that of learning to engage productively with difference and in so doing critically reflect on oneself, rests upon what Noé Cornago terms “the singularity of diplomacy as a form of ‘knowledge production’”, which is “framed in ‘highly specific and ephemeral social constellations’” and deeply “dependent on the perceptions and sociability of diplomats themselves.” If it is via her encounter and conversations with the gypsies that Orlando attains a more radical level of transformation and reflexivity, then the ‘specific and ephemeral social constellations’, ‘perceptions and sociability’ of Kang Youwei certainly play a large part in his travelogue and impact his practice of *theoria*. In Kang’s case, there are three notable encounters that he mentions: (1) a chance encounter on board a ship with three ex-government officials, accused of corruption and fleeing to Greece together with their families, (2) another chance encounter, again on board a ship, with a member of parliament, and (3) an invitation to the personal residence of a high-ranking member of the Young Turks, identified by historian Giray Fidan as Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha (1855-1922), who would go on to serve as Minister of the Interior, Grand Vizier, and Ambassador to Austria-Hungary, among other positions. Kang provides extensive notes regarding the conversations that result from these encounters. It is tantalising to wonder in what language they communicated, and if they perhaps spoke in a mixture of English and French; but Kang, rather curiously, makes no mention whatsoever of such matters. (He does, however, remark upon the overwhelming French

---

96 ibid., 137.

influence on Ottoman politics and the Ottoman elites —“if one doesn’t speak French, one is like a blind and mute person here,” he observes— nor does he see it as a good thing, for in his opinion, “Unlike the English and Germans, the strength of the French lies not in actual politics and governance, but in clamouring for revolution.” Kang also often clumsily, or downright unrecognisably, transcribes the names of the Turkish figures he discusses, leading the precision of his transcriptions to become both more dubious as well as more poignant; these are traces of the friction, the imperfect unsmoothness, of these encounters that are otherwise lost in Kang’s refined and polished writing style.

If one of the main functions of a diplomat is to ‘report back’, then Kang goes out of his way to fulfil his duties in his conscientious documentation of these serendipitous exchanges. The member of parliament shares with Kang his concerns over the hastiness with which the electoral laws have been compiled, and the self-interested power struggles and corruption which plague the parliament, in turn composed of individuals that he sees as interested in prestige and power rather than the governance. Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha (who met Kang and, we are told, took a shine to him) is described as “a wealthy individual from the new ruling party”

98 言語文字悉師法國，故政論亦以法為師。入突境而不通法文法語者，猶盲啞也。
99 然法人不同英、德，本不長於政治，但嘩於革命耳。
100 Lieguo Youji — Kang Youwei Yigao (列國遊記 康有為遺稿), 540.
101 吾於舟中遇突議員，言突各州郡民智未開，選舉法又草率未善，暴民力爭，黨人自私，作弊百端，舉議員多豪強暴夫，無政治學，只有囂嘩，恐突之亂未艾云。
102 ibid., 565.
(新黨之豪富)\textsuperscript{103} whose residence is “very spacious, full of greenery and pavilions, all opulent and beautiful, and European in style”\textsuperscript{104}.\textsuperscript{105} This unusual combination of host and guest seemed to have conversed at length and in depth, and Kang demonstrates a strong interest in taking note of what his host has to say. Kang’s request to be introduced to Niyazi Bey, one of the key figures in the Young Turk revolution, sparks his host into an extended defence of the success of the Young Turks as a collective effort: “After Midhat Pasha was sent into exile, many of us were forced to flee as well, and for this reason we became dispersed all across Europe, and wrote and published in the various countries we were in. We tried to awaken the people of our nation; as we did so, our people began to comprehend what was going on in the world, and the ranks of our followers gradually increase.” A failed attempt at a coup led them to realise that their real issue was a lack of funds, in turn leading to insufficient military clout: “So we sold everything of any value in our homes, and managed to collect 400 thousand pounds. Secretly the soldiers, heads of harems, high-ranking officials and concubines conspired together. … the sultan, out of fear, gave in and proclaimed the constitution. This took us thirty years, step by step, to achieve; we even abandoned our families in order to attain such results. Niyazi Bey was simply one of our pioneers. The prominent members of our organisation wished to keep a low

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{103} ibid., 563.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{104} 慕吾而宴於其第，園林大里許，樓閣草樹，華妙皆歐式
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{105} ibid., 563.
\end{flushleft}
profile; it wasn’t single-handedly achieved by him.” This exchange with Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha leads Kang to the ‘sudden and deep realisation’ (吾乃恍然) that ample funds are a necessary condition for the success of any political intervention, regardless of the extent of its support. Listening to this interpretation of events surely would have called to mind Kang’s own failed coup attempt in 1900, which also suffered from a lack of coordination and finances and was easily suppressed by Qing troops. Kang’s additional reflections upon this exchange include dismay at the corruptible power of money, as well as admiration for the Young Turks’ courage and determination in achieving their desired aims. For the reformist in exile, this must have been a bittersweet success story to hear and reflect upon.

The figure Midhat Pasha (1822-1883) mentioned above by Hüseyin Hilmi Pasha (referred to by Kang as ‘MAHATPACHA’) is featured prominently in the travelogue, not least because his life and work seemed to constitute such a poignant analogue to Kang’s own. Ahmed Şefik Midhat Pasha had, too, been a prominent statesman, instrumental in the Tanzimat reform movement, and had spearheaded the creation of the shortlived 1876 constitution. He had also been sent into exile when Sultan Abdul Hamid II’s commitment to constitutionalism crumbled; and, likewise, had set off on wide-ranging travels, during which he had continued to produce

106有三益啤者，名吾，故外郎大臣之子，其姨為妃，世襲父之啤，而姓三益者也。新黨之豪富，慕吾而宴於其第。園林大里許，樓閣草樹，華妙皆歐式。識呢詩賓焉，吾欲介紹一見之，三益啤曰：“此非呢詩賓之功也。乃吾全少黨人為之也。吾黨自阿士文罷逐後，累見逋逮，乃散於甌北各國，或者書撰報，以警國人，國人日明於事勢，從吾黨者日益眾，近則大臣大將，咸以蘇丹壓制，君權過重，非立憲、開國會不能振救，而兵力無目起也。乃令黨人編結兵官，而非散金不能也。乃各毀家醵資，得四十萬鎊，乃以陰結各兵官內監，且及大臣官妃、衛將軍，某陰實主其事，而令其心腹校呢詩賓先登，乃遍電全國同時並舉。蘇丹震懾，立憲竟成，乃吾全黨人，三十年經營閱歷，苦心破家而得之，呢詩賓姑使為先鋒者，當人多貴族富豪，不便出名耳，非其功也。

107 ibid., 563-4.
texts that reflected upon Ottoman modernisation, just as Kang continued to seek viable ‘solutions’ for China even as he was estranged from it.\textsuperscript{108} This was a remarkable identification of a Chinese thinker with his perceived Ottoman kindred spirit — with a man who, it likely appeared to Kang, despite being of a different language, race and religion, was yet in several aspects far closer to himself in aspirations, ideals and experience than many of his own countrymen. Kang notes admiringly how the current constitution was based on Midhat Pasha’s groundbreaking work from three decades earlier, the result of the careful compilation of what in his view were the best and most suitable laws from various countries.\textsuperscript{109,110} After such a promising beginning, Kang was pained — perhaps almost on Midhat Pasha’s behalf — at the hastiness of the execution of the constitution’s restoration: “A constitution put in place in three days, and now the Parliament will hold elections in three months — among all the nations of the world, there has never been another phenomenon under the sun as strange as the speed of this undertaking.”\textsuperscript{111,112}

In Ban Wang’s discussion of Kang Youwei and his philosophy, he observes that for Kang, world history “is not something given and fixed, but an open-ended, ongoing conversation aimed at mutual reading and interpretation among individual nations and interlocutors. Rather

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{Fidan} Fidan, “Chinese Intellectual Kang Youwei and Ottoman Modernisation,” 198.
\bibitem{突今憲法} 突今憲法，悉用三十年舊憲，乃蔑乞(MAHATPACHA)總集而定之者，顚收集各國之良法而行之
\bibitem{Lieguo Youji} Lieguo Youji — Kang Youwei Yigao (列國遊記 康有為遺稿), 565.
\bibitem{立憲之事} 立憲之事，三日而成，國會之開，三月而舉，自大地萬國，無如是之速且易者，天下咸怪之。
\bibitem{ibid.} ibid., 562.
\end{thebibliography}
than a grand narrative of Western modernity ... world history is a discursive process of reading in sympathy, imagination, and understanding.”

Long before it became common practice to study the histories of nations in consultation with one another, both Kang and Woolf regarded the history of one’s own nation as utterly inadequate on its own, as incomplete and limited in perspective. They are mindful of the multiple, contingent versions of history, and of the need for dialogue with ‘other’ histories. This mode of engaging with history, in a manner that draws upon sympathy and imagination, is particularly resonant with Woolf’s concept of the ‘unmanageable’ sight. During her time at Mycenae, Greece, which Woolf visited right before her trip to Turkey, she attempts to work through her reaction to the view of the ruins before her: “There was never a sight, I think, less manageable; it travels through all the chambers of the brain, wakes odd memories & imaginations; forecasts a remote future; retells a remote past.”

In this full, highly conscious mode of seeing, the sight in question is so overwhelming or richly suggestive to the viewer that it can become a touchstone for unsettling one’s conception of past, present and future. It is the very ‘unmanageability’ of the sight that leads to its emotive and creative impact.

One such ‘unmanageable’ sight for Kang Youwei is the tomb of Suleiman the Magnificent (1494-1566). Faced with this marker of mortality for a sultan who had attained such prominence and power during his reign, Kang finds himself overcome with emotion: “This was the peerless hero of his age, yet where is he now? Buried in this coffin of seven chi.”

---

113 Wang, “Aesthetic Humanity and the Great World Community: Kant and Kang Youwei.”


115 A traditional Chinese unit of measurement based on the length of the human forearm, equivalent to roughly one-third of a metre, and usually rendered in English as ‘foot’.
utterly distressed at the sight / Let me improvise a poem:…” Kang then breaks into a short verse composition, presented as a spontaneously flowing expression of the strong sentiments provoked by Suleiman’s tomb. The resulting poem highlights Suleiman’s military exploits in Hungary, juxtaposing his former glory and glittering entourage with his current, unpeopled surroundings of quiet columns in the fading light of dusk. The act of seeing is interrupted; concrete sensory input is derailed by emotional and mental associations, of the telescoping between historical knowledge and its emotional impact, its resonances with one’s own lived experience and mortality. Kang’s ode to Suleiman is couched in the rhythms and conventions of Chinese classical poetry, as well as historical references — for example, an allusion to one of China’s most famous Tang-dynasty tombs, rendering it another modest but poignant instance of *theoria* as cross-civilisational fertilisation.

‘Unmanageable’ sights such as these show how our idea of an effective ‘diplomat’ should broaden to take account of the creative and communicative potential in vulnerability and ‘unmanageability’. Such moments unsettle and disrupt the smooth flow of our mental and sensorial processes; they render oneself suddenly and temporarily more malleable, more open to leaps of thought and imagination, to the personal resonances of abstract pasts. This is a dimension of the encounter with difference that writers such as Woolf and Kang are more attuned to exploring, more so than agents of the state or those working through official channels. Towards the end of *Orlando*, after centuries of time-travelling, gender-bending international adventures, Woolf’s protagonist muses:

116 觀此則蓋世之雄，埋于七尺之棺，而今何在？為之慨然! 口占詩: …

‘Time has passed over me,’ she thought, trying to collect herself; ‘this is the oncome of middle age. How strange it is! Nothing is any longer one thing. I take up a handbag and I think of an old bumboat woman frozen in the ice. Someone lights a pink candle and I see a girl in Russian trousers. When I step out of doors, as I do now,’ here she stepped on to the pavement of Oxford Street, ‘what is it that I taste? Little herbs. I hear goat bells. I see mountains. Turkey? India? Persia?’  

Orlando, after years upon years of globetrotting and self-transformation, thus attains a sort of multiple vision, a state in which her memories of different places are dynamically and synaesthetically interconnected. She is almost effortlessly able to ‘live’ different places and cultures, to synthesise sensations in her past and present, and traverse from one time and space to another in an instant. The flow of life becomes much less ‘smooth’, but far richer. Perhaps such a state is the gift of a lifetime of theoria.

**Imagining the world**

“It is almost strange,” Woolf writes during her 1906 travels, “how the longing grows & what it desires; it will feed on names, so that the simple word Devon is better than a poem … But yet we are not patriotic; indeed it is amusing to read the newspapers & find how little interest it is possible to take in all the frizzling & bubbling that goes on still in our island. *The Times* loses its stately proportions: it is the private sheet of a small colony of islanders, whose noise is effectually shut up in their prison.” A ‘strange’ sensation indeed: increased affection and longing for one’s native land, such that a mere place name grows sumptuously evocative, yet also a sense of detachment from its ‘frizzling & bubbling’, together with an increasing realisation of its insularity, even of—or especially of—its most authoritative and vaunted


institutions. Such a sensation, in Woolf’s case, marks the growth of a capacity for a more complex notion of attachment, one that allows for both a sharpened sense of belonging to and critique of one’s home country, coupled with the capacity to situate it in a broader, more global context. In the above notes, we see Woolf beginning to turn her critical attentions towards the meaning of patriotism; an issue that she would tackle more fully, decades later, in *Three Guineas*, in a desire to outline the fundamentals of a better, fairer society. A fairer, less insular society is an ideal that Kang is similarly preoccupied with; he emphasises that, now that “the globe is completely known”, the proud ‘Middle Kingdom’, whose very name posited its position as the centre of the world, turns out to be “…just one corner of Asia, and only one-eighthieth part of the world.”

*One World*, initially written in the 1880s but continually revised and added to until the late 1910s—for example, there is a mention of the Panama Canal, which opened in 1915—also focusses its critique on the wrong-headedness of socio-political values and institutions. In fact, the first half of *One World* was published as one of two texts in the same volume of Kang’s self-edited, self-founded periodical *Compass*—the other being his Turkey travelogue! Clearly, then, while the two texts were written quite far apart in time, Kang saw them as complementary continuations of his thought and oeuvre. Both *Three Guineas* and *One World* argue for the interlinked nature of the following: the importance of empathy and compassion; the detrimental nature of competition, particularly of that between states; and the complicity of education and other societal institutions in furthering the latter while stunting the former. Ultimately, both works call for radical societal reforms, and for a kind of ethical cosmopolitanism as a necessary antidote to harmful forms of competition and insularity.

---

120 Thompson, *The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei*, 80.
For Kang, the universally shared experience of suffering is what makes us human: “the whole world is but a world of grief and misery, all the people of the whole world are but grieving and miserable people, and all the living beings of the whole world are but murdered beings … I myself am a body. Another body suffers; it has no connection with me, and yet I sympathise very minutely.” 121 To be human is to suffer; to be human is to understand what suffering means; and it is suffering that forms the basis for our capacity to empathise with those who have no relation to us, and who we have never nor will ever meet. One of the most remarkable dimensions of Kang’s cosmopolitanism is his desire to extend it to an interplanetary, even intergalactic, scale: “How about the living creatures on Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Uranus, Neptune?” he muses. “I have absolutely no connection [with them]; they are too distant and obscure to expect it. I wish to love (je n) them, [but] they are so far off I have no way to do it.” 122 Elsewhere he adds: “In the international wars now going on among the people of Mars, how many millions of li of blood have flowed, how many billions of lives have been lost, I do not know.” 123 These truly cosmopolitan ideals show Kang’s efforts to exercise the empathic imaginations to its very limits. Woolf, too, insists that “…the human figure even in a photograph suggests other and more complex emotions. It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure but are ourselves that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure. A common interest unites us; it is one world, one life.” 124 Woolf argues that that

121 ibid., 63.
122 ibid., 66.
123 ibid., 80.
124 Woolf, Three Guineas, 168.
injustices, even to complete strangers in places distant from us, are injustices to ourselves; a point predicated upon the understanding that all humans share a common humanity, a common potential to be done injustice to, and a common responsibility to resist injustice. This can be seen as Woolf’s take on that famous line from Kant, the definitive philosopher of eighteenth-century cosmopolitan thought, “a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere.” This is particularly unusual given the often fervently nationalistic climates in which they were each situated. The dragomanate of the British embassy in Constantinople, for example, “changed in three significant respects between 1810 and 1914, all for the worse. First, it gradually lost most of its local expertise. This was largely a result of the nationalist temper of the nineteenth century and its distrust, not to say contempt, for persons of cosmopolitan character.”

Neither Kang nor Woolf is content to stop at the observation that the world is replete with suffering and injustice. As they lament the ubiquity of conflict and violence, they are also keen to expose their systemic and socio-political causes. The whole cause, Kang writes, “of this variety of human suffering is to be found in the existence of the ‘boundary’ of sovereign states,” for with “states having been established, patriotisms are born. Everyone looks to the


126 A dragoman, in the context of Constantinople, was an interpreter and guide between Turkish and European embassies and other diplomatic institutions. In some cases, dragomen could attain positions of significant power and influence.


128 Thompson, The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei, 82.
advantage of his own state, and aggresses against other states".¹²⁹ Moreover, “[Since] there is no limit to the [possible] size of a state, then there is also no limit to the [feasibility] of uniting coexistent states”, leading to a neverending cycle of war. For Woolf, too, the manmade disaster of war is a supreme evil which society has failed to mobilise against: “The question we put to you …” she writes with feeling: “…how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilised human beings; human beings, that is, who wish to prevent war?”¹³⁰ In addition, both see education is part of the problem rather than the solution:

For do they [Cambridge undergraduates who vandalised the gates of women’s only Newnham College] not prove that education, the finest education in the world,” asks Woolf, “does not teach people to hate force, but to use it? Do they not prove that education, far from teaching the educated generosity and magnanimity, makes them on the contrary so anxious to keep their possessions … that they will use not force but much subtler methods than force when they are asked to share them? And are not force and possessiveness very closely connected with war? Of what use then is a university education in influencing people to prevent war?²¹³¹

Similarly, Kang observes that the nation-state system inevitably leads to education that is centred more around national interests rather than ‘the greater good’: “…so long as individual states coexist and the boundaries between states have not been abolished, then in the education [of its youth] every state will continue to use its own national language so as to inculcate patriotism as the foundation of the national existence.”¹³² The interests of the state are glorified above all else, leading to a kind of ‘hypnotism’, Woolf terms it, carried out by the

¹²⁹ ibid., 80.

¹³⁰ Woolf, Three Guineas, 91.

¹³¹ Woolf, Three Guineas, 38.

¹³² ibid., 93.
state on its citizens, a hypnotism of “medals, symbols, orders and even, it would seem, of
decorated ink-pots...”\textsuperscript{133}

It is these lines of inquiry that lead Kang and Woolf to both fret over ‘competition’ — a
particularly suggestive and contested notion in the early twentieth-century, with the founding
of the British Eugenics Education Society in 1907 and many others across Europe, and Yan Fu’s
translations of Herbert Spencer, T.H. Huxley and others making waves amongst Chinese
intellectuals in roughly the same time period. One of the central points Woolf tries to convey
in \textit{Three Guineas} is her concern over the way in which competition in the professional sphere
might have pernicious effects on individuals, particularly women, as they to seek to become
successful in society’s “procession of men” (which she also describes as a ‘caravanserai’ —
another delicate nod to the stock of images that Woolf’s trip to Constantinople provided her
with): “And the facts which we have just extracted from biography seem to prove that the
professions have a certain undeniable effect upon the professors. They make the people who
practise them possessive, jealous of any infringement of their rights, and highly combative if
anyone dares dispute them.”\textsuperscript{134} Kang, similarly to Kant’s notion of the ‘unsocial sociability’ of
human beings — “that is, their tendency to come together in society, coupled, however, with a
continual resistance which constantly threatens to break this society up”\textsuperscript{135} — was certain that
it was futile to stop humans from competing with one another. The key issue, then, becomes

\textsuperscript{133} Woolf, \textit{Three Guineas}, 135.

\textsuperscript{134} Woolf, \textit{Three Guineas}, 81.

\textsuperscript{135} Wallace and Held, “Editors’ Introduction,” 19.
the channelling of these competitive urges in constructive, rather than destructive, ways. In Kang’s ‘One World’ utopia, nation-states, and indeed all boundaries, along with private property, are eradicated. Following that, “There will be no military, economic, or social competition; but men will compete to produce the best material goods, to invent new methods, to expand knowledge, and to manifest their jen. Through this co-operative kind of competition the world will not fear a stagnation of civilisation or a retrogression into the disorderly stage, but will continue to progress.”\footnote{Thompson, \textit{The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei}, 50.} This, too, is in agreement with Kant’s discussion of the necessity of a cosmopolitan approach to world government: “But as long as states apply all their resources to their vain and violent chemes of expansion, thus incessantly obstructing the slow and laborious efforts of their citizens to cultivate their minds, and even deprive them of all support in these efforts, no progress in this direction can be expected.”\footnote{Wallace and Held, “Editors' Introduction,” 23.} Both Woolf and Kang, then, single out the following question as a crucial and urgent one: How should states, and indeed, smaller units of society, create healthy environments for constructive, rather than destructive, competition?

In relation to this, Kang and Woolf can both be seen as urging a reconfiguration of our notions of ‘loyalty’. To whom or what do we \textit{think} we owe ‘loyalty’, and to whom or what \textit{should} we owe our ‘loyalty’? If Kang wants us to be physically free of nation-states, Woolf wants us to be at least ethically independent of them, to attain a state of “freedom from unreal loyalties”. “By freedom of unreal loyalties,” she urges her reader, “is meant that you must rid yourself of pride of nationality in the first place; also of religious pride, college pride, school pride, family

\footnote{Thompson, \textit{The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei}, 50.}

\footnote{Wallace and Held, “Editors' Introduction,” 23.}
pride, sex pride and those unreal loyalties that spring up from them.”¹³⁸ These kinds of false
prides and loyalties, Woolf implies, cause us to turn inwards rather than look outwards; they
courage self-satisfaction rather than self-reflection; and they impose their own prerogatives
upon the freedom and identity of the individual — in this case, in particular, upon the
hypothetical female reader that Woolf envisions. As she adds to her female reader, with some
glee, “And so long as the Church of England refuses our services—long may she exclude us!—
and the ancient schools and colleges refuse to admit us to a share of their endowments and
privileges we shall be immune without any trouble on our part from the particular loyalties and
fealties which such endowments and privileges engender.”¹³⁹ Kang is of a similar mindset, for
his conceived ‘World of Great Unity’ would, too, be a place free of ‘unreal’ loyalties, with the
notable/noteworthy? abolition of last names, for example: “If we have family names then we
have relatives; and if we have relatives then we have selfishness,” he explains, “which is the
greatest obstruction to our principle of making the world public.”¹⁴⁰

While Woolf sharply critiques society’s treatment of women and the imposition of a
particularly onerous share of ‘unreal loyalties’ upon them, Kang’s commentary on the same issue
in One World is, if anything, even more damning, and his proposed championing of their rights
even more radical. He details at length the physical, social, and intellectual injustices against
women:

… [men] have callously and unscrupulously repressed them, restrained them, deceived
them, shut them up, imprisoned them, bound them, caused them to be unable to be
independent, to be unable to hold public office, to be unable to be officials, to be unable

¹³⁸ Woolf, Three Guineas, 97.
¹³⁹ ibid., 99.
¹⁴⁰ Thompson, The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei, 194.
to be citizens, to be unable to enjoy [participation in] public meetings; still worse, [men have caused them] to be unable to study, to be unable to hold discussions, to be unable to advance their names, to be unable to have free social intercourse, to be unable to enjoy entertainments, to be unable to go out sightseeing, to be unable to leave the house; still worse, [men have] carved (sic) and bound their waists, veiled their faces, compressed their feet, tattooed their bodies, universally oppressing the guiltless, universally punishing the innocent. These are worse than the worst immoralities. And yet throughout the world, past and present, for thousands of years, those whom we call Good men, Righteous men, have been accustomed to the sight of [such things], have sat and looked and considered them to be matters of course, have not demanded justice for them, have not helped them. This is the most appalling, unjust, and unequal thing, the most inexplicable theory under heaven. 141

Kang goes on to state that “women are equal with men in their ability to handle the occupations of agriculture, industry, business, and commerce … in their ability to study for official positions”, 142 rendering these injustices all the more grievous. In addition, Kang notes how laborious and dangerous the process of pregnancy and childbirth can be. In his vision of a utopian society, special living quarters that are “pleasant, clean, healthful, with due regard to weather factors and aesthetic factors” are created to house pregnant women, with “special delivery rooms with music and pleasant conditions”, 143 along with an all-female staff, including the physicians. 144 Moreover, Kang, at first noting that it would ‘naturally’ be forbidden for women to have intercourse during their stay at the institution, “fearing that it may be difficult for human nature to refuse to permit them to be with men”, modifies it with the potential solution that “it may be that they will have pleasure only by substituting a mechanical man.” 145 It is worth mentioning here that ‘marriage’ as an institution is also

141 ibid., 149-50.
142 ibid., 150.
143 ibid., 193.
144 ibid., 191.
145 ibid., 194.
abolished in Kang’s utopia, with relationships instead being ratified via short-term renewable contracts; and moreover, that no moral ban is placed on the practice of homosexuality, “since, judged by its criterion of happiness or suffering, no harm is done to others by the practice, and there will always be those who are happier in it than in the normal relationship.” If we remember that Kang began, and wrote the bulk of, this text in the 1880s, these are truly remarkable suggestions for their time that seek to take into account a much fuller spectrum of sexual desires and needs across society.

Another crucial consequence of a world free of ‘unreal loyalties’ is the necessary re-reading of ‘achievement’ and of ‘greatness’. Recalling Pamuk’s comment regarding the ‘Fall’ vs. ‘Conquest’ of Istanbul, what happens when one becomes unmoored from a particular national standpoint in one’s assessment of victory vs tragedy, triumph vs outrage? Kang lambasts the criteria for evaluating what is worthy of adulation and remembrance:

[They] consider fighting for territory and killing other people to be an important duty,” he writes; “[they] consider destroying other states and butchering their people to be a great accomplishment. [They] engrave [these deeds] on tripods, carve [such exploits] on stone tablets, cast statues and write histories [of their victories]. [They] are called great by later generations throughout the world because they have [thus] conferred upon themselves posthumous titles of ‘brilliant’. It is not realised that they are bloody butchers and robbers of the people. 147

Woolf’s Orlando, sitting under the night sky with a group of gipsies on the outskirts of Istanbul, is also suddenly made to see what her ancestors have prized for generations from a rather different perspective: “Looked at from the gipsy point of view, a Duke, Orlando understood,

146 ibid., 39.
147 ibid., 82.
was nothing but a profiteer or robber who snatched land and money from people who rated these things of little worth, and could think of nothing better to do than to build three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms when one was enough, and none was even better than one. She could not deny that her ancestors had accumulated field after field; house after house; honour after honour; yet had none of them been saints or heroes, or great benefactors of the human race.”

Age-old ideas of privilege and honour are suddenly turned on their head. Rather than taking them for granted, Orlando must justify them in light of other alternatives.

This alternative, fresh perspective on one’s core values and ideals is intimately associated with the experience of encountering ‘foreignness’, whether of one’s own or another’s. A voracious reader and traveller, Kang was unequivocal about the need to draw upon as wide a range of cultural sources as possible as one went about re-conceiving a better version of the world: “The values and beauties of the dwellings, clothing, food, boats, vehicles, utensils, government, education, arts, and music of the ten thousand countries of the world I have daily received and utilised.”

Here we see Kang rather dramatically seeking to establish his own credentials as someone whose vision of the world is worth taking seriously. We also see, however, that Kang’s exposure to a wide range of norms and values does allow him to examine the most fundamental values of Chinese culture, in a manner that is aesthetically and ethically appreciate of them, yet simultaneously critical with regards to its broader social effects, particularly in comparison with other alternatives. In his assessment of ancestral worship, for example, to this day an integral part of Chinese culture: “The Chinese system, with its

---

148 Orlando: A Biography, 114.

149 Thompson, The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei, 66.
maintaining of memory and respect for the ancestors, is very beautiful. Nations which do not do this forget their roots. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the other nations do not carry on this beautiful system, Europe and America are not only civilised and strong, but actually surpass China. They spend huge sums of money on public institutions for the benefit of the whole nation, and not just the individual clan. If we weigh the respective advantages of either system we must choose in favour of the one which gives the greatest advantages; although the Chinese system is good, the Western system is better, all things considered.”

As Ban Wang observes, Kang Youwei conceived of learning as a means that “allows us to have intimate access to others and fosters sympathy and shared appreciation of pluralistic cultural forms.”

“Because he looks at the several tens of nations of the earth,” Kang writes, “he thus is intimate with the people of the whole earth. Being able to think profoundly and look to the future, he thus is intimate with the people of the countless generations to come.”

By actively seeking knowledge, understanding and experience of as many other cultures and nations as possible—from their cuisine and architecture to their customs and legal systems, and all manner of other things which he writes about so interestedly in Constantinople, for example—Kang creates a sense of ethical, aesthetic, and historical connectedness with the world at large. In such a vision, our engagement with the world is active and multi-dimensional, through which we both practise as well as expand our humanity — and in particular our capacities for imaginative empathy, social collaboration and ethical reasoning. Kang’s gesture

---

150 ibid., 172.

151 Wang, Aesthetic Humanity and the Great World Community.

152 ibid., 67-8.
to the ‘countless generations to come’ reveals a deeply long-term, holistic vision of the world, both back into the past and far into the future, that more traditionally defined, nation-state-focussed diplomacy is often incompatible with, due to its more immediate pressures and more narrowly defined aims and interests. It is this sort of longer-term outlook that Kang and Woolf, with their literary explorations, can contribute through their alternative practices of diplomacy. It is no coincidence that Woolf’s Orlando, who offers us such an evocative ‘diplomatic’ figure in his/her fluidity of identity, shuttling between value systems, cultures, and genders, is given a fantastically broadened life-span of several centuries, corresponding to a vision of global history and transformation outlasting any single monarch, regime, or government.

As we have discussed, the imagination is an essential force for both Woolf and Kang in creating an ethical, aesthetic, and historically reflective global community; and the resources for one’s imagination should be manifold — where one has travelled, what one has read, and so forth. But if so, the question then becomes: how do we apply our imaginations, this precious but potentially distorting force, in a creative but also sufficiently critical and rigorous manner? In their writings on Istanbul and their blueprints for a better society, both Woolf and Kang have moments where we see their imagination falling short in some way, or where unfortunate conclusions are drawn due to ill-informed or distorting preconceptions, ranging from the amusingly ridiculous to the gravely concerning. Kang, for example, observes authoritatively that recent decades of political turmoil have led Turkish men to develop gloomier countenances and more deeply furrowed brows; and that generations of Turks praying in mosques without shoes on has led them to possess remarkably oversized feet. Much graver, however, are the instances of Kang’s blatant racism; in One World, he makes a significant number of remarks
regarding the ‘inferiority’ and ‘unattractiveness’ of those who are black-skinned; and when he sees African eunuchs working at the palace in Constantinople, even as he launches into a heartfelt criticism of the eunuch system, he praises the Turks for at least not castrating their ‘own’ kind, unlike the Chinese. In this case, Kang’s sources of knowledge of all the ‘ten thousand nations’ of the world nevertheless fall short of allowing him to live up to his own ideals of equality and cosmopolitanism; his empathetic imagination falters and shows the very real limitations in this regard of his ethical and aesthetic sensibilities, keeping him from truly extending his ideals to include every fellow human being. Woolf, meanwhile, writes during her time in Constantinople that “Indeed the only remark I can make with any confidence is that no Christian, or even European, can hope to understand the Turkish point of view…”,¹⁵³ that “You must begin at the beginning & confess that the Turk himself is the riddle; a tough, labyrinthine riddle, by which wise heads – the Times newspaper even – are still constantly confounded”,¹⁵⁴ and even more strikingly: “But when we come to consider the question of the West & the East - then indeed - we lay down the pen, and write no more.”¹⁵⁵ There is a sense here of a weariness of the clichéd East-West question, as well as a caution to do with venturing into territory she feels unequipped to; but there is also a passivity and unwillingness to attempt to tackle the complexity of what she encounters. The statements above are remarkable in comparison with Orlando, written two decades after, in which Constantinople features prominently as a site that allows for self-transformation, and in which ideas and representations of the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ are playfully and transgressively present throughout. Woolf’s ability


¹⁵⁴ ibid., 357.

¹⁵⁵ ibid., 353.
to conceive of ‘Turkishness’ as not just a ‘riddle’ (a lazier route for the imagination to fall back on), and as more than just impenetrable ‘difference’ shut off to her forever by dint of geographical birthplace, is far from flawless in *Orlando*; but, much more so than in her travel diary, we see a more sustained, creative and empathetic effort to engage and imagine via the medium of fiction, leading in turn to a less rigid, more transgressive idea of ‘Englishness’.

In this process lies the core worth of productive diplomacy, Constantinou emphasises; when “not only the Other but also the Self become strange, sites to be known or known anew”, allowing one to “creatively deal with alterity, overcoming the diplomatic fixation of clear and unambiguous identity … ”156 And this is why, too, I think it is meaningful to bring two such different, yet in some ways unexpectedly kindred, voices together. In the alternating cacophony and harmony of Kang and Woolf’s writing, we are offered clearer glimpses of the necessary relationship between an informed exercise of the imagination and reflection upon self and other; as well as the potential for an alternative kind of diplomacy that is concerned more with identity transformation and long-term coexistence in innovative ways, that is less delimited by the relatively narrower perspectives and timelines of the nation-state, and that engages ethical, aesthetic, social and historical dimensions, that demands both sense and sensibility of its participants. If Hussein Banai identifies the troubling and persistent phenomenon of “estranged publics who continue to insist on the absolute or universal validity of their own grand narratives”,157 then it is through such ‘diplomats’, such literary practitioners

---

156 Constantinou and Derian, *Sustainable Diplomacies*, 68.

157 ibid., 17.
of theoria, who engage, critique and cross-fertilise such narratives with one another, that we are able to truly “enact pluralism, to continually articulate – not just mediate – reasons for the importance of maintaining a logic of cohabitation and critical dialogue”. The work of Virginia Woolf and Kang Youwei show us their potential to illuminate and expand the scope of our ethical, aesthetic and historical imaginations. Yet their project, in terms of the work of theoria, is an incomplete and imperfect one. Their work excels, not at providing us with solutions, but at showing us the kinds of questions that might be asked, and the kinds of endeavours our imaginations might strive to undertake. Their work offers us creative material and helpful vantage points from which to continue grappling with that perpetual problem of the modern human being, that ‘problem’ which is an intrinsic part of what makes us modern and makes us human — how to imagine those different from ourselves.

---

158 ibid., 18.
II.

THE MONA LISA IN SHANGHAI:

NAZIM HİKMET’S IMAGINATIVE DIPLOMACY 159

Imaginative diplomacy

In August 1911, the Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre. The theft, accomplished by a lone handyman who smuggled the painting out of the museum under a smock, seemed like a dubious candidate to become the most notorious art heist in modern history. The ensuing public furore, however, stoked by the Parisian popular press, construed it as the tragic loss of a priceless national treasure (never mind the fact that Leonardo da Vinci was Italian) and made the painting’s disappearance a nation-wide obsession.160 As Donald Sassoon explores in Mona Lisa: The History of the World’s Most Famous Painting, a potent mix of factors contributed to creating this sensation: from the institutional significance of the Louvre, established in 1792 during the French Revolution with the mission that “the state should defend the nation’s artistic patrimony”;161 to the influence of popular, profit-driven print media in shaping public opinion — Le Petit Parisien, an avid disseminator of Mona Lisa-related headlines, boasted some 1.4 million daily readers in 1914;162 to the aura and mystery surrounding the painting and its famous creator,


161 ibid., 45.

162 ibid., 176.
regularly renewed by prominent artists and writers such as Théophile Gautier, who presented the Mona Lisa as the archetypal unattainable, desirable *femme fatale*.\(^{163}\)

Even given the commotion over its disappearance, the pomp and circumstance lavished upon the occasion of the *Mona Lisa*’s recovery, two years later, was remarkable:

\[\text{[The] Mona Lisa stayed in Florence until 19 December 1913. The following day - under armed guard - she travelled to Rome to be officially handed back to the French authorities…. At each stop special agents in civilian clothes surrounded the train. In Rome she was welcomed at the station by functionaries who took her to the Ministry of Education. Then the king, Victor Emmanuel III, and a long line of deputies, senators and civil servants visited her. At a private ceremony the Italian Foreign Minister handed her back to the French Ambassador. The Director of the Louvre was present to check the authenticity of the painting, the famous *craquelures*. Speeches were made about the friendship between the two countries (though they were in rival power blocs competing for European supremacy). She was then taken to the French Embassy in the Piazza Farnese.}\(^{164}\)

The painting’s return had effectively become a diplomatic event, involving state representatives along with the requisite ritual and rhetoric. The intensification of significance attributed to the *Mona Lisa* by the press and general public was instrumental in elevating the painting to a matter of international, diplomatic concern; in turn, the *Mona Lisa* became a means through which the Italian and French heads-of-state could engage in a form of mutually beneficial public diplomacy, presenting themselves as possessing an amicable relationship, as well as the rightful and competent custodians of precious cultural heritage. This formal, public gesture also served to resolve any controversy over the issue of the painting’s rightful ownership, raised by the fact

\(^{163}\) ibid., 115.

