

Orientalism and the Location of Intellectuals: Has the wall between Critical Theory and Cultural Studies broken down?

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The urgent task for the intellectuals in this country is, undoubtedly, to effectively challenge the globalised neoliberalistic domination throughout the society. They are facing the dire cultural question as to how to deal with the emaciation of a system of knowledge that could analyse various causes of the overwhelming success of neoliberal ideology including neo-conservatism, ethnic fundamentalism and civilisationism, as well as economic questions regarding the expanding power of capital, and the historic questions involving traditional allure of vested interests. There seems to be at the base of cultural infrastructure a bewildered tendency that those who suffer most by these ideologies will support them, and that recalcitrant cultural mood is underlined by anti-intellectualism, a typical articulation of which is, I would argue, a deep-seated hostility towards Theory inside as well as outside the academic institutions.

In this paper, my focus will mainly be upon the location of intellectuals within universities or academic institutions. One of the key intellectuals today regarding this issue is Paul Gilroy, who, by investigating in his *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* through to *The Black Atlantic* the hybrid and multifaceted cultural histories of black music, has proposed a fundamental “alter-native”, that is a critical project of “transformation into the beginning”, to institutionalised forms of knowledge and power in the West. Those alter-natives are reviving themselves in the tradition of (anti-)knowledge in hip-hop cultures and anarchist thoughts for instance. However, under the present circumstances of domination by neoliberal globalisation, it would be vital, not only to develop an alternative form of knowledge outside universities, but to attempt collective activism based on humanities inside and outside the academic institutions. That task, provisional as it is, increasingly requires a historical review of the political environment in Japanese society in which Cultural Studies and Postcolonialism are yet to be firmly established institutionally and culturally.

This paper consists of three parts. First, I would survey, from a viewpoint of student of

literature such as myself, historical circumstances of the introduction of Critical Theory and Cultural Studies into this country. Next, by looking at various reactions to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which has been said to be a groundbreaking work for Postcolonialism, I would like to draw attention to the theme of critical consciousness and location of intellectuals in general. Finally, by glancing at Said's own thought on intellectuals' position in the present society, and a few relevant remarks by Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, I would consider ways in which Cultural Studies can still revitalise itself as a critical and collectively rewarding project.

1. The Import of Cultural Studies into Japan

It seems an undeniable fact that in Japanese academic milieu literary studies are increasingly replaced by cultural studies. The number of those who publicly profess themselves as "literary scholars" is shrinking dramatically, and that is undoubtedly influenced by the restructuring and abolition of literature departments in Japanese universities. Since 1980s, literary studies in Japan have been dramatically intervened by various critical theories, and one of the reasons was the fact that the major theorists of New Historicism, Feminism and Postcolonialism and alike were literary scholars. Many of them were educated in institutions informed by English academic traditions, and by choosing diasporic careers reflecting over their own scholastic origins of students of English Literature, they have established themselves as multi- or counter-disciplinary practitioners of Cultural Studies, while appropriating literary techniques of subtle textual analysis. From their pioneering works, multiple political, economic and cultural themes have emerged as topics in cultural studies including critique of nationalism and colonialism, perspectives on gender and sexuality, globalisation studies, and as they were also eye-opening phenomena for literary scholars living within Japanese linguistic and cultural community, expanding new arena for studies involving publishing, academy and teaching seemed to have dramatically opened up.

At the same time, however, 1980s saw the emergence of neoliberal reforms in politico-economic establishments all over Japan. Neoliberalism's devastating effects have been most acutely felt worldwide in the fields of economy, nature and education, and in Japan too, they have revealed themselves in disparity in wealth as a result of economic deregulation and restructuring of labour force, drastic deterioration of natural environment due to intense capital investments, and radical degradation of public education that brings about a gradual ruin of middle classes which have been a traditional lynchpin of this country's cultural backbone. Especially the sudden increase of young people who cannot afford reading books in terms of

time, revenue and ability is alarming enough as to the sheer marginalisation of humanities education. However it was after 2000 that those neoliberal “reforms” manifested themselves in the administrative arena of higher education in this country, finally revealing themselves as restructurisation of residual departments and coorporatisation (or privatisation) of the hitherto national public universities. Then one question inevitably arises as to how we interpret the time gap between the “import” of critical theories in the 1980s and the actual institutional depreciation of literary studies in the universities. To put it briefly, were we literary scholars somehow blind to the impending dynamics of neoliberal reformation at our own feet being too naively excited about extra-disciplinary possibilities that Theory brought about?

It is important here to reflect upon circumstances around the reception of Cultural Studies in this country. Cultural Studies in Japan have been developed in a two-fold path; on one hand they have learned from the activities of English practitioners like Stuart Hall, and on the other they have revived experiences of uniquely Japanese attempts in ethnology, anthropology and historical studies since 1950s, such as activities of Tsurumi Shunsuke and his “Science of Thought” group, the grass-roots level practices of Hanasaki Kohei, Ueno Eishin, Morisaki Kazue and others, and South-East Asian studies by Tsurumi Yoshiyuki and so on. One remarkable occasion to tie up these two trends was a large-scale symposium in Tokyo in 1996, in which Hall and Hanasaki were invited as plenary speakers¹⁾. From those movements, there emerged a number of critical project of Cultural Studies where new wave of inter-disciplinary knowledge would arise such as critique of Japanese own colonialism and exclusionary ethnic identities, and examination of communicative dynamics in the highly developed information society. But the point nevertheless has to be rearticulated as to how many of us who have been keen to import Critical Theories into Japan were alert to the fact that the practices of Stuart Hall and co. were a conscious attempt to resist Thatcherite neoliberal experiments. Were we trying to understand them in its own context of attempted “reforms” by then prime-minister Nakasone and the Japan Federation of Economic Organisations? As if to underscore our lack of understanding such contexts, the cruel realities steadily progressed during what we may call “the lost decade of displacing literary studies by cultural studies”. If we may crudely diagram chronically as; the import of Critical Theories in 1980s, the introduction of Cultural Studies in 1990s, and neoliberal restructuring in academic institutions in 2000s, we still find ourselves in the present quandary in which the critical and emancipatory capacities of Cultural Studies have not been fully developed. In my immediate environment of literary studies, since the late 1980s, those who ardently appropriated Western Theories regarded those who stuck to “traditional literary studies” as “conservative reactionary forces”, and amid pseudo-generational struggles

there have been somewhat interesting debates within academic circles and journals. On one hand, since late 1990s an increasing number of young Japanese scholars who were “theoretically baptised” in Western universities came back to Japan with their Ph.D. degrees; on the other, there have been steady drops in number of those who specialise in literary studies in Japanese universities, until the neoliberal storms literally devastated many university departments since the turn of the century, and as if to make amends, Cultural Studies programs have replaced literary courses in the name of “Communication Studies” and “Studies of Anglo-American Culture” and so forth. But their so-called “Cultural Programs” have already ceased to be a creative and hybridised endeavour that should provide critical insights against pre-existing disciplinary structures, undermine exclusive rhetoric of national languages and histories, and reexamine the canonical authorities. They are the manifest symptom of absolutist intellectualism characterized by the lack of critical consciousness.

To recap our question: why were we the literary scholars who were so sensitive to the Anglo-American movements of Critical Theories unable to create moments of resistance against neoliberal tides which were at the root of those movements? If one reason for such failure lay in suppression of, or indifference to the “political” in the traditional literary studies in this country, how can we unite ourselves under the banner of anti-neoliberalism at the present height of neoliberal reforms? Obviously we cannot answer this question in a simple dualistic format, conservative or radical, research or education, literature or culture, macro structural investigation or micro textual analysis etc. Here in order to deal with this question in a concrete way, we try to reexamine a few reactions against Edward Said’s *Orientalism* which has been regarded as a ground-breaking work in the politics of literary studies.