\(^{164}\) ibid., 188.
that the thief, Vincenzo Peruggia, claimed he had stolen the painting in order to restore Da Vinci’s masterpiece to its ‘homeland’.\textsuperscript{165}

Though Peruggia’s claimed patriotic motives did not help to keep him out of prison, the narrative he presented was admired by the Italian writer Gabriele D’Annunzio:

He [Peruggia] who dreamed of honour and gratitude; he, the avenger of Napoleonic thefts. He who kept Leonardo’s \textit{Gioconda} in Paris for two years, deceiving the French police, and then took her across the border back to Florence. Do you understand? Back to Florence where she was born, near the Palazzo Vecchio, by the sounds of the bells of Giotto’s campanile, able to see the cypresses of San Miniato . . . Only a poet, a great poet, could dream such a dream.\textsuperscript{166}

If imagining the ‘liberation’ of the \textit{Mona Lisa} and her return to Florence was, for d’Annunzio, undoubtedly the work of a poetic mind, then Turkish writer Nazım Hikmet’s 1929 poem, \textit{Gioconda and Si-Ya-U (Jokond ile Si-Ya-U)}, offers us a labour of the imagination that is all the more audacious.

Written upon Nazim’s return to Turkey after seven formative years in the Soviet Union, \textit{Gioconda and Si-Ya-U} is a giddy experience of a poem: action-packed, full of stylistic innovation and vivid imagery, shifting dynamically across cities and continents, between narratorial perspectives and tones, ranging from Paris to Shanghai via monoplane and ship, now brashly irreverent, now lyrically sing-song. The poem opens with bravado; the poet claims to have information about the ‘real’ \textit{Mona Lisa}, or Gioconda,\textsuperscript{167} who has mysteriously disappeared from

\textsuperscript{165} ibid., 186.

\textsuperscript{166} ibid., 187.

\textsuperscript{167} Throughout this chapter, ‘Mona Lisa’ will refer to Leonardo da Vinci’s ‘actual’ painting, and ‘Gioconda’ to Nazım Hikmet’s fictional entity.
the Louvre: “I, Nazım Hikmet, / authority / on this matter, / thumping my nose at friend and foe / five times a day, / undaunted, claim / I can prove it; / if I can’t / I’ll be ruined and banished / forever from the realm of poesy.”[168] The reader is then provided with excerpts from Gioconda’s diary which convey her stifling boredom: “to visit / a museum is fine, / to be a museum piece is terrible!”[169] Gioconda is finally lifted out of her dreary state when she becomes infatuated with a Chinese visitor, Si-Ya-U; he is, however, soon deported for protesting at the Chinese embassy. In the following sections, taken from ‘the author’s notebook’, the poet helps Gioconda to escape the Louvre, flying her via monoplane until they reach the Indian Ocean, whereupon the poet drops her on the deck of a British ship that takes her to Shanghai. Once there, Gioconda swiftly tracks down her lover Si-Ya-U — alas, only in time to see him executed (“And thus on a death day / Gioconda of Florence lost in Shanghai / her smile more famous than Florence”).[170] In a frenzied desire for revenge, Gioconda strangles a British officer, is promptly tried in a French military court, and sentenced to be set on fire, after which the poem comes to a close, with Gioconda laughing as she burns.

Gioconda and Si-Ya-U thus re-molds the Louvre from a hallowed space of high culture, filled with static emblems of European glory, to a dynamic space of political contestation and confrontation — but also of humour and playfulness, as can be seen in Gioconda’s ’20 March’ entry: ‘Last night / a window / was left open. / The naked Flemish goddesses caught cold. / All


[169] ibid., 8.

[170] ibid., 27.
day / today, / turning their bare / mountain-like pink behinds to the public, / they coughed and sneezed . . .") Nazım also drastically re-focuses and re-frames the conversation surrounding Da Vinci’s painting: the Mona Lisa is no longer primarily a locus for issues of national artistic patrimony and institutional ownership; no longer confined or defined by museum directors and heads of state; no longer the passive object of desire and fantasy for male artists and intellectuals; and most crucially, no longer an emblem for the charisma of European and bourgeois culture — instead, she highlights the charisma of the Far East.

Whilst the ‘real’ Mona Lisa captured the imagination of a nation and became the locus of high-profile diplomatic gestures, Nazım engages in an altogether different, more subversive kind of diplomatic work; Gioconda and Si-Ya-U constitutes a diplomatic intervention into nationalist and imperialist official narratives founded on constructions of exclusivity or superiority. The work of Hussein Banai, in particular his discussion of diplomatic imaginations and their role in mediating estrangement, provides a foundation for approaching Nazım’s poem through this prism. As discussed in the previous chapter, if we limit the purview of diplomacy to include only official state actors, we are left with a deeply impoverished picture of diplomacy — a fundamental dimension of human practice that should encompass the rich and complex negotiations, both official and non-official, between various kinds of transnational ‘difference’. This is largely due to the fact that “interstate or sovereign diplomacy … inevitably must begin from the position of essentialism, of exclusion,¹⁷² and as such, “[s]tate-sanctioned diplomacy …

¹⁷¹ ibid., 10.

is in large measure the practice of mediating state-sanctioned histories.”

For Banai, the key to mitigating the exclusionary basis of state-level diplomacy is an awareness of, and engagement with, ‘public imagination’ — “a broad term for inherited historical meanings that condition the political agency and hence culture of concerned individuals, groups and / or nations in world society”; or, more simply, “imagination with public consequences”. Public imagination constitutes the “very threads out of which the fabric of identity and difference, of contestation and reconciliation is woven together”. With reference to Benedict Anderson’s work on nationalism, Banai gives a brief but emphatic nod to the impact of literature, noting that “the novelistic and literary shaping of public imagination” is “an inescapable dimension of how citizens understand their identities and their debates”; and that works of art and literature “incarnate and articulate both the destructive and productive achievements of political communities in international society, especially sovereign nation-states.” He suggests, finally, that diplomacy “can and must … attempt to transform those aspects of public imagination that engender difference and lead to exclusion” by “detrimentalising and decentring the discourses and disciplines that delimit and confine opposing views and imaginations.”

Through his re-working of the Mona Lisa, Nazım Hikmet, I argue, carries out precisely this kind of diplomatic work that Banai describes, but takes it even further: his poem mediates

---

173 ibid., 460.

174 ibid., 461.

175 ibid., 462.

176 ibid., 462.

177 ibid., 471.
and draws unexpected connections between different, or ‘alien’, publics, disrupts particular kinds of discursive and disciplinary expectations, deterritorialises and decentres Paris, and moreover — precisely because Hikmet is a poet rather than an official state representative — his poem is able to not only challenge state-sanctioned, official histories, but provides us with an alternative, charismatic narrative, crafted with an awareness of the stakes and contours of public imagination, and imbued with the power of creative imagery and narrative. *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U*, from the conditions of its production to the specificities of its stanzas, is both an artifact of late 1920s modernist Turkish poetry as well as of an imaginative approach to diplomacy.

**Charismatic narratives**

It is clear from his work that for Nazım, the foreign was a charismatic force — deeply unfamiliar, yet potentially transformative. The modern use of the term ‘charisma’ was popularised by the German sociologist Max Weber, who lifted the word out of its obscure origins as an ancient Christian concept and re-defined it within the context of the twentieth century as an irrational, intangible quality that was capable of challenging the ‘iron cage’ of modern bureaucracy and rationalisation.¹⁷⁸ Weber tied the concept to that of leadership and authority — for him, a ‘charismatic’ leader is revolutionary in that s/he:

sweeps aside existing authority and tradition: charismatic authority ‘repudiates the past’. The charismatic leader installs no hierarchy or system of rules; charismatic leadership is opposed to bureaucracy and all rational forms of domination: it is ‘specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules … charisma is the great revolutionary force.’¹⁷⁹

---


¹⁷⁹ ibid., 120.
With some modifications, the Weberian notion of ‘charisma’ can be brought into dialogue with Nazım Hikmet and the particular kind of diplomatic work that his poetry engages in. If we untie authority from Weber’s conception, but leave in its fundamental opposition to hierarchy, rules, bureaucracy, domination, and a willingness to repudiate the past, then we may begin to think about how ‘charisma’ is relevant to Nazım’s work and the task of diplomacy in particular; I suggest here that charisma can be defined as a capacity to capture the imagination. It is in this sense, then, that I refer to Gioconda and Si-Ya-U as a charismatic narrative — one that offers, in Weber’s terms, a “countervailing force to rationalisation”\(^\text{180}\), as well as, through the sheer “power and ingenuity of its discourse”, the potential to “disarm and eschew exclusivist yearnings for domination and violent discord”.\(^\text{181}\) By captivating the imagination, Nazım’s poem is able to truly challenge readers’ pre-existing notions of identification and relevance, to provide alternative, creative visions of how alien publics might relate to one another. Perhaps it is only to be expected, then, that Nazım Hikmet chose as the star of his poem the single most charismatic painting in history.

**Re-worlding the *Mona Lisa***

At the time of writing *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U*, Nazım Hikmet had never visited France, much less seen the *Mona Lisa* in person (and would not do so until 1958). His impressions of the city and the museum were refracted through, among others, one crucial source: Emi Siao (蕭三 1896-1983), a Chinese Communist and a childhood friend (and later biographer) of Mao

\(^{180}\) ibid., 116.

Zedong. Nazım and Siao met in the late 1920s when they were both enrolled at the Comintern-run, Moscow-based Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV), an institution aimed at training communist cadres in developing or colonised nations, (and whose alumni include Deng Xiaoping and Ho Chi Minh). When Nazım first met Emi Siao, the latter’s smart, dandified appearance made a deep impression, such that Siao is described vividly in a later autobiographical work of the poet’s “complete with satin trousers, patent-leather shoes, a tie and a trilby hat”. Gioconda writes thus of her first impression of Si-Ya-U:

Today I saw a Chinese:  
he was nothing like those Chinese with their topknots.

This line of the poem, then, is a wink at Chinese visual stereotypes, and how this encounter has already begun to unsettle them. It was Siao who provided the impetus for Nazım’s poem (and also for its violent ending), which opens with the memorable dedication: ‘To the memory of my friend SI-YA-U, whose head was cut off in Shanghai’. Hikmet had composed the poem in Siao’s memory, upon being misinformed of his friend’s assassination in a Communist crackdown in China (Nazım would only learn that Siao was in fact alive when the two crossed paths again at the 1951 World Peace Congress in Vienna!).

Prior to his time in Moscow, Siao spent several years in Paris as part of a government-organised work-study programme. In Remembering No. 17 Rue Godefroy (記巴黎戈德弗魯瓦街十

---


183 Hikmet, Poems of Nazım Hikmet, 10.

184 Göksu and Timms, Romantic Communist: the Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet, 266.
Siao recalls that the Chinese government was unable to find employment for a significant number of the students in the programme, nor did they provide alternative means of financial assistance, leaving many of the students in dire straits; this led five hundred or so students to gather in public protest in February 1920, demanding that the Chinese ambassador officially recognise their ‘Right to Survive’ (生存權) and their ‘Right to Study’ (求學權). The protest ended in chaos when French policemen surrounded the students and began to violently disperse them. According to Siao, this event was a turning point in helping student leaders such as Zhou Enlai (later Premier of China under Chairman Mao) to mobilise support for further student campaigns. Months later, at a student protest in Lyons which drew the participation of Chinese students from all over France, the Chinese government and French police co-operated on an operation that successfully coerced the protesters onto a China-bound ship, effectively deporting these students for being political ‘extremists’. Having remained in Paris, Siao escaped deportation. In the wake of these events, he and many of his increasingly disaffected fellow students became interested in the ideologies of Marxism and Communism, resulting in Siao eventually joining the Party in 1922, and later eagerly accepting the chance to enroll in the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, where he arrived in the spring of 1923.

---

185 San Xiao, Zhengui De Jinian, (Tianjin: Tianjin People’s Press, 1983), 128.
186 ibid., 129.
187 ibid., 130.
188 ibid., 134.
Reading these reminiscences alongside *La Gioconda* and *Si-Ya-U* makes it clear that Siao must have recounted stories of these experiences in Paris to his Turkish schoolmate, with traces of them clearly identifiable in the fabric of Hikmet’s poem. After Gioconda has developed her infatuation with the Chinese visitor, for example, we find the following lines in her diary:

He works as a weaver days
and studies nights.
Now it’s a long time since the night
came on like a pack of black-shirted Fascists.
The cry of a man out of work
who jumped into the Seine
rose from the dark water.\(^{189}\)

In a way that further echoes Siao’s recounted Paris experiences, we see Gioconda’s political consciousness awaken and intensify throughout the poem. At the start of the poem, she is simply fed up with the museum and her daily routine within it: “In this palace that imprisons the past / I am placed under such a heavy sentence / that as the paint on my face cracks out of boredom / I’m forced to keep grinning without letting up.”\(^{190}\) It is Si-Ya-U who lends her vague discontent more specific political form, as shown from the entry dated ’21 April’, the entirety of which follows:

Today my Chinese looked me straight in the eye
and asked:
“Those who crush our rice fields
with the caterpillar treads of their tanks
and who swagger through our cities
like emperors of hell,
are they of YOUR race,
the race of him who CREATED you?”

\(^{189}\) Hikmet, *Poems of Nazım Hikmet*, 11.

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 8.
I almost raised my hand
and cried “No!”\textsuperscript{191}

Faced with these accusing inquiries from her beloved, Gioconda is compelled to recognise, and
dissociate herself from, the legacies and activities of Western imperialism and colonialism. Later
on, Gioconda announces the deportation of Si-Ya-U in the following remarkable passage:

Sculptors of Greece,
painters of Seljuk china,
weavers of fiery rugs in Persia,
chanTERS of Happy to dromedaries in deserts,
dancer whose body undulates like a breeze,
craftsman who cuts thirty-six facets from a one-carat stone,
and YOU
who have five talents on your five fingers,
master MICHELANGELO!
Call out and announce to both friend and foe:
because he made too much noise in Paris,
because he smashed in the window
of the Mandarin ambassador,
Gioconda’s lover
has been thrown out
of France … \textsuperscript{192}

Gioconda highlights the glittering diversity of her audience to subversive effect — not to
showcase the splendour of France’s national art collection, but to mobilise the artworks and
artists of the Louvre into a cosmopolitan network of potential activists for spreading the word
regarding Si-Ya-U’s treatment at the hands of the French government. She calls for participation
from, not the admiration of, the breathtaking range of civilisations and artistic mediums hitherto
passively displayed.

\textsuperscript{191} ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{192} ibid., 15.
The passage also constitutes a clarion call for the intertwinement of the artistic and the political on an international scale — a perspective honed by the remarkably cosmopolitan environment which Nazım found himself part of in Moscow. The student body of KUTV provided Nazım with the opportunity to befriend politically passionate individuals from across Asia. Besides Emi Siao, there was Zafer Hasan, an England-educated Muslim involved in Indian anti-colonial movements, and Banerjee, a revolutionary with an interest in both Indian mysticism and Communism; together, they would inspire Nazım’s 1932 anti-colonial work *Why Did Banerjee Kill Himself? (Benerci Kendini Niçin Öldürdü?)*. In addition, much of the communication between Nazım and his friends and colleagues would rarely have taken place in a shared native language; Emi Siao and Nazım, for example, relied on French to communicate. Daily life for Nazım in 1920s Moscow, then, was a constant series of experiences and encounters with difference, aspects of which are fascinatingly transmuted into the fabric of *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U*, a text structured, after all, around the intensity of a foreign encounter between an Italian woman and a Chinese man, and transmitted in Turkish.

Besides political consciousness, for example, Nazım makes it clear that Gioconda also undergoes a fundamental shift in the way in which she aesthetically perceives, and desires, the world. For starters, she wishes her world-renowned features and backdrop were Chinese rather than Italian:

O that Leonardo da Vinci’s brush
had conceived me
under the gilded sun of China!
That the painted mountain behind me
had been a sugar-loaf Chinese mountain,

---

that the pink-white colour of my long face could fade,
that my eyes were almond-shaped!\textsuperscript{194}

And when Gioconda is afforded a panoramic, bird’s-eye view afforded from atop the poet’s monoplane, she marvels in her diary that:

\begin{quote}
Below us the earth looks
\begin{center}
like a Jaffa orange
\end{center}
turning gold in the sun...
By what magic have I
climbed off the ground
hundreds of minarets high,
and yet to gaze down at the earth
my mouth still waters. . \textsuperscript{195}
\end{quote}

The fact that Gioconda now compares the globe to a Middle Eastern variety of orange, and conceives of height in terms of minarets, reflects a profound expansion of aesthetic vocabulary, an indicator of her fruitful encounter and friendship with the Turkish poet-pilot responsible for whisking her out of the Louvre. The boldness of Nazım’s diplomatic work lies in moments like these, in which Gioconda’s chosen comparative terms—a golden Jaffa orange, a lofty minaret—serve to decentre the primacy of metropolitan Europe in setting the grounds for comparison. Another such moment is when Gioconda goes so far as to experience a kind of partial amnesia:

\begin{quote}
I’ve begun to forget
the names of those fat Renaissance masters.
I want to see
\begin{center}
the black bird-and-flower
\end{center}
\begin{center}
that slant-eyed Chinese painters
\end{center}
drip
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{194} Hikmet, \textit{Poems of Nazım Hikmet}, 17.
\textsuperscript{195} ibid., 20.
from their long thin bamboo brushes.\textsuperscript{196}

Gioconda’s mnemonic relinquishing of names embodies the radical suggestion that being open to transformation in encounters with cultural difference requires a kind of ‘forgetting’; this ‘forgetting’ provides the conditions for shedding pre-existing perspectives and for re-learning how to perceive the world, for trying on different modes of evaluating beauty.

**Foreign forms**

During Nazım Hikmet’s 1920s stay in Moscow, he experienced firsthand “the magical early years of Soviet modernism”,\textsuperscript{197} when avant-garde artistic production flourished, from Futurism and Cubism to Constructivism and Suprematism. Steeped in a wealth of radically new formal strategies, Nazım absorbed and modified them for his own work. His daring re-presentation of the museum, for example, was partly inspired by Futurist iconoclasm, spearheaded by F.T. Marinetti’s notorious 1909 manifesto which so baldly declared “We want to destroy museums, libraries, all kinds of academies…”\textsuperscript{198} In a similar vein, Kasimir Malevich’s painting *Composition with Mona Lisa* (1914) features a downsized, de-centred *Mona Lisa* within a Cubist collage, defaced by two red crosses. Like Marinetti and Malevich, Nazım, too, sought to knock museums and masterpieces off their lofty pedestals; but unlike the former two, who sought to void them of meaning, Nazım worked to invest them with new ones.

\textsuperscript{196} ibid., 11-12.

\textsuperscript{197} Göksu and Timms, *Romantic Communist: the Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet*, 47.

Nazım was particularly moved by the Soviet theatre, which was then experiencing a golden age of experimentation. “I saw plays,” he recalls, “produced by Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, Tairov, freshly baked and fragrant, smelling of life, revolution, beauty, heroism, goodness, rationality and intelligence”. Nazım was above all smitten by the avant-garde theatre of Vsevolod Meyerhold: “I read the courses on Marxism, which I was studying at the Communist University for the Workers of the East,” he later said, “under the spotlights of the contemporary Soviet theatre.” His admiration is telling, for Meyerhold was known for his daring, unconventional ways of cross-fertilising different artistic traditions with one another, from his utter disregard for traditional disciplinary boundaries and conventions, to an enthusiasm for drawing from “diverse and seemingly incongruous theatrical traditions such as commedia dell’arte, Japanese Kabuki, ancient Greek tragedy, and cabaret.” Especially appreciative of the stylised theatricality of Chinese opera and Japanese Kabuki, Meyerhold wrote in a 1929 letter that “I profoundly believe that the newest technical achievements in the Soviet theatre grew on the roots of conventional theatre in exotic countries, mainly Japan and China”. For Meyerhold, heightened stylisation did away with superficial illusions and drew attention to theatre-as-theatre, leaving audiences less complacent, and pushing them to engage more actively with the performed work. A decade later, in 1936, Bertolt Brecht would write his essay *Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting*, in which he discusses the essence of Chinese theatre as

---


202 Min Tian, *The Poetics of Displacement and Difference: Twentieth-Century Chinese-Western Intercultural Theatre*, (Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 64.
“playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play”, leading “[a]cceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances … to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience’s subconscious.”203 By making the unorthodox choice of having a painting for a protagonist, as well as setting up constantly shifting even merging narratorial perspectives and aesthetic vantage points, Nazım constructs a sort of kindred set-up in his poem, in which it is difficult for the reader to fall into in any straightforward kind of ‘identification’, and in which dynamic literary strategies prevent us from complacently accepting “the very condition of our reasoning”204 as we read Gioconda and Si-Ya-U.

In addition to the dapper Hunanese Communist Emi Siao’s accounts of work-study life in Paris, then, much of Nazım’s raw material for imagining China and Chineseness were in fact derived secondhand from the interpretations of Soviet avant-garde theatre. One such source, which Nazım found particularly memorable, was a 1922 staging of Turandot. Yevgeny Vaktahngov based his staging of Turandot on a commedia dell’arte play by the Italian Carlo Gozzi, who in turn had drawn upon the French Orientalist François Pétis de la Croix’s translation of a 12th-century Persian fairytale, featuring a romance between a Tartar prince and a Chinese princess named Turandot. The name ‘Turandot’, however, is not etymologically Chinese at all, with ‘Turan’ referring to Turkistan, and ‘dot’ meaning ‘daughter’; thus, as Kii Ming-Lo and Jürgen Maehder observe, Turandot is really more of a Turkish-Chinese princess rather than a Chinese

203 Göksu and Timms, Romantic Communist: the Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet, 50.

one, and the story overall amounts to a sort of “Persian Chinoiserie”. Add to this patchwork of narrative origins the avant-garde, abstract geometric stage-sets of Vaktahngov, and the result was a spectacular hybrid of different aesthetic and narrative traditions that must have resurfaced in Nazım’s mind when, seven years later, he constructed his own stylistically experimental, cross-cultural love affair in *La Gioconda and Si-Ya-U* — on one level, a sort of Turkish Chinoiserie. Just like ‘Turandot’, the name ‘Si-Ya-U’ is not ‘authentically’ Chinese, but rather an approximation of what Nazım thought a Chinese-sounding name would be, loosely based on the sound ‘Siao’. Similarly, Nazım tends to conflate or lump together Chinese and Japanese imagery in *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U*, as often happens in Chinoiserie:

```
READ
SI-YA-U
    READ. . .
And when your eyes find in the lines what they desire,
        when your eyes tire,
rest your tired head
    like a black-and-yellow Japanese chrysanthemum
        on the books. . .
    SLEEP
SI-YA-U
    SLEEP. . .
```

A more comprehensive understanding of Sino-Japanese history, along with Japan’s demonstrated imperialist ambitions in Korea and Manchuria by the late 1920s, would likely have led to a different approach. As an experiment in imaginative engagement with cultural difference, Hikmet’s poetic diplomacy, like all acts of diplomacy, has its epistemological shortcomings. As diplomacy is “implicated in the normative dictates of public imagination: namely, the public

---


understanding of history which arises from the exclusionary—and hence often conflicting—cultural narratives about nationhood, justice, language, rights, personhood, et cetera that remain the perennial facts of human relations in world society,” it is inevitably “a paradox: an intervention into, and an enabler of, exclusivist narrations of public imagination in world society”. 207 The rich contradictions inherent in Hikmet’s text —flamboyantly, naïvely Orientalising, yet simultaneously staunchly, imaginatively anti-imperialist—are thus deeply akin to the contradictory nature of the practice of diplomacy itself.

Meanwhile, Nazım did not simply voice his admiration for Soviet avant-garde theatre; he became very much part of its scene, culminating in the METLA theatre, ‘Moscow’s Only Leninist Theatre Studio’, for which Nazım served as resident poet and playwright from 1926-27. 208 During the theatre’s brief lifespan, it staged a number of short, innovative, political plays which drew upon elements and techniques ranging from cabaret and pantomime movement to typographic design, cinematic montage and Turkish puppet theatre. 209

A theatre-trained, well-honed eye for layout and design, inflected with the Futurist penchant for speed and dynamism, would follow Nazım into his later work after his departure from the Soviet Union. In Gioconda and Si-Ya-U, it is manifest perhaps most notably in the brash intrusions of the radio, which appear several times throughout the poem:

HALLO
HALLO
HALLO

207 Banai, “Diplomatic Imaginations: Mediating Estrangement in World Society”.


209 ibid., 66.
Voices run through the air like fiery greyhounds. The wireless in the Eiffel Tower calls out: "HALLO HALLO HALLO PARIS PARIS PARIS ..."\(^{210}\)

During a brief period of freedom from political persecution after his return to Turkey in 1928, Nazım became part of a tight-knit editorial team at the helm of *Resimli Ay*, or *Illustrated Monthly*, a newly re-vamped large-format periodical which fast became a prominent discussion forum for the younger generation of poets and intellectuals\(^{211}\) (with said discussions often sandwiched between advertisements for Firestone tires, cigarettes, and provocative images of ‘modern’ young women). In the March 1929 issue of *Resimli Ay*, half a year before the publication of *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U*, the same typographic phrase can be found in a feature article on the musician Bestekâr Cemal Reşat, emblazoned with ‘Allo!!! Allo!!! Allo!!!’\(^{212}\) in three tiered rows of increasingly boisterous type. Incongruously hanging over the article, seemingly disconnected from its content with no function but to attract and even slightly discombobulate the reader, the ‘Allo’ tripplicate that will later re-appear in *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U* points to Nazım’s eagerness to let styles and practices from different artistic domains— theatre, magazine design, poetry—mix and interact with one another.

---

\(^{210}\) ibid., 12.

\(^{211}\) ibid., 84-5.

\(^{212}\) ‘Allo’ is the original Turkish, which is translated as ‘Hallo’ in the English rendition of the poem.
Nazım’s work at *Resimli Ay* is a veritable showcase of influences from Soviet modernism, with its innovations re-worked for a Turkish context. One of *Resimli Ay*’s most controversial and well-known pieces, for example, ‘Putları Yıkıyoruz’, or ‘Demolishing the Idols’, in which Nazım and the other editors attacked the literary establishmen’s ‘empty idols’, was very much in the spirit of Russian avant-garde iconoclasm, with its mocking and rejection of “the most sacred Russian cultural figures, such as Alexander Pushkin, Fedor Dostoyevsky, and Lev Tolstoy,”213 and its “preoccupation with experimentation and the profound reformulation of life, shaped by the power of art” in the interests of provoking social change and “challenging the boundaries of acceptable cultural discourse”.214 Meanwhile, the visual statement of red crosses, earlier employed by Malevich to the *Mona Lisa*, have now been applied to Turkish literary figures.

While Futurism provided a formative study in iconoclasm, Marxism was the other iconoclastic ideology that Nazım found even more alluring, to which he would adhere to all his life, and which drew him to the Soviet Union in the first place. A poem excerpt from his early days in Moscow, in 1922, vividly conveys his enthusiasm:

I am a poet  
I have written as much poetry as it rains in a year.  
But in order to start writing my masterpiece

my ‘Constructivist-Marxist’ novel  
I shall have to wait till I’ve learned  
‘Das Kapital’ by heart! 215


214 *ibid.*, 14.

Nazım’s combination of literary productivity and Communist affinities was to prove alarming to Turkish authorities. In 1929, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the government of the fledgling Turkish nation-state was focused on consolidating its power and implementing sweeping national reforms that would change almost every aspect of the daily life of its citizens, from religion to calendar to clothing to language. Duygu Köksal suggests that 1930s policy-makers in Turkey faced a dilemma when it came to interwar artistic modernism: “they acknowledged that modernist currents reflected contemporary and avant-garde perceptions of the age, but they also realised that such extreme modernist currents as Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, or Futurism, if taken too far, could easily challenge and criticise the bourgeois-nationalist worldview they were trying to build.”216 The need and desire for a unified nation-state with a cohesive ‘Turkish’ identity led in turn to the intense policing of narratives that threatened to in any way subvert these larger frameworks and objectives; the Kemalist project of modernisation, Nazım İrem observes, was “a struggle for the self-constitution of the nation,” and the “immedate Kemalist aim in the 1930s was to make the cultural history of the nation.”217

In May 1931, Nazım Hikmet was put on trial for inciting revolution. The public prosecutor had on his desk five of Nazım’s poetry texts that had been found objectionable, including La Gioconda and Si-Ya-U. Responding to the accusation that the poem sought to foment

---


communist revolution in Turkey, Nazım countered: “The poem is about French and English imperialism in China. It is those governments that should take me to court. I was only expressing my sympathy for the Chinese revolt against imperialism.”\(^{218}\) This was a clever defence, for Turkey had all too recently fought its own fight against Western imperialism—with Atatürk’s rise to prominence founded on his effective leadership during the Turkish War of Liberation, itself a reaction against the Allies’ post-WWI partition and occupation of the Ottoman Empire—and Nazım was acquitted. In 1933, however, he would nevertheless find himself placed behind bars for his ‘radicalising’ poetry; shortly thereafter, a “systematic campaign to suppress Nazım’s work”\(^{219}\) began, one which would not come to a close until after his death. Imaginative diplomacy, after all, “does not respect disciplinary boundaries; it crisscrosses multiple sovereign territories and undermines convention”, and thus “constitutes a serious threat to the logic behind, and the authority of, the states-system, and all of its representative prerogatives.”\(^{220}\)

_Gioconda and Si-Ya-U’s_ politics of language and representation, as well as its politics of death, all present subversions in relation to the agenda of the Kemalist establishment. As Benedict Anderson has argued, one of the key ways in which nationalist discourse establishes its legitimacy is to promise a “meaningful and mournable death”.\(^{221}\) As “the radically unknown, the most foreign element of life or experience imaginable”, Nergis Ertürk notes in her exploration of

\(^{218}\) Göksu and Timms, _Romantic Communist: the Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet_, 184.

\(^{219}\) ibid., 112.


linguistic modernity in Turkey, death becomes inextricably intertwined with the ‘national, with “the reduction of all communicability and translatibility to an all-or-nothing choice between life in a national language and an unmourned death in a banished outside.” Gioconda’s death, then, is precisely the kind of death that is grossly unassimilable into a narrative of nationalism:

A voice:
“All right, the lighter. 
Burn, Gioconda, burn…”
A silhouette advances, 
a flash…
They lit the lighter 
and set Gioconda on fire. 
The flames painted Gioconda red. 
She laughed with a smile that came from her heart. 
Gioconda burned laughing…”

Gioconda dies for no country; she laughs mockingly in the face of a court and an executioner presented to us as wielding an unjust, undeserved form of authority. Most alarmingly of all, however, the poet denies the means to mark Gioconda’s death as ‘unmournable’ by flinging the following closing lines:

Art, Shmart, Masterpiece, Shmasterpiece, And So On, 
And So Forth, 
Immortality, Eternity—
H-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-Y…
“HERE ENDS MY TALE’S CONTENDING, 
THE REST IS LIES UNENDING…”
THE END

222 ibid., 72.

223 Hikmet, Poems of Nazım Hikmet, 31.

224 ibid., 31.
By hurling an accusation of untruth, delivered in a register that revels in its own cheekiness and silliness, the poet’s sleight-of-hand ensures that any ‘serious’ pronouncement upon the death of Gioconda will seem ridiculous by sheer incongruity. Ertürk’s earlier observation regarding the relationship between death and national language bears out, however, in the poignant fact that Nazım would be forced to flee Turkey and have his work censored in his native tongue, thus eventually dying in an officially unmourned, linguistic ‘outside’.

In addition to Gioconda’s unruly death, the linguistic politics of the poem would also have been problematic for a national agenda that prioritised standardisation and unification above all. This was particularly true for Turkey in 1928, with Atatürk having just launched one of the most radical language reforms in human history. The Turkish language made the switch from Arabic letters, which it had used for centuries, to the Latin alphabet, and, almost “[o]vernight,” observes Feroz Ahmad, “virtually the entire nation was made illiterate”. For Ertürk, the reform constitutes “a narrative of profound self-alienation, even what we might call self-surgery’, at the very limit or limits of modernity.” (It is worth pointing out here that the primary rationale for language reform in the first place was that a significant portion of the population was illiterate; Arabic, together with the ornateness of Ottoman Turkish, was deemed an obstacle to universal literacy, and in turn for a unified and modern nation-state.) In his historical 1928 speech, Atatürk presents this radical reform to the Turkish public:

The richness and the harmony of our language will become manifest in the new Turkish letters (yeni Türk harfleri). You must understand the necessity of saving ourselves from the

---


226 Ertürk, Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey p.xi.
incomprehensible (anlaşmayan) signs we cannot understand, and which have imprisoned our minds in iron for centuries.\textsuperscript{227}

As Ertürk points out, Nazım’s brand of modernism does not strive to smooth over differences and incongruities into an overall ‘harmony’, but is instead interested in “affirming the internal heterogeneity of the Turkish language” and the “opening up of the Turkish language to the difference of other historical registers and languages —Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Russian, German, Italian— that is \textit{not} also a domesticating of that difference.”\textsuperscript{228} \textit{La Gioconda and Si-Ya-U} contains distinctly different styles of Turkish; the opening, in which the poet establishes his authority and knowledge of the fate of the \textit{Mona Lisa}, for example, is written in a more Ottoman-esque, ornate vocabulary as well as a tidier, more condensed tempo, than the vernacular that follows. Even visually, there is a marked difference between the first section, ‘A Claim’ (Bir İddia’), and the following, ‘Part One: Excerpts from Gioconda’s Diary’ (1. KISIM), with the first several lines of each in the original Turkish placed here for comparison:

\begin{verbatim}
BİR İDDIA (A CLAIM)
Leonardo nâm
nakása dehrin
meşhur Jokondu
basımtır kadem
rahı firâre.

1. KISIM (PART ONE)
Luvur müzesi’nde artık canım sıkılıyor
Can sıkıncısından çok çabuk bıkılıyor
Bıktım artık canımın sıkıncısından.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{227} ibid., 91-2.

\textsuperscript{228} ibid., 160.
With the first section dated 1928, and the second dated in 1929, it is almost as if Nazım insists on the poem bearing witness to the rapid and radical change undergone by the Turkish language.

Language, of course, plays an utterly crucial role in public imagination and diplomacy; the “terms of discourse in public imagination,” Banai observes, “are not formal, but descriptive and historical—that is, reasoning is based on how the agents (individually and collectively) articulate themselves as historico-linguistic beings in society”; meanwhile, “negotiation between estranged publics in society depends upon large-scale assumptions about language, subjectivity or historical arguments.” Inspired by the Russian poet Mayakovsky’s poetics of ostranenie, or defamiliarisation, Nazım’s heteroglossic poetry diligently unsettles such large-scale linguistic assumptions, encouraging rich and flexible forms of articulation that are constantly in dynamic interaction with the ‘foreign’.

The stimulating effect of encountering foreignness was experienced by Nazım in a memorable first encounter with Mayakovsky’s poetry, when he was not yet able to read Russian. Though he could not ‘understand’ a word of the poem, its visual, avant-garde ‘wave-like’ form made all the deeper of an impression on him, and profoundly changed the way he approached his own poetry. Communist congresses and events, too, were wonderful training grounds for developing comfort with ‘incomprehensibility’. In the Communist Turcological Congresses that

---


230 Ertürk, Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey, 166.

took place in the 1920s, for example, the international nature of the delegates and representatives necessitated the delivery of statements opposing British imperialism to be delivered in “Russian, German, English, French, Bulgarian, Persian, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Kumyk, Uzbek, and Chechen, in a record animated by many and various episodes of (mis)translation”; the well-meaning official intention on the part of the Comintern organisers to “unite under its banner speakers of all the languages of the world”\(^\text{232}\) had in practice evaporated by the fourth session of the Congress, when out of sheer frustration with the laboriousness of the proceedings, translations became limited to the three ‘official’ languages of Russian, Azerbaijani Turkic, and Persian.\(^\text{233}\) (This, of course, must have resulted in a significant number of attendees not having the faintest clue what was being said for a significant portion of the time.) In various ways, then, Nazim had a familiarity with, if not a fondness for, the incomprehensibly foreign.

**Mobility in exile**

Given that diplomacy is “at once both a historical and a representative act in the sense that it is necessarily aware of multiple background narratives and imaginations at play, and of its own perspective in mediating between them”\(^\text{234}\), Nazim Hikmet’s *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U* is a truly innovative diplomatic intervention into the exclusionary, essentialist, nationalist and imperialist politics of the late 1920s. Political, playful, innovative, international, and charismatic, the poem is both a stage and a testing-ground for various kinds of difference —of style, register, tone,


\(^{233}\) ibid., 149.

genre, aesthetic, culture and so forth—and how they might interact productively in order to better captivate and stimulate the imagination of perhaps local, perhaps foreign, perhaps estranged, reading publics.

In his preface to Saime Göksu’s biography of Nazım Hikmet, the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko writes: “I believe that a few high United Nations officials hold a ‘universal passport’, although I have never seen one. But Nazım belonged to the class of people whose whole life, rather than their official duties, earned them a passport of this kind. . . . Wherever they are, people like Nazım are never foreigners: their heart becomes their universal passport.”

Yevtushenko’s tribute is both poignant and ironic, given that Nazım Hikmet’s Turkish citizenship was revoked in 1951 after he fled the country for the Soviet Union; and while the Soviet Union granted Nazım refuge and hospitality, it ultimately declined to provide him with official citizenship status. Jesper Gulddal notes that the modern passport, tellingly, only became common after the outbreak of WWI, when governments had both the administrative resources and the growing need to survey and control movement; as a “key instrument of modern governance” based on a principle of national discrimination, passports are thus an embodiment of the thoroughly ‘anti-nomadic, “compartmentalised political

---


237 ibid., 143.
geography characteristic of modernity”.\textsuperscript{238} A truly ‘universal passport’, then, somewhat like a ‘cosmopolitan government’, is both an ideal and a contradiction.

In the December 1929 issue of Resimli Ay, hot on the heels of the publication of Gioconda and Si-Za-U, the prominent writer and critic Peyami Safa poses the question: “Is Gioconda and Si-Za-U a fantasy?” (“Jokond ile Si-ya-u bir fantezi midir?”) Using the rest of his essay to answer this question, Peyami shows his enthusiasm for reading the poem as a constellation of symbols corresponding to Nazim’s own thoughts and desires: “Gioconda and Si-Za-U are symbols. Their love is the love of the poet, their ideals are the poet’s ideals. …” While Nazim was apparently not too pleased by this take on the poem\textsuperscript{239}, there is one sense in which the poem really does function as as a fantasy — but not one of love. While Si-Za-U and Gioconda’s love affair is in fact portrayed in relatively abrupt and abstracted form, the poem functions much more comprehensively as a fantasy of mobility: of passport-less, multi-modal, adrenalin-inducing, continent-hopping escape, flight, and travel. Here, the imprint of Futurism, and its strong affinity for various kinds of technology and speed, come back into play. In particular, Gioconda’s dramatic escape via monoplane was likely inspired by Charles Lindbergh’s record-breaking 33.5 hour solo flight via monoplane in 1927, which catapulted the young pilot into superstardom overnight. This was a particularly exciting time for aviation, with the world’s first trans-Pacific flight successfully completed by Charles Kingsford Smith shortly afterwards in 1928. As always, Nazim takes world events and gives them a twist, providing us with an alternative field of view

\textsuperscript{238} ibid., 133.

\textsuperscript{239} Göksu and Timms, Romantic Communist: the Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet, 93.
— not New York-Paris or New York-Australia, but Paris-Indochina; not trans-Pacific or transatlantic, but across the Indian Ocean.

In a strange case of life imitating art, Nazim’s own escape to the Soviet Union in June 1951 was almost as dramatic as the one he had created for Gioconda two decades earlier. With the help of his brother-in-law, Nazim eluded the policemen stationed permanently outside his house and left Istanbul via speedboat; by sheer luck, they ran into a Romanian steamer with a friendly crew upon reaching the Black Sea. When Nazim was taken to the captain’s cabin, he was shocked to find himself staring at a poster with his own picture on it, and the caption ‘Free Nazim Hikmet!’ From then onwards, Nazim easily found his way to Moscow, where he was given a hero’s welcome. In light of this, perhaps the notion of Gioconda being dropped from atop the cockpit of a monoplane onto the board of a hospitable British vessel in the Indian Ocean, and transported swiftly thereafter to Shanghai, was not so outlandish after all.

Mobility is of course a particularly fraught issue for an exiled writer. When Emily Apter holds up the Austrian literary critic Leo Spitzer’s sojourn-in-exile in Istanbul (1933-36) as a model “not just of exilic humanism but of worldly linguistic exchanges containing the seeds of a transnational humanism or global translatio” as well as of the Saidian “attachment to the shock value of cultural comparison”, I find myself wondering, alongside Nergis Ertürk, at the

---

240 Erhan Turgut, ed., Vivre Comme Un Arbre, Seul Et Libre, Vivre en Frères Comme Les Arbres D’une Forêt = Yaşamak Bir Ağacı Tek Ve Hür Ve Bir Orman Gibi Kardeşesine = to Live, Free and Single Like a Tree but in Brotherhood Like a Forest, (Levallois-Perret: Turquoise, 2002), 71.
242 ibid., 275.
“spectralised non-place, or ‘absent presence’, of Turkish literature in Said’s and Apter’s comparative-critical histories, which by choice or by necessity converge on the activities of European exiles in Istanbul.”243 There is an unfortunate lack of overlap or significant intellectual exchange between exiled critics and scholars such as Spitzer, who temporarily sought refuge in Turkey in the 1930s, and who actively thought and wrote about literature while there; and Turkish writers such as Nazım Hikmet, a prominent Turkish poet who was at the height of his literary creativity and innovation in the 1930s, and who was similarly devoted to the shock value of cultural comparison, to worldly linguistic exchanges appreciative of foreignness and difference, and moreover who would embody time and again the lived experience of a transnational, exilic humanism. At the very least, I imagine, Nazım and Spitzer could have had a lively dialogue concerning the latter’s “hallowed principle” of “non-translation”,244 which would hold rather different ramifications for the former, as a poet whose censored work could often only appear in translation if it was to appear at all.

In the twilight years of his life, Nazım became both the subject and object of conventionally defined public diplomacy: an exceptionally high-profile, international Paris-based committee was formed in his honour to protest his imprisonment, co-ordinated by Tristan Tzara and supported by a large number of artists and writers including Pablo Picasso, Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Aragon;245 and he was seen as an unofficial “poet laureate of the [international]

243 Ertürk, Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey p.xii.
244 Apter, “Global Translatio: The ‘Invention’ of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933,” 277-278.
245 Turgut, Bivre Comme Un Arbre, Seul Et Libre, Vivre en Frères Comme Les Arbres D'une Forêt = Yaşamak Bir Ağac Gibi Tek Ve Hür Ve Bir Orman Gibi Kardeşçesine = to Live, Free and Single Like a Tree but in Brotherhood Like a Forest, 69.
peace movement”\textsuperscript{246}, serving as a member of the Bureau of the World Peace Council and attending meetings and assemblies in Stockholm, Prague, Berlin, Budapest, Warsaw, Vienna, Helsinki, Hiroshima, and others (but never again returning to his native Turkey).\textsuperscript{247} As for the \textit{Mona Lisa} — the one that was stolen in 1911— she, too, had an increasingly illustrious ‘diplomatic’ career, most notably with her 1963 state visits to the U.S.A., where she was escorted by secret service agents through tunnels cleared of traffic for the occasion, and attended a formal dinner held for her by the Kennedys.\textsuperscript{248}

It seems fitting, finally, that poetry has played a central role in both the Turkish and Chinese civilisations. “Long before the emergence of the Ottoman state,” writes Talât Sait Halman, “Türkic nomadic and settled communities had channelled their creative energies into epic literature and lyric poetry”; later, the “crowning achievement of Ottoman culture”, too, was arguably poetry, with two-thirds of the Ottoman sultans active poets themselves,\textsuperscript{249} and with poetry serving as the key conduit for consolidating and disseminating the values of Ottoman civilisation.\textsuperscript{250} In China, too, an imperial culture flourished in which poetry formed the communicative and aesthetic core; the \textit{Zuozhuan} (ca. 4\textsuperscript{th} century BC) already contains records of numerous instances of statesmen who recite or chant poetry in order to “convey their political

\textsuperscript{246} Göksu and Timms, \textit{Romantic Communist: the Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet}, 268.
\textsuperscript{247} ibid., 267.
\textsuperscript{248} Sassoon, \textit{Mona Lisa: the History of the World's Most Famous Painting}, 244.
\textsuperscript{249} Talât Sait Halman, \textit{Rapture and Revolution: Essays on Turkish Literature}, (Syracuse University Press, 2007), 155.
\textsuperscript{250} ibid., 163.
vision, policy recommendation, or diplomatic finesse."

With *Gioconda and Si-Ya-U* in mind, then, it is poignant to learn that the earliest known record of a Turkish poem, supposedly dating back to about 200 B.C., is preserved only in Chinese translation from a Northern Dynasty (420-589) text. Nazım Hikmet would, I hope, have been delighted to learn of this connection; that the earliest known vestige of Turkish literary heritage can be found, irrevocably transformed yet miraculously safeguarded in a foreign language, its very own proof of its enduring charisma.

---

III.

SHAO XUNMEI AND EMILY HAHN:

SALON DIPLOMACY IN SEMI-COLONIAL SHANGHAI

Prelude: diplomacy, hospitality & semi-colonial Chinese modernity

When George Macartney set off from Britain in 1793 with the directive of establishing diplomatic relations with China, he had little inkling that his mission would be largely remembered for his refusal to perform the ceremonial kowtow—required of all visitors—before the Qianlong emperor. Centuries later, the ‘Macartney embassy’ grew into a kind of shorthand, not just for diplomatic failure, but also for an ostensible clash of civilisations; and Macartney’s rejection of the kowtow became viewed as a fittingly symbolic start to China’s disastrous diplomatic relations with European nations throughout the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The issue of the kowtow (or lack thereof) does not, however, take centre stage in Macartney’s own travel account. Instead, it is portrayed as merely one part of a series of fascinating interactions in which both the Qing Chinese and Georgian Brits demonstrate considerable effort to maintain goodwill. For starters, shortly after arriving on Chinese soil, Macartney fastidiously records that the newcomers were presented by their hosts with “a profusion … so great and so much above our wants”:

---

252 A Chinese gesture of respect which entails kneeling and touching one’s forehead to the ground.
20 bullocks, 120 sheep, 120 hogs, 100 fowls, 100 ducks, 60 bags of flour, 160 bags of rice, 14 boxes of Tartar bread, 10 chests of tea, 10 chests of small rice, 10 chests of red ice, 10 chests of white rice, 10 chests of tallow candles, 1,000 water melons, 3,000 musk melons, 22 boxes of dried peaches, 22 boxes of fruit preserved with sugar, 22 boxes of other fruit, 22 boxes of ochras, 22 boxes of other vegetables, 40 baskets of large cucumbers, 1,000 squash cucumbers, 40 bundles of vegetables, 202 measures of peas in the pods, 3 baskets of earthenware of coarse porcelain. 253

According to Macartney, these gifts were conveyed by two high-ranking officials — “intelligent men, frank and easy in their address, and communicative in their discourse” — who

sat down to dinner with us, and though at first a little embarrassed by our knives and forks, soon got over the difficulty, and handled them with notable dexterity and execution upon some of the good things which they had brought us. They tasted of our wines of different kinds, and also of our spirits, from gin, rum, and arrack, to shrub, raspberry, and cherry brandy, the latter of which seemed to hit their palates in preference to the rest, and they shook hands with us like Englishmen at their going away.

This scene sets the tone for much of the rest of Macartney’s account. Undergirded with a degree of cultural befuddlement, the general atmosphere is nevertheless one of cordiality, even conviviality, in which the guest endeavours to appreciate the gestures of the host, and the host seeks to respect the social customs of the guest. Lest one wonder whether the Chinese came to regret these initial overtures of hospitality as the mission unfolded, the British were upon their departure presented with a comparable abundance of gifts, including two cows — “a singular proof of attention”, for the “Chinese seldom use milk in any part of their food,” notes Macartney,

but, observing that we had been much accustomed to it, and that we always mixed it with our tea when we could get it, they have taken care that we shall not want that article on the road ... by which means we shall have a constant supply of milk all the way, an accommodation of no inconsiderable value to English travellers. 254

253 Macartney, An Embassy to China; Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney During His Embassy to the Emperor Chʻien-Lung, 1793-1794, 72.

254 ibid., 163.
Cows and all, this was clearly not a send-off intended to signal a parting of foes.

Even the notorious kowtow question was negotiated with at least an appearance of civility and concord. When Macartney insisted he could not “pay greater homage to a foreign prince than to his own liege Sovereign”, his hosts inquired as to what his manner of presentation was to his king. Upon hearing the answer —kneeling upon one knee and kissing His Majesty’s hand— it was decided, after further deliberations and negotiations, that as hand-kissing was not customary in China, Macartney could simply kneel upon one knee when presented to the Qianlong emperor. “And thus ended,” Macartney writes, “this curious negotiation.”

The fact remains, of course, that the Chinese refused to engage with any of Macartney’s formal requests, which included the drawing up of a formal treaty of commerce and friendship, and the improvement of trade conditions and access for English merchants — an increasingly pressing priority for the British due to rapidly rising demand for Chinese luxury goods such as silk, porcelain, and tea. This led the ambassador to write in some bewilderment:

How are we to reconcile the contradictions that appear in the conduct of the Chinese Govt towards us? They receive us with the highest distinction, show us every external mark of favour and regard … entertain us with their choicest amusements, and express themselves greatly pleased with so splendid an embassy, commend our conduct and cajole us with compliments. Yet, in less than a couple of months, they refuse our requests without reserve or complaisance, precipitate our departure, and dismiss us dissatisfied; yet, no sooner have we taken leave of them than we find

---

255 ibid., 119.


257 ibid., 10.
ourselves treated with more studied attentions, more marked distinction, and less constraint than before. 258

These apparent contradictions make more sense when one takes into account the classical Chinese approach to diplomacy, which can be summarised with the memorable phrase *huairou yuanren* (懷柔遠人) — literally, ‘the tender cherishing of people from afar’. This phrase, used in almost all official documents relating to foreign visitors, including those relating to Macartney’s visit, 259 implied both a strong duty to take care of visiting foreigners, as well as the cultural superiority of the munificent Chinese civilisation, which rendered the Chinese uninterested in entertaining requests for treaties and partnerships. This was in sharp contrast to European nations, amongst which the concept of a shared ‘right’ to trade, and the practice of the resident embassy, had been evolving since the Renaissance period. Compounding the communicative distance between the British and Chinese was the fact that the entire mission was conducted in translation by Chinese students from Naples who understood Latin and Italian, but spoke no English or French! 260 Due to these fundamental differences in cultural and diplomatic frameworks, amplified by linguistic barriers, Macartney is now widely perceived as having been sent on a mission that was doomed to fail before it had even begun.

While the Macartney embassy was regarded as a failure, it generated no less than six highly successful books, all of which ran several editions and would go on to be translated into other

258 Macartney, *An Embassy to China; Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney During His Embassy to the Emperor Ch’ien-Lung, 1793-1794*, 164.


260 ibid., 49.
European languages.\textsuperscript{261} As Frances Wood observes, a “personal, eyewitness account of late eighteenth-century China, whether written by a foot soldier, valet or an official, was in a Europe already fascinated by the East, guaranteed to sell and make a writer out of the visitor”\textsuperscript{262} — a trend which survived well into the 20th-century, when foreigners who travelled to China, now in vastly larger numbers, continued to produce influential bestsellers, relating their experiences or ‘explaining’ China to curious Anglo-American or European audiences. Macartney’s bestselling account thus shaped generations of European perceptions of the Chinese. His avoidance of sensationalism, together with a generally nuanced and sympathetic outlook, helped his readership to conceive of China, not as a fantastical far-flung kingdom, but as a country that co-existed with European nations. When Macartney is favourably impressed by the appearance of the Chinese, for instance, he quotes Shakespeare’s \textit{Tempest}: “Oh, wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! Oh, brave new world / That has such people in it!”\textsuperscript{263} Just as Kang Youwei sought to communicate the stunning beauty of Istanbul and the Bosphorus to his Chinese readers by alluding to famous Tang poetry, so Macartney draws upon the cultural familiarity of Shakespeare to include the Chinese in the same ‘brave new world’, but also to express his delight at the world's sheer diversity. This strategic double movement —emphasising at once both the familiarity and the difference of the Chinese— is one that Macartney maintains throughout his work, from his famous warning that “[N]othing could be more fallacious than to judge of China by an

\textsuperscript{261} Wood, \textit{The Lure of China: Writers From Marco Polo to J.G. Ballard}, 71.

\textsuperscript{262} ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{263} Macartney, \textit{An Embassy to China; Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney During His Embassy to the Emperor Ch‘ien-Lung, 1793-1794}, 74.
European standard”, 264 to the book’s ending: “The Chinese, it is true, are a singular people, but they are men formed of the same materials and governed by the same passions as ourselves.”265

Though this late-1700s diplomatic encounter may seem far removed from the twentieth-century cosmopolitan cities that are the focus of this dissertation, the issues it raises are deeply relevant to the kinds of ‘diplomatic’ encounters that this chapter will explore. Above all, the Macartney embassy reveals that diplomacy is inextricably intertwined with culturally and historically specific practices and problems of hospitality. The tension that Macartney grapples with as a writer, between portraying the Chinese as ‘similar’ yet ‘different’, mirrors that of hospitality itself, “forever caught,” writes Gideon Baker, “between the singularity which is the stranger who comes, and the universalising move whereby the stranger, in order to be welcomed, must first be translated into the host’s own idiom”.266 Given the violently unhappy history of post-Macartney Chinese foreign relations, the stakes of diplomacy and hospitality only intensified. The Middle Kingdom experienced a series of devastating shifts in its self-perception and global position, from the Opium Wars (1839-1842; 1856-1860) which forced China to sign unequal treaties granting foreign powers access to its most desirably located ports, i.e. ‘treaty ports’, as well as extraterritorial rights to foreigners; to the Eight-Nation Alliance — a military coalition formed by Japan, Russia, Britain, France, United States, Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary to quell anti-foreign sentiment (1899-1901), leading to further concessions in

264 ibid.
265 ibid., 215.
China’s sovereign rights. The philosophy underpinning Chinese diplomatic practice, the ‘tender cherishing’ of the ‘other’, centred on a stable and benevolent ‘self’, was shattered. Macartney’s case also highlights the significant restrictions that national interests and official protocols can pose for diplomacy and hospitality; in a context of radical national change, alternative, un-official practices of diplomacy can play an all the more significant and path-breaking role. If Qian Suoqiao posits that the “definitive element of Chinese modernity is the fact that it is a product of a series of Chinese-Western military confrontations”, then tracing an arc from Qing diplomats to Republican Shanghai cosmopolites allows us to re-focus on the evolution of modern China as a turbulent, multi-faceted negotiation of how to interact with foreign ‘others’. (It is interesting to note here that the word for ‘welcome’ in English and Chinese are already perspectivally different; the former focuses on the good coming of the guest, i.e. ‘well-come’, while the latter, ‘huanying’, lit. ‘happily receive’, emphasises the actions of the host.)

The treaty ports opened up to Western nations, meanwhile, led hybrid, uneasy existences; flourishing commercial centres thanks to the stimulus of international trade, they were nevertheless daily reminders of violated sovereignty and national humiliation. By the early 1900s, the glittering jewel among these ports —the most hybrid of them all— was without question Shanghai. This treaty port par excellence, administered by several governments at once, was the seat of multi-national merchant empires, foreign banks and luxury hotel chains, as well as home to millions of industrial workers and labourers, and tens of thousands of foreigners and refugees from across the world. Boasting an unparalleled diversity of “elements

267 Qian, Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity, 25.
from different Chinese regions such as the Lower Yangtze Valley and Canton, as well as from such foreign centres as Yokohama, Edo, London, and Paris,” it offered endless diversions, including the longest bar in the world,\textsuperscript{268} soaring skyscrapers designed by internationally renowned architects, and innumerable cinemas, cafés and dance halls. On the other hand, with its waves of migrants and immigrants, and political instability within and without, the glitzy city was wracked with poverty and saddled with crime and prostitution. Modernist Japanese writer Yokomitsu Riichi devoted an entire novel to depicting Shanghai as “a centre of moral, spiritual and physical degradation”, \textsuperscript{269} Austrian novelist Vicki Baum described it as “the world’s refuse heap”.\textsuperscript{270} Inexhaustible and defying categorisation, Shanghai inspired both admiration and revulsion.

Perhaps due to its rich contradictoriness, the city’s charisma was legendary, attracting individuals of every stripe, from underground Russian Communists to Sichuanese silver-screen hopefuls to White Russian triple agents. It was the kind of place which allowed the re-invention of identity, the concoction or discarding of life-stories, names and titles at will — and many did just that. There was ‘Princess Sumaire’, for example, niece of the wealthiest Maharajah in Paris, who “scandalised Shanghai society with her open bisexuality and high-profile affairs with Japanese aristocrats and Gestapo agents;\textsuperscript{271} or Jean Tokugawa, in Shanghai by way of Australia and South Africa, and companion to a Japanese princess; or Trebitsch Lincoln, a “Hungarian-

\textsuperscript{268} Miller, \textit{Shanghai on the Metro: Spies, Intrigue, and the French Between the Wars}, 241.


\textsuperscript{270} Miller, \textit{Shanghai on the Metro: Spies, Intrigue, and the French Between the Wars}, 11.

born Buddhist abbot and former “Presbyterian missionary among the Jews of Montreal, a Member of Parliament in the British House of Commons, the organiser of a right-wing putsch in Weimar Germany, and an arms dealer to some of the most vicious warlords in northern China”, who now went by the name ‘Chao Kung’. 272 “For mystery alone,” writes Michael B. Miller, “there were Trieste, Tangier, and Istanbul. But nowhere else did traffickers, adventurers, intriguers and spies come together quite as they did in interwar Shanghai.” 273

Shanghai offered ‘traffickers, adventurers, intriguers and spies’ opportunity and versatility in the form of a deeply heterogeneous, de-centralised administrative structure. Essentially several cities in one, it was divided into several independent municipalities, with the most formalised zones being the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese-controlled areas. Individually, each municipality retained a distinct character; journalist George Digby wrote that “part of the French concession very closely resembled a French colonial town,” while the international settlement “was predominantly British”, which led to the gratifying sensation of spending each day in “essentially English surroundings.” 274 Shu-Mei Shih has termed this state ‘semi-colonial’, referring to the “multiple, layered, intensified as well as incomplete and fragmentary nature of China’s colonial structure.” 275 In practice, semi-colonial Shanghai’s informal, multiple, layered, and fragmentary municipal institutions and authorities spawned all kinds of unique freedoms and confusions. The Gregorian, Republican and

272 ibid., 104-105.
traditional lunar calendars were often in use all at the same time. Various dialects of Chinese co-existed with pidgin and a multitude of other languages, several of which were used for official administration in the foreign concessions. Extraterritoriality, a result of the unequal treaties signed between China and various foreign nations, allowed foreigners to be exempt from Chinese laws, and by the 1920s at least twenty different sets of laws were in force in the city, with five or six distinct policing zones. There were such extreme cases as a “Spanish-owned, French-rented, American sublet, Mexican managed, Russian-, Spanish-, British-, and Chinese-staffed casino on an extra-settlement road.”

It was little wonder, then, that Shanghai could feel like a ‘foreign’ city to both Chinese and non-Chinese, and was commonly described by both as “not quite China.” This was especially true for Chinese citizens, who unfortunately encountered racial prejudice and spatial interdictions on their own soil. Chinese individuals had to use a separate elevator in foreign commercial buildings, and were not permitted to enter the club grounds or to become formal members of the Shanghai Race Club, making the club title a disturbing double entendre. 1930s Shanghai was thus a particularly fraught and fascinating case of a wide and de-centred range of practices of diplomacy and hospitality. As the prominent intellectual Lin Yutang wrote critically, “You don’t know what a luxurious feeling it gives to a fellow to ride round in a rickshaw—extra-territorially, i.e., feeling oneself above all the police, police-regulations, laws, customs, and tribunals of the land…. It

276 Bickers, “Incubator City: Shanghai and the Crises of Empire.”


[extra-territoriality] breeds bad manners, and it exempts the persons enjoying the privilege from the social obligation of being pleasant to one’s neighbours.”

It was here, in semi-colonial Shanghai, that Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1906-1968), also known as Sinmay Zau, was born into one of the city’s wealthiest and most prominent families. His great-grandfather, Shao Youlian, had served as a diplomat, and had been instrumental in facilitating the signing of the Treaty of Saint Petersburg between Russia and China in 1881. Sinmay’s fortune and status was further cemented when he married his cousin, Sheng Pei-yu, granddaughter of the high-ranking Mandarin official Sheng Xuanhuai. Even as Shao Xunmei’s family connections firmly tied him to the traditional gentry elite, then, it also opened doors for him to experience the full force of social and intellectual change that Shanghai’s treaty port status brought with it. Educated with a mix of traditional Chinese and Western missionary schooling in Shanghai, and then later at Cambridge University (1925), Shao became a voracious reader of Chinese and European classical and avant-garde literatures. As if to reflect this educational hybridity, unlike most other Western-educated, suit-clad Chinese intellectuals, Shao loved to wear traditional long Chinese robes matched with English leather shoes, cutting an idiosyncratic and striking figure everywhere he went. Upon his return to Shanghai, Shao drew upon both his literary interests and family fortune to become a key figure in the city’s publishing industry, from bankrolling, founding and running various magazines—including importing a cutting-edge rotogravure printing press from Germany, the only one of its kind in China—to producing prolific amounts of his own poems, essays, and editorials. These works

279 Shen, Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-Colonial Shanghai, 42.

280 Li, Bernard Shaw and China: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 155.
reveal the stunning breadth of his reading: from tributes to Sappho and George Moore, to biographies of Catullus and Cicero, references to Tristan and Isolde and Scheherazade, to literary criticism on T.S. Eliot, Christina Rossetti, Dante, and more. Shao also quickly earned a reputation for being uniquely able to traverse a wide range of socio-cultural settings, particularly between the Chinese and non-Chinese social worlds, in a city deeply defined by its many social demarcations of race and class. From the city’s most powerful gangster boss, Du Yuesheng, to glamorous vedettes and struggling cartoonists, Shao was fast friends with them all, more broadly connected than any diplomat. Among Shao’s broad array of connections and relationships, few would attain the significance of the American journalist Emily ‘Mickey’ Hahn (1905-1997), who arrived in Shanghai in 1932 and stayed for the next seven years, collaborating with Shao on periodicals, translations, and various other projects. These golden years of publishing were not to last. With the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1937, and Hong Kong in 1939, Hahn would leave China for good, and Shao would lose the entirety of his fortune and his publishing empire. He would later eke out a livelihood by translating Shelley, Tagore, Shakespeare, Twain, Brontë, and others, but by the time Shao passed away in 1968, he had become financially destitute and culturally marginalised in an increasingly ideologically rigid sociopolitical climate. The city that had formed the backdrop for Shao’s wide array of commercial and experimental publications, and his vibrant, cosmopolitan social networks, had also waned. Though Shao was offered opportunities to leave the country by concerned friends with plane tickets ready in hand, he never did, as if he and the city were simply too
intertwined. As Tara Grescoe writes, “…[for] what happened to Zau Sinmay, also happened to Shanghai.”

**Salon diplomacy**

In 1933, as part of an essay published in the periodical *Modern Miscellany*, Shao Xunmei wrote the following remarkable sentence: “I’m convinced that the key to the popularisation of literature lies in the socialising that takes place between men and women; those who are the greatest masters of socialising should also be the foremost advocates of literature.” He elaborates: “For example, if conversation at social gatherings were to revolve around literature, then would not anyone who wished to frequent such settings, or to have a social life, thus need to make the reading of literature a necessary part of their lives? If literature starts off as ornamentation, so be it; with time, its true worth and allure as a life-long companion will become clear, and poets and novelists will become household names.” Socialising, for Shao, was thus far from a trivial matter; it was the primary means through which literature could be

---

281 Shao, *Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)*, 263.


283 Where no English translations are available, and renderings are thus my own, I include the original text as reference.

284 Xunmei Wencun (*Collected Writings of Shao Xunmei*), 327.

285 譬如說，一個交際的敘會，他們的談話一定會把文學作為題材；那麼凡是在交際場中出入的，或是希求廁身交際場中的，誰尤趕不把翻讀文學作品作為人生的條件之一呢？先把它當作裝飾品，領略到了真趣便自然認為終審的伴侶，這便是詩與小說家誦呼呼傳的時候了。

286 ibid., 327-8.
given an existence beyond the rarefied page and enter into the fabric of people’s daily lives and thoughts. Influential individuals had an important role to play as literary arbiters (and vice versa — effective literary connoisseurs needed to be rather good at socialising!).

Following this logic, China, Shao claims, *needed* socialites — but not just any kind of socialite. He offers the example of Mrs. Bernardine Szold-Fritz, an American of Hungarian-Jewish descent married to a Shanghai-based English businessman. A former reporter, she was known for hosting the city’s most famous and successful salon, for organising various cultural productions, and for being the go-to hostess for European and American writers, artists and celebrities visiting Shanghai. “This,” Shao insists, “is the kind of socialite we need most.” In his assessment of Fritz’s significance, Shao demonstrates his typical tendency to intertwine the cosmopolitan with the national. Even as he places Fritz within the context of English and French salon traditions, and emphasises the fact that she keeps company with writers from all over the world, he is keen to highlight that she is also a “vigorous promoter of Chinese literature and art”. Fritz is the sort of salonnière that Shanghai ‘needs’, then, not just because she has an international field-of-view, but because she melds an international perspective with the championing of local literary culture. Shao concludes his essay on a critical, yet optimistic, note: “I hope China’s socialites will swap their mahjong and poker gatherings for discussions of

---

287 我們最需要的交際領袖

288 對於中國的文學藝術提倡尤力

289 ibid., 328.
literature, and work, each in their own way, towards this common goal with Mrs. Fritz; we will then not be far off from a bona fide literary and artistic renaissance.”

Shao Xunmei’s impressions of Western literary social culture were not derived from Bernardine Fritz’s gatherings alone. As a student at Cambridge in 1925, he had met Liu Jiwen, future mayor of Nanjing, then auditing economics courses at the university. Liu, asked to represent the Chinese government on a ‘study tour’ of Paris, but who spoke little English, invited the more linguistically adept Shao to join him on his trip to France as secretary. Whilst Liu spent his time visiting government institutions and attending official events, Shao happily attended French language classes — in which he made rapid progress — and frequented neighbourhood cafés, where he befriended other Chinese youths studying a range of subjects, from painting to political science. Shao and the other Chinese regulars of a particular café became known as the ‘Celestial Dog Society’ (Tiangouhui 天狗會), a tongue-in-cheek name alluding both to a Chinese art group named the ‘Celestial Steeds’ and ancient Greek Cynicism. Influenced by French social culture, they met on a regular basis to discuss the latest plays, literary works and exhibits, and were eager to re-create a similar intellectual environment upon returning to their native country. Steeped in debates concerning modernist trends and techniques, Shao’s passion for literature, recently awoken at Cambridge University, intensified. Though Shao’s exposure to student social life in Paris was relatively short, it opened his eyes

290 但願我國諸交際領袖，把麻將撲克的約會，易為文學的談話，起而與弗麗茨夫人分頭合作，則真正的文藝復興，不難實現也。

291 ibid., 328.

292 Shao, Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei), 32.
to new modes of engaging with literature. Thenceforth, for Shao, the status of literature in a given nation, and the role it played in that nation’s social life, were intimately connected. At this early stage, Shao’s activities already form an intriguing counterpoint and alternative ‘study tour’ to that of the official government representative Liu Jiwen.

For Emily Braun and Emily D. Bilski, the study of salons falls under ‘microhistory’ and examines how they evolve over time “in different nations with varying traditions of political democracy, relationships between the sexes and commercially available culture.” What, then, was the salon culture of 1930s Shanghai — a city which in itself was composed of multiple, dynamically interacting national variants of political tradition, sexual politics and commercial culture? How might it compare to a famous 20th-century counterpart, that of Gertrude Stein's salon, set in the city which had inspired Shao to reassess the nature of social life? What kind of alternative ‘microhistory’ of diplomacy might a comparative analysis of Shanghai salons offer?

Having begun as an offshoot of courtly social life in the early 17th-century, French salons had by the middle of the following century succeeded in generating “a form of critical discourse in opposition to absolute monarchy”, rendering them “instrumental to the rise of civil society, to the theory and practice of educated persons assembling in private to debate politics and culture.” This mode of conversational sociability was highlighted by none other than Immanuel Kant, who later laid the groundwork for modern cosmopolitan theory: “The French

---


294 ibid., 4.
nation stands out among all others by its taste for conversation,” observed the German philosopher, “in which it is the model for all the rest.”

It was above all this power of conversation, write Braun and Bilski, “—the the ability to publicise and arbitrate, to shape consensus, to unite in dialogue those who would not normally meet—” that was “key to the political politesse of the salon.” Yet the salon’s relatively informal, conversational also led to its being maligned by critics of various kinds. Its “complex, fluid, multilayered, and, to some, ‘wasteful’ conversation”, its “orality and ephemerality”, ran counter to both Romantic notions of “what was deep, essential, eternal” as well as “nineteenth-century bourgeois rhetoric of authenticity, normalcy, and productiveness”.

This ambivalent status of the salon — elite or subversive? intellectual or superficial? — lead Braun and Bilski to describe it as “a kind of underground of high culture—with all the fascination and neglect that marginality implies”; many of the most successful salons were run by ‘outsiders’ of a kind to mainstream or elite society, such as foreigners, or Jewish women. The twentieth-century’s most famous salon was that of Gertrude Stein, after all, who was both; the French, writes Braun, “conflated her outsider status as Jew with the exotic appeal of an untamed American.”

Despite the success of her salon and the “mythic” status she attained during her lifetime, Stein was “often, like Wilde and Proust, an object of contempt and
resentment because of the widespread perception of her sexuality as deviant and of her writing as meaningless and pretentious.” 300 Shao, too, as we shall see, would face similar accusations of being frivolous and irrelevant, as well as had to navigate a complex ‘outsider’ status further fraught by Shanghai’s fragmented social landscape.

Due to this greater openness to ‘outsiders’, and enhanced by their private nature — generally unfolding in personal residences, away from public view — salons were often spaces with the rare distinction of enabling “people of different economic standing, religion, rank, and nationality to exchange ideas and be recognised both as individuals and as part of common humanity”. 301 Stein’s Paris-based salon, a “new, supranational collective bohemia, one defined by ambiguous social background, subversion, and social alienation—qualities long associated with a nomadic underclass”, was a showcase of this kind of fluidity. “Foreigners and expatriates encamped at 27 rue de Fleurus, which became the port of call for avant-gardes and conscious pariahs. … the salon welcomed Germans, English, Americans, Italians, Swedes, Spaniards, and, later, a few slumming French aristocrats.” 302 20th-century salons, then, were often social worlds which reflected and facilitated the increasingly mobile and transnational milieu of artists and writers, and in which individuals of different national and linguistic backgrounds could regularly gather, converse, and even collaborate, leading to what Robert B. Crunden describes as the great “cultural possibilities” 303 of networking at Gertrude Stein’s salon. It was through

300 ibid., 193.

301 ibid., 2.

302 ibid., 115.

303 Crunden, American Salons: Encounters with European Modernism, 1885-1917, 300.
Stein and her salon, for example, that Pablo Picasso would be introduced to Henri Matisse and engage in regular conversation with him; Stein “shattered the humdrum round of Picasso’s Montmartre life, exposing him to new social contacts, dialogues and challenges”, and it was at 27 rue de Fleurus that Matisse would show Picasso the first African artefact he had ever laid eyes on. Stein’s salon —regular yet informal, secluded yet cosmopolitan— was a social institution was ideally suited to facilitating the trans-national, trans-medium cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Cosmopolitan salons, whether in Paris or Shanghai, thus functioned as alternative embassies. They provided a regular social space for individuals of different national and linguistic backgrounds to meet, converse, and collaborate, but in a far less structured environment than in that of an official embassy. Meanwhile, these alternative embassies performed certain functions that overlapped with, or ran parallel to, those of an official embassy, from offering hospitality to (a broader range of) foreign visitors, to serving as information networks that generated and circulated the most current news and ideas. While it is often said that cities such as Paris or Shanghai were the cosmopolitan capitals of the world, these alternative embassies provide us with insight into, in the words of Bruce Robbins, “actually existing cosmopolitanism”. What did being ‘cosmopolitan’ mean for someone like Shao Xunmei in semi-colonial Shanghai?