2. Orientalism and its opponents

Reasons why Said’s *Orientalism* has caused so much debate in and out of academy are not limited to that this book revealed Orientalism as a discursive system of arbitrary representation of the “East” by the “West”. Criticism against colonial cultural domination could be as old as colonialism itself, and in the tide of decolonisation during the 20th century, critique of Western colonialism appeared in succession such as Fanon, Césaire, Pannikar and Ruskin²⁾. Before and at about the same time as the publication of Said’s book, we also had criticism specifically targeted at Orientalism in those works by Abdel-Malek, Tibawi and Turner³⁾. Among these works, however, Said’s *Orientalism* has had more and unique influences within academic institutions in general than any other work, because the book foregrounded fundamental

questions about the relationship between theories and academic disciplines, and the location of intellectuals in the postcolonial world.

Reactions against Said's attacks on Orientalism have varied, but if we divide them into two main camps, they can be either those who consider invalid Said's theoretical assumptions influenced by Foucault that social practices thorough discourses construct power relationships historically and institutionally, or those who, though generally accepting those assumptions, question particular aspects of Said's approach⁴⁾. We can't go into their details here, but let me summarise some of the main arguments by Barnard Lewis and John MacKenzie, who may be taken as representing the first group of critics.

Lewis' refutation of Said's critique of Orientalism might be regarded as a typical reaction by a traditional Orientalist. Lewis accuses Said of making "very arbitrary decisions" about what Orient is and who Orientalists are, reducing the Orient to a small part of the Middle East excluding Persian, Turkish and Semitic studies, identifying Orientalism as a whole with British and French imperialism ignoring German, Austrian and Russian Orientalisms, and while disregarding important contributions such as Henri Corbin's and Edward Lane's, criticising Chateaubriand, Nerval, and Cromer who in fact had nothing to with Orientalism. Lewis argues that Said's book in its rebuttal of Orientalist project is full of historically elemental errors and misinterpretations, and explains the reasons for Said's arbitrariness that he had drawn on Raymond Schwab's *La Renaissance orientale* (1950) which is mainly concerned with the discovery of India by Britain and France⁵⁾. There is a historical difference, according to Lewis, between European development in Indian studies that coincided with Western domination in India, and Western interest in the Islamic world that had begun in the High Middle Ages when Europe was threatened by the Saracen and the Turkish territorial expansion.

Here we see a confrontation between Saidian thesis that Orientalism as a powerful discursive formation has been successively maintained in European/Christian literary and religious imagination that has expressed deep-seated fear of Islam since the Middle Ages, and Lewis's conception of history as accumulation of indubitable facts. While Said asserts that Orientalists, however academically neutral they might presume themselves, cannot but participate as an agent in the discursive formation of knowledge as power through the combination of enunciative practices and visible non-discursive activities, Lewis accuses Said of manipulating academic discussion of Orientalism for his own political purposes of flogging imperialism. Lewis seems to imply that Said presumes that imperialism promoted Orientalism, but what Said maintains throughout his book is that it was Orientalism as a discourse at the heart of the ethno-centric tendency of European imagination towards its others that promoted imperialism.