Shanghai’s most famous salon could boast even more diversity than Stein’s. Bernardine Fritz could count among her guests “Morris ‘Two-Gun’ Cohen, the scholarly dilettante Harold Acton,

---

304 Madeline, Correspondence: Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein p.xii.
and the triple agent 'Trebitsch Lincoln”, as well as famous visitors to the city such as Charlie Chaplin and Chinese-American movie star Anna May Wong. It was at one of Fritz’s gatherings that Acton met Shao Xunmei, leading to an interesting little collaboration between Shao and the British aesthete on a poem titled *The Serpent.* Acton was deeply impressed by the sheer range of people he met at Fritz’s salon, as well as by Shao, of whom he is supposed to have said: “What a charmeur!” On a different evening at Fritz’s, you might find “a French count and his Italian wife, a Pole naturalised as a Frenchman, one of China’s best young essayists, and a Chinese customs official, who would take care of ordering from the menu.” What set Fritz’s salon apart was not in fact the presence of French counts or Poles — it was the Chinese. 1930s Shanghai was a world in which Chinese and foreign social circles rarely mixed, save for “a small number of [Chinese] diplomats, compradores, senior clerks and managers at foreign banks, and intellectuals who had studied abroad”; it was thus “an extremely small number of Chinese individuals who would frequent salons, of which Shao Xunmei was one.” Fritz was particularly proud of her inclusion of Chinese guests, as demonstrated by the following

---


306 ibid., 61.

307 Shao, *Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)*, 149.


309 ibid., 103.

310 Shao, *Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)*, 148.
caricature of her in *Steps of the Sun*, a 1940 semi-fictional novel by Emily Hahn (and co-written to some degree by Shao Xunmei\(^{311}\)):

> She was proud that she had collected Dorothy to show to the Chinese, and more proud that she could show Dorothy how well she got on with the natives. “Before I came,” she was fond of saying, “nobody made the slightest attempt at social relations. It was simply disgusting, all these smug, impertinent foreigners trying their best to pretend they were still at home in England or France, and all these perfectly darling Chinese people just lived their lives as they always had done, so gracefully, so leisurely. . . \(^{312}\)

While the passage pokes fun at Fritz’s self-congratulating and romanticising tendencies, Fritz’s salon undeniably pioneered a social space which challenged Shanghai’s foreign/local demarcations, and which encouraged cross-cultural and transnational connections. Shao Xunmei in turn brought many other notable Chinese guests to Fritz’s gatherings, for instance Xie Shoukang 謝壽康 (1897-1973), former Chinese Minister in Belgium and then member of the Legislative Yuan, whom he had met in Paris. Xie was thus able to ask for Fritz’s input on matters concerning the Chinese chapter of the PEN Club, an international organisation of writers (of which Shao was also a primary member).\(^{313}\) Jessica Berman suggests in *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* that modernist writers can be seen as immersed in the “politics of connection”, engaged with “the inadequacies of dominant categories of affiliation, especially regarding gender and nationality”. Her argument for modernist writers in general is applicable to the twentieth-century literary salon in particular

---

\(^{311}\) ibid., 235.

\(^{312}\) Hahn, *Steps of the Sun*, 42.

\(^{313}\) Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany: Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei’s Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen, 1926-1938*, 64.
that at their best, they offer “an instructive narrative model of how we can begin to imagine community anew”. 314 Guests at Fritz’s salon would have been keenly aware that they were participants in a social space that flouted Shanghai’s “dominant categories of affiliation”; with the “insight that comes from standing at the margins”, salonnières and attendees could fashion a “subtle new mode of belonging”. 315

Shao Xunmei, meanwhile, recognised that it was the relatively informal nature of salons which lent them much of their charm, as well as their critical edge and innovative potential. In his essay on Fritz, for instance, he emphasises that salons “are not the kind of organisation that comes with rules and regulations”. 316 317 Elsewhere, he makes a general point of relishing interruptions and distractions as opportunities for discovery and connection: “I take pleasure,” he says, “in the arrival of an unexpected guest who interrupts the train of my thoughts as I write; and in a strange new book title which arrests me midway through the composition of a poem.” 318 319 Despite being a prolific publisher and writer, Shao places equal value on the medium of non-directed, organic conversation: “My preferred means of expressing thoughts and opinions is through conversation; when friends drop by, it is perfectly normal for us to talk

314 Berman, Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community, 27.
315 ibid., 73.
316 它並不是一個有條規的組織
317 Shao, Xunmei Wencun (Collected Writings of Shao Xunmei), 327-8.
318 我喜歡有不速之客來打斷我的文思，我喜歡有新奇的書名來停止我寫了一半的詩
319 ibid., 12.
until the break of day.” Shao makes it clear that an ideal social and intellectual environment revolves around non-hierarchical, informal dialogue, punctuated and enriched with unexpected contributions. The social space of the salon provided just such a setting — a space for interaction and connection, but also the perpetual potential for interruption. For Emmanuel Levinas, the key to “intersubjectivity as lived immediacy” is rooted wholly in dialogue, which is essentially “always response—a responding-to-another, that is, to her summons.” Jacques Derrida, building upon Levinas’s thought, has suggested that hospitality is fundamentally an “interruption of the self”. Perhaps relatedly, gatherings at Shao’s residence would often involve the smoking of opium. Emily Hahn remembers various occasions where she would listen to discussions of modern literature in a room “filled with the smoke of Turkish cigarettes and with Chinese words”. The effects of opium on blurring the passage of time and rendering the smoker into a state of languorous calm lent itself particularly well to exceptionally long and meandering conversations.

This openness to interruption and the unexpected is particularly significant given the rigid nature of official diplomatic culture, which is “not so much a function of invention and innovation”, writes James Der Derian in Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement, as “the canonisation and imposition of peripheral alien forms”. Already in Emperor Constantine’s day, for example, a formalised book of ceremonies listing various functions for foreign envoy

---

320 ibid., 3.
321 Bergo, “Emmanuel Levinas.”
322 Derrida, Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas, 51.
323 Hahn, Mr. Pan, 6.
was compiled; the “emphasis on ceremony and ritual and receiving and despatching ambassadors”, Der Derian adds, are of paramount importance because “they sanctioned the movement across social and political boundaries”. In other words, highly formalised and detailed diplomatic protocol was a means of regulating, and making smooth, interactions between foreigners familiar with differing cultural frameworks and social templates. Treaty ports, with multiple governments vying for supremacy, could present particularly thorny problems of protocol: “In the outports,” writes Christopher Elder, former New Zealand Ambassador to Beijing, “it was never possible to reach a settled opinion as to whether the wife of the British Consul or that of the [Chinese] Commissioner of Customs should enter dinner first.” The Macartney kowtow, of course, remains a classic example of a case in which a lack of precedent, and thus established protocol, made ‘encountering the other’ much more vulnerable to friction and conflict. ‘Tact’ and social etiquette played a similar role of regulating behaviour in literary salons, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, allowing for “the negotiation of difference among strangers”; the radically transnational makeup of salons like Fritz’s and Stein’s made such social templates and rules far less applicable or relevant.

This lack of official ‘protocol’ made cosmopolitan salons such as Bernardine Fritz’s particularly complex social settings in which the problematic reality of semi-colonial inequalities mixed with a heightened liberty on the part of the attendees to experiment with various social strategies and identities. Emily Hahn’s popular column for The New Yorker,

---

324 Derian, On Diplomacy: a Genealogy of Western Estrangement, 34.


326 Braun and Emily, Jewish Women and Their Salons: the Power of Conversation, 1.
featuring a Chinese character named Pan Heh-ven—based on none other than Shao Xunmei—provides glimpses into the ways in which Shao navigated such settings. “In the beginning” writes Hahn, “he [Pan Heh-ven] would quote Confucius … and because he had been trained by Mrs. Manners [based on Bernardine Fritz], he never failed to say after some dull evening at a restaurant, ‘You are the first foreigner who has ever been there, do you know?’ So sightseeing with Heh-ven was very satisfactory as long as he was obliging, but he grew restless after a time.” Compare this to a different scene, in which Pan Heh-ven converses with a British government representative:

Yesterday a British vice-consul met Heh-ven at my house for tea and began asking him questions about Chinese mentality. He, too, seems to think that one Chinese can be all Chinese things to all men. He is making notes for a statesmanlike book, so his questions were very careful.

“Now, Mr. Pan … what effect would you say that the English type of education has upon the minds of your compatriots?”

Heh-ven, looking rather small and poetic, replied vaguely.

“But is it not true,” continued the vice-consul, “that the Japanese are encouraging your young men to gain their education in Japan? A very clever method of propaganda, eh?” He looked heavily arch.

Heh-ven brightened. “Oh, those Japanese schools,” he said lightly. “Yes, they are so good. The Japanese, you must know, are wonderful; they have arranged all knowledge in the world. … Thus in a short time one knows everything, and so our young men like to go to Japan for their degrees. Though I myself prefer England. I bought very good clothes in Cambridge.”

The vice-consul was grievously shocked. “Knowledge?” he repeated bleakly. “Clothes? But surely, Mr. Pan, such an attitude on the part of your students is very dangerous for China’s future welfare.”

Heh-ven’s eyes were blank.

“No wonder the Japanese—” began the vice-consul, and he stopped and looked reproving, “Then the Chinese are, I can only say, lazy,” he said. He snapped his mouth shut.

Heh-ven slowly selected a cigarette, smoothed his gown over his knees, and struck a match. He inhaled delicately.

“That is just it,” he said at last, purring. “We Chinese . . . are . . . lazy.” 328

327 Hahn, Mr. Pan, 5.

328 ibid., 8-9.
In both cases, Pan Heh-ven intentionally lives up to stereotypes of the Chinese, both with Mrs. Manners and the British vice-consul. In the former, however, he does it in a way that constitutes a returning of hospitality; in return for Mrs. Manners’ invitation to her social circle and her hospitality, he tries to behave in accordance with his hostess’s expectations in a way that would give her and her guests pleasure, even as he is aware that they are shaped by cultural stereotypes. When Heh-ven tires of performing ‘Chineseness’ for Mrs. Manners and his guests, he simply stops showing up to gatherings and events, thus rejecting both the hospitality he is offered and that which he would feel a sense of obligation to offer in return as a guest. In the latter case, in which Heh-ven finds himself faced with a (rather tone-deaf) government representative seeking to extract information about ‘the Chinese’, Heh-ven employs a clever sleight-of-hand in which he both fulfils the vice-consul’s expectations as well as subverts his ‘statesmanlike book’ project, which will supposedly present English readers with authoritative, insightful observations on topics such as the ‘Chinese mentality’. Without confronting or offending his English interlocutor, Heh-ven nevertheless refuses to co-operate. Perhaps most importantly, we see that Pan/Shao subtly ridicules the very notion of any individual being able to ‘represent’ the entire Chinese nation — an inevitable ludicrousness which lies at the core of all state or national-level diplomacy.

In this respect, Shao Xunmei is characterised in stark contrast to Lin Yutang, a scholar and writer who received his doctoral education at Harvard University and the University of Leipzig, and who by the late 1930s was famous for his English-language bestsellers such as *My Country and My People* (1935), making him the most influential Chinese writer of his generation for American audiences. A literary phenomenon both within and outside China, Hahn’s depiction
of him in *Steps of the Sun* — in the form of ‘Dr. Tang’ — offers an unorthodox take on Lin. Here he is at one of Marcia Peters/Bernardine Fritz’s salon gatherings:

> Dr. Tang was indeed entertaining, with a chattering small voice and a flowing American vocabulary. He had been educated in the Western world. There was in his talk a good deal of “you people” and “we Chinese”; he delivered himself of gentle rudenesses with a thin little swagger. 329

Dr. Tang’s speech soon melts into a series of indistinct statements on Chineseness for the narrator:

> Dr. Tang: “… the Chinese ideal of motherhood … calligraphy and its effect on the Chinese mind … Chinese … China … Chinese …”
> Marcia… listened with a rapt smile, perfectly happy that all this conversation was going on under her guidance, at her party. 330

The narrator finds Dr. Tang too “exhibitionistic”, too “antiseptic and clever” 331, culminating in her “rowdy desire to stand up in the middle of the room and shout, ‘Come on, chaps, can’t we all stop being significant and Representative of the Best of our Race?’” 332

Unlike Pan Heh-ven, then, Dr. Tang is far more interested in, and comfortable with, making statements and observations that generalise about Chinese culture or ‘the Chinese mind’. This approach hews closer to conventional models of official diplomacy, in which government representatives are indeed expected to be “significant and Representative of the Best of [each] Race”. Pan Heh-ven, on the other hand, while also aware that he performs ‘Chineseness’, displays both more tentativeness and playfulness with regards to exactly how that is carried

---

329 Hahn, *Steps of the Sun*, 42.
330 ibid., 48.
331 ibid., 53-4.
332 ibid., 53.
out, and thus a critical awareness of the various expectations and assumptions of participating in international social settings, and of “the way in the gathering of identity always remains partial and fleeting.”

While Bernardine Fritz’s salon gatherings, then, could certainly reflect the problematic power dynamics of semi-colonialism, her most prized initiative, the International Arts Theatre, an amateur artistic group, provided a unique forum for cross-cultural artistic productions. “What made it good,” remembers Hahn, “was that the concerts were Russian or German or whatever, the debates took into account such extremely controversial subjects as ‘Birth Control in China’ (three Catholic priests attended, with skyrocket results), and the plays were damn good, especially Lady Precious Stream with an all-Chinese cast.”

‘Lady Precious Stream’ was based on a Peking opera, The Red-Maned Steed, and had been rendered into the form of an English-language play in 1934 by Hsiung Shi-i Hsiung Shi-i (熊式ー). It enjoyed a surprisingly successful run in London, where it ran for three years with nine hundred performances to critical acclaim, leading Lin Yutang to comment optimistically that “the unstinted praise and cordial welcome given to Mr. Hsiung’s play seem to augur well for a deeper understanding of the more intimate and leisurely aspects of Chinese life.”

In particular, Lin draws attention to the creative license of Hsiung’s translation: “When the Prime Minister and his family are

---

333 Berman, Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community, 20.
335 Li, Bernard Shaw and China: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 167.
336 T’ien Hsia, vol. 1, Aug 1935, p.107
talking about the disgrace of having their daughter married to a gardener, the tone is so typically English that we might believe it to be any one of the English lords and ladies protesting against the marriage of his or her daughter to a commoner. Without that type of happy rendering, the play would not have gone off so successfully on the London stage."

As before, in comparison to Lin Yutang, Emily Hahn provides a more wryly critical take on the play’s reception in England:

[It] did a good deal in its whimsical way to render Europe China-conscious, and by the mysterious alchemy known as Publicity, common opinion was veering. Those people who had been accustomed to say, “The Chinese may be very clever, but the Japanese are clean,” were now stating savagely that the Japanese were - dreadful little menaces, whereas China, big old-fashioned adorable China, like a harried St. Bernard, should be protected.

Hahn’s wryness was perhaps justified, given the fact that a mixture of commercial obligations and a lack of familiarity with Chinese theatre culture on the part of the English cast —which often expressed incredulity or confusion over the play’s costumes and stage directions— meant that “the cast’s engagement with Chinese performance aesthetics was always going to be cursory.” As Hahn intuits, this kind of public interest tended to be superficial and trendy rather than grounded in actual understanding or openness to artistic and cultural difference.

---

337  T’ien Hsia vol 1 Aug 1935, p.108

338  Hahn, Steps of the Sun, 165-166.

In the hands of Fritz’s Shanghai-based International Arts Theatre (IAT), however, this Anglicised Peking opera, now with an all-Chinese cast, became something else again. Thanks to the varied connections of Shao Xunmei, this Shanghai staging of *Lady Precious Stream* was directed by the legendary Chinese opera singer Mei Lanfang, with the heroine played by another of his friends, the famous actress Tang Ying (唐瑛). (Even Shao’s three brothers were involved as minor cast-members.) Under Mei Lanfang’s direction, the IAT cast delivered their English lines with classical Peking opera stylisation, from tones to gestures to expressions.  

By all accounts, the play was a great success. Unlike its English counterpart, the IAT version was less weighted down by fears of commercial failure, and thus more open to artistic experimentation; and it was directed and guided by a set of Chinese performers, artists and intellectuals who together possessed genuine expertise in the Peking opera performance tradition as well as some degree of cultural fluency in both Western and Chinese theatrical practices. Had *Lady Precious Stream* “been premiered in China and not Britain,” writes Ashley Thorpe, “its place in theatrical history could have been different; the play might have been regarded as an experimental fusion of Eastern and Western theatrical forms indicative of the period.”  

One might argue that that is exactly what took place in the IAT staging of *Lady Precious Stream*, which remains a striking instance of the ways in which salons “trafficked in the innovation and distribution of cultural forms” and could function as “a laboratory for the new—failures and successes alike.”

---


At her best, then, Bernardine Fritz was a rare individual genuinely interested in creating connections between the Chinese and foreign social worlds of semi-colonial Shanghai; she “liked most people, she could enter their worlds quickly, know them, listen to them. It was this quality which gave her her charm.” 343 Together with an enduring enthusiasm for Chinese culture, Fritz-as-salonnière provided the driving force for culturally adventurous productions and created a space for experimental cross-cultural collaboration to thrive. At its worst, however, her enthusiasm could blur into a kind of exotification, in which Chinese attendees at her social gatherings functioned more as showcases than as participants. In another work by Hahn, we hear how Marcia Peters (a stand-in for Bernardine Fritz) gushes about Yuin-loong (a stand-in for Shao Xunmei) in rather telling vocabulary as she entreats him to meet one of her friends: “…she won’t be here [in Shanghai] for long and, dear Yuin-loong, I do want her to see you. Because you really are one of the sights of China. Heavens, if I could only keep you in a glass case!...”344 Elsewhere, with her usual unforgiving wit, Hahn describes Fritz’s expression, upon being invited to take part in a predominantly Chinese social gathering, as “that of an American tourist in the British Museum”. 345 Given, then, that Fritz was prone towards stereotyping and romanticisation of her Chinese guests, it is worth re-examining the moment when Shao Xunmei offers Fritz’s salon as a model: “I hope China’s socialites will … work, each in their own separate way, towards this common goal with Mrs. Fritz.” Shao’s word choice here, fentouhezuo, i.e., ‘to work, each in their own separate way, towards a common goal’, makes clear


344 ibid., 17.

345 ibid., 87.
that he hopes other socialites will not simply participate in or expand Fritz’s salon, but rather offer their own variants and gathering spaces. Shanghai needed a diversity of such social spaces and gatherings, with Bernardine Fritz as one possible model, or option, of many. Different salons would offer varied possibilities and avenues for relating to oneself and others, and for exploring different modes of conversation or affiliation.

In light of this, what kind of salon did Shao Xunmei himself run? If Shanghai was a city that was the result of, according to Meng Yue, “multiple processes of processes of social, political, and cultural decentering”, Shao’s approach to salon culture was a correspondingly decentralised network of sites, rather than any single one. Shao’s famed social gatherings, while always revolving around the subjects of art and literature, took place not in one fixed location, but rather spread across various points in the city: from his residence, to his printing press, to Sunya Teahouse on North Sichuan Road, to his friend Zhang Zhenyu’s residence, among others. Yu Dafu, famous for his avant-garde short stories, recalls Shao’s study being perpetually full of guests and freely running wine; it was through such gatherings that Yu met other writers experimenting with modernist form, such as Zhang Ruogu. Meanwhile, the list of dinner guests at Shao’s residence often reads like a Who’s Who of modernist Chinese writers: Liu Na’ou, Shi Zhecun, and Dai Wangshu, for example, would dine together there, along with prominent artists and officials.

---


347 Shao, *Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)*, 68.

348 ibid., 65.
Analects (Lunyu), one of Republican China’s longest-running and most influential magazines, was born in Shao Xunmei’s residence. Night after night, Lin Yutang, Li Qingya, Cao Hanmei, Lin Huiyin, and roughly a dozen other writers and intellectuals had gathered in Shao’s living room to discuss their plans, wracking their brains for a suitable title for what they envisioned as a ‘Chinese-language humour magazine’,\(^{349}\) along the lines of England’s Punch.\(^{350}\) The publishing and distribution of the bi-weekly periodical were overseen by Shao Xunmei’s bookshop and printing press; and from the tenth issue onwards, Shao became the sole financier. As Shao’s daughter, Shao Xiaohong, writes: “Though it is often referred to Lin Yutang’s Analects, this is in fact a misconception.”\(^{351}\) Among other things, the fact that the Analects was “the first to feature foreign and domestic humorous cartoons as a specialty” among Chinese magazines\(^{352}\) is sufficient to show the strong influence of Shao, who published magazines devoted to the cartoon (manhua) genre, and was a strong proponent of the significance of the form. Just as Gertrude Stein’s salon had provided a space for artists and intellectuals to meet, so too did Shao seek to host social gatherings that created a wealth of ‘cultural possibilities’.

For Jessica Berman, modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein “engage directly with early twentieth-century historical and political transformations of community, transformations that occasioned on the one hand an almost desperate effort to recoup community in the form of nationalism and fascism, and on the other hand an insistence on

\(^{349}\) Hockx and Denton, \textit{Literary Societies of Republican China}, 209.

\(^{350}\) Shao, \textit{Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)}, 92.

\(^{351}\) \textit{ibid.}, 91.

\(^{352}\) Hockx and Denton, \textit{Literary Societies of Republican China}, 212.
deepening cosmopolitanism.” Salons and literary gatherings in semi-colonial Shanghai can be viewed as social sites where ‘desperate efforts to recoup community in the form of nationalism’ interfaced with ‘an insistence on deepening cosmopolitanism’. This is further borne out when we look at representative examples of the hospitality that a ‘salon diplomat’ such as Shao Xunmei provided for foreign visitors to Shanghai: the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (in 1933), Mexican illustrator Miguel Covarrubias, and Rabindranath Tagore (1929).

Salon hospitality

G.B. Shaw’s highly anticipated visit to Shanghai in 1933 culminated in a Chinese media frenzy, with newspaper and magazines documenting and analysing the playwright’s every word and gesture. Yet his trip ultimately proved confusing, if not disappointing, for many of the Chinese who had so eagerly awaited his visit. “Shaw and China had been constructing one another’s image for a long time,” observes Kay Li, “and they believed themselves to be quite familiar with one another. However, when they finally met in 1933, they were at a loss.” As demonstrated by the media coverage of his trip, Shaw was understood by the Chinese to have visited China in order to express moral support for and “further the cause of Chinese nationalism”; whereas the ‘real’ Shaw avoided making any statements of this nature. Chinese intellectuals who enthusiastically welcomed Shaw—including Lin Yutang, who waited for hours at the wrong pier for Shaw’s ship to pull into harbour—sought from him “ideological

---

353 Berman, Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community, 3.

354 Li, Bernard Shaw and China: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 132.

355 ibid., 145.
inspiration and affirmation”, 356 but found instead a reluctant guest, fatigued from attention, who had apparently only set foot in Shanghai in the first place at his wife’s insistence. A snippet of Shaw’s conversation with the Peking opera icon Mei Lanfang, for example, is enough to show us Shaw’s general frame of mind:

[SHAW]: Will you please tell me how a Chinese actor can do anything in the midst of such infernal uproar as one hears on your stage? In our theatre, they put a man out if he sneezes. But you have gongs and symbals [sic] and the competition of half the audience and innumerable vendors. Don’t you object?
[MEI LAN-FANG]: [The noisy drums and gongs were necessary] because the opera was a folk art first performed in the open air and the drums have been kept to this day. 357

Shaw’s China-related writings, such as the character of Confucius in his 1920 *The Thing Happens*, had been based on a fairly superficial understanding of Chinese culture, and were mainly useful in enabling “him to make universal claims and strengthen his arguments on British-European matters” rather than intended for Chinese audiences. 358 Meanwhile, in the other direction, misreadings of Shaw were compounded by the fact that the Chinese, for their part, saw him simply as ‘English’ or even ‘Western’ for their purposes, unaware of difference between ‘English’ and ‘Irish’. 359

The dour Shaw nevertheless agreed to attending a banquet in his honour, to take place at the private residence of Soong Ching-ling, wife of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China. The sumptuous vegetarian spread —which cost forty-six silver dollars, at a time when

356 ibid., 153.
357 ibid., 153.
358 ibid., 6.
359 ibid. p.xii.
the most extravagant banquets would cost around twelve—was paid for entirely by Shao Xunmei, who had also handpicked several gifts for the playwright. Oddly, it was in these circumstances that Shao and Lu Xun, the towering giant of modern Chinese literature, met for the first time. Shao did not make a good impression; his bankrolling of the banquet and gifts seems to have piqued Lu Xun’s annoyance, beginning a trend that only intensified and continued. In the following years, Lu Xun would attack Shao Xunmei as a frivolous literary hack whose reputation was based solely upon his wealth, going so far as to accuse Shao of hiring ghostwriters (claims which have since been refuted). For Lu Xun, Shao Xunmei was a decadent playboy whose literary tastes and works were trivial and irrelevant to the struggles of modern China. In a related vein, Shao was often questioned as to why he spent so much time producing glossy pictorial magazines rather than more ‘serious’, high-brow publications. In response, Shao would point to the limited readership of the New Literature Movement and its detachment from the common people. “Pictorials,” he replied, “do not regard editorial opinion as important but pay attention to the pleasure of the reader”; in order to foster a habit for reading among the common people, it was important that the magazine be accessible and interesting. For Shao, the importance of pleasure was overlooked in many Chinese intellectuals’ attempts to ‘reform the nation’ and its literature. Nor was the role of wealth something to be dismissed, either. “Art does not need to be commercial in order to be successful,” Shao writes in 1934, “but some degree of financial support is necessary. It was thanks to the Medicis that Florence

---

360 ibid., 2-3.

was able to become a second Athens.”\textsuperscript{362} 363 As the primary, and sometimes the sole, source of capital of not just mainstream glossies but also artistic and literary magazines such \textit{The New Crescent Monthly (Xinyue yuekan)},\textsuperscript{364} Shao Xunmei represents an alternative, but equally significant, facet of modern Chinese literary history. It is in no small part due to Lu Xun’s influence that Shao Xunmei has until recently been marginalised — almost effaced — from this history, save for a few unflattering traces. Shao Xiaohong recalls the time when her son showed her a footnote to Lu Xun’s essay ‘Grabbism’ in his Chinese class textbook: “Here, ‘obtained through marriage’ is intended to mock those who show off their wealth, gained by marrying a wealthy woman, such as Shao Xunmei and his ilk.”\textsuperscript{365} 366 As Ji Xiaobo (季小波), an artist and acquaintance of Lu Xun, writes in his memoirs:

Xunmei was richly connected both at home and abroad. Among his friends were mayors, ambassadors, writers and painters, most of whom were accomplished and successful. When the great English humorist G.B. Shaw visited China, Shao Xunmei was the host, alongside Soong Qing-ling. I think all of this suffices to show the kind of esteem that Xunmei was held in, in both Chinese and foreign artistic and intellectual circles — was this something your run-of-the-mill ‘prodigal son’ could have achieved?”\textsuperscript{367}

\textsuperscript{362} 我以為藝術品的成功，雖不一定要把來完全商業化，但是一種經濟的鼓勵是需要的。翡冷翠的成為“西方的雅典”，不能不歸功於米地西(Medici)一家人：結果的種子，是他們對金錢的愛好與對藝術的愛好。

\textsuperscript{363} Shao, \textit{Xunmei Wencun (Collected Writings of Shao Xunmei)}, 112.

\textsuperscript{364} Shao, \textit{Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)}, 68.

\textsuperscript{365} “(做了女婿換來的)，這裡是諷刺做了富翁的女婿而炫耀於人的邵洵美之流。”

\textsuperscript{366} ibid., 326.

\textsuperscript{367} ibid., 319.
Meanwhile, Shao Xunmei’s two published pieces on G.B. Shaw’s visit, both published in the periodical *Analects (Lunyu)*, strike an intriguingly divergent tone from much of the media commentary. The first one, written before Shaw’s arrival, asks:

> But why is Shaw coming to China? Is it because he has read of our stories and legends, and has come to seek out traces of dragons and gods; or is it because he read about the history of Sino-Japanese conflict, and has now come to take a closer look at this strange people? Or is it in order to reawaken his lively wit and gain a few more converts? Or, similar to his previous trip to Russia, is it to gather material for composing a paean to our nation?^368^ 369

By framing Shaw’s upcoming visit in terms of a series of wide-ranging, semi-serious questions, Shao avoids making assumptions about or fixing specific expectations upon the playwright’s reasons for visiting China. The other article, written after Shaw’s visit and titled *I’ve Finally Met Him After All* strikes a similarly droll tone: “At the PEN club … when Mei Lanfang expressed the desire to befriend Shaw, Shaw responded ‘You can never trust an Irishman’ — this, on the contrary, to me seemed like a trustworthy confession on his part. This one sentence from him seemed to me far more sincere than a ten-volume biography.”^370^ Shao recognises, then, Shaw’s reticence and refusal to ‘perform’ ties of affection and friendship to his Chinese audience; nor does he ask them of him — rather, he respects the fact that Shaw chooses not to affect any insincere enthusiasm. Shao continues:

> He [Shaw] was unwilling to waste even one extra sentence on us. When taking his leave, he said, ‘I must go now, there are five thousand reporters

---

^368^ 但是他為了什麼到中國來呢？是讀了故事傳說而來探詢神龍的遺跡呢；還是聽得了中日戰史而來參觀這奇異的民族呢？還是要重新施展他四五十年前的靈活的舌尖來添收幾多的徒眾呢？還是和他上次去俄羅斯一般，預備歸國後寫一部頌讚呢？1933.2.16《論語》第11期

^369^ Shao, *Xunmei Wencun (Collected Writings of Shao Xunmei)*, 319.

^370^ 梅蘭芳很願意和他交朋友，他回答說，愛爾蘭人全靠不住，這倒是一個靠得住的供狀。就這一句話，我就覺得比十部羅騷的自傳要忠實。1933.3.1 《論語》第12期 《我總算見過他了》
over there waiting for me.’ This sentence, too, was very suggestive. … To be honest, my impression of him isn’t bad at all, you might even say it was excellent; but in those short twenty minutes, I didn’t enjoy myself one bit, because from the moment he entered the door to the moment he stepped into his car, I’d been waiting tensely for him to offer an insult cloaked in a smile [帶著笑罵人]. 371 372

While Shao realises, then, that Shaw has every right to remain detached from his Chinese interlocutors and fans, he, in return, remains en garde — in many respects the perfect host, providing food, entertainment and organising events, while never imposing or demanding anything in return. Ultimately, he is unable to engage in the kind of informal, salon-style dialogue with Shaw that he so values.

In contrast, let’s look at what takes place when Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias, by then already world famous for his illustrations for The New Yorker and Vanity Fair, comes to town. As Shaw’s visit was structured by public engagements and those involving government figures and representatives such as Soong Ching-ling, Shao’s reception of him was also much more in line with conventional diplomacy and official hospitality, as compared to the kind of ‘salon diplomacy’, or salon hospitality, that Shao is able to engage Covarrubias in.

As the publisher and friend of many outstanding Chinese cartoonists and illustrators, Shao first showed Covarrubias some examples of their work. In a 1933 article published in The Decameron (another of the many periodicals issued under the auspices of his publishing company), Shao recalls how, at their second encounter at Bernardine Fritz’s, Covarrubias

371 老實說，我對於他的印象並不壞，竟然可以說極好；可是在短短的二十分鐘，我卻並沒得到多少快感，因為我自從他踏進門一直到他跨上車，我都在防備著他會帶著笑罵人。

372 ibid., 325.
pulled me aside and said: ‘Yesterday a reporter came to interview me; I told him that, based on the work of Zhang Zhenyu which you showed me last time, Chinese modern art is witnessing significant breakthroughs. Zhang is clearly very familiar with the strengths of Western art, yet also able to call upon the advantages of Eastern art. I don’t think the reporter agreed with me though, so I don’t think what I said will make it into the papers… so I was hoping you could somehow transmit these thoughts of mine to the Chinese art world. … In any case, the reporter never quite understood what I was getting at.’

Covarrubias thus had already begun to view Shao as a preferred alternative to more official channels for communicating his ideas to his Chinese counterparts. Covarrubias was soon cancelling his formal engagements in order to be able to spend more time conversing with Shao. As they met nearly every day, Shao and Covarrubias soon discovered a shared enthusiasm for jade; Covarrubias was an avid collector of Mexican jade carvings, and a connoisseur of Han dynasty jade-work. “He was most delighted,” Shao writes, “upon discovering this common ground between Chinese and Mexican artistic traditions, because a love of jade and jade-carving is so rarely found among other nations…. I’m sure the clean, strong lines of his drawings are at least partly inspired by this art form.”

Their longest and most memorable conversation takes place on the night of a large party and dinner originally planned in Covarrubias’s honour, to which Covarrubias makes up an excuse in order to be able to drop by Shao Xunmei’s residence instead. (Shao found this entirely understandable: “artists are always terrified of

373 ibid., 329-330.

375 He loved jade, collecting many Mexican jade carvings. He was most delighted to discover a common ground between Chinese and Mexican artistic traditions, because a love of jade and jade-carving is so rarely found among other nations. I’m sure the clean, strong lines of his drawings are at least partly inspired by this art form.”

1933.10.20 《十日談》第8期 《珂佛羅皮斯》
formal and respectful invitations,” he remarks. Their discussion that evening ranged from an Ingres sketch hung on Shao’s wall, to thoughts on Chinese painting, to Shao’s treasured Song Dynasty copy of the classic text Biographies of Exemplary Women (Lienüzhuan), the cover of which had exceptionally beautiful carved wood flowers. This medium of art, Shao told Covarrubias, was native to China, yet was on the brink of dying out; it now, however, had a vigorous existence in Japan. Covarrubias responded by comparing Japan to Ancient Rome and China to Ancient Greece — the former, he said, could only ever be an imitator of the latter: “China has many precious things that have not truly disappeared — for political reasons, they have only temporarily become hidden beneath the surface.” “He said,” writes Shao Xunmei, “[that] he was utterly sincere, but I know that these were simply consoling things to say.”

After their conversation, Shao and Covarrubias left for dinner at the home of Zhang Zhenyu’s — the accomplished cartoonist and illustrator whose work Shao had earlier shown Covarrubias — where they had prepared wine and food, including shark fin’s soup, Covarrubias’s favourite Chinese dish. To Shao’s surprise and pleasure, Covarrubias dropped by with a gift the following morning — a black-and-white portrait of Shao in his signature style.

As Garrett Brown writes:

---

376 *ibid.*, 330.

377 *ibid.*, 331.

378 我又給他看一部宋版的《列女傳》，上面有顧虎頭的木刻插花；我又對他說，木刻起源在中國，但是現在幾乎失傳了；反而被日本得到了極大的收穫。他卻說：“日本對於中國，正像羅馬對於希臘，做出種種可笑的模仿。中國有許多寶貴的東西並沒有失蹤，只是為了政治的關係，暫時躲避開來罷了。”他說這是他誠實的意見，但是我總覺得是同情性的安慰。

379 *ibid.*, 332.
there is a direct relationship between the experience of mutual global hospitality and the propagation of a cosmopolitan order. This is because historical developments and perceptions of experience largely form our social obligations to both national and any eventual global identity. If a sense of world citizenship is advanced, it will largely be the result of positive experiences of global interaction and the formation of norms based on the fulfilment of certain mutual expectations.\textsuperscript{380}

In ‘salon diplomacy’ as practised by Shao, then, dialogue about the arts becomes an effective means of mediating and enlivening cultural difference and connection in a way that enhances a sense of cosmopolitan belonging, and helps to shape a cosmopolitan ‘formation of norms’.

Shao’s approach to hospitality provides an interesting counterpoint, too, to the consolidation of elite power that is so central to the practice of official, inter-state diplomatic hospitality. “Hospitality was offered with such largesse by Homeric heroes,” writes Gideon Baker, because these heroes were “thereby able to preserve their elite power in a changing world of emerging city states through the mutual recognition that hospitality afforded.” This is, he adds, a strategy that continues to the present day, in “a world of nation-states and their ostentatiously hospitable summit meetings, state visits and exchange of diplomats”. ‘Guest friendship’ then, “served as a device for the promotion of the material and political interests of the elites engaged in it”; “Persian syngenics, Macedonian hetairoi and Hellenistic philoi were all composed of a narrow core of kin and a wide periphery of guest-friends drawn from an astonishing variety of localities”, rendering ‘guest friendship’ a “major device in the formation of the ruling circles of the great territorial empires” and an effective “repository of heroic values” in the ancient world.\textsuperscript{381} We might then view these cosmopolitan networks of hospitality formed

\textsuperscript{380} Baker, \textit{Politicising Ethics in International Relations: Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality}, 68.

\textsuperscript{381} ibid., 21-22.
by salons and similar gatherings as similarly instrumental in the formation of “ties of solidarity which linked together the elites of separate communities”, they provide an alternative network for a alternative kind of ‘elite’, a loosely connected global artistic and intellectual elite whose interests were often different from, if not counter to, the ‘material and political interests’ of the diplomatic representatives of nation-states. Miguel Covarrubias, for instance, was a deeply influential figure in North America, and friends with writers and artists such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. In a way, then, the moment when Covarrubias meets Shao is also the moment where the Harlem Renaissance meets the Shanghai avant-garde. Similarly, before coming to Shanghai, Fritz had made the acquaintance of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and Isadora Duncan, among others.

Rabindranath Tagore’s 1929 visit to China offers an example of the importance of this alternative form of hospitality, as the Chinese government refused to host him. During his prior visit in 1923, the famous Indian poet’s perceived ideological position had drawn widespread ire. The prominent writer Mao Dun, for example, had written in the journal *Consciousness (Juewu)*:

... we do not welcome the Tagore who loudly sings the praises of the Oriental civilization, nor do we welcome the Tagore who creates a paradise of poetry that has made our youth intoxicated and self-complacent. We welcome the Tagore who works for the upliftment of the peasantry (though we do not support his methods), the Tagore who passionately sings, ‘March alone’....

---

382 ibid., 22.


384 Shao, *Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)*, 64.
... And that is the reason why we expect these two things from Tagore:

1. We hope Tagore will understand the weakness of the modern Chinese youth. Because they are afraid to face the reality, they want to escape into a world of illusion... In this sickening atmosphere we need someone who can give strength to them; someone who can encourage them to face the reality and to struggle with it.

2. We expect Tagore to oppose the imperialism of the West. He, with his intense patriotism, will be able to demolish the slavish admiration for the West prevailing among a group of people in China.

The backlash against Tagore culminated in the passing out of vitriolic leaflets attacking him at a lecture he gave in Nanjing. The poet, who advocated pacifism and an appreciation of Chinese tradition in the face of an imposed Western modernity, was accused of harbouring the ulterior motives of indoctrinating Chinese youth and leading them astray from actively fighting Western imperialism. Tagore's 1923 visit was, in short, not a success. 

This time, then, Tagore was instead hosted by the famous poet Xu Zhimo, whom Shao had also met in Paris. One of Shao Xunmei’s closest friends, and a great admirer of Tagore, the name of the poetry society Xu had founded, the ‘Crescent Moon Society’ (Xinyueshe) was inspired by the title of one of Tagore’s poetry collections. To make the poet feel more at home, Xu had taken pains to prepare a bedroom for him, specially decorated with Indian carpets, tapestries, and pillows; Tagore, however, ended up preferring Xu Zhimo’s own Chinese-style bedroom, and insisted on sleeping there instead. Regardless of Xu’s well-intentioned though misguided décor efforts, the drastic difference is clear between Mao Dun’s list of demands and

---


386 Shao, Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei), 64.
expectations regarding how Tagore should think and behave on Chinese soil, and Xu’s efforts to make him feel ‘at home’.

For Gideon Baker, hospitality captures the “productive tension between identity and difference at the heart of such a cosmopolitan ethics … where our awareness of the identity of the stranger as a fellow human being seeking refuge is opposed by the irreducible difference of the stranger as Other — someone who, as a guest in a home not his own, suffers the violence of assimilation.” 387 Shao and Xu Zhimo’s salon diplomacy offer a kind of hospitality that is more aware of the potential ‘violence’ of assimilation, and that seeks a productive middle ground between universality and singularity. By extending their informal hospitality to figures such as Covarrubias and Tagore, they were participants in an alternative circuit of ‘embassies’, a network through which an alternative artistic ‘elite’ of the world could express ties of solidarity.

**Magazine diplomacy: From *Candid Comment* to the *New Yorker***

In addition providing hospitality to government representatives and distinguished foreign visitors, information gathering “has long been recognised as one of the most important functions of the resident embassy.”388 Embassy personnel, writes G. R. Berridge, “[i]mmersed in the local scene and swapping information with other members of the diplomatic corps … are ideally situated to provide informative reports, and it is difficult to see this function ever being adequately performed in any other way.”389 Likewise, from its earliest manifestations, the

---


salon formed “the centre of an information network”, drawing upon personal correspondence, literary newsletters, and later periodicals to distribute and absorb opinions, news, and ideas. Social gatherings in semi-colonial Shanghai, as you might imagine, were particularly fertile ground for information-gathering—not just about China, but on a global scale—as Emily Hahn writes:

I still feel that Shanghai, as far as it is, was the best centre I have ever found for European and American developments. Back in Chicago when the Abyssinian fever first took hold of Italy, how much did you know about it? Only what you saw in the papers and heard on the radio. … But in Shanghai we were better off than that: we had small bits of all the governments in the world right there, where we could talk to them. I dined with Italians while all this was going on. I could talk to them—ships’ captains and consuls. I could turn around at the same dinner and talk to British diplomats. It happened often, because Shanghai hostesses couldn’t be expected to remember all the strains and stresses of European politics when they planned their dinners. I don’t wish to claim that I knew any more about Italy’s actions in Africa just because I met some idiotic little Italian officer at a cocktail party, but certainly I knew more about why Italy did what she did.

Shao Xunmei, as a superbly well-connected individual at the heart of a diverse range of Shanghai’s social networks, was uniquely positioned to gather, distribute, and act upon various kinds of information. Even during his time in Europe, Chinese embassy staff had often referred Chinese students in trouble to seek out the resourceful Shao for assistance. And it was thanks to Shao Xunmei’s connections that Emily Hahn was able to write a biography of the Soong sisters, with Shao making arrangements for private interviews with both Soong Mei-ling and Soong Ching-ling, as well as gathering and translating related materials for her. Publishing,
meanwhile, remained Shao’s main passion, and the primary means by which he both gathered and distributed information. The list of publications which Shao was closely involved with or founded, via his two publishing companies, Modern Publications Ltd. and the Number One Publishing Company, is extensive: *Modern Miscellany (Shidai huabao, 1929-37), Modern Sketch (Shidai manhua, 1934-37), The Decameron (Shiritan, 1933-34), Van Jan (Wansiang, 1934-1935), The Analects (Lunyu, 1932-37; 1946-49), Vox (Shengse huabao, 1935-?), Candid Comment (Ziyoutan/Zhiyan pinglun, 1938-39), Modern Cinema (Shidai dianying), and more.* 394 This passion inspired Emily Hahn to write the following passage:

“Well, and who are you?” she retorted with his own question. “...Are you the Chinese Cocteau, for instance?”
He took these words seriously and considered. “Cocteau? No, I will not say that. I am not a poet anymore, and even when I was a poet, I was something like Swinburne, but not Cocteau.” 395
“Well, what are you then?”
“The Chinese Northcliffe,” he said solemnly. “I publish magazines and papers. Popular ones. You are disappointed?” 396

In her study of Anglophone print culture in semi-colonial Shanghai, Shuang Shen notes how English-language periodicals constituted a “space of encounters between cultures” as part of a public sphere with “multilingual, translational, and transnational qualities”. 398 The English-language magazines that are the focus of Shen’s study were in fact established by

---

396 ibid., 98.
398 ibid., 2.
groups of Chinese intellectuals who had been educated abroad, such as Lin Yutang and *The China Critic*. Why did they choose to write in English about China? The “disjunction of their chosen linguistic medium with the subject of their concern and their immediate environment is intrinsic to the production of meaning in these periodicals”, 399 and is at least partly a manifestation of “a desire to communicate with the outside world from a position self-identified as ‘Chinese.’” 400 Lin Yutang, for example, like “most other editors and writers for *The China Critic* … believed in modernity as a global project and tried to find a position for Chinese culture within it.” 401 This is further supported by what Lin writes in a 1936 issue of the English-language periodical *T’ien Hsia*: “[P]eriodicals in China have exercised a most profound influence on the social and intellectual awakening of China” he declares, and they “are the best indication of a country’s cultural progress. After all, the function of a periodical, as distinct from that of books, is to serve as a medium for educating the public, surveying the most important tendencies and the domestic and foreign situation, introducing or advocating new movements of art and literature and thought, and constantly guiding the current of thought and rectifying its errors.”

Meanwhile, Shao Xunmei and Emily Hahn decided to take an intriguingly different route. What sets the magazines they collaborated on, namely *Vox/Shengse Huabao* and *Candid Comment/Ziyoutan*, apart from the crowded field of Shanghai periodicals during this time is that, rather than selecting Chinese or English as the primary language, they sought to include both.

399 ibid., 1.
400 ibid., 63.
401 ibid., 154.
This immediately made the ‘self-positioning’ of the magazine impossible to identify with a single nation or language; nor could the mission of such a magazine be the awakening of ‘China’ per se.

Their first joint endeavour came in the form of the bilingual *Vox*, in 1935. According to Hahn, one afternoon Shao suggested suddenly: “Why should we not have a magazine? … A double-language one, English on one side and Chinese on the other. I suggest it because of the format, which will be original. You see, Chinese writing reads from the back of the book, and from right to left. Well, English is just opposite. Well, let the book be printed in such fashion that the English and Chinese meet in the middle! I can get plenty of advertising for the Chinese half; what do you think about the English?”

Hahn’s excitement is palpable from her letters to family in late 1935, one which ends with “That is all the news there is except that of course there is always VOX*; bless it”, and another in which she reports: “My magazine should be out any time now; it’s being printed today. The last few weeks were very very hectic, and I don’t know what I should have done without Sinmay, because I didn’t know a thing about pasting and preparing dummies, or getting photographs, or anything. It’s quite a different job from preparing a school annual.” The true scope of Shao and Hahn’s editorial ambitions only becomes clear in the opening foreword to the inaugural issue of *Vox*, which begins with an unequivocal indictment of official diplomacy. “Diplomacy is a big Lie,” it states. “In order to attain mutual understanding, it is necessary to get to know one another; for this, official


404 ibid., 37.
documents are of course unreliable; cultural exchange is what is needed. … This is why we thought that the most desirable way to attain this goal would be for a small group of friends — all longtime kindred souls, determined to avoid the bias of national boundaries— to get together and collaborate on a periodical such as this one.”

Emphasising that the magazine “is the first experiment of its kind in China”, the editors then state that its content will focus on introducing “the best of all cultures from all across the world, along with the most incisive critiques [of social phenomena]” and welcome submissions on the topic of “any and all misunderstandings that occur in interactions between China/Chinese and others, ideally involving detailed description and analysis.”

This foreword makes evident that Hahn and Shao viewed their magazine as providing a compelling and alternative discourse to official diplomatic rhetoric and communication. Not to mention the fact that, in theory, this was the only magazine of its kind in Shanghai that would present Chinese- and English-readers with the same content — put them on the same page, so to speak. In practice, however, Shao’s elegant solution of having English and Chinese ‘meet in the middle’ was not a successful one. “The story of *Vox*, our first bilingual paper,” writes

---

405 “外交是一個大謊”這成語是全世界公認的...... 見到面時，互相顯耀自己的長處，又互相恭維對方的優點；背過身來，卻總是一種過分的指斥與刻薄的訕笑。......什麼中外文化協會，什麼國際聯歡社等的組織，便也不過是表面的酬酢罷了。交通是一天天的在進步，各國人民互相接近的機會是一天天在等多，以往的儀式的朋友是一天天在顯得虛偽：現在實在是一個剖心相見的時候了。但是要互相了解，先須互相認識；要達到這個目的，那種公家的文件，當然又是不可靠的；而文化的交換乃是一種必然的需要。但是所謂文化的交換又決不是股東的搬運，我們打倒“陰配”式的舉動，我們是要“活人做朋友”！所以我們相信，幾個絕無國界成見的寫作者，互相又早是知己的朋友，來合作編輯一個刊物，是達到那個目的的最如意的方法。

406像這一類性質的刊物，在中國還是第一次的嘗試；開始的時候自然免不掉有許多意料中的麻煩。我們歡迎來稿。關於中外交誼間之一切誤會，能有詳細之描寫，透徹之解剖更好。
Hahn, “is a sad and common one.” Unable to procure a sufficient number of foreign advertisers, who remained sceptical of the reach of such a magazine—“Usually it was a Russian who was willing to try it out when we talked”—the paper folded after a handful of issues.\textsuperscript{407} As C.V. Starr, publisher of the \textit{Evening Post}, pointed out to Hahn, the idea behind \textit{Vox} was wrongheaded from the start: “just because Shanghai was a bilingual city, that didn’t mean that people wanted to read their magazines in two languages, did it? A man reads English or he reads Chinese. Very few people read both with equal ease. Why not publish identical magazines, one in English and one in Chinese, but separate?”\textsuperscript{408}

And that is exactly what Shao Xunmei and Emily Hahn did for their next collaboration. Undiscouraged, they co-founded \textit{Candid Comment} (1938-39), a sort of \textit{Vox} 2.0, with a heavier emphasis on organising against Japanese oppression. Like \textit{Vox}, it was another bold experiment in cross-cultural stewardship of a magazine, conceived for a cosmopolitan yet also segmented reading public. “In the end,” Hahn explains, “we struck a compromise: my magazine and Sinmay’s used the same chief leader and many of the articles, but in format, illustration, and all other art we went our separate ways. Whenever I received and used an English article that Sinmay liked, he translated it and used it. The same went for his Chinese contributions. I had the better of that bargain. My contributing public was limited; how many Americans and English in the Far East are expert writers? Whereas through Sinmay I had the choice of all China’s output…”\textsuperscript{409} As Shen argues, the semi-colonial Shanghainese periodical constitutes a

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{408} ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{409} ibid., 28.
\end{flushright}
“looser collective” which “organises the translation and circulation of foreign cultures”, a collection of “scattered and momentary interactions of a smaller scale between the local and the global, the particular and the universal.”\textsuperscript{410} That the magazine was Hahn and Shao’s ‘cultural form’ of choice attests to the flexibility of the format, which “lends itself to the representation of cosmopolitan subject matters”, as it allows for openness and “mixing of different genres and authorial voices”.\textsuperscript{411}

Shao and Hahn still saw their magazine as a means with which to conduct a form of alternative diplomacy. (The third issue of \textit{Candid Comment} boldly states, for example, that “Military spokesmen, like diplomats, are men paid to lie for their country.”) One of the most impressive achievements in the magazine’s ‘alternative diplomacy’ —which truly drew upon subversive forms of American-Chinese collaboration— was the first appearance in English of Mao Zedong’s now classic essay, \textit{Prolonged War (Lun chijiuzhan)}, originally given in lecture form at the Chinese Communist Party base at Yan’an in May 1938. Containing historical analyses of China and Japan, and discussion of strategies for resisting and fighting the Japanese, the Communist Party was eager to have the document translated into English in order to reach a broader audience. Having asked one of its members, Yang Gang, a graduate of Yanjing University’s English Literature department, to undertake this task, Yang then travelled to Shanghai, where a copy of the speech had been smuggled to, and stayed in secret at Emily Hahn’s residence, where she could work in safety.\textsuperscript{412} During the translation process, Yang Gang


\textsuperscript{411} ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{412} Shao, \textit{Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)}, 193.
often asked for Shao Xunmei’s input and advice, while Hahn would help polish the English. 413 Once completed, it was decided that, apart from its publication in Candid Comment, the text would have a separate run of 500 copies. Mao Zedong prepared a foreword in January 1939 specially for this separate edition, entitled ‘The Relationship between Our Resistance to the Japanese and Foreign Assistance’ [抗戰與外援的關係], in which he wrote: “Our friends in Shanghai are translating my essay, Prolonged War, into English. … I hope that this book may awaken compassion in some of those who encounter it in English-speaking countries — for the sake of China, but also for the sake of the world.” 414 415 The translation of this foreword was carried out by Shao Xunmei, who also took it upon himself to secretly distribute copies to foreigners in Shanghai. As a precaution, the copies were stored in Hahn’s house, and delivered surreptitiously to mailbox after mailbox using Hahn’s automobile. 416 The risk of punishment, at least for the Chinese involved, was very real; ‘site 76’ was notorious in the city for being a place where Japanese would torture and kill any Chinese known for harbouring anti-Japanese sentiment.

In addition to formal essays such as ‘On Protracted War’, Candid Comment also contained plenty of playful, tongue-in-cheek content. One remarkable section in the fifth issue, for

---

413 ibid., 194.

414 上海的朋友在將我的《論持久戰》[Prolonged War] 翻成英文本。……我希望此書能在英語各國間喚起若干的同情，為了中國利益，也為了世界利益。

415 ibid., 194.

416 ibid., 194-6.
example, criticises the injustices being committed in occupied Shanghai, while also parodying ‘official’ news:

“The Shanghai Trials” by Eoj Nilats

New item: New political trials are scheduled soon in Moscow.

Shanghai, January 24—(Trash News Agency)—Six hundred and eighty-one defendants went on trial here today on charges ranging from spying and sabotage to conspiring with the Chief Abbot of Pootoo Island in a colossal interstellar plot with cosmic ramifications and permutations to turn the International Settlement over to George Bernard Shaw.

Among the defendants are Stirling Fessenden, Donald Chisolm, Sir Frederick Whyte, General Shunroku Hata, Sir Harry Parkes, Colonel Charles F.B. Price, Max Chaichek, Abbott Chao Kung, H.S. “Newsreel” Wong, Mae West, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

Unlike official diplomatic documents and press releases, alternative periodicals could afford to be subversive, even absurd.

Like almost all of Shao’s other publications, Candid Comment was shortlived, and ceased publication in May 1939. Margaret Beetham argues that for a periodical to maintain a regular readership, it must “[offer] readers a recognisable position in successive numbers, that is creating a consistent ‘reader’ within the text” 417. While the ephemerality of Vox and Candid Comment can be attributed to other factors such as wartime instability and fiscal naïveté, it was also due to the lack of a ‘consistent reader’ for either publication. As international as Shanghai was, readers still wanted magazines that cohered around a particular language, or a particular identity group, whether that was ‘Americans in Shanghai’ or ‘Chinese educated abroad’. It wasn’t clear at all exactly who Vox or Candid Comment were intended for — and

417 Shen, Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-Colonial Shanghai, 27.
this was both Shao and Hahn’s remarkable cosmopolitan vision, as well as their Achilles’ heel in the hyper-competitive world of Shanghai publishing.

Emily Hahn’s series of twenty-eight *New Yorker* vignettes featuring Mr. Pan, all written in the late 1930s, on the other hand, was extremely successful, both critically and commercially. At the time, the *New Yorker* could boast a circulation of over 170 thousand copies per issue, including many of America’s most affluent and politically prominent household;\(^{418}\) her *New Yorker* fees also constituted Hahn’s main source of income. For Taras Grescoe, Hahn’s ‘Mr. Pan’ pieces brought an American readership a “humanised”, \(^{419}\) “modern and nuanced alternative to the prevailing Western image of the inscrutable - or scheming, or impoverished - Oriental”.\(^{420}\) In contrast to Lin Yutang’s more didactic approach in his works on China, also directed at an American audience, Hahn generally employs a lighter touch, focusing on crafting a single character with memorably endearing quirks. She had a talent for being able to blend the ‘exotic’ into the fabric of the everyday, which effectively enabled her to both play upon, and dismantle, American stereotypes of the Chinese. For example, she would offer a description of Pan Heh-ven’s visits as “always confused affairs, because he’s never as tranquil as I had been led to expect from reading about Buddha and the wisdom of the East. He’s never still for a moment: swooping about after cigarettes and matches, looking at books and putting them down, his robe fluttering in the breeze he himself creates.”\(^{421}\) Note that Pan Heh-ven’s exotic robes are


\(^{419}\) ibid., 3.

\(^{420}\) ibid., 148.

\(^{421}\) Hahn, *Mr. Pan*, 11.
carefully juxtaposed with the familiarity of cigarettes and books. Hahn shows the same knack in a little scene involving oranges:

He then cut each half orange into halves and split the pulp from the rind at each end, making four little boats sitting on four little rafts. Still he had not spilled a drop of juice. I wiped my hands on a small handkerchief, looked at the mangled remains of my own orange, and glared at him. “Take one of these,” said Heh-ven tactfully. 422

Moreover, Hahn is also always at pains to make clear that Heh-ven’s is not ‘interesting’ simply because he is ‘Chinese’; rather, he is interesting full stop — “You can’t judge Heh-ven by our standards or, indeed, by any standards.” 423

In various ways, then, Shao and Hahn engaged closely with the format of the magazine in various attempts to reach a diverse range of cross-cultural audiences. In so doing, they viewed themselves as providing an alternative to that of official diplomatic channels and dialogue, which they found corrupted by national interests and biases, as well as too far removed from the imaginations and interests of everyday life and a broader reading public.

**Going native, turning foreign**

“Going native, or succumbing to ‘localitis’,” writes G.R. Berridge, “is an occupational hazard experienced by professional diplomats who have been posted for a long time in the same part of the world. It has been recognised since the birth of resident missions during the Italian Renaissance. At best, they lose touch with sentiments at home; at worst, they become

422 ibid., 182.

423 ibid., 49.
moumouthpieces for the governments to which they are accredited, rather than those they
nominally represent.”  \textsuperscript{424} It is due to this phenomenon that we now have the conventional
practice of regularly rotating diplomats between postings every several years.  \textsuperscript{425} The root cause
of ‘localitis’, Berridge adds, is easy to diagnose: “resident diplomats need constant access to
local officials and other influential persons. It is a short step from regularly having to listen to
their point of view to showing sympathy for it as a professionally expedient courtesy - and it is
perhaps not a much longer step to sharing it.”  \textsuperscript{426} Just as diplomats are often suspected of ‘going
native’, so Shao Xunmei and Emily Hahn drew a fair share of suspicion regarding their
allegiances.

When the Japanese occupied Shanghai in 1937, Shao Xunmei and his family were forced to
flee their original home, as well as leave behind Shao’s beloved printing press. As foreigners
with permits were allowed access to Japanese-occupied areas, Shao and Hahn decided to
procure marriage documents, so as to give Hahn legal rights to claiming the press. Once this
was completed, Hahn requested a special pass from the British and American consulates and,
accompanied by a British soldier, over a dozen hired White Russian movers, four trucks, a
diagram of the printing press interior hand-drawn by Shao Xunmei, and twenty-eight(!) keys,
headed off to Japanese-occupied Yangshupu. After five trips back and forth, with suspicious
Japanese soldiers supervising them throughout, the gigantic printing press was successfully

\textsuperscript{424} Berridge, Diplomacy: Theory and Practice, 107.

\textsuperscript{425} ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{426} ibid., 107.
moved into a garage in the French Concession.\footnote{Shao, \textit{Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)}, 173; Grescoe, \textit{Shanghai Grand: Forbidden Love and International Intrigue on the Eve of the Second World War}, 233-34.} Despite these heroics, the Japanese occupation represented a tragic turning point for Shao Xunmei as well as Shanghai. In addition to losing his family home, his fledgling but vibrant publishing empire came to an abrupt end. Almost overnight, as Shao Xiaohong puts it, “my father … turned from a publishing magnate to a member of the proletariat.”\footnote{Shao, \textit{Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)}, 168.} Shao Xunmei later sold his storied printing press to the Communist Party government — which used it to produce \textit{The People’s Pictorial (Renmin huabao)}\footnote{ibid., 271.} — but never gave up his love for reading and for literature. Shao Xiaohong still remembers her father reciting lines from \textit{Hamlet} in the 1960s, physically frail but enunciating and emoting clearly and beautifully.\footnote{ibid., 242.}

In something of a twist, long after their romantic relationship and professional collaborations had drawn to a close, Emily Hahn’s paper marriage to Shao Xunmei would help Hahn avoid internment in Hong Kong in 1939. As Japanese rules stipulated no-one of ‘Asiatic blood’ would be interned, including those married to an ‘Asiatic’, Hahn — despite objections from her husband, the British head of army intelligence in Hong Kong, Charles Boxer — decided to claim her paper marriage with Shao, thus allowing her baby to be spared the ordeals of internment.\footnote{Hahn, \textit{Love, Mickey: Letters to Family From Emily Hahn}, 52.}
A final twist came when a destitute Xunmei, whose family had already sold everything of value, wired Hahn asking if she would be able to return a 1000 US-dollar loan she had once borrowed from him, and to wire it directly to his younger brother in Hong Kong, who was ill and needed money to cover medical bills. The wire aroused suspicion, and Shao was imprisoned from October 1958 until April 1962 for being a foreign spy. It was later found that the suspicion was due simply to the fact that Shao had signed off his message to Hahn with a different name — ‘Pan Heh-ven’.

Bruce Robbins has argued that “actually existing cosmopolitanism”, rather than “an ideal of detachment”, is “a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachments, or attachment at a distance”. Shao and Hahn — one accused of being a spy for foreigners, the other accused of being ‘too Chinese’— practised ‘actually existing cosmopolitanism’ in the sense that they constantly imagined “the embedded self as engaged with writing her/himself into two stories at once”. As Emily Hahn observed, Shanghai was the kind of city that made a mockery of the official documents and categories of nation-states and governments, which could only handle single narratives:

Shanghai was peculiarly international, with a long-standing internationality; there existed there a generation of people born in Shanghai, though they held European and American passports. German boys brought up in Frenchtown, who were French in

---

432 Shao, *Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)*, 308.

433 ibid., 361.


435 ibid., 17.
speech and habits of thought, found that they must report to Berlin for orders. Eurasians had to hold themselves in readiness to fight for England, a country they hated with the hatred born of a lifetime of snubs. Italians were faced with an extra dilemma; many of the most important members of the Shanghai-Italian community were Jews who had suddenly been deprived of their Italian citizenship. People of all nations had been sending children to mixed schools. What were they to do? Then there were the many Austrian-Iraqians who had travelled so long on Chinese passports. What was going to happen to them?  

Due to the “intricacies of their inherently networked essence”, writes Michele Arcuto, global cities present a “gamut of epistemological challenges”. “Characterised by a distinctive ‘geographical intensity of social relations and activities’ which is however ‘open’ due to their inherent relationality with other cities, flows, infrastructures, cultures and spaces far beyond their localised contexts”, global cities are “open intensities”, “foci of interconnections with wider worlds”. By exploring cosmopolitan salon culture in semi-colonial Shanghai, we can see the various ways in which figures like Shao Xunmei and Emily Hahn were critical of official diplomatic rhetoric and creatively engaged in alternative diplomacies, from participating in and creating cosmopolitan salon gatherings, to providing hospitality to foreign visitors, to targeting and shaping the opinions and imaginations of transnational reading publics.

One of Shao Xiaohong’s more curious memories of her father brings us back, strangley, to the encounter between George Macartney and the Qing Chinese. Her father, Xiaohong recalls, told her that one of their ancestors, Shao Kangjie (邵康節), was an Arab. Because Shao Kangjie had distinguished himself in some way, he said, the emperor bestowed on him the last name ‘Shao’ as a gift; “If you visit our ancestral hall back at Yuyao, you’ll find Arabic written on the

---

stone tablet there.” 438 Xiaohong could never, however, find anything that corroborated this story; “It turns out father must have been joking,” she concludes. 439 Quintessentially diplomatic (in the alternative sense), Shao’s joke contains a fantasy of cosmopolitan connections, and suggests a more fluid, hybridised conception of what it might mean to be ‘Chinese’. It also brings up issues of inter-cultural hospitality and assimilation, of transformative encounters with the ‘other’ that destabilise the identity of both ‘guest’ and ‘host’. It makes us continue to ask: “Can we articulate a cosmopolitan ethics that ‘decides’ neither for universality nor for singularity but which opens up the political space necessary to negotiate between them?” 440

IV.

BETWEEN ORIENT AND OCCIDENT:
THE CIVILISATIONAL DIPLOMACY OF HALIDE EDIB AND LIN YUTANG

Being civilised

438 Shao, Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei), 380.
439 ibid., 382.
440 Baker, Politicising Ethics in International Relations: Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality, 92.
During a trip to Turkey in the mid-1990s, Islamic studies scholar Kevin Reinhart recalls being taken aback by the phrase used to scold a group of noisy children—“Medeniyetli ol!”, or “Be civilised!” The phrase, he later learned, had entered common usage decades ago. After all, as Reinhart reflects, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, had “sought more than anything… to have [the Turks] take their rightful place among the civilised nations, and his social revolution was to ‘civilise’ the Turks.” Yet the admonishment to ‘be civilised’ is one as familiar to contemporary inhabitants of the People’s Republic of China as it was to those boisterous Turkish children. Bright-red banners in public spaces remind citizens going about their daily business to “jiang wenming, ban wenming shi, zuo wenmingren” (lit. “value civilisedness, do civilised things, be a civilised person”); and offended individuals in heated altercations might well tell their interlocutors to “zhuyi wenming”, which means something along the lines of “Watch your civilisedness!” One might render these expressions into smoother English by selecting more idiomatically favoured cognates (“be civil”, for instance), but the need for such smoothing only highlights the fact that a distinctly intense concern with ‘civilisedness’—and not merely ‘civility’—is part of the fabric of everyday social and political life in Turkey and China. This shared concern is, in turn, revealing of how the tumultuous formation of these two nation-states in the early 20th-century revolved around an array of remarkably comparable experiences, responses, and strategies.

Despite their significant parallels, to this day there is a dearth of scholarly interest in how the modernisation experiences of Turkey and China might relate to and illuminate one another.

---

441 Reinhart, “Civilisation and Its Discussants: Medeniyet And the Turkish Conversion to Modernism,” 267.
As early as the 1920s, however, the Turkish Republic’s most famous female writer, Halide Edib (1884-1964), had begun to notice this common ground. Invited to speak at the annual conference of the Williamstown Institute of Politics in Massachusetts—the first woman to do so—Halide Edib was there to present, as the title of her roundtable states, ‘Modern Turkey and its Problems’ for an American audience. Conference records show, however, that nestled in her discussion of the Turks was a series of observations on the analogous situation of the Chinese:

We cannot, in observing the Turkish Nationalist revolution, overlook the fact that it is a phase of general Asian-European relations with certain similarities to the Chinese Nationalist revolution. Both Turkey and China had endured capitulatory regimes granting extraterritorial rights to Europeans, and in both countries the abolition of these is one of the Nationalist aims. Both had been subjected by treaty to conditions which offered continual occasion for foreign intervention. Both had had occasion in the past to fight this intervention, but Turkey had the support of European Allies while China has always been isolated. Constitutional monarchy was a recent development in each, and in each short-lived and replaced by a republic. Both countries have been the objects for schemes of partition among the Great Powers. Each entered the World War hoping thereby to end the privileges enjoyed by foreigners. Both found the terms of peace highly unsatisfactory, and by resistance and diplomatic insistence gained a revision, Turkey at Lausanne and China at Washington, although the latter gained less because (according to the Chinese view) of the great strength of China’s neighbour, Japan.

Looking into the future, we see certain common claims, such as the principle of self-determination or sovereignty exemplified in the question of the abolition of privileges to foreigners, and certain common obligations, particularly the necessity of modernisation (not Westernisation). The strong points of Eastern civilisation should be developed in the preparation for the new world-civilisation which will be a crystallisation of the Eastern and Western. The East should be enthusiastic but critical in taking over ideas from the West. Three things should be avoided: imperialism, the worship of military victories, and the pride coming from economic success.  

What makes the emergence of these comparisons all the more unexpected is that throughout Halide Edib’s prolific output prior to 1928, no other mention of modern China can be found.

---

442 Newhall, Report of the Round Tables and General Conferences at the Eighth Session, 8:120-121.
Perhaps due to several obvious factors which seem to situate the two nations as poles apart, such as Turkey’s Islamic heritage and greater proximity to European nations, Halide Edib had never given the distant polity and people of China much thought. At the 1928 Williamstown conference, however, where some of the most heated discussions revolved around China, and several of its participants were Chinese, it is likely that Halide Edib gained an introduction to ‘China and its problems’, as it were—and, apparently, was so struck by the similarities that she swiftly incorporated these observations into her own talk on Turkey. Halide Edib would have been intrigued to find, I’m sure, that there were yet more parallels beyond the ones she identified.

As a key intellectual figure in the twilight years of the Ottoman Empire, and later the fledgling Republic of Turkey, Halide Edib was steeped in vibrant, contentious modernisation debates, many of which revolved around how to become ‘modern’—and indeed what ‘modern’ might mean at all for an Ottoman or a Turk. One particularly intense locus was that of language reform, a continuation of debates which had emerged earlier during the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876) among Ottoman intellectuals, in part a reaction to devastating military losses against Russia, Britain, France, and others. The suitability of Arabic letters for the Turkish language, taken for granted for centuries, begun to be fundamentally questioned, not least because the the Arabic alphabet began to be viewed as a crucial impediment to literacy, progress and modernisation.\(^{443}\) Meanwhile, 1920s Chinese intellectuals were also wrapped up in the issue of script reform; their discussions, too, built upon earlier debates by late Qing

\(^{443}\) Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey (1923–1945)*, 141.
reformers—likewise deeply rattled by shocking military losses—who had presented the
difficulty of the Chinese written language as a barrier to widespread ‘modern learning’, in
particular Western science, the most coveted form of foreign knowledge.⁴⁴⁴ In both contexts, a
wide variety of proposals were made, from modifications of the existing script in various ways,
to adoption of the Latin alphabet. Where one stood in these language debates reflected one’s
historical allegiances and cultural affinities, one’s desired vision of the nation’s past and future.
Opponents of proposals for the Turkish language to adopt the Latin alphabet, for example,
argued that this would tragically sever the Turkish language, and the cosmopolitan Ottoman
Empire, from the rest of the Islamic world and its own cultural heritage.⁴⁴⁵ Others supported
such proposals precisely because it would break such traditional ties, helping to forge a
specifically ‘Turkish’ consciousness, and “bring [the Turks] closer to Western civilisation”.⁴⁴⁶

In light of this, it is less surprising that in her Williamstown speech Halide Edib moves
beyond comparison and goes so far as to firmly align Turkey and China as co-contributors to
‘Eastern civilisation’, with an important role in contributing their strengths to what she
intriguingly terms ‘world-civilisation’. After all, she and her compatriots had been reflecting on
such questions for years: what was ‘civilisation’? Was there an Ottoman civilisation as distinct
from Western civilisation, or Turkish civilisation? And if civilisation was a goal for Turkey to
reach, rather than an already attained state of being, what would enable the Türks to ‘join’ it?
In comparison to many of her 1920s fellow Turkish intellectuals, however, the vision Halide

---


⁴⁴⁵ Yılmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey (1923–1945)*, 142.

⁴⁴⁶ ibid., 143.
Edib presents at Williamstown is more resolutely grounded in larger and older affinities and scales than that of the newly formed Turkish nation-state. Nor is ‘Western civilisation’ something to be emulated wholesale; on the contrary, ‘Eastern civilisation’ could hold its own in what it had to offer. In addition, Halide Edib suggests that the recent unjust treatment of both Turkey and China by western ‘Great Power’ greed is in itself a lesson that ‘world-civilisation’ needs to absorb in order to progress. Her observations here mirror what Qian Suoqiao observes as the “deep ambiguity” of Chinese liberal intellectuals: for “the ‘West’ came to China in two faces: democratic ideals and institutions necessary to building a modern nation-state as well as its colonial desires and practices detrimental to the nascence and independence of other new nation-states.”

Likewise, “[c]ivilisation, for the Ottomans was experienced not just as a conceptual challenge but also as a threatening reality—it was not just ideas but gunboats, not just medical advances but the advance of the Russian troops into Anatolia (1877-8).”

Given this ambivalent, ‘two-faced’ of the West, what makes Halide Edib’s speech all the more intriguing is that she presents these points not to an audience of Turks or Chinese, but to a principally American audience in the United States. If “the language and diction used by any author writing in Turkish will often indicate a political stance”, Halide Edib is unique in the landscape of early 20th-century Turkish literature for her choice to write many of her most significant works in English. Her two-volume memoirs (1926-1928), for example, detailing her upbringing and career as a writer, and culminating in her experiences in the

---

447 Qian, Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity, 199.

448 Reinhart, “Civilisation and Its Discussants: Medeniyet And the Turkish Conversion to Modernism,” 285.

Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), were written entirely in English and published in England. The *Turkish Ordeal* was eventually published in Turkish only in the 1960s, and even then in “immensely modified” form.  