John MacKenzie, a 19th-century imperial historian, in his critique of Said's analysis exhibits a subtler form of opposition between the reflection on discursive practices around knowledge and power, and writing of traditional histories. MacKenzie who emphasises the sheer instability, heterogeneity and porousness of Western imperial culture criticises Said that he creates a stereotypical image of the West. MacKenzie finds it hard to understand that Said on one hand is working within the European humanistic tradition, and on the other seeming to reject that tradition embracing post-structuralist theories. He wonders if Said's critique of a master-narrative discourse of Orientalism is at odds with his nomadic character that distrusts any universal theorisation or totalising project. As a result, Said, according to MacKenzie, makes moral judgement on past times from present values and fails to discriminate intention from effect, a trap historians should never fall into. But we might argue against MacKenzie that he presumes that historians should be able to distinguish between present interpretations and past events, between subjective intention and objective result. How is it possible for historians to act as free agents regardless of their cultural identities and inclinations? Perhaps Said's unique contribution lies in the fact that he as an intellectual constantly places himself in a contradictory position torn between subjectivity and context, intention and action. For Said, therefore, "a-historical" literary texts should be regarded as best examples of imaginative works that can highlight the cultural structure of the past, if not history itself, which is not readily acceptable for disciplinary historians like MacKenzie. Here the question lies not in estimating ideologies or beliefs scholars might hold (Marxist or Humanist, conservative or liberal, relativist or absolutist, hermeneutic or realist etc.), but in discerning the power structure within humanities in general.

We briefly refer to Aijaz Ahmad's critique of *Orientalism*, which while generally accepting Said's critical framework, questions his approach from Marxist point of view. Like MacKenzie, Ahmad argues that Said is caught in a dilemma between Auerbachian Humanism and Foucauldian Poststructuralism, tracing European representation of others from ancient Greece onwards on one hand, and examining Orientalism from the 18th century on the other. According to Ahmad, Said's reduction of objective experiences to textual concept of representation leads to his failure of analysing economic, political and military condition in which Orientalist discourses took effect, and as a result his critique of Orientalism cannot embrace resistance movements against colonialist cultural domination say in 19th-century India or South Africa. Here again the focus is on Said's contradictory position between traditionalist stance that considers Orientalism as reality and poststructuralist mind that stresses on its discursive effects.

Then, in the present context, questions raised by Said's *Orientalism* are far beyond how to accurately define Orientalism, or what kind of shapes anti-imperialist historical and literary studies should take. They highlight an urgent task of us intellectuals who are concerned with how power and knowledge could be negotiable within the institutional framework of humanities. Here again the position of critical theories becomes foregrounded as a central theme.

3. Critical Theories and the Location of Intellectuals

Said titled his autobiography "Out of Place", which seems to match some of the characteristics he discerned in his *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994)⁶⁾: secular universalism that raises oppositions against unfair realities and questions the majority's common beliefs; politically critical consciousness that is combatant and resistant towards any issue; nomadic marginality that seeks new encounters rejecting contentment with present positions. What kind of critical implications does the intellectual thus being "out of place" in any situation have in the present academic institutional juncture under neoliberalism?

In terms of the relationship between theories and practices, Said once put forward the following questions in his essay "Traveling Theory" (1983):

.....as a result of specific historical circumstances, a theory or idea pertaining to those circumstances arises. What happens to it when, in different circumstances and for new reasons, it is used again and, in still more different circumstances, again? What can this tell us about theory itself — its limits, its possibilities, its inherent problems — and what can it suggest to us about the relationship between theory and criticism, on the one hand, and society and culture on the other?⁷⁾

Responding to these questions, Said, who warns against turning theory into "an ideological trap", argues it is necessary to situate theory in concrete situations, and that is precisely the role of critical consciousness:

.....we distinguish theory from critical consciousness by saying that the latter is a sort of spatial sense, a sort of measuring faculty for locating or situating theory, and this means that theory has to be grasped in the place and the time out of which it emerges as a part of that time, working in and for it, responding to it; then, consequently, that first place can be

measured against subsequent places where the theory turns up for use. The critical consciousness is awareness of the differences between situations, awareness too of the fact that no system or theory exhausts the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported. And, above all, critical consciousness is awareness of the resistances to theory, reactions to it elicited by those concrete experiences or interpretations with which it is in conflict⁸).