Less than a decade after Halide Edib’s memoirs appeared, the Chinese writer Lin Yutang (1895-1976) became a household name in America for two runaway bestsellers, *My Country and My People* (1935) and *The Importance of Living* (1937). Akin to Halide Edib’s works, which sought to provide insight into Turkey and ‘Turkishness’, these books were about China and ‘Chineseness’, written by a ‘native’ Chinese for an Anglophone readership. Like Halide Edib in Istanbul and Ankara before her self-imposed exile in 1925, Lin Yutang had also been an active and influential member of the Shanghai literati and its thicket of cultural debates before moving to the United States in the 1930s. How should China survive and modernise for the future? How should she relate to her own past? What was the value of Chinese ‘civilisation’? Chinese intellectuals were as obsessed over such questions as their Turkish counterparts were. As Angelika C. Messner writes, following the introduction into China of the concept of *wenming*, or ‘civilisation’, “eminent scholars and educators in the early twentieth century, like Hu Shi (1891-1962), barely wrote an article without referring to it.”

In *My Country and My People*, Lin Yutang expresses his exasperation with the countless irrational and superficial approaches to ‘national salvation’ espoused by various individuals:

---

Some advocate salvation by learning the use of machine-guns, another by frugality and the wearing of sandals, another by dancing and wholesale introduction of Western life, another by selling and buying national goods, another by physical culture through good old boxing, another by learning Esperanto, another by saying Buddhist masses, another by reintroducing the Confucian classics in school, and another by ‘throwing the classics into the toilet for thirty years’. To hear them discussing the salvation of the country would be like listening to a council of quack doctors at a patient’s deathbed.\textsuperscript{452}

Meanwhile, making a rather similar point to Halide Edib’s—that the WWI peace treaty would have been less of a shambles if ‘Eastern civilisation’ had been taken more seriously—Lin Yutang writes elsewhere in the same work: “To the Chinese, the Versailles Treaty is not only unfair, it is merely vulgar or lacking in \textit{hanyang}. If the Frenchman had been imbued a little with the spirit of Taoism at the moment of his victory, he would not have imposed the Versailles Treaty... But Clemenceau had not read Laotse. Nor has Hitler.”\textsuperscript{453} This passage offers a typical case of Lin’s endeavour, through his writings, to “arrive at an alternative space of meaning out of a fusion of horizon of Chinese and Western cultures.”\textsuperscript{454}

At these comparable historical moments—a critical juncture of nation-building with all its attendant social, political and linguistic reforms in their respective countries—why did a Turkish and a Chinese writer both decide upon English as their language of choice? If “the contention between nationalism and cosmopolitanism as engendered by imperialism”\textsuperscript{455} characterises both Turkish and Chinese modernities, how might writing in English have allowed Halide Edib and Lin Yutang to navigate and negotiate between these three fields of

\textsuperscript{452} Lin, \textit{My Country and My People}, 366.

\textsuperscript{453} ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{454} Qian, \textit{Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity}, 191.

\textsuperscript{455} ibid., 5.
sentiment? The rest of this chapter will explore the English-language works of Halide Edib and Lin Yutang, which span the late 1920s to early 1950s, as a form of alternative public diplomacy. In contrast to the “largely invisible processes” of traditional diplomatic practice, public diplomacy focuses on diplomatic engagement with broader publics, and can be defined as “an instrument used by states, associations of states, and some sub-state and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour; build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilise actions to advance their interests and values.”456 Through writing English-language books, publishing articles for mainstream British and American newspapers, and giving speeches to a range of Anglophone audiences, Halide Edib and Lin Yutang sought to achieve similar objectives in the interests of their respective nations. At the same time, due to their unofficial capacity, they were able to voice critiques both of inter-state diplomatic practices as well as of the internal workings of their own nations. Both these authors’ works evince a shared emphasis on the long arcs of literary and cultural pasts that are often subversive of the Turkish and Chinese radical modernisation and nation-building projects—which they were respectively, and in various ways, critical of and marginalised from. Lin Yutang was to be more or less effaced from Chinese literary history by the Communist Party, with his work only enjoying a re-discovery in the 1980s; and Halide Edib would only return to Turkey after Mustafa Kemal’s death in 1938. In his discussion of civilizational discourse in East Asia, Prasenjit Duara writes:

The critical problem in understanding civilisation during this period is the extent to which it could be identified with or appropriated by a nationalist goal. Although nationalism, too, sought its ultimate meaning in civilisation, it tried equally to manipulate it for expansionist purposes. As long as nationalists were able to deploy civilisation as a

456 Melissen, “Public Diplomacy.”
supplement to nationalism, the civilisational idea could scarcely realise its promise as the higher authoritative principle from which the nation-state itself could be judged.\textsuperscript{457}

Halide Edib and Lin Yutang used their English-language works as a platform from which to defend the interests of their nations, but also from which to rescue ‘civilisation’ from being either a mere ‘supplement’ to xenophobic nationalism, or a prop for imperialist rhetoric. Writing in English, then, provided an effective—if fraught—linguistic medium for this kind of alternative public diplomacy, allowing them to mediate fluidly yet critically (and precariously) between ‘civilisational’ and ‘national’ perspectives.

Finally, the kind of alternative public diplomacy Halide Edib and Lin Yutang engage in can be termed ‘civilisational diplomacy’—in that their negotiation with foreign publics was centrally concerned with the collaborative construction of an equitable and inclusive world society, founded on an awareness of and attention to the complexity of cultural histories. They write as advocates for a world-civilisation with certain shared ethics and values, above all in the interests of avoiding war and imperialism, but a world-civilisation which nevertheless values and nourishes the various civilisational characteristics and traditions within it. In other words, nations and civilisations (e.g. Ottoman civilisation and modern Turkey), as well as ‘Civilisation’ (global governance by shared consent) and ‘civilisations’ (the continuing unfolding and development of diverse national traditions and lifestyles), could and should co-exist. To this end, they engaged with a wide range of cultural resources, in particular looking to other Eastern civilisations as potential allies in both resisting Anglo-American hegemony and complementing what was perceived as ‘western’ civilisation. Reading Halide Edib and Lin Yutang in tandem

\textsuperscript{457} Duara, "The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism," 100.
with one another thus also allows us to re-visit their works as part of a lively, early twentieth-century landscape of anti-imperial transnational solidarity, imagined and fashioned in ways that variously challenged or transcended the boundaries of the nation-state, as well as binaries such as east/west or modern/backwards.

**Civilising the West: inventing ‘China’ and ‘Turkey’**

“Beware of pronouncing on a country when you have only met its sons and daughters abroad. You may form a pretty good opinion, or you may be totally misled. A person without his background is like a floating plant, difficult to identify. Further, what is personal may appear national; and what is national, personal.”—Halide Edib, *Inside India* (1937)

When Halide Edib visited Stanford University as part of her 1928 American tour, *The Stanford Daily* urged its readers to attend her lecture: “Madame Edib’s subject is ‘The Face and Mind of New Turkey’… What most of us know about the face and mind of new Turkey we could put in our hats. It greatly behooves us to attend the assembly and learn something about Turkey and about one of the most notable women of our time.” 458 If the average Stanford student could supposedly fit their knowledge of Turkey ‘in a hat’, then a 1935 *New York Times* book review recommends Lin Yutang’s *My Country and My People* to the reader with similar reasoning: “If your powers of generalisation about China have been limited to a paraphrase of Noel Coward’s incontestable statement, ‘Oh, yes, China; very large, China,’ Lin Yutang’s ‘My Country and My People’ (John Day, Reynal & Hitchcock, $3) is a clean breeze to blow away your vagueness.”459 In other words, Halide Edib and Lin Yutang were both in the position of ‘inventing’ Turkey or China for an audience that, for the most part, were “English readers who

---

458 “A Notable Woman Is Halide Edib.”
459 Chamberlain, “Books of the Times.”
had little or nothing else to go on.” At the same time, their Anglo-American readerships were not unburdened with various stereotypes and misconceptions, in part due to the fact that ‘new’ Turkey and ‘new’ China, offshoots of long-exoticised, once-glorious empires, now suffered marginalisation and prejudice in the international arena of nation-states and power blocs.

The use of hat imagery in the well-meaning announcement for Halide Edib’s Stanford lecture was an unfortunate coincidence, for one of Halide’s bêtes noires was in fact Western media’s tendency to fixate on Turkey’s ‘Hat Law’, passed in 1925. In Turkey Faces West—a book based on the lectures Halide Edib gave during her 1928 tour of the United States—she singles out the law in the context of Turkey’s wide-ranging social reforms:

The first and most spectacular of these reforms was the ‘Hat Law’, passed in 1925. It was also the most futile and superficial in comparison to the others which followed. But it was the only one which accomplished an external change overnight. In a week it made the Turks don European hats (the only part of the city dwellers’ outfit which had not been westernised) and made them look like westerners, although the manner in which it was accomplished was utterly un-western. The westernisation of Turks is not and should not be a question of mere external imitation and gesture. It is a much deeper and more significant process. To tell the Turk to don a certain headdress and ‘get civilised’ or be hanged or imprisoned, is absurd, to say the least. The opposition of individuals among the men in the street, really much more westernised than those who carried the measure through, had a note of wounded self-respect rather than of objection to wearing hats. Among all the recent measures, this was the most seriously opposed in the country itself. Any opposition to the ‘Hat Law’ was labelled as reactionary. The interesting fact connected with the substitution of the hat for the Turkish fez is that it attracted the greatest attention in the western world. Other more fundamental changes taking place in Turkey were either entirely unnoticed, or criticised, or neglected as unimportant items of foreign news in the western papers. But the moment the Turks put hats on their heads the general cry in the West was, “At last the Turks are civilised; they wear hats.”

460 Laughlin, “Lin Yutang’s Unique Adoption of Tradition,” 39.
461 Edib, Turkey Faces West: a Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin, 224-225.
“Evidently,” Halide Edib added dryly, “it is necessary to see an outward similarity in people in order to classify them with this or that trend of thought.”462 Halide Edib faults the Western media for focusing on the sensational and superficial, rather than on far more extensive and meaningful reforms, such as Turkey’s completely overhauled legal code, enacted in 1926, and modelled after Switzerland’s —after careful deliberation between the Austrian, French, German and Swiss civil codes— which had particularly important effects on the rights of women. Such reforms “of a much more serious nature”,463 Halide observed, which had long-term ramifications for Turkey’s political system as well as more symmetrical relations between Turkey and other European nations, tended to garner far less coverage in the papers. She also points out how Western media excitement over the hat reform ironically obscured the fact that its implementation was in fact authoritarian in nature, as well as chafes at the mindset that ‘civilisedness’ must come in only one guise—that of Western dress.

On the other hand, in a December 1925 Manchester Guardian profile, Halide’s interviewer writes that she:

wanted to disabuse the Western world of the curious ideas it held about Turkish women. They pictured her as pining on silken cushions in a harem, looking at roses and eating Turkish delight. Such a picture belonged to the Arabian Nights and not to reality, but was a favourite subject of yellow journalism when it wanted to speak against Turkey. Veiled or unveiled, in or outside a harem, the Turkish woman was fundamentally the same as her Western sister. 464

462 ibid., 225.

463 ibid., 226.

464 “Turkish Women of to-Day - Polygamy Now Very Rare - Some Popular Fallacies.”
This complex negotiation, between the preservation of difference and the claim of commensurability, is one that Halide Edib steadfastly engages with throughout her speeches, interviews, and writing. Seeking to present the specific challenges and political problems faced by the Turks, she also hopes to de-sensationalise and humanise them for her audience. Her end-goal is to create the possibility for her Anglophone reader to identify with, and to empathise with, the modern Turks and their project of bringing a nation into being, whilst also appreciating the worth and distinctiveness of their culture and civilisation. As can be observed from Halide’s attitudes towards the Hat Law, these aims were made all the more complex because her desired manner of representing the Turks was at times at odds with the official narratives of the Turkish nation-state and modernisation projects.

Like Halide Edib, Lin Yutang was concerned about the potential effacement of Chinese cultural difference, and a loss of precious heritage and tradition, in an overly simplistic and flattening rush to modernise in the mould of the ‘West’. Like Halide Edib, he thus endeavoured to “achieve a subtle balance in the representation of identity and difference” in “translating an alien culture regarded as the Other”.⁴⁶⁵ Albeit often conducted in a deeply playful vein, his most popular works are full of supposedly essential differences between the Chinese and American approaches to life, and of moments where he even implies (with a wink) that the latter may be less civilised than the former. “Of all the ridiculous Western customs,” he writes in The Importance of Living, “I think that of shaking hands is one of the worst. I may be very progressive and able to appreciate Western art, literature, American silk stockings, Parisian

---

⁴⁶⁵ Qian, Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity, 170.
perfumes and even British battleships, but I cannot see how the progressive Europeans could allow this barbarous custom of shaking hands to persist to the present day.” Elsewhere, Lin points out there are clear downsides to the ‘mechanistic’, high-efficiency American way of doing things: “Our quarrel with efficiency is not that it gets things done, but that it is a thief of time when it leaves us no leisure to enjoy ourselves and that it frays our nerves in trying to get things done perfectly. An American editor worries his hair grey to see that no typographical mistakes appear on the pages of his magazine. The Chinese editor is wiser than that. He wants to leave his readers the supreme satisfaction of discovering a few typographical mistakes for themselves.” Yet Lin also emphasises alongside such passages that “the only way of looking at China, and of looking at any foreign nation” is “by searching, not for the exotic but for the common human values, by penetrating beneath the superficial quaintness of manners and looking for real courtesy… The differences are only in the forms of social behaviour. This is the basis of all sound international criticism.”

As cross-cultural public intellectuals who chose to write for Anglophone readerships, then, Halide Edib and Lin Yutang wielded deeply complex ‘diplomatic’ ambitions. Beyond introducing readers to what they viewed as important and relevant aspects of their native countries, they sought to present Turkey and China as ‘civilised’, and thus as worthy participants in global affairs, deserving of equal footing with other modern nations. In order to do so, both strove to find a balance between valorising what they perceived as the

---

466 Lin, *The Importance of Living*, 263.

467 Ibid., 168.

distinctiveness—and in some respects, superiority—of their own historical and cultural traditions, whilst also forging common ground with their Anglophone audiences. Moreover, their critique was often double-edged, with ramifications for both Anglophone audiences as well as their native countries. By critiquing superficial or inaccurate Western representations of the East, as well as dismantling Western ‘civilisedness’ as a monolithic given, Halide Edib and Lin Yutang challenged Western notions of ‘civilisedness’ and the status of the West as the standard-bearer for ‘civilised’, but also the ways in which Turkey and China respectively approached modernisation.

In light of these complex aims, it is interesting to note that both Lin Yutang and Halide Edib have been criticised for their ‘self-Orientalising’ tendencies. The poet Muhammad Iqbal, for example, objected to Halide’s characterisation of the ‘East’ as fundamentally more spiritual and the West as more ‘material’, accusing her of a “self-Orientalisation of the Orient.”

Similarly, Lin Yutang’s portrayal of the Chinese, peppered with general statements on the ‘Chinese character’ such as its “ancient geniality”, “mellow understanding of life and of human nature” and the uniquely honed Chinese art of leisure and living, have been viewed as ‘self-orientalising’ gestures. For Qian Suoqiao, “[t]he issue here is not so much self-orientalisation, but rather that Lin’s act of cross-cultural translation in America became heavily commercially oriented and market-driven.” In other words, the kind of ‘Chineseness’ that Lin

469 Edib, *Inside India* xxii.


Yutang created was a closely tailored kind of Chineseness—with input from his business-savvy editor, Richard J. Walsh, and his wife, the Nobel-Prize winning ‘China’-author Pearl Buck—tweaked to be exotic yet accessible, foreign yet palatable, to a mainstream American readership. It is undeniable that neither Lin Yutang nor Halide Edib’s works could escape “the nexus of power relations already prevalent” by very dint of their publishing in English—not least the fact that they were each, to some degree, necessarily ‘selling’ a kind of Chineseness or Turkishness to their audience. Rather than self-Orientalising, however, I read such endeavours within the context of their times and larger aims and oeuvres, as strategies to define and preserve a kind of ‘Chinese’ or ‘Turkish’ difference within a global political climate in which modernisation was often synonymous with Westernisation. As one round-table leader at the 1928 Williamstown Institute had put it: “…the whole world is becoming Americanised.”

Adding fuel, perhaps, to perceptions of them as ‘self-Orientalising’ is the fact that, while Lin Yutang and Halide Edib became ‘representatives’ abroad for their respective nations, they were each shaped by a profoundly atypical upbringing and education from their compatriots. Born into a devoutly Christian family in rural Fujian Province, Lin Yutang grew up more familiar with the Bible than with Chinese classics, and would go on to study at the Episcopalian-founded St. John’s University in Shanghai, and to pursue graduate studies in literature at Harvard and philology at Leipzig. Before leaving for graduate study, Lin’s time spent in Beijing academia made him acutely self-conscious of his relative lack of training in his ‘own’ literary

473 ibid., 191.

culture; it felt as if “I had been cheated of my national heritage”, and in order to make up for lost time, Lin “plunged into a Chinese relearning”. From then on, Lin began to immerse himself in the Chinese classics, voraciously albeit unsystematically catching up on, and delighting in, all that he had missed out on. As he explains:

My father and mother were devout Christians. … I was forbidden to attend Chinese theatres, never allowed to listen to Chinese minstrel singers, and entirely cut apart from the great Chinese folk tradition and mythology. When I entered a missionary college, the little foundation in classical Chinese given me by my father was completely neglected. Perhaps it was just as well—so that later, after a completely Westernised education, I could go back to it with the freshness and vigorous delight of a child of the West in an Eastern wonderland. … If Vesuvius had not covered up Pompeii, Pompeii would not be so well preserved, and the imprints of carriage wheels on her stone pavements would not be so clearly marked to-day. The missionary college education was my Vesuvius.

Lin Yutang’s volcanic analogy helps illustrate how he was able to view Chinese literary heritage with a far less jaded eye than the majority of his peers. Lin’s “self-construction as a native informant to the English-speaking world on China” thus “involved his reconstruction of Chinese culture and tradition according to a certain vision”; “[m]ore than just informing Western readers about China,” Lin “is affirming a particular vision of Chinese cultural identity and what he would call the Chinese ‘philosophy of life’, one that is based to a large degree in literary traditions, and specifically in a certain unconventional canon of literature.”


476 Qian, The Cross-Cultural Legacy of Lin Yutang: Critical Perspectives, 11.

477 Lin, The Importance of Living, 416-417.

478 Laughlin, “Lin Yutang's Unique Adoption of Tradition,” 38.

479 ibid., 39.
Just as Lin Yutang’s father, a pastor, had been a deep admirer of Western learning and endeavoured to instil Christian values in his children, so too was Halide Edib’s father determined to educate his offspring in the English fashion. Though he worked as First Secretary to Sultan Abdül Hamid II—a sultan notorious for trying to counter foreign influence in the Ottoman Empire (despite his love of Sherlock Holmes stories, which palace translators apparently worked on around the clock so he could enjoy them\textsuperscript{480})—he nevertheless ensured that his daughter Halide dressed in British clothes, kept a British diet, and attended English-language or Christian schools. \textsuperscript{481} When a decree by the sultan temporarily prohibited Turkish students from enrolling in missionary schools, Halide’s education continued in the form of private lessons from English governesses and Italian music teachers as well as directed study of mathematics, Arabic, French, and Turkish literature from prominent scholars, rendering her well-versed in writers from Émile Zola to Dante Alighieri as well as Eastern Anatolian fairytales and Janissary epics. \textsuperscript{482} The scope of her reading, then, like Lin Yutang’s, was deeply eclectic and adhered to no one particular canon. And like Lin, even as she was exposed to various avant-garde intellectual theories and trends from the West, she often found an incomparable delight in traditional Eastern literature. Of one tutor, Rıza Tevfik, the famous philosopher and politician, Halide writes: “His Herbert Spencer talk did not interest me so much as his knowledge of Oriental mystic philosophy and of Oriental art and poetry”, while his “perfect mastery of Persian … opened to me an unparalleled world of beauty and thought.”\textsuperscript{483} Of another,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{480} Edib, \textit{Memoirs of Halidé Edib Adıvar}, 207.
\textsuperscript{481} Adak, “Introduction: an Epic for Peace.”
\textsuperscript{482} ibid. p.vi.
\textsuperscript{483} Edib, \textit{Memoirs of Halidé Edib Adıvar}, 182.
\end{flushright}
Ahmed Aga, “I got a great deal of my early education… it was this chance which opened to me the folk-lore, the popular Turkish literature, which none of the rest of my generation of writers have enjoyed.” 484 Halide Edib was later to become the first Muslim-Turkish graduate of Istanbul’s American College for Girls in 1901, before going on to begin her storied career as a Turkish nationalist, which included working as a writer and translator for Mustafa Kemal at Ankara, and later as a nurse and corporal for the Nationalist forces during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-23). A September 1922 article in the New York Times describes her as ‘Kemal’s Fair Press Agent’, “a Turkish woman with a romantic history…in charge of the press bureau and propaganda of Mustapha Kemal and the Turkish Nationalist Government… [who] conducts a ceaseless campaign, writing at least thirty letters a day to eminent politicians all over the world.”485

These two unconventional readers, meanwhile, were both influenced by prior models of cosmopolitan civilisational thinking. In Lin Yutang’s case, he was “deeply impressed and influenced” by Gu Hongming (1857-1928),486 a “Malay-born, Britain and German educated, classical Chinese scholar” whose translations of Chinese classics such as the Analec ts are filled with annotations drawing upon “Arnold, Carlyle, Emerson, Goethe, Kant, Ruskin, Shakespeare, Tolstoy”, 487 and whose essays sparked major debates on the issue of Chinese civilisation versus Western civilisation—in particular whether the former could redeem the excess of the latter—

484 ibid., 115.

485 “Kemal's Fair Press Agent.”

486 Qian, Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity, 58.

487 ibid., 43.
among Chinese intellectuals in 1919, underscoring “not only the emergence of a global intellectual sphere, but the necessity of its recognition by the Other in order to be affirmed by the self.” For Qian Suqiao, Gu Hongming’s “cosmopolitan strategy of cross-cultural alliance” was intended to “stand critically against the advance of Western modernity in its logic of commercialism and imperialistic ‘Kolonial Politik’.”

Namık Kemal was likewise a figure whom Halide Edib greatly admired for what she saw as his unrivalled ability to synthesise East and West. While “in spirit he was thoroughly Turkish”, and held a deep faith in “the accumulated power of the thought and the art which the Turkish nation” had inherited, Halide observes, Namık Kemal was also the one who “crystallised and turned into a religious creed two great ideas of the middle nineteenth century West” for the Turks, namely patriotism and the equal rights of man. According to Kevin A. Reinhart, it was also he who “first sought systematically to work out the implications of the word ‘civilisation’ for the Ottomans. Taking on the range of meanings medeniyet had gained by then—from technological advancements such as trains and telegraphs, to decadence and excess—Namık Kemal puts forth his own view in a landmark essay in 1871. Key for us here is the way in which he asks: “Let’s suppose that European civilisation’s condition is brimful of a thousand kinds of defects and evils. For peoples working to attain civilisation why should it be necessary so completely to imitate (taklit) blindly the Europeans?” He moves on to say: “Now, if we want

---

489 Qian, Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity, 43.
490 Edib, Conflict of East and West in Turkey, 190.
491 Reinhart, “Civilisation and Its Discussants: Medeniyet And the Turkish Conversion to Modernism,” 276.
to advocate civilisation, we should appropriate this sort of useful truth wherever it is found. Just as we needn’t skewer kebabs in Chinese fashion to be civilised (temeddiin), we need not imitate blindly European dance or marriage principles.”492 He concludes, “Our own morals’ guidance, our own intellects’ appreciation for the products of civilisation’s application are more than enough to correct [bad] outcomes arising from civilisation”493—indeed, “to live without civilisation is something like dying an untimely death (ecelsiz ölmek)”. 494 As Reinhart observes, Namık Kemal “seems to decide that the moral resources of Islam have the potential not only to absorb the benefits of civilisation but to lead Ottomans to become not imitators but exemplars of civilisation.”495

The British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, meanwhile, who also had a deep impact on Halide Edib—and was lauded by her one of the “most dependable and fair-minded writers on the impossibly difficult tangle of Near East”496—offered a similarly cross-cultural conception of “a common global civilisation originating in the technological achievements of the West, but spiritually regenerated by the major world civilisations.”497 A 1930 radio programme entitled ‘The world and ourselves’, broadcast on British national radio—in which “[p]rominent Englishmen will discuss national characteristics with representatives of America, France, Russia,

492 ibid., 282.
493 ibid., 283.
494 ibid., 281.
495 ibid., 282.
496 Edib, Memoirs of Halidé Edib Adıvar, 61.
Germany, Italy, and Turkey, among other countries”—featured Arnold Toynbee as Halide Edib’s discussant. The Manchester Guardian report of their conversation remarks: “It was characteristic of modern Turkey that a Turkish woman was the representative of that country in last night’s discussion in the ‘World and Ourselves’ series. The choice is the more remarkable when it is recalled that no woman has taken part in the five previous discussions.” It goes on to provide a summary of Halide Edib’s comments: “Turkey, she explained, had always been a thoroughfare through which humanity had been constantly passing, and it had constantly been changing. The Turkish people were self-controlled and matter of fact. The adoption of Western ideas was a move entirely in accordance with their habit of choosing the best from all that they saw.” In Halide Edib’s view, then, civilisation was a matter of dynamic, cross-cultural evolution. The Turks were not blindly imitating the West, she insisted; rather, they were selectively synthesising with what they came into contact with, just as they always had.

We might notice that these remarks are not so consistent with Halide Edib’s earlier concerns over the imitative nature of the Hat Law, among other things. As Prasenjit Duara observes, the “transcendent stance of civilisation thus may permit a critique of the nation and, as we shall see, can produce the problem of loyalties divided between those close to the nation and those to civilisation.”

If Qian Suoqiao points out that it is “this tension between a self-styled modern cosmopolitan and a perceived oriental Chinese that lies at the root of Lin’s many

---

498 “International Talks.”
499 “The Turkish Woman: Last Night’s Broadcast Discussion.”
frustrations in his literary practices in America”, one might well rephrase the tension that Halide Edib and Lin Yutang face as the tension between that of negotiating and representing this more transcendent notion of ‘civilisation’ as well as that of their respective ‘nations’ to ‘outsiders’. To make matters more complicated, ‘civilisation’ was of course a deeply fraught and contest term in both contexts.

The term *wenming* had since ancient times mainly served to distinguish the Chinese from ‘barbarians’; from around 1900 onwards, however, as the Chinese empire spiralled into decline, China itself began to be termed ‘barbaric’ and ‘backward’, with the West in contrast as ‘modern’ and ‘civilised’. Within this new context, *wenming* was reintroduced via Japanese, carrying the meanings of ‘progress’ and modern ‘civilisation’, and was soon a concept mobilised to “fight for a new political and institutional order in China.” Likewise, *medeniyet* had been shaped by the Young Ottomans into a “rallying-crying in the drive to alter the course of Ottoman thought and self-understanding”; and the word itself also initially carried overtones of ‘foreignness’, being a new coinage from the Arabic word *madinah*, or ‘city’, rendered into an abstract noun. *Wenming* soon developed into “an unquestioned universal term in the sense of progressive modernisation”; there was a perceived “universal civilisation to which China

---

503 Reinhart, “Civilisation and Its Discussants: *Medeniyet* And the Turkish Conversion to Modernism,” 274.  
504 ibid., 272.  
505 Messner, “Transforming Chinese Hearts, Minds, and Bodies in the Name of Progress, Civility, and Civilization,” 3.
now had to be connected, and with regard to which it should now be transformed.\(^506\) In the
Ottoman context, *medeniyet* had also undergone a transformation from referring to “morality, refinement and moderation” in the mid-nineteenth century, to, by the turn of the twentieth, being conceptualised more along terms of a universally applicable notion of *terakki*, or progress.\(^507\) As a Muslim empire, the Ottoman Empire had long encountered European, in particular French, notions of *civilization* — notions that firmly circumscribed the Turks as neither Christian nor European, and thus ‘barbaric’ and “outside civilisation”,\(^508\) embodied by British statesman William Evert Gladstone’s (1809-1898) influential *The Turco-Servian War: Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (1876), which portrayed the Ottomans as a ’savage race’ in contrast to the British as ‘civilised mankind’.\(^509\)

This kind of civilisational stigmatisation suffered by both the Chinese and the Ottomans/Turks were thus at the heart of the drive in both nations for radical modernisation. It is against these backdrops that Lin Yutang and Halide Edib worked strenuously to ‘de-stigmatise’ the Chinese and the Turks, as well as to question the binary of civilised/barbaric that both these stigmatisation and modernisation drives rested on. In a 1936 *New York Times* article, for instance, Lin Yutang, angered by Japan’s imperialist designs on China, opines:

> Japan swallowed Western civilisation whole, its militarism, its capitalism, its nationalism and its belief in power, and superimposed it upon a feudalistic society

\(^{506}\) Ibid., 16.


\(^{508}\) Reinhart, “Civilisation and Its Discussants: *Medeniyet* And the Turkish Conversion to Modernism,” 271.

with no time to think for itself. That gave her civilisation a machine-like, humourless, inhuman quality. This machine-like humourless quality is seen in the bothersome, routine-loving and perfectly serious Japanese customs officials and police; the vainglorious dreams of the Kwantung army, and the sauciness of a ‘Japanese-ueber-Alles’ diplomatic challenge to the world, including Great Britain.\textsuperscript{510}

Lin implies here that an undiscerning choice of civilisational elements in the interests of being ‘modern’ or ‘Western’—a lack of thoughtful synthesis or balance—can in fact lead a country to become the opposite of ‘civilised’, i.e. inhuman, regardless of the advanced level of their material achievements. Three years later, on the eve of WWII, he would write point-blank: “In the sphere of politics there is something terribly inhuman in the logic of minds of men and conduct of affairs in certain states of Europe.”\textsuperscript{511} In other words, Europe had lost its grip on civilisation and civilisedness. In order for “some common standard for all humanity” to be “rediscovered”, Lin offers us the ancient philosopher of Mencius, who “has provided us with a doctrine of equality of all men, a basis for world co-operation among the races of mankind, and the possibility of freedom.”\textsuperscript{512} If European civilisation has taken a disturbing turn in its development, the cultural resources of other civilisations like China, he suggests, might furnish alternative foundations for a more peaceful global future.

In her discussion of the Chinese character \textit{yi}, roughly translated as \textit{barbarian}—used to refer to the British during the Opium War, and which the British saw as an insult and demanded that the Chinese ban entirely\textsuperscript{513}—Lydia Liu draws upon the concept of the ‘super-sign’ in order

\textsuperscript{510} “As ‘Philosophic China’ Faces ‘Military Japan’.”

\textsuperscript{511} Lin, \textit{The Importance of Living}, 436.

\textsuperscript{512} Lin, \textit{Between Tears and Laughter}, 213.

to capture its semantic and cultural complexity. “Properly speaking,” she writes, “a super-sign is not a word but a hetero-cultural signifying chain that crisscrosses the semantic fields of two or more languages simultaneously and makes an impact on the meaning of recognisable verbal units... The super-sign emerges out of the interstices of existing languages across the abyss of phonetic and ideographic differences. ... it always requires more than one linguistic system to complete the process of signification for any given verbal phenomenon.”  

In this regard, we might well see ‘civilisation’, _wenming_, and _medeniyet_ all as ‘super-signs’, for which more than one linguistic and cultural field of reference is always at stake when used, contested, or (re-)defined. Halide Edib and Lin Yutang were both acutely aware of this cross-cultural richness, as well as instability, of the notion of ‘civilisation’—its complex and manifold origins, its twists and turns and transformations, its many uses and abuses.

**From Wilsonians to ‘Europe’s gadflies’**

“For the world is now business, political business and economic business. A nation is a concern, a government is only its shop counter, and its diplomats are its travelling salesmen trying to outsell its competitors and beat them to a new market, and its publicists and thinkers are its expert accountants. The audacity of these thinkers of peace hurts my soul.” —Lin Yutang, _Between Tears and Laughter_

In _The Importance of Living_ (1938), Lin Yutang re-imagines the peace conference as a platform for international negotiation—by getting rid of conventional diplomats and statesmen altogether:

> Send, for instance, five or six of the world’s best humorists to an international conference, and give them the plenipotentiary powers of autocrats, and the world will be saved. As humour necessarily goes with good sense and the reasonable spirit, plus some exceptionally subtle powers of the mind in detecting inconsistencies and follies and bad logic, and as this is the highest form of human intelligence, we may be sure that each nation will thus be represented at the conference by its sanest and soundest mind. Let Shaw represent Ireland, Stephen Leacock represent Canada; G.K. Chesterton is dead, but P.G. Wodehouse or Aldous Huxley may

---

514 ibid., 13.
represent England. Will Rogers is dead, otherwise he would make a fine diplomat representing the U.S.; we can have in his stead Robert Benchley or Heywood Broun. There will be others.... Send these people to a conference on the eve of a great war, and see if they can start a European war, no matter how hard they try. Can you imagine this bunch of international diplomats starting a war or even plotting for one? The sense of humour forbids it. All people are too serious and half-insane when they declare a war against other people. 515

Lin Yutang’s emphasis on humour here would have been familiar to his Chinese peers back home; he had in fact coined the Chinese neologism youmo—transliterated from ‘humour’—as early as 1924, which subsequently became associated among Chinese intellectuals with Lin’s literary form of choice, the xiaopinwen. 516 Lin’s fondness for this particular style of essay shines through in the description he offers an American audience in My Country and My People:

This ancient geniality is best reflected in the Chinese familiar essay, xiaopinwen [xiaopinwen], which is the product of the Chinese spirit at play. The pleasures of a leisurely life are its eternal themes. Its subject matter covers the art of drinking tea, the carving of seals and the appreciation of pot-flowers and the caring for orchids, boating on the lake, climbing historically famous mountains, visiting ancient beauties’ tombs, composing poetry under the moon and looking at a storm on a high mountain—all written in a style leisurely and chatty and suave, as disarmingly hospitable as a friend’s chat by the fireside and as poetically disorderly as the recluses’s dress, a style trenchant and yet mellow, like good old wine. 517

In China’s radical political context of the time, dominated by anti-traditionalism and revolution, Lin Yutang’s preoccupation with humour and lightness of tone and topic came across as irrelevant and indulgent to many of his peers. In such a climate any “less-than-radical” stance was perceived as “conservative cultural essentialism”. 518 His most formidable critic, Lu Xun,
sneered at Lin’s writing as so many “little ornaments” which “anaesthetised” its readers.\textsuperscript{519} In Lin’s re-imagining of the international peace conference, however, we can see how for Lin humour and a critical social edge were in fact far from mutually exclusive. Having lived through the devastation and aftermath of one world war, and now writing on the cusp of yet another, it is also characteristic of Lin to critique the peace conference in particular as a platform thus far approached in a woefully wrongheaded manner; he had been convinced for a long time that too little attention had been paid around the world to collectively crafting a ‘technique of peace’, or a ‘philosophy of peace’.\textsuperscript{520} This in turn was likely motivated by the at first spectacular success, and later equally spectacular failure, of former American president Woodrow Wilson’s ideals.

In the wake of the tectonic upheavals of WWI, Woodrow Wilson’s grand vision of a re-ordering of international society, founded on the principles of self-determination, equality, and justice, had an electrifying effect around the globe. “For a brief interval, Wilson stood alone for mankind,” wrote H.G. Wells. “Or at least he seemed to stand for mankind. And in that brief interval there was a very extraordinary and significant wave of response to him throughout the earth. … He ceased to be a common statesman; he became a Messiah. … That response was one of the most illuminating events in the early twentieth century. Manifestly the World-State had been conceived then, and now it stirred in the womb. It was alive.”\textsuperscript{521} That ‘brief interval’—from mid-1918 to the early spring of 1919—has been characterised by scholar of

\textsuperscript{519} Qian, \textit{Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity}, 82.
\textsuperscript{520} ibid., 227.
international history Erez Manela as a ‘Wilsonian moment’, defined by its “simultaneity across the boundaries of nations, regions, and empires”. The response to Wilson’s rhetoric among both political elites as well as broader publics during this period, Manela observes, “transcended the usual geographic closures of historical narratives”, with anti-colonial movements in particular newly empowered to view themselves as part of a ‘global wave’, and as aspiring collectively to “a new international society whose structure and dynamics would reflect Wilsonian precepts”.

Due to a potent mix of Wilson’s soaring rhetoric, the perceived military and economic power and relative neutrality of the United States, and extremely effective American utilisation of propaganda networks and technologies, Wilson spoke as an “American president had never before spoken … on such a grand stage, to such a broad audience, and with such a widespread effect. Arguably, none has done so since.” Through the Committee on Public Information (CPI)—a governmental propaganda agency formed in 1917 by Wilson’s own executive order—the 28th US President was able to have all his major speeches and statements disseminated with record speed to “England, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Holland, Scandinavia, Russia, Australasia, Japan, China, Siberia, South America, Central America, Mexico, India, South Africa, Greece, Egypt, and Canada”, and beyond. George Creel, under whose leadership the CPI came to be regarded as the world’s most successful public relations organisation, asserted to Wilson:

---

522 ibid., 10.
523 ibid., 7.
524 ibid., 11.
525 ibid., 21.
“for the first time in history the speeches of a national executive were given universal circulation, and I am proud to tell you, sir, that your declarations had the force of armies.” 526

Among these globally disseminated speeches were Wilson’s ‘Peace without Victory’ address to the United States Senate in January 1917, viewed as the “first time that any statesman of stature” had expressed a “penetrating critique of European imperialism.” 527 The contrast between Wilson’s rhetoric and that of other Western statesmen, such as Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau, both eager to preserve England and France’s respective empires, was glaring. It is difficult to exaggerate the degree to which Wilson thus became synonymous with the ideals and values he espoused, couched in various memorable phrases which lent fuel and hope to the political arguments and dreams of colonised and marginalised peoples across the world: “right over might”, “consent of the governed”, and “equality of nations”… 528 Decades later, Lin Yutang still writes of this time with great feeling:

I am an old Wilsonian. I remember my emotion when I was a young teacher at Peking on reading his conditions of peace in the winter of 1916-17; it was an emotion shared by all the people in remote Asia. We out there saw a light and a world leader. The phrase ‘peace without victory’ has remained always in my mind. There was to be no victory but the ‘victory of mankind’. Only by reading again that speech made on January 22, 1917, before America entered the war, can I recapture those moments when the world believed. 529

526 ibid., 51.
527 ibid., 24.
528 ibid., 22.
529 Lin, On the Wisdom of America, 434.
Most influential was Wilson’s landmark ‘Fourteen Points’ address, delivered to the United States Congress in January of the following year, and which laid out a set of principles for the approaching peace negotiations in Paris. Among these were a call for an open, transparent approach to diplomacy, and an end to power politics in the interests of constructing world peace and avoiding the devastation of another world war. “With clear logic and unmistakable meaning,” Lin Yutang writes from the vantage point of 1950:

Wilson enunciated certain principles that we have totally forgotten, principles whose every antithesis our statesmen are practicing today. ‘Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power? If it be only a struggle for a new balance of power, who can guarantee the stable equilibrium of the new arrangement?… There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organised rivalries, but an organised common peace.’ … ‘The guarantees must neither recognise, nor imply a difference between big nations and small, between those that are powerful and those that are weak.’ … As for ‘open covenants openly arrived at’, that phrase is forgotten long ago; in fact, the authors of secret treaties are rather pleased with themselves. And so we go on, but it cannot be said that we progress.\[^{530}\]

Lin Yutang was far from alone; from Columbia University graduate Hu Shi (1891-1962), a leader of China’s New Culture Movement and its most prominent advocate of literary reform—and who served as Ambassador to the United States between 1938-42—to Kang Youwei (1858-1927), the globe-trotting, erstwhile constitutional monarchist who appeared in this dissertation’s first chapter, and who rose to prominence during the late Qing, a broad spectrum of Chinese intellectuals placed their hopes for a better future, both nationally and internationally speaking, in Wilson. Kang was in particular ecstatic about Wilson’s proposed League of Nations, seeing in it the “realisation of the traditional Confucian notion of datong,\[^{530}\] ibid.
a utopian vision of universal peace” which Kang had explored in his *Datongshu, or One-World Philosophy*.531

Within days of Wilson’s address, the CPI had “produced hundreds of thousands of poster copies of the ‘Fourteen Points’, both in the original and translated into numerous languages”; the full text was published in a major Shanghai newspaper shortly thereafter.532 Wilson’s proposed vision of a postwar global order thus became rapidly and “widely familiar to reading publics around the world”,533 with the ‘Fourteen Points’ soon outpacing the literal content of Wilson’s speech to grow into a shorthand for “the transformation of international society along the principles of equality, self-determination, and justice.”534 These principles, Wilson insisted, were necessary to form the basis of the international legitimacy of any government, as well as “the legitimacy of the international system as a whole”,535 and would be shared by “forward looking men and women everywhere, of every modern nation, of every enlightened community.”536 Manela points out that this phrasing nevertheless offered a convenient way out for imperialists: “If certain groups were not sufficiently ‘modern’, certain communities not fully ‘enlightened’, they could be excluded, at least for the time being, from the brave new world

532 ibid., 99.
533 ibid., 52.
534 ibid., 52.
535 ibid., 24.
536 ibid., 23.
that the president envisioned.” As most of the attending nations were to discover, this would indeed prove a useful loophole at the Paris Peace Conference with which the Big Three could justify deferring the eradication of imperialist and colonialist policies until a more ‘appropriate’ stage in the future.

Halide Edib was, if anything, even more moved by the Wilsonian vision than Lin Yutang—so much so that she and a group of like-minded writers, publicists, and lawyers founded an association named the ‘Wilsonian League’. Formed around the purpose of drawing up an official scheme to the Americans, the League proposed that the US provide financial assistance to Turkey and guarantee it a period of peace so as to allow the country to engage in internal reforms and re-building; in time, Turkey would become a stable, peaceful and modern nation, thus contributing to the stability of both its immediate regions and the larger world. With hostility and anti-foreign sentiment towards the plan mounting from within Turkey—“Eastern Anatolia was against it from the very beginning”—and increasing disillusionment with and distrust of the Western powers, the League folded within two months. Nevertheless, Halide recalls in The Turkish Ordeal her intense conviction upon hearing Wilson’s speeches that “[i]n the midst of blind hatred and the cry of ‘no quarter to the defeated’, the only gleam of justice and common sense seemed to come from those principles”. And when Halide writes warmly of the American representative to Turkey after the Armistice, Mr. Philip Browne, it is in no small part due to his being a ‘Wilsonian’:

He took temperamental delight in everything that was Eastern and Turkish. It was not only this which gave him a special charm in the eyes of every Turk; he was also

---

537 ibid., 24.
538 Edib, The Turkish Ordeal—Being the Further Memoirs of Halidé Edib, 15.
a sincere believer in the Fourteen Points of President Wilson. After hearing him speak on these points with surprising eloquence and conviction, I went home thinking that Time would soothe and soften this political malady called anti-Turkism, and that the coming peace, however hard or however drastic, would not lay the foundation of a bloodier era of revolution and horrors, especially over the bones of the twenty million human beings who had died for the sake of a better human understanding and adjustment. The peoples, judging from my own, I felt to be intensely anxious to act on the principle of live and let live.\(^{539}\)

A primary aim of Halide Edib in writing her English-language memoirs could thus be framed as curing western audiences of ‘this political malady called anti-Turkism’. *The Turkish Ordeal* strives to paint a fuller, more sympathetic picture of the Turks and their political motivations, as well as a sense of the complex and problematic role that western nations had in them. In this regard, though written decades apart, the *Turkish Ordeal* (1928) is comparable to Lin Yutang’s *Vigil of a Nation* (1944)—both were written to illustrate the desperate plight and fundamental humanity of the writer’s respective nations, especially during wartime, to Anglophone readerships, and to criticise the hypocrisy and destructive diplomatic tactics of western countries.

To this end, Halide Edib was not one to mince words for her readers. The Turkish press, she writes, was “tightly muzzled by the Allied censor”, allowing only particular, often distorted, narratives to reach the western media.\(^ {540}\) “The ‘Down with the Turk!’ cry”, Halide writes, “drowned every voice which spoke the truth”; meanwhile, “Western politicians who dreamt of dividing the whole of Turkey were more than encouraged by the internal situation of the country”; \(^ {541}\) with ‘internal situation’ referring to the “historical transition period … marked by

\(^{539}\) ibid., 11.  
\(^{540}\) ibid., 5.  
\(^{541}\) ibid., 11.
political and military confusion and chaos in Istanbul and Anatolia: civil war, two governments (Ottoman and Anatolian) vying for internal and external legitimacy, war against the Greeks and other Allied occupation forces, and revolution.\textsuperscript{542}

Amid all the hostile atmosphere created in our own country by the narrow policy of the victors, the internal process, which was gradually hardening me into an absolute rebel against the enemies of my country, received a check whenever a Westerner appeared who was capable of understanding the desperate position into which the Turks were being pushed. Apart from the gradually weakening flicker of hope that the West might solve the Turkish question with more common sense if not with more equity, I felt the fundamental oneness of all those who, regardless of race and creed, dare to believe in truth and reality in a noisy world of politics.\textsuperscript{543}

This passage, along with many others in the \textit{Turkish Ordeal}, embodies the way in which writing in English allows Halide Edib to simultaneously mobilise all three fields of sentiment—cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and imperialism—into play. Firstly, Halide Edib was communicating in the language most directly accessible to, and associated with, the perceived perpetrators of imperialism; English thus becomes the most effective linguistic tool with which to ‘defend’ the Turkish nation against its perceived oppressors, allowing her to introduce her own political values—to create new associations and valences with English words such as ‘Turk’ and ‘West’—into the English language, and to reach those readers who might be able to directly affect imperialist policy. Meanwhile, writing in English also allows Halide Edib to speak to non-Turkish-speaking readers and thinkers in the wider world who might become sympathetic to her views and share her values; those who might share her sensation of a ‘fundamental oneness’ regardless of ‘race and creed’ in a ‘noisy world of politics’. Finally, writing

\textsuperscript{542} Göknar, “Turkish-Islamic Feminism Confronts National Patriarchy: Halide Edib’s Divided Self ,” 46.

\textsuperscript{543} Edib, \textit{The Turkish Ordeal—Being the Further Memoirs of Halidé Edib}, 10.
in English allows her the space, even as she defends the Turkish nation, to simultaneously
critique aspects of the Turkish nationalist project by holding it up to the higher standards and
ethics of a ‘world-civilisation’. As Erdağ Göknar has pointed out, The Turkish Ordeal can be seen
as a response to and critique of Mustafa Kemal’s autocratic, patriarchal nationalist project,\textsuperscript{544} as
much as it is a defence of the Turks against western prejudice.

It is easier to grasp the daunting nature of Halide Edib’s task when one reads the
following League of Nations document, compiled in 1919, entitled ‘Can the Turks Enter the
League of Nations?’ On the very first page, the reader is greeted with the opinion that “that
the great Gladstone was fully right when he denounced the Turks as the most abominable kind
of humanity is proved by the entire history of this horde, from its appearance to the present
day.”\textsuperscript{545} We later find: “The civilised peoples of America and Europe could not possibly tolerate
the existence of the Turks as a dominant race without assuming a serious responsibility toward
human conscience.”\textsuperscript{546} And, following, in a similar vein: “Christian peoples in Turkey languish
in misery under the barbarous Turk … they will certainly die out should they continue under
the rule of that race so little susceptible of civilisation. … It is high time that Europe confessed
her fault of tolerating for centuries this political organisation called Turkey, and that she ridded
the Orient of the unbearable yoke of the Turk, who to the present day has displayed no other
talent than that of committing massacres and heaping ruins upon ruins.”\textsuperscript{547} The content of this

\textsuperscript{544} Göknar, “Turkish-Islamic Feminism Confronts National Patriarchy: Halide Edib’s Divided Self ,” 38.

\textsuperscript{545} “Can the Turks Enter the League of Nations? Accounts, Documents, Reports Etc.,” 1.

\textsuperscript{546} ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{547} ibid., 19.

199
document alone should help explain the urgency with which Halide Edib felt driven to conduct ‘civilisational diplomacy’ between the Turks and western audiences.

Given *Can the Turks Enter the League of Nations?* as indicative of the post-WWI reception of the Turks in even the highest and most educated echelons of European society, one is less likely to be sceptical of Halide Edib’s claim when she decries the fact that, as the fateful Paris Peace Conference drew near, various Turkish organisations and groups desiring of voicing their concerns were unable to do so: “Their mouths were shut by the prejudice of the Allied censorship, nor, owing to the general hatred of Turkey, could they get a press outside the country to represent their grievances.”

Halide also notes critically the double standard in which European public opinion would work up into a frenzy over any news or possibility of Christians being killed by Muslims in Turkey, while the opposite resulted in indifference.

Woodrow Wilson’s inclusive vision, then, was truly like a bolt from the blue for the Turks. Yet this ultimately led to a keener, sharper disappointment with the actual outcomes of the Paris Peace Conference. From the ever-shrinking circle of leaders who had decisive power over all final decisions, which, by April 1919, had dwindled down to the ‘Big Three’ of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Wilson, to the Allied occupation of Constantinople and British and French partition of formerly Ottoman territories, the Turks soon realised that the Fourteen Points were simply an empty manifesto. The collapse of the Wilsonian ideal would prove all the more trying

\[\text{Edib, The Turkish Ordeal—Being the Further Memoirs of Halidé Edib, 58.}\]

\[\text{ibid., 62.}\]
to Halide Edib, for her support of an American mandate, and her association with the Wilsonian League, would later become grounds for political opponents to attack her as a ‘traitor’ of the Turkish nation. “The Turks,” recalls Halide Edib at the Williamstown conference, “placed complete faith in the declarations of European statesmen, which seemed to hold out a promise that surrender would no longer mean the entire partition of Turkey. The faith was born because of a new element that had entered European politics in the personality of President Wilson, the representative of a hitherto non-imperialist nation who had created a general idealism and faith throughout the world. … The rights of the peoples was the favourite term and theme. Whatever the governments had done and were responsible for, the people were going to have their rights recognised.”

She concluded that “[t]he western peoples, who had sacrificed twenty millions of their manhood, were on the eve of a great change, but western diplomacy was not. It was bound by a series of secret treaties, all contradictory and intricate, and all the logical outcome of century-old western greed in the Near East.”

This utter disillusionment led to one of the most iconic moments in both Halide Edib’s own life and that of Turkey’s national historiography: her speech delivered in front of a crowd of an estimated 50,000-200,000 people in Sultanahmet Square in June 1919. She recalls seeing, draped high on the mosque railings before her, “an enormous black flag on which was inscribed in huge white letters, ‘Wilson’s Twelfth Point’.” It was during this speech that Halide Edib uttered the exhortation to her listeners which was to become a kind of national slogan: “The

550 Edib, Turkey Faces West: a Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin, 159-160.

551 Edib, The Turkish Ordeal—Being the Further Memoirs of Halidé Edib, 162.

552 Ibid., 30.
peoples are our friends, the governments our enemies”. In uttering this, Halide writes, she was “expressing the proper sentiment of a Moslem nation, highly conscious of its democratic principles”; in other words, a statement in defiance of the Paris Peace Conference and its non-democratic, religiously and racially motivated outcomes. In Halide Edib’s presentation of this scene, she emphasises how the overwhelming nature of the scene—“Each gaze sent its message, and I was intensely conscious that at that moment I was identified with my country” —rendered it a distinctly out-of-body experience. In order to transmit this sensation to the reader, Halide reverts from first- to third-person narration for the duration of the speech:

When she was asking them [the crowd] to take the sacred oath, which they were to swear three times, that they would be true to the principles of justice and humanity, and that they would not bow down to brute force on any condition, she was formulating that moral characteristic without which no people can survive in the human family of the new world which is to come.554

One has the strong sense that, for those few moments, she became her own, and Turkey’s own, ‘Wilson’.

Meanwhile, Halide Edib presents the argument in both The Turkish Ordeal (for a British audience) and her talk at the Williamstown conference (for an American audience) that it was the shock of the actions taken by the Allied powers—after all the high-flying Wilsonian rhetoric—which pushed Turkey to forge a more extreme path of nationalism: “Turkey grew accustomed to the knowledge that she must henceforth expect no help save from herself—a truth which was brought most fully home to her by the occupation of Smyrna, where a

553 ibid., 24.
554 ibid., 32.
spectacular inauguration was carried out before the eyes of all the Allied fleets (except Italy), America included.” One strain of this was Marxism; due to the post-Paris “general hatred of the West and the ideal of the Westernisation,” Halide writes, “the Turks tried to create a new ideal with which to replace it. And it was called the ‘Eastern Ideal’. It may roughly be described as an amorphous collection of ideas arising from a thwarted desire for a more congenial state of affairs.” “At present,” she goes on to observe, “Moscow is supplying agreeable food for thought to the oppressed and aggrieved. It is supplying them with an ideal, though in an indirect way. The West has yet to come out with an ideal which will be fair to the under dog.”

Halide Edib’s argument is in keeping with Erez Mandela’s argument that, while Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau successfully outmanoeuvred Woodrow Wilson in prioritising British and French imperial interests at the Paris Peace Conference, “in an age of advancing popular democracy they could offer no substitute, either domestically or internationally, to the principle of self-determination ‘as an ordering principle for national society’”; and in the long run, “[r]ather than bolster or expand the imperial order, the events of 1919 in fact laid the groundwork for its demise.” Manela explores how, akin to Halide’s interpretation of the Turkish response, the original enthusiasm of many Chinese intellectuals for Wilson’s principles, and the prospect that his league “would serve as bridges between East and West” similarly gave

---

555 ibid., 175.
556 ibid., 11.
557 ibid., 194.
way “to a growing sense of estrangement from the Western-dominated international society.”

China did its best to ‘play by the rules’, sending to Paris in 1919 as its representative V. K. Wellington Koo (Gu Weijin), who portrayed the Chinese—in impeccable English—as a civilised and righteous people, inculcated with Confucian morals and teachings, which in turn were entirely harmonious with the goals of the League of Nations and its notion of universal peace, justice and equality. While Clemenceau even complimented Koo on his eloquence, the council refused to renounce secret wartime agreements with the Japanese, including its seizure of Shandong Province. Koo was later to write to a former professor at Columbia University: “Little has been heard here of the famous fourteen principles, and still less has been noted in practice.” As Manela points out, before 1919, most Chinese intellectuals were far more familiar with Wilson than with Lenin. It was only after the May Fourth Movement, which arose in direct response to the perceived injustices of the Paris Peace Conference—and, if we recall, also led Nazım Hikmet’s Si-Ya-U to protest outside the Chinese embassy in Paris and to be deported from France—that “disillusioned nationalists like Mao began seriously to examine Bolshevism as an alternative path for resisting imperialism and attaining international equality and dignity for China.”

---

559 ibid., 186.

560 ibid., 115.

561 ibid., 181.

562 ibid., 184.

563 ibid., 196.
It was small wonder that Lin Yutang, in *Between Tears and Laughter* (1943), took great relish in caricaturing a day in the life of a self-important diplomat from one of the great powers:

For thus goes the day of the diplomat. Properly ensconced on the top floor and comfortably inaccessible to the public, he sits in his hard, upright, high-backed chair that used to belong to the nephew of Louis Napoleon. On the side of the room there is a long, plain table that comes from a very old Aragon family of Spain. The room is richly and, what is more important, heavily curtained. There is an atmosphere of complete silence, broken by *tick-ticks* from the secretary’s room. It is insulated from the world, and yet it is not; there is on the other hand, an air of intense excitement and power. In a specially built enclosure is a wireless telephone that will put him in instant touch with some distant continent.

... The second and the third interviews ended with more “Ah, very interesting’s” in still lower whispers. The world in fact was getting very interesting, made more interesting by a wireless telephone call from Stockholm. Now it became positively amazing. He called Ankara. It was now astonishing.

... Armed with the air of military secrecy, he went forth to battle. He never failed in combat. At the critical moment, he barked, ‘I know all the facts.’ The argument was unanswerable. The diplomat had all the facts, the press did not have them; the public felt beaten in an unfair game. He could not tell the facts, moreover, except in a White Paper to be issued four years hence which the press correspondents would be at liberty to challenge then if they liked. ...So another day began and ended, as many days had begun and ended, with a whisper in his heart, ‘Ah, how very interesting!’

Here we see again Lin’s distinctive mix of the humorous with political critique. “For Europe is a bull,” he writes, both gleefully and glumly, “and I am merely its ‘gadfly’ in the Socratic sense.” As with Halide Edib, even as Lin Yutang voices his utter disillusionment with western power politics and rhetoric, it seems as if he seeks to carry on the Wilsonian mantle in his own fashion, exhorting his American readers in *Between Tears and Laughter* amidst the chaos of the Second World War: “If the world is to function as a unit, the faith must ultimately develop equally

---


565 ibid., 93.
that no nation is better than any other nation.”

“In a truly civilised peace treaty,” he adds, “the ‘guilt clause’ will be abolished. For according to Laotse … Only at a peace conference where both opponents insist on fixing the guilt on oneself will there be permanent peace.”

For Manela, “the story of the Wilsonian moment” in colonial and imperial contexts “is one about the role of power, both real and perceived, in the dissemination, adoption, and operationalisation—the conversion into purposeful political action—of the new norms of international legitimacy and practice that Wilson championed.” Both Halide Edib and Lin Yutang would be deeply impacted by the Wilsonian moment, and, after its demise on the world stage, each would go on to draw upon its legacy to continue grappling with the questions it had raised. The Wilsonian moment led both to question Western civilisation, and to see the need for more diverse cultural elements and resources in a ‘world civilisation’ or ‘world government’, than ever before.

Perhaps if it were not for the disappointing collapse of the Wilsonian vision, Halide would not have been quite so moved to reflect upon the figure of Mahatma Gandhi in the following manner: “Both the Eastern and the Western world should study him seriously, for he is offering one of the ways which may lead to the salvation, not only of the East but also of the West, by enabling it to co-operate with a free, strong, moral and peaceful East. I will say in conclusion: ‘The key of the future will belong to that nation which knows how to blend the material and

---

566 ibid., 207.
567 ibid., 198.
the spiritual in as near and equal a proportion as it is possible to do.”  

Lin Yutang, for his part, also turned his sights to India for a period during World War II. But that is a story for the next section.

**Beyond the ‘East-West problematic’: pan-Islamic solidarity from India to Japan**

As invested as they were in representing their native countries to the Anglophone world, Lin Yutang and Halide Edib’s oeuvres also include less-studied engagements with broader, multi-faceted configurations of political solidarity. These configurations of solidarity were often drawn across non-Western axes, and intended to confront the hegemony of western powers — India, for instance, became a particularly significant locus for both writers from which to critique contemporary politics and envision a more equitable global future. If both Chinese and Turkish writers were preoccupied with issues of being derivative or imitative of the West, leading to a cultural crisis termed by Turkish scholars as the ‘East-West problematic’, studying these works offer us a look at how Lin Yutang and Halide Edib attempted to “inscribe alternative sites of identification” beyond such East/West binaries.

For Lin Yutang, the refusal to respond to India’s widespread agitation for self-rule during WWII was an unequivocal reflection of both the hypocrisy of western powers, in particular Great Britain, as well as their refusal to admit the emergence of a new world order in which Asia was destined to play a decisive role. “If one could see the invisible forces rising and risen

---

569 Edib, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*, 300.

in Asia, one would be forced to look upon this Second World War as a revolution in the world structure,” he remarks in Between Tears and Laughter (1943). Placing the agency for radical change squarely in Asia, he adds emphatically, “This revolution is being forced by Asia upon Europe, and not by Europe upon Asia.”

Lin firstly critiques the mindset of Britain’s political elite by referring to two Members of Parliament: “Sir Norman Angell… his liberal concepts of the necessity of world co-operation and standing and falling together are strictly ‘white’ and limited to west of the Suez Canal. … His notion of Russia and of Asia stands intellectually on a par with the Tory Lady Astor, who says, ‘I would like China and Russia to be in the framework of a new society formed by America and the British Commonwealth, but they would have to get into the ‘British way of thinking’. Such superb gems can only be cut in London.” Angell had notably been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933, a fact which renders Lin’s critique of the narrow and prejudicial nature of Western elite values all the more pointed. In this regard it is they, Lin insists, and not Asia, that is passé and anti-modern: “The emergence of Asia simply means this: the end of the era of imperialism.”

By the time of writing Between Tears and Laughter, as discussed in the previous section, Lin Yutang had become deeply disillusioned with western power politics. In a 1942 New York Times

---

571 Lin, Between Tears and Laughter, 18-19.

572 ibid., 18-19.

573 ibid., 20.
article, he tried to present India’s independence as a crucial development in both moral and pragmatic terms:

The role of India is coming steadily to the fore, and this fact must be faced, or we might yet lose the war in Asia. A tremendous difference in war morale of the Asiatics, particularly in the war efforts of India, hangs upon the vision of the leaders of the Western democracies and their ability to tell the Indians, in more convincing terms than vague promises and unctuous sops of praise, that they have something deep and elementary to fight for. Real creative statesmanship should see this point.

Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill, he noted, had side-stepped “India’s demand for freedom … as a trivial, inconsequential issue”, revealing the double standard that the “Atlantic Charter would apply to all countries subjected by Hitler, but it would not apply to countries subjected by England. Europe is to be free but not Asia.” To have such double standards for Asian and European nations, Lin adds, emboldens fascists: “Refusal to face this issue deliberately plays into the hands of Japanese propaganda of ‘Asia for the Asiatics’, and of Lord Haw-Haw in Berlin.” In quoting Jawaharlal Nehru, Lin notes it is only judicious to recognise how it “was manifestly absurd for a subject India to become the champion of liberties abroad which were denied to her.” Lin observes, judging from China’s resistance against the Japanese, “even inferiority in weapons and enemy control of the air do not matter so much if the millions of Asia have the will to fight”; yet “neither in the United States nor in England has any political leader said or done anything to bid for the support of Asia’s millions or given them an incentive to better fighting morale.” It must have seemed to him that, for all his millions of western readers, his words had fallen on deaf ears.\(^574\)

The Wisdom of India, a compilation of classical Indian literature and philosophy selected and annotated by Lin Yutang, was published in 1944, a year after Between Tears and Laughter, and when the Second World War was still hanging in the balance. For all its focus on Indian classics, then, The Wisdom of India was also intended as a forceful political statement. In the book’s foreword, Lin writes: “It is my first belief that this generation of elderly statesmen is hopeless, and that we must begin by educating a new generation towards a more correct view of the Indian nation.” By re-iterating his critique of European politicians as possessing outdated mindsets no longer suited to the realities of global modernity, Lin positions himself as an alternative, and indeed more qualified, influencer of transnational public opinion.

In The Wisdom of India, Lin writes:

My love and true respect for India were born when I first read the Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in the present translation in my college days. In these two masterpieces we are brought closer to the atmosphere, ideals and customs of ancient Hindu life than by a hundred volumes of commentary on the Upanishads, and through them Hindu ideals, as well as Hindu men and women, become real to us. And the fact that Hindu imagination produced such masterpieces of literature, closely rivalling Homer in antiquity and in beauty and power of portraying human passions, is a definite pledge of the worth and richness of the Hindu civilisation.

Lin thus emphatically situates classical literature as being of deep relevance to contemporary politics; indeed, it forms one of India’s strongest claims to being regarded as equal to any Western civilisation. “Eventually, I am convinced India must win her freedom, not by fighting, because Hindus will not resort to violence, and not by politics,” Lin continues, “but by

---

575 Lin, The Wisdom of India, 11.
576 ibid., 125.
Englishmen falling in love with Sita. Whether English stockholders will ever read Indian literature and poetry is doubtful... But anyone can see that one who loves Phidias would not like to bomb the Acropolis, and no one in his senses could believe that a people that could produce such epics ought to be ruled by others. It does not make sense."  

By drawing upon the perceived cradle of Western civilisation and its sacred architectural heritage, Lin uses the richness of India’s ancient literature to illustrate why its colonisation is so unconscionable.

In 1943, the Indian League of America elected Lin Yutang as their honorary president. In his acceptance letter to the League’s president, Sirdar J. J. Singh, Lin wrote: “you must have felt that the cause of India is an international issue when you chose a Chinese for this unusual honour, and in the same spirit I am glad to accept.” The League’s moving gesture affirmed and extended Lin’s attempts at forging a kind of political solidarity which crossed national, religious, and ethnic lines, and which in fact cohered around Western concepts of ‘liberty’, ‘freedom’ and ‘nationhood’, but used those very values to critique Western power politics.

When Halide Edib was invited in 1935 to deliver a series of lectures at the Jamia Millia Islamia (National Muslim University) in New Delhi, she formed part of a similarly anti-imperial network of political solidarity—that of pan-Islamism as well as a kind of anti-colonial, secular transnationalism. Mahatma Gandhi presided over one of her talks, and openly affirmed that the Turkish and Indian struggle for freedom from foreign encroachment formed an “indissoluble bonding” between them. As historian Mushirul Hasan notes, Turkey’s July

---

577 ibid., 126-127.

578 “India League Elects Lin Yutang.”

579 Hasan, Between Modernity and Nationalism: Halide Edip's Encounter with Gandhi's India, 7.
1908 Revolution and successful toppling of the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid had served as a beacon of hope for a new generation of political leaders in the Middle East and beyond.\textsuperscript{580}

The jostling crowds and packed halls which greeted Halide at her lectures reflected the powerfully imagined pan-Islamic solidarity of Indian Muslims, of which there were some 45 million at the time.\textsuperscript{581} While Halide Edib had been aware of the Khilafat movement (1919-22)—a political campaign launched among Indian Muslims to dissuade the British from abolishing the Ottoman caliphate—she writes in her travel notes: “As for what it meant to Turkey, one could say that it belongs to the past, but for India that movement had a different significance. And that I could never grasp until I went to India.”\textsuperscript{582} Given the circumstances, one might well imagine the fundamental shift of perspective Halide’s travels to India afforded her. As one of Sultan Abdülhamid II’s fiercest critics, the fact that the sultan had encouraged and aligned himself with pan-Islamic movements, partly in a bid to help stamp out democratic opposition at home, would likely have made her regard the Khilafat movement with something less than enthusiasm. Now, however, she realised for the first time the vitality of these pan-Islamic affinities, as well as Turkey’s complex significance for so many in the Indian subcontinent. “Hindus and Muslims alike saw the Turks as the agency best suited for the piloting of modernist Islam within the twentieth century Muslim world,” Hasan writes. “They replaced images of imperial decay by the promise of reform, reconstruction, and social

\textsuperscript{580} ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{581} ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{582} Edib, \textit{Inside India}, 7.
Mustafa Kemal was seen as having made sure that “an emancipated Turkey was not to be chained to Europe or Arabia; it was to be herself, self-contained, and independent”, and was idolised by many Indian Muslims, some of whom named their children after him. And even after their hopes of a Turkish-led pan-Islamic bloc were dashed after Mustafa Kemal chose, as part of his secular reforms, to abolish the Caliphate—a position of nominally supreme spiritual authority over the Muslim world, which each Ottoman sultan had claimed since the 14th century—hundreds of thousands of Indian Muslims gathered in mosques upon the occasion of Mustafa Kemal’s death in 1938. As for Halide herself, she too had been “lionised beyond belief” in India, according to Hasan, since her iconic speech at Istanbul’s Sultanahmet Square in 1919, during which she had situated the Turkish nationalist struggle in global terms: “You have two friends: the Moslems and those civilised peoples who will sooner or later raise their voices for your rights. The former are already with you, and the latter we will win over by the invincible justice of our cause. Governments are our enemies, peoples are our friends, and the just revolt of our hearts our strength. The day is not far off when all nations will get their rights.…”

In the period leading up to the First World War, pan-Islamism had commanded a broader following within Turkish intellectual circles debating the constitution of modern Turkish identity. Enver Pasha (1881-1922), one of the key leaders of the Young Turks involved in the

---

583 Hasan, *Between Modernity and Nationalism: Halide Edip's Encounter with Gandhi's India*, 4-5.
584 ibid., 6.
585 ibid., 20.
586 ibid., 19.
1908 Revolution, was known for his pan-Islamist beliefs. In a conversation with the anti-British Bengali revolutionary (and later political science professor at Columbia University) Tarak Nath Das (1884-1958), Enver Pasha emphasised the entwined fates of the Turkish and Indian peoples, and how best Indian Muslims could show their solidarity with the Turks: “The best way an Indian can aid Turkey and the World is by concentrating all efforts on the freedom of India, because without a free India it will be hard for Turkey to maintain her national independence. Above all every Indian Mohammadan should learn that they have to cooperate with the Hindus as Indians, and that religious fanaticism must be banished from the field of national and international politics, unless the world is to go back to the darkness of the Middle Ages.” Enver, then, espoused a moderate form of pan-Islamism which had a kind of binocular vision, one which called upon Muslims to be both nationalist and internationalist at the same time.

Halide Edib, according to Hasan, “made similar appeals to Muslim audiences everywhere” during her stay in India. (This is not to say that Halide Edib and Enver Pasha’s politics generally agreed; she was, for one, somewhat critical of his over-eagerness to enter into war: “…had the Allies consented to modify the supreme symbol of Turkish humiliation, the capitulations, twenty Enver Pasha would not have sufficed to drag Turkey into the general lunacy of war.”) Consistent with her vision of modern Turkey, Halide Edib expressed similar hopes for an India that would evolve into an independent, modern nation, and yet retain intact its history, identity, and diversity. She is said to have declared upon her departure, amid

587 Edib, Inside India p.xxi.
588 Hasan, Between Modernity and Nationalism: Halide Edip's Encounter with Gandhi's India p.xxi.
589 Edib, Turkey Faces West: a Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin, 138.
enthusiastic cheers, “I go away, but I salute India, not Bengal, not northern India, not south India, but the India which will be the great land of varying civilisation harmonised. Not a uniform India but a United India.”590 The degree to which pan-Islamic solidarity was viewed as a threat, meanwhile—as well as to which it was justified—can be seen from the following British memo from the period:

We cannot crush Pan-Islamism any more than we can crush the nationalisms of the West. Our aim must be to divide, to conciliate, and to rule. It is necessary to divide and to conciliate, because we do not want Moslems to rally as a whole round the fundamental but at present half-forgotten principle that Moslems should not be ruled by non-Moslems. 591

Halide, ever the prolific writer, kept a fairly extensive travel diary in English during her travels in India. Besides an investment in expressing her cultural affinity and political solidarity with the country and its Muslim minority——“I felt India to be nearer to my Soul-Climate than any other country not my own” 592 — she spends a considerable amount of ink on her ambivalence towards the imprint of British socio-political culture on Indian society. Her impression of many Indian intellectuals, for example, is that they “spoke and thought in the same terms as an intellectual bred in Oxford”; thus “British domination may end some time; but British influence will remain through the culture and education derived from the English, and take part in the future shaping of India.” 593 Here she remains neutral, simply observing the impact of British culture and its necessary significance for whatever future path India

590 Edib, Inside India p.xxi.

591 Hasan, Between Modernity and Nationalism: Halide Edip's Encounter with Gandhi's India, 79.

592 Edib, Inside India, 3.

593 ibid., 16.
should take. The complexity of the British legacy clearly remains on her mind, for when she has the opportunity to engage in conversation with Mahatma Gandhi, she asks him:

“What is the greatest contribution of the English to India?”
He answered without hesitation:
“Nationhood.”

When Halide Edib visits the Indian Parliament, however, she becomes critical, describing it as “a ghost of Westminster”, with all the “niceties of English Parliamentary speech”: “The members were self-conscious, I thought. They were indeed like actors in giving a representation with the artistic effect of the procedure of the British Parliament”. Unsettled by the “unreality” of it all, Halide shifts her focus to the incongruous attendants, outfitted in crimson tunics and turbans: “They moved noiselessly about, with overdone obsequiousness, bowing, kneeling by the desks where they deposited papers. If the Parliament were even only a show, the attendants were marring the effect by acting as if they were in a Rajah’s palace, rather than in a democratic institution. They brought an air of servility, an ingrained sense of inequality, which did not suit the atmosphere at all.”

This may seem somewhat contradictory, given Halide’s earlier convictions that India could and should retain its own cultural identity amidst modernisation. Yet this might be more precisely viewed as another instance of Halide’s discomfort with modernisation—imitation, rather than reform as a more thoughtfully contextualised process, a phenomenon which she had also warily observed in her native Turkey—not least in the previously discussed Hat Law of 1925. In a similar vein, in *The Clown and His Daughter*, an English-language novel written several years before her trip to India, Halide

594 ibid., 56.
595 ibid., 54.
has one of her main characters describe the children of the Istanbul upper crust as having the appearance of “second-hand copies of European children”.\(^{596}\)

Ultimately, Halide Edib is careful to temper her observations with an acknowledgement of the sheer complexity of India and her own lack of knowledge, describing her visit “in terms of a primary-grade student of life wandering into a post-graduate class.”\(^{597}\) In her opening to *Inside India*, she gestures at the ways in which her visit to India has opened her mind, not just to the importance of India, but of Eastern nations more generally. India, she notes, has shown her not just her significance, but the difficulty of comprehending anything as epistemologically overwhelming as a nation, much less the world:

> Once I used to think that a first-hand knowledge of Russia and America would enable one to sense the direction in which the world was taking; but this India must surely have its share in shaping the future. Not because of its immemorial age, but because of the new life throbbing in it. Perhaps the same is true of China, of Japan. How can one tell? How much must one see and understand before being able to have any idea of the working of history?\(^{598}\)

Japan, as it turns out, had been a source of significant inspiration for both Turkish and Indian politicians in imagining the futures of their nations. A fourteen-year-old Nehru in May 1906 had “read joyously the news of the decisive Japanese victory over Russia in the strait of Tsushima” and “mused of Indian freedom and Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe” (he had also admired Enver Pasha as “daring and adventurous”).\(^{599}\) Halide Edib, meanwhile,

---

\(^{596}\) Edib, *The Clown and His Daughter*, 57.