One of the principle reasons why Said's critique of Orientalism remains an inspiring work of intellectual imagination, surviving the reactions by historians to the arbitrariness in his choice of targets or the criticism about the contradiction of theoretical positions, is, to put it succinctly, that Said himself grasped Foucauldian theory of discursive formation through his own critical consciousness within the concrete situation of postcolonial and diasporic intellectual milieu. Any theory is measured against the possibility of cultural translation in order to attain the status of a critique. If we call the theoretical arena opened up by Said's critical consciousness in *Orientalism* postcolonialism, our task more than quarter of a century after its publication should not be a banal assessment from the reactionary disciplinary expertism, but an enquiry into possible cultural appropriations within its critical framework under the present neoliberalistic continuation of colonial domination.

To close, let me refer to recent thoughts around the place of theory within humanities by Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak.

In her "Preface" to the 10th Anniversary Edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler states that theory is only effective in the concrete cultural aspects, and its values change through its cultural sequestrations beyond the false opposition between theory and practice, between discourse and history:

There is a new venue for theory, necessarily impure, where it emerges in and as the very event of cultural translation. This is not the displacement of theory by historicism, nor a simple historicization of theory that exposes the contingent limits of its more generalizable claims. It is, rather, the emergence of theory at the site where cultural horizons meet, where the demand for translation is acute and its promise of success, uncertain⁹).

Theory emerges as viable social practices within the contingent eventuality realised by cultural translation. For instance, Butler has theorised one of her key terms performativity in

that it should not be confused with performance that tends to be understood as an individual act on one's free will. Performativity should be placed within collective, cultural and historical time-frame, as she writes: "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration"¹⁰⁾. From this "culturally translational turn", Butler tries to reassess the claim of "universality" which has been somehow conceived by her in negative and exclusive terms. She says she "came to see the term [universality] has important strategic use precisely as a non-substantial and open-ended category", and to "understand how the assertion of universality can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for a convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met"¹¹⁾. Obviously this move should not be understood as an acceptance of dominant and exclusionary norms around gender and sexuality, nor as a renunciation of theoretically subversive possibilities of performativity. Rather it is an attempt to extend those theoretical moments into a broad range of issues around human lives and rights in general, and within the socio-political dynamics of future-oriented concept of "universality", theory and critical consciousness might be organically negotiated in the imminent practices of cultural studies that resist anti-intellectualism prevailing globally after the events on September 11th, 2001¹²⁾.

Gayatri Spivak has also been very incisive about this issue of critical viability of cultural studies. She mentioned, in her talk titled "Academic Activism in the Humanities" at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo this summer, today's organic intellectual's task of "supplementing" globalisation, that is to seemingly make up the lack of globalisation by supplying the excessive elements, thus resulting in subverting the definitive framework of globalisation itself. According to Spivak, activism in academic humanities informed by cultural diversities is located in such a milieu where it can supplement uniformed and superficially cosmopolitanised globalisation brought by globally sophisticated capitalism. It is also where we need to be an agent of theory and aware that a judgement based on experience alone may become auto-immune. She concluded her talk referring to the position of intellectuals thus:

Here we are not inside or outside the academy; rather is the difference between the two coming loose. Here love of land is not allowed to be the last justification of struggle. Arrived here, the abstract structures of democracy must seem worth saving, because they're frail and vulnerable. Here the difference between the academy and its military-industrial outside comes tight again. The humanities academic does not form capital to any

significant extent. Yet she can be useful indeed if by indirect and meticulous training she occasionally fosters a judgement and an inclination that can distinguish and choose between the uses and abuses of capital¹³).