\(^{598}\) Edib, *Inside India*, 16-17.

went so far as to name her second son, Hassan Hikmetullah ‘Togo’ — who, born in 1905 and “named after the great Japanese naval hero, appeared with red tufts of feathery hair, bleared baby eyes, and a continual screech.” Halide’s naming of her son—a popular move among new parents at the time—serves an index of the excitement in the Ottoman Empire over Meiji Japan as a new and successful non-Western modern nation to both emulate and ally with. When the Young Turk representatives met with the British in 1908 to discuss a possible alliance, they described themselves as, rather than “the sick Man of Europe”, the “Japan of the Near East”.

Renée Worringer notes that this pan-Asian association was largely “a fiction generated by the imaginations of a vast number of Ottoman writers who searched for ways to ensure the empire’s survival in the modern era” — one that was based on the overwhelming belief of Ottoman Muslims that the Japanese would convert to Islam. As absurd as this might sound, Worringer writes, this hoped-for conversion was rooted in the fact that it would dissolve “any discrepancy between identifying with the Islamic community and with the strength of Asian modernity as represented by Japan”, and was furthermore encouraged by the Japanese authorities when appropriate in furthering their own political ends. This illusion of solidarity with Japan was, however, shattered when the Japanese insisted on an unequal treaty, thus “underlining

---


601 Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, 1.

602 ibid.

603 ibid., 81.
underlining its own position as civilised and the Ottoman Empire’s position as civilisationally inferior.” The Ottomans declined. \(^{604}\)

In something of a surprise, *Vermilion Gate* (1953)—perhaps Lin Yutang’s least-studied work—is an English-language novel which centres on issues of Muslim unity and agitation within China. Its protagonist, a journalist named Li Fei who works for a Shanghai-based paper, is eager to try his luck at learning more about the Muslim revolts in ‘Chinese Turkestan’, or Xinjiang Province, shrouded in mystery and “unknown and forgotten to the Chinese”. Due to Russian expansionist ambitions and the successful exploits of Chinese Muslim forces, however, there now looms the threat of the formation of a Central Asian Muslim empire. \(^{605}\) The novel turns out to be deeply sympathetic to the Muslim case, providing context in which Governor Chin’s discriminative ‘redistribution of land’ policy in the Hami area has inflamed the local Muslims: “Under this well-meaning phrase the Turkis in this region, who were Mohammedans and made up 70 per cent of the population of Chinese Turkestan, had been ousted and given poor land instead, and their own lands had been distributed in favour of Chinese peasants from Kansu and refugee farmers from Manchuria. The Moslems were sullen and defiant.” In response, the Turki minister, Yollbars Khan, appealed to the legendary Chinese Moslem General Ma Chingying in neighbouring Gansu Province for help. Ma, along with other Muslim forces, helped to lay seige to Hami for six months, during which Governor Chin ordered a lockdown on the frontiers so that little news of what was going on could filter out. \(^{606}\) The novel

---


\(^{605}\) Lin, *The Vermilion Gate: a Novel of a Far Land*, 171.

\(^{606}\) ibid., 79.
ultimately closes on a happy note, in which Governor Chin has been removed from power, and the local Muslims and Han Chinese have found ways to make peace, even if only for the moment. While *Vermilion Gate* is a somewhat simplistically drawn novel, it leaves its reader with the lasting impression of an insistently hybridised history of the Chinese civilisation. One character, for example, enamoured of the cosmopolitan history of the city of Xi’an, the ‘western capital’ of the fabled Tang Dynasty, loves to regale newcomers to the city with tales of *Poszukuan*, the special quarter where Persians once lived, and how exquisite, ancient Persian carvings can still occasionally be found in the unlikeliest of dwellings in the city.  

Our protagonist Li Fei is equally insistent on the cosmopolitan, and specifically Turkic, origins of several of China’s most legendary beauties and poets, from Emperor Qianlong’s ‘Fragrant Concubine’, the wife of a slain Turkic chieftain, to the iconic Tang poet Li Bai (formerly Romanised as ‘Li Po’). In the latter, he meets some resistance from his listener: “No! Li Po’s family came from here, where we are now.” Li Fei replies smoothly: “That was his remote ancestry. Li Po probably had Turki blood or Greek blood in him. A hundred years before he was born his great-grandfather was exiled to Suyab in Central Asia, on the Talas Muren River, beyond the Sinkiang border, near Afghanistan. … I am quite convinced he had a Turki mother.” The novel continuously seeks to entangle the contemporary with the ancient, the present with the past, and its narrative is shot through with the shifting and re-shaping of identities and allegiances over time: “Some of the people were descendants of Uighur and

---

607 ibid., 70.

608 ibid., 249-50.
other Turkish soldiers who had come a thousand years ago and settled here, while others were of more recent origin, dribbling in from Chinese Turkestan in the centuries which followed. The inhabitants of this village were a Turki tribe who had come here over a century ago, as the age of the mosque, of a discoloured grey, with glazed green and yellow minaret and cupola, testified."

Worringer points out that while the Ottomans and the Japanese each forged ‘modern’ identities in the new global order, neither “seriously attempted to reject the notion of a civilisational hierarchy that placed one people above another in the evolutionary ladder”; instead, they sought to “reorder the power scheme within the established framework while leaving its foundational principles of social Darwinism and cultural determinism intact.” As non-official actors who were nevertheless deeply engaged with international cultural politics, Lin Yutang and Halide Edib used various forms of writing in attempts to call upon various reading publics to reject and reorder these very hierarchies and power schemes. In so doing, they often engaged in the imagining or narrating of various kinds of non-Western political solidarities that did not sit easily with those of the modern nation-state, Western or non-Western; and often did so by placing an emphasis on a ‘long view’ of civilisational history and intermingling. As Halide Edib spoke to her rapt audiences in India:

Decline is the recuperation time, the rest-cure of nations. What the day is to the individual, a long historic period is to the nation. The decline of Rome, the Dark Age, was a period of rest for the Western world. New nations under new names awoke and built up fresh civilisations in the West. In the homes of older Eastern civilisations, where

---

609 Ibid., 223.

610 Worringer, Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, 6.
peoples seemed fast asleep to the naked eye, in China, India and the Near East there are now signs of awakening. May it be a good morning to them all!611

World literature for a world civilisation

In the early 1950s, Halide Edib and Lin Yutang each published their last English-language work. Remarkably, both works use the medium of fiction to present deeply eccentric, playfully imagined visions of a radically cosmopolitan alternative modernity. Halide’s play *Masks or Souls?* (1953) features as its cast “William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the premier poet and playwright of the English Renaissance; Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), the Maghrebian founder of modern historiography; Tamarlane (1336-1405), the Mongolian world conqueror; and Nassir-eddin Hoja (c.1300-1400), the Anatolian religious scholar, spiritual teacher and trickster.”612 In *Masks or Souls?*, these various luminaries from across time and space gather in ‘the League of Human Affairs’ —a celestial, parodic equivalent of the League of Nations— as they debate the fate of Earth’s mortal beings who live in an increasingly ‘mechanistic’, or soulless, age. Lin Yutang, on the other hand, in his novel *Looking Beyond* (also titled *Unexpected Island*; 1955), imagines a post-war world, now governed by a ‘Democratic World Commonwealth’, and in which a small, isolated, and cosmopolitan mid-Pacific island community lives under the guidance of a philosopher-king figure named Laos, a former delegate to the United Nations of Chinese, Greek and Sicilian heritage, and who speaks Greek, English, German, French, Chinese — and Turkish!613

611 Edib, *Conflict of East and West in Turkey*, 42.


Laos, who quits a brilliant diplomatic career over disillusionment with power politics, is portrayed to us as above all a reader of world literature — and in turn, a synthesiser of world civilisations. Having grown up in Crete, nourished by its rich local mythology and ruins, he leaves upon experiencing a strong a yearning for the wider world and a sense of ‘incompleteness’, and develops a penchant for reading “rare ancient authors usually difficult to find in public libraries.” At the age of 23, he publishes “A Study of Brahmin Influence on Pythagoras, drawing many parallels of ideas, particularly the idea of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls”. He is later appointed Chargé d’affaires of the Greek Embassy at Cairo, and soon promoted to minister; “[h]owever, he was more interested in the antiquities, in the history of the Pharoahs and the cult of Isis and Osiris and Mithras, than in current politics.”

By the age of 31, he has become appointed as the Greek delegate to the United Nations, where he shortly discovers a strong distaste for diplomatic rhetoric and schemes:

…he snored through the speeches of the other orators. He knew exactly what the Polish delegate was going to say, the Soviet delegate had said it already, and the Pole would take another hour and half to say it again. … he had scant respect for adroit manoeuvres, whispering caucuses, deals of mutual support, and watering down of resolutions. … It [the UN] was not a world government, it had no body of enacted world law, and no means of law enforcement. It was just a splendid opportunity for the powers to come together and chatter over their differences of point of view. Some nations had to abide by the will of the majority, the bigger powers didn’t.

---

614 ibid., 50.

615 ibid., 50.

616 ibid., 51.

617 ibid., 52.
After quitting the UN, Laos travels to the ‘Orient’ and spends time in communist China, a monastery near Kyoto, and Bali, during which Zen Buddhism strongly influences his thinking.\textsuperscript{618} These travels are perhaps inspired by the his grandfather—“practically illiterate, one of those ubiquitous Chinese merchants who had trekked across Siberia and seeped like water into every nook and cranny of the world - Dresden, Berlin, Paris, Sicily, Algiers, the Belgian Congo - without the shadow of a consulate’s protection.”\textsuperscript{619} It is during this period that Laos’s conception of ‘civilisation’ takes shape, and that he becomes determined to form a small, alternative community on an isolated island, Thainos. In a conversation with a fellow island dweller, we learn that Laos is really Lin Yutang’s tongue-in-cheek conception of a philosopher-king, for whom ‘world civilisation’ “can be built only upon the common basis of international living, a combination of all that is best and finest in each civilisation. The ideal life would be, I think, to live in an English cottage, with American heating, and have a Japanese wife, a French mistress and a Chinese cook. That is about the clearest way I can put it.”\textsuperscript{620}

Halide Edib’s\textit{ Masks or Souls?} presents us with another radically cosmopolitan vision, undergirded with plenty of humour and irreverent critiques of normative diplomacy. The play shows us, for example, before the ‘League of Human Affairs in Heaven’, “CLEMENCEAU, speaking on the stage: After all, Heaven is essentially a European place. (Striking the table with his fists) Nay, it is essentially a French place!”\textsuperscript{621} Meanwhile, much of the play’s cast rests

\textsuperscript{618} ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{619} ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{620} ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{621} Edib,\textit{ Masks or Souls?: a Play in Five Acts}, 52.
on a playful mechanism of ‘metempsychosis’ — the ‘transmigration of souls’ which so fascinated Lin Yutang’s Laos, and which Laos concluded was the result of an intermingling of Brahmin and Greek thought — thus emphasising a radical fluidity and connectivity in thought and sentiment across time and space. The play wraps up on the striking image of Nasreddin Hoja and William Shakespeare holding hands, about to proceed together to a higher plane.

The pointed inclusion alongside Shakespeare of Nasreddin Hodja — a beloved Sufist figure of Turkish folklore, as the star of countless anecdotes in which he is either able to outwit his adversary or ends up the endearing fool in a comic situation — is thus key throughout the work. Bernadette Andrea notes that “his sage humour … renders him the forebear of Shakespeare’s wise fools and existential philosophers”, though he “may be less well known on the world stage.” 622 (On the contrary, although Nasreddin Hodja may not be famous in the English-speaking world, he is an iconic figure in dozens of storytelling cultures worldwide, from Urdu and Persian to Serbian and Chinese.) As one character insists: “The civilised Anatolia has always laughed at her own shortcomings … that is the greatest test of being civilised. It is since you have imported what you call modernism that the citizens of Akshehir look like mannikins in a shop-window … standardised state-products! I am glad my son remains a real descendant of Nassir-eddin Hoja.” 623 In other words, just as for Lin Yutang’s Laos, in *Masks or Souls?* civilisation is something which should not take itself so seriously; top-down programmatic policies intended to ‘civilise’ and ‘standardise’ citizens, rather than allowing individuals to be


shaped by diverse literary and cultural influences in their own ways, results in a grotesque effect. If, as Andrea observes, Shakespeare and Nassredin Hodja “remain the lone voices questioning this destruction of the human soul”\textsuperscript{624} in the play, Halide Edib makes an unequivocal statement about the necessity for cross-civilisational cultural resources in allying against the ever-present threat of fascism and narrow-minded nationalism.

Nasreddin Hodja’s prominent role in the play is also indicative of Halide Edib’s endeavours to “integrate the ‘high’ Islamicate and ‘low’ folk cultures the modern Turkish Republic inherited”:\textsuperscript{625}

She was particularly critical of the break with the past imposed through the authoritarian imposition of the Latin alphabet onto the Turkish language. For Edib, cultural nationalism is “nothing but the individual style of a nation, her way of adjusting herself”; she distinguished this multi-layered nationalism from the political nationalism based on ethnic exclusivity that led to the mass transfers and attendant massacres of populations, including over half a million ethnic Turks, in the former melting pot of the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{626}

For Halide Edib, the vitality and value of a particular civilisation lay in the totality of its literary, cultural and material ‘styles’, from vernacular expressions and ephemera to its most venerable ‘high’ art and architecture, both past and present. In her 1935 novel \textit{The Clown and His Daughter}, we find a memorable passage intended to portray the sheer expressive power and versatility of a sailor swearing:

\begin{quote}
At the top of the ladder a sailor swore in husky and lusty tones. … The swearing was infinitely comprehensive. It was uttered by a sailor who had been on the \textit{Glory of the Sea} for twenty years. He had witnessed these heart-breaking scenes of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{624} Andrea, “Dialogism Between East and West: Halide Edib’s “Masks or Souls?”,” 12.

\textsuperscript{625} ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{626} ibid., 12.
farewell almost every year. The boat did nothing but carry exiles to Yemen or Tripoli. His objurgations included the ancestor of every tyrant. They went back into the past until they reached the first, the original father of man. They did not spare the future progeny of those who exiled and persecuted their fellows. They reached out to the future, not forgetting the relatives of all the world’s tyrants, and arrived at the millennium, when governments and rulers would cease from troubling the down-trodden, weary human masses.627

This calls to mind Lin Yutang’s foreword to *The Importance of Living*, in which he lays out the various ‘sources’ he drew upon in compiling the book:

> Some of my sources are: Mrs. Huang, an amah in my family who has all the ideas that go into the breeding of a good woman in China; a Soochow boat-woman with her profuse use of expletives; a Shanghai street car conductor; my cook’s wife; a lion cub in the zoo; a squirrel in Central Park in New York; a deck steward who made one good remark; that writer of a column on astronomy (dead for some ten years now); all news in boxes; and any writer who does not kill our sense of curiosity in life or who has not killed it in himself. . . how can I enumerate them all?628

This emphasis upon the value of the vernacular, and an openness to mixing ‘high’ and ‘low’ literary culture, is also reflected in the ways in which Halide Edib and Lin Yutang approach translation. Halide Edib recalls how, when first translating Shakespeare, she opted for ‘simple Turkish’ rather than a more refined Persianised Turkish—at the time “an unheard-of and shocking” approach—and was criticised for “vulgarising” Shakespeare. She remembers the eminent Salih Zeki Bey going over her version, “scratching out with a red pencil here and putting in Arabic words and the usual orthodox terms of high literary Turkish there.” Halide Edib remained convinced, however of “a wild harmony in the Anglo-Saxon diction of Shakspere the parallel of which I thought I could find in the simple but forcible Turkish of popular

---


628 Lin, *The Importance of Living* p.viii.
Likewise, in *My Country and My People*, at one point Lin Yutang phrases Confucius’s response to the significance of death as: “Don’t know life—how know death?”, with a memorable footnote: “I am using pidgin English here in order to retain the terseness and force of the original.”

Just as Halide Edib felt there was an energy and rhythm to vernacular Turkish that was more kindred to her own perception of Shakespearean vigour, so too did Lin Yutang elevate pidgin English—conventionally frowned upon by speakers, much less readers, of ‘proper’ English—as a register which could better capture the sheer concision and force of Confucius.

Like Halide Edib, Lin Yutang places great emphasis on the value of the vernacular and of the multitudinous quotidian elements which constitute one’s ‘culture’ or literary background. He, too, views ‘civilisation’ as not only that which is perceived as ‘fine’, ‘high’ or ‘modern’, but equally that which is popular and traditional. He writes, for instance, that the art of folk theatre in China has

[through its immense popularity … achieved a place in the national Chinese life very nearly corresponding to its logical place in an ideal republic. Apart from teaching the people an intense love of music, it has taught the Chinese people, over ninety per cent of whom are illiterate, a knowledge of history truly amazing, crystallising, as it were, the folklore and entire historical and literary tradition in plays of characters that have captured the heart and imagination of the common men and women. Thus any amah has a livelier conception than I have of many historical heroes … from her intimate knowledge of Chinese plays, as I was prevented from attending the theatres in my childhood through my missionary education.


631 ibid., 265.
In another passage from *The Clown and His Daughter*, Halide Edib gives similar pride of place to the traditional Turkish folk art of the shadow-play. Tewfik, a talented shadow-play artist, sets up show in the local coffee-house, where many neighbourhood regulars have come to chat, exchange news, and watch the performance:

His shows began with the traditional prayer to His Majesty—that his days might last for ever, his sword be ever sharp, and his enemies be confounded. That they might turn into black earth and be eaten by worms. But the heroes of the old-time shadow-play were made by Tewfik to resemble contemporary figures. Some even suggested the much-talked-of-royal favourites. In earlier shadow-plays the ‘Heir to Millions’—the most important character—had been represented as an insipid youth, exploited and fleeced by flatterers, and dying in want. But Tewfik’s ‘Heir to Millions’ was a vigorous, shrewd, unscrupulous grandee, a past-master in extortion and bribery, living in luxury. …Tewfik’s interpretation of every ancient character, from the ‘Albanian Bully’ to the Negro Eunuch, suggested the Sultan’s entourage. But he presented them in such impossible situations that his audience held their breath, trying to guess, yet not arriving at a definite conclusion, as to their identity. Tewfik reproduced the lives of the humble with merciless realism—their cynical acquiescence, their abject flattery of the great to their faces, their acrid criticism the moment they were among themselves, their passive revolt.632

While the art of the shadow-play in itself offers beauty, skill, and a valuable capacity to capture the popular audience’s imagination, in this passage Halide Edib shows that this traditional art form moreover has the versatility and expressive power to formulate witty commentary on present societal issues, thus telescoping between the political present and historical past within itself. Halide Edib was particularly appreciate of this quality, as she viewed civilisation as a gradual evolution, constantly drawing back to and enriching itself with the past, rather than a radical break from history. For these same reasons, she was critical of the ‘overnight’ manner with which Mustafa Kemal had carried out the transition of Turkish from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet:

Now the graver danger of being cut away from the Turkish culture of the past is looming on the horizon. The new generation rising within the next twenty years will be as strangers in the country and to its past. The continuity of Turkish culture has been abruptly broken. … Without a past, without a memory of the accumulated beauty in the national consciousness, there will be a certain crudeness, a lowering of aesthetic standards. If the change had been brought about in fifteen years instead of five months, with enough experts to work it out, with enough funds to edit the essential works of Turkish culture in Latin letters, these drawbacks would have been infinitely reduced. Edib

The cast of characters in The Clown and His Daughter offer its reader a spectrum of mindsets with regards to the future of Turkey and Turkish civilisation. There is the vehemently anti-religious Young Turk, Shevki, whose ideal is for future generations to “raze to the ground every scrap of the old, rotten world—wipe the slate clean, make a waste and a desolation of what was the Past. Then and only then can we create the True Civilisation.” Then there is his friend, a fellow Young Turk with less extreme, but vaguer ideals, a “a sort of Turkish Hamlet, disturbed by the wickedness of his father; one of the brooding, vocative, incoherent Hamlets of this world.” And as a polar opposite to the Young Turks, there is the First Chamberlain, one of Sultan Abdul Hamid’s trusted palace staff:

The First Chamberlain stood before his mahogany desk, buttoned up in his tight and elegant long black coat. People wondered how such a man, refined, a scholar, and notoriously benevolent, could remain so loyal to Abdul Hamid. But his detachment from the milieus in which he lived was complete. He performed his duties with tact and ability; they had become nearly mechanical. His leisure was occupied in collecting antique Turkish pipes, daggers, and old English clocks. In his evenings he employed himself carving back-scratchers out of sandalwood. This interest he shared with Selim Pasha, and it created a certain sympathy between them. ... His library contained only the mystical and philosophical works of the early writers in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. The collection contained not a single modern book; he was a stranger to his time and to its literature.

---

633 Edib, Turkey Faces West: a Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin, 235.


635 ibid., 65.
Incongruous as he seemed to outsiders in the Hamidian entourage, he was still not so inconsequent as they deemed him. He accepted things as they were. He had no ambition to change the world, for to his mind change and disorder were synonymous. His Majesty was the centre of the social and political order. His Majesty gave a certain stability to the world. Further, he was devoted to His Majesty as a man; that royal person had the manners of a gentleman, never lost his temper, never raised his voice, and spoke to his inferiors in a tone of mild friendliness.... Temperamentally he preferred the good-mannered tyranny of polite despots to the reign of rude and unpolished liberal rulers.\textsuperscript{636}

This portrait of the First Chamberlain is critically, yet sensitively, drawn. Even as his complicity in the Sultan’s oppressive regime as well as the stagnation of the Empire is made evident to us, we are also shown the values to which he ascribes, the framework in which he has built his identity, and thus the roots of his attitude towards all social reform and change. Meanwhile, the model for a desirable future in \textit{The Clown and His Daughter} is clearly invested in the Italian music master Peregrini—a former Catholic monk—who marries Rabia, a Koran chanter. In order to marry her, as social norms dictate, he must convert to Islam, which he eventually does after some hesitation: “Strange that I should accept a new creed? But am I accepting it really? Islam to me is not a religion, it is a way of living, a mere label and a code of human relationship. I can’t enter the Sinekli-Bakkal as an inhabitant without that label pinned on my coat. I shall still have my back garden, the preserve of my private life and thoughts. I shall pass under the purple wistaria every day, joking with the women at the fountain... In the month of Ramazan we may give shadow-plays for the street children when our bambini are big enough.”\textsuperscript{637} Over time, his musical improvisations reflect his receptiveness and synthesised worldview, with the “incursion of Oriental into his brilliant Western harmonies.”\textsuperscript{638} It is

\textsuperscript{636} ibid., 165-66.

\textsuperscript{637} ibid., 271.

\textsuperscript{638} ibid., 280.
noteworthy that this novel—with its cross-section of a lively Istanbul neighbourhood in the
twilight years of the Ottoman Empire; its diversely drawn portraits of characters, from cross-
dressing shadow-play artists to the sultan himself to Sufi dervishes; and its vision of cross-
civilisational synthesis—was composed in Paris, and written expressly in English for an English
audience.

While it is clear that these various works by Halide Edib and Lin Yutang seek to present
a notion of a ‘world civilisation’ that is decidedly cross-cultural, transnational, and even transhistorical, it is less clear what status these works themselves hold, and if their fate
embodies the falling-short of the very ideals they espouse. Jing Tsu notes that the bilingual
writer “has too often been theorised as a mobile intermediary between two cultural worlds,
whereas he is in fact a product of their contradictions—neither broker nor agent.”639 Written in
English and published in countries in which their authors resided temporarily as foreigners,
these works do not fall into any national canon or literature. Just like their authors, these texts,
rather than mobile intermediaries between cultural worlds, often end up awkwardly in an
undefined between-space.

In some cases, these works may even function as a kind of ‘guest’ literature, which is of
some interest to its ‘host’ nation, yet must abide by certain unwritten rules lest it outstay its
welcome. After the release of Lin Yutang’s highly critical Between Tears and Laughter, for example,
very much destroy the Chinese-American good-will his previous efforts had established.”

639 Tsu, Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora, 92.
Prescott added that Lin, as “a product of an ancient and non-industrialised civilisation… pours the vials of his wrathful condemnation upon the materialism, the imperialism, the wars, power politics and general corruption of Europe and America (although as a long-time exile and resident of America he frequently forgets himself and uses the pronoun ‘our’ about American institutions).” Whilst much of Lin Yutang’s previous success had resided precisely in the skilful crafting of a conversational tone that allowed for a fluidity of identification between Chinese speaker and American reader, once Lin’s critical eye came to bear forcefully on America and western civilisation, many of his readers were no longer so receptive to such permeability, portraying him as a sort of ‘ungrateful’ guest. Rather than speaking as a high-profile member of a ‘world-civilisation’, Lin was still regarded by his American readers as a representative ‘Chinese’ voice.

Since David Damrosch’s *What Is World Literature?* (2003), world literature has been viewed, less as a sort of international canon, and more in terms of “the circulation of works out into languages and cultures beyond their original homeland”. In this model, “works of world literature are not born but made, at a subsequent stage of their life or afterlife.” With even this expansive and flexible mode of viewing world literature, it is difficult to find a place for Halide Edib and Lin Yutang’s English-language imaginative fiction, such as *Masks or Souls?* or *Looking Beyond*. These works could be viewed as truly ‘born’ as works of world literature, in the sense that they were not published in, nor written in the primary language of, their authors’

---


642 ibid., 307.
respective ‘homelands’. Nor are these English-language works found in any ‘Chinese literature’, ‘Turkish literature’, or ‘English literature’ courses or anthologies, despite their well-known authors. In fact, it seems that largely because these works are, in a sense, quintessentially ‘of the world’—i.e. have an existence outside of any canon, have no ‘natural’ native audience, and deal primarily with transnational and cross-cultural content— they have failed to circulate.

In his 2011 discussion of the Book of Job, Damrosch expands upon his previous discussions of world literature to include “the other side of the coin: … the ways in which writers can intervene within their own culture by adopting and adapting forms and themes they have found in foreign works. Borrowing from the wider world for their own purposes, such writers can be seen as participating in world literature from the outset, whatever their subsequent readership may be.” Such writers “mobilise elements derived from the foreign works in order to create an alternative discourse within their own tradition.”643 This conception of world literature as an alternative discourse is helpful here, in that Halide Edib and Lin Yutang strove to provide such an ‘alternative’— albeit in the opposite, rather unusual direction: by mobilising elements from their ‘native’ traditions and works, they sought to create an alternative discourse within foreign traditions. Of course, their ability to do so was often circumscribed by their very foreignness. Lin Yutang’s experiments in English writing were given short shrift by his editor Walsh. Excited by what was, in Lin’s view, “the deepest book” 644 he had ever written, Walsh wrote in response: “…too much of what goes before is a feeble imitation of European and American styles of writing, which are not appropriate and can not

643 ibid., 308.

644 Qian, Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity, 185.
be well adapted by a Chinese philosopher." Lin’s beloved ‘deepest book’ thus sank into oblivion.

Other problematic aspects of ambitious ‘civilisational diplomacy’ remain. Sources taken from a plurality of cultures will nevertheless reflect certain conceptions of ‘great civilisations’, or some sort of hierarchical framework, thus likely reproducing the ‘great power’ dynamics of normative diplomacy, albeit in a different guise. Meanwhile, ‘civilisational diplomats’, no matter how well-intentioned, are never free of their own blind spots and prejudices. Throughout all of his works, for example, Lin Yutang demonstrates deeply traditional and restricted conceptions of gender roles; and it remains unclear to what degree Halide Edib may have been unwittingly complicit in certain kinds of state violence when she was in the inner circles of either Mustafa Kemal or, earlier, the Committee of Union and Progress.

Despite such issues and limitations, however, Lin Yutang and Halide Edib were undeniably pioneers in their efforts to imagine, across Orient and Occident, for themselves and their readers, a more equitable, inclusive and vibrant ‘world civilisation’. They also offered a unique understanding of the role of world literature. More than merely fashioning a stronger basis for cross-cultural understanding and empathy, Lin Yutang and Halide Edib—who both demonstrated a strong aversion to top-down, programmatic approaches to ‘fashioning’ a certain kind of citizen—suggest that it is through each individual’s absorption of a cosmopolitan, eclectic, and even deeply idiosyncratic set of texts that one can become more effective at countering, and resisting, both the programmatic intents of fascism or autocracy, as well as the

---

645 ibid., 184.
hegemonic forces of imperialism and colonialism. With nothing remotely approaching a ‘standard’ reader, there can be no standard citizen.

**‘Who is who and what is what?’: concluding thoughts**

In 2005, the United Nations founded its ‘Alliance of Civilisations’ initiative (UNAOC), co-sponsored by the governments of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Prime Minister of Turkey, and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, then Prime Minister of Spain, with the official aim of “[exploring] the roots of polarisation between societies and cultures today, and to recommend a practical programme of action to address this issue.” To mark the occasion of the 2006 UNAOC meeting in Istanbul, Erdoğan issued the following statement:

> Turkey is a democratic and secular country having a predominantly Muslim population which has started entry talks with the EU. Taking into consideration these characteristics, I believe that Turkey is a symbol of the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative. We consider this initiative the global peace project of the 21st century. Turkey's membership to the EU will prove that this project is achievable. I believe that Turkey's membership will show that inter-cultural polarisation is in fact artificial and virtual, and that the real polarisation emerges between those who are for a compromise and those who advocate conflict. It will also prove that societies having different histories, cultures and religious beliefs can meet on the basis of common humanitarian values.646

Much has changed since 2006, not least the negotiations over Turkey’s accession to the EU, which have since stalled. Now President of Turkey, Erdoğan has in recent years pivoted from an interest in cultivating closer relations with Europe, to building an image of himself as a strong-willed leader unafraid of confronting western powers, which has contributed to his popularity among voters and his increasingly autocratic consolidation of government and

---

646 “Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan Addresses Alliance of Civilisations Meeting.”
judicial power. His most recent high-profile statements concerning a European nation, for example, have referred to the Dutch as “fascists” and “a banana republic”, in response to a diplomatic spat in mid-March. This is only one example which highlights how notions of transnational solidarity and cross-cultural dialogue in official diplomatic rhetoric are extremely vulnerable to the vicissitudes of political or economic circumstance; such notions also tend to be at their most abstract and vague whenever mobilised or invoked by world leaders and politicians. The alternative space within which writers and their narratives endeavour to render audiences more open to the concrete complexities and actualities of ‘foreign’ others, regardless of —and often in response to— such governmental grand narratives and gestures, is thus a crucial one, even in an age when states have become aware of the value of public diplomacy.

In this dissertation, we first travelled to turn-of-the-twentieth-century Constantinople with Kang Youwei and Virginia Woolf, where we took in the bustling district of Pera and the layered grandeur of the Hagia Sophia, glimpsed the leafy private gardens of government pashas and witnessed celebrations of the 1908 restoration of the constitution. We were then led by the Istanbulite poet-pilot Nazım Hikmet inside the Louvre, where we met Gioconda, tired of being confined to a museum and smitten with a Chinese activist, and followed our intrepid heroine to 1920s Shanghai, the site of her defiant denouement. Once in Shanghai, we delved into the exhilaratingly diverse social and literary worlds of Shao Xunmei and Emily Hahn, mingled with Peking opera stars and Vanity Fair cartoonists, and browsed the pages of Shao and Hahn’s many publications, from long-running New Yorker columns for middle-class Americans to short-lived bilingual periodicals for Shanghai-based cosmopolites. Finally, with Istanbul and Shanghai as their points of origin, we traced the outward arcs of Halide Edib and Lin Yutang as
they discussed Turkish hats, Chinese pastimes and Indian epics, among other things, seeking to connect with, as well as reshape the mentalities of, the wider English-speaking world.

This constellation of writers, who orbited Shanghai or Istanbul (or both) in various ways, engaged in the imaginative diplomatic work of making different literary traditions and national contexts speak to one another. For them, the charisma of the literary narrative was a powerful force in re-imagining and shaping an ethically and historically reflective global community; and an increasingly and fascinatingly interlinked world— as well as one driven by inequalities and prejudices— called upon an openness to mutual transformation, to fluidity, creativity and hybridity in how one defined both oneself and others. Even as each of them remained firmly attached to a particular national identity, their works explored a spectrum of strategies and possibilities within the middle ground between an imperialistic, homogeneous universality and an insular singularity. “There’s a sense,” writes Kwame Anthony Appiah, “in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge.” For these figures, cosmopolitanism was a project rather than a label to be applied; it was a dynamic process of constantly re-negotiating one’s relationship with both one’s immediate community and the wider world through the acts of reading and writing. This particular constellation of writers reminds us, too, that the early twentieth-century was a fascinating period of not just ‘East’ meeting ‘West’, but also ‘East’ meeting ‘East’ — encounters which, of course, continue to unfold today, and to which the works of these writers remain relevant and illuminating.

It seems fitting, then, to close this dissertation with a striking description of the world, presented by Halide Edib during one of her speeches in America in 1928. Though parts of it show its age and now read as dated, it revels in describing a great commingling of civilisations, the gist of which puts a decisive and prescient twist on Rudyard Kipling’s formulation: Oh, East is East, and West is West, and ever the twain shall meet...

Human groups, large or small, countries, near or far—all touch each other, help or hinder each other, in their onward march. Never in human history has there been such a baffling intermixture of human beings, race, mind, and purpose. No forecast of a single nation is possible without some knowledge of the world which surrounds it, immediate or remote. In a conversation with a distinguished Englishman two years ago, the talk drifted into a discussion of the possible future clash between the East and the West. The gist of what he said was: “By the time the clash begins, they will have taken so much from each other, will be so much intermixed, that it will be almost impossible to tell who is who and what is what.” When one sees in the theatre of a New York skyscraper, the brand new architecture of a brand new people, black men quivering with the primeval throb of Africa, singing airs that scorch your ears with their intense warmth and passion and seize your heart with their unfathomable sadness or wild joy; when one sees in a western state of the same land buildings medieval in their exquisite curves and simplicity, with coloured roofs and lovely gardens with fountains by which a Moor of the thirteenth century might find himself completely at home; and in that same medieval building the latest art of the new world, the art of the screen, created with the thousand and one devices of science; when one sees a Chinese in a tweed suit, addressing a New World audience with a perfect Oxford accent and thoughts that belong to it, telling of the westward urge which is altering the oldest and what was once deemed an everlasting civilisation; when one sees in the heart of the wildest steppes, men of all races, Slavs, Mongols, Armenians, and what not opening a new era, an era which is an irrevocable mixture of West and East, with the ideals, philosophies, and moods of all peoples colouring it all; when one sees in the oldest and most conscious country of the West where the spirit of Christianity is supreme, a woman launching a new Hindu Prophet; when one sees a Turkish shepherd boy, wearing a cap with his Turkish
trousers, and singing ‘Valencia’ at the top of his voice to the yellow, endless mounds of Anatolia; when one sees . . . never mind what else—a gigantic scene where the mixing, shifting, and boiling of ideals, philosophies, customs, faces, and manners go on in the most incongruous way—no wonder one says with the Englishman: “Who is who and what is what?"

---

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY


*Sustainable Diplomacies*. Edited by Costas M Constantinou and James Der Derian, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.


Das, Sisir Kumar. “The Controversial Guest: Tagore in China.” *Indira Gandhi National Centre*


*Traditions of East Asian Travel*. Edited by Joshua A Fogel, Berghahn, 2005.


Hahn, Emily. Mr. Pan, Doubleday, Doran, 1942.

Hahn, Emily. Steps of the Sun, New York: The Dial Press, 1940.


Shao, Xiaohong. *Tiansheng De Shiren: Wo De Baba Shao Xunmei (A Born Poet: My Father Shao Xunmei)*, Shanghai Bookshop Press (Shanghai Shudian Chubanshe), 2015.

Shao, Xunmei. *Xunmei Wencun (Collected Writings of Shao Xunmei)*, Liaoning Educational Press (Liaoning Jiaoyu Chubanshe), 2006.


Thompson, Laurence G. *The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei*, Norwich: George Allen &
Unwin, 1958.


Worringer, Renée. Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.


Tian, Min. The Poetics of Displacement and Difference: Twentieth-Century Chinese-Western Intercultural Theatre, Hong Kong University Press, 2008.


Vivre Comme Un Arbre, Seul Et Libre, Vivre en Frères Comme Les Arbres D'une Forêt = Yaşamak Bir Ağacı Gibi Tek Ve Hür Ve Bir Orman Gibi Kardeşhesine = to Live, Free and Single Like a Tree but in Brotherhood Like a Forest. Edited by Erhan Turgut, Levallois-Perret: Turquoise, 2002.