If we can redefine Cultural Studies as academic activism in the humanities, that is workings of critical consciousness in order to reactivate theories through cultural translations, we should keep a crucial distance from globalism or neoliberalism that encloses people into civilisational absolutism and exclusionary ethnicism that regards culture as a calculable asset and an ethnic possession. We cannot deny the academic history in which Cultural Studies were institutionally introduced as a part of neoliberal restructuring of universities, but it is also an undeniable fact that critically active cultural studies have been pointing ways forward to multicultural negotiations and hybrid interfusions that presents oppositional and supplementary standpoints against globalisation and neoliberalism. In order to avoid letting multiculturalism appropriated by the managerial rhetoric of “cooperative participation” or “support for autonomy”, we can only fight against the prevalent anti-intellectualism in this country at a position farthest from cultural essentialism. Rather than teaching “Anglo-American Culture” or “Exchange between Different Cultures”, we should keep attending in a critical way to dynamics of suppression and exclusion that comprise a particular “culture”. Detaching cultures from ethnic and economic concept of possession, we are required inside and outside the academy to highlight various sites of producing cultures as “commons”, as shared materials for production, rather than as common properties. In such a process, we might expect as organic intellectuals that cultural studies reemerge as a realisation of diverse critical theories in their unforeseeable and festive endeavours with the possibilities of change, while revitalising literature, histories and philosophies as cultures, and theories as critical activities.

〈NOTES〉

- 1) Hanada Tatsuro, Yoshimi Shunya, Colin Sparks, *A Dialogue with Cultural Studies*, Tokyo: Shinyosha, 1999.
- 2) Franz Fanon, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (Edition du Seuil, 1952) ; Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Présence africaine, 1955) ; K. M. Pannikar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (George Allen and Unwin, 1959) ; Jonah Ruskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism* (Random House, 1971).
- 3) Anouar Abdel-Malek, ‘Orientalism in Crisis’ (*Diogenes*, 44, Winter, 1963, pp.103–40) ; A. L. Tibawi, ‘English-speaking Orientalists’ (*Islamic Quarterly*, 8, 1–4, 1964, pp. 25–44 and 73–88) ; A. L. Tibawi, ‘Second Critique of the English-speaking Orientalists’ (*Islamic Quarterly*, 23, 1, 1979, pp. 3–54) ; Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (George Allen and Unwin, 1978).

- 4) The former category of responses includes: C. F. Beckingham, 'Review of Orientalism' (*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 42, 1979, pp. 38-40); Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (Penguin, Allen Lane, 2006); David Kopf, 'Hermeneutics versus History' (*Journal of Asian Studies*, 39, 3, 1980, pp. 495-506); Bernard Lewis, 'The Question of Orientalism' (New York Review of Books, 24 June 1982; also published in revised version in Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West*, Oxford University Press, 1993); John M. MacKenzie, 'Edward Said and the Historians' (*Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 18, 1994, pp. 9-25); John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester University Press, 1995); Michael Richardson, 'Enough Said' (*Anthropology Today*, 6, 4, 1990, pp. 16-19). The latter includes: Aijaz Ahmad, 'Between Orientalism and Historicism' (*Studies in History*, 7, 1, new series, 1991, pp. 135-163; later expanded in 'Orientalism and After' in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Verso, 1992, pp. 159-220); James Clifford, 'On Orientalism' (in *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 255-276); Fred Halliday, 'Orientalism and its Critics' (*British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20, 2, 1993, pp. 145-163); Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, 'Orientalism and orientalism in Reverse' (*Khamsin*, 8, 1981, pp. 5-26).
- 5) Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale* (Editions Payot, 1950).
- 6) Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (Vintage, 1994).
- 7) Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 230.
- 8) Ibid., 241-242.
- 9) Judith Butler, 'Preface (1999)' in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1999), p. ix.
- 10) Ibid., p. xv.
- 11) Ibid., p. xvii-xviii.
- 12) Butler's response to the issue of "universality" and to concrete political situations after 9. 11 is put together in her *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2004).
- 13) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Academic Activism in the Humanities', a paper presented at Hitotsubashi University, July 7, 2007.

本稿は、東京経済大学 2007 年度個人研究助成費 (A) による助成を受けた研究成果の一部です。記して関係者の皆様に心より感謝申し上げます。