

The Never Fixed *Chinese Characteristics*: The Agential Cut of American, Japanese and Chinese Scholars

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ABSTRACT: Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* (1890) elicited varied responses in the US, China, and Japan. However, scholars often overlook Shibue Tamotsu's Japanese translation. This paper addresses why Tamotsu's work has been neglected and examines how Smith's book has been interpreted in these three countries. Using Karen Barad's theory, it argues that *Chinese Characteristics* and its interpretation represent an entangled canvas of experiences and relations, offering a complex view of East-West and intra-East Asian dynamics. The paper advocates for cross-temporal and spatial dialogue by analysing the unique interpretations shaped by different agents.

KEYWORDS: *Chinese Characteristics*, Arthur Smith, Shibue Tamotsu, Lu Xun, Agential Cut

Arthur Smith, an American Protestant missionary who spent many years in China during the late nineteenth century, wrote many books on Chinese culture. One is *Chinese Characteristics*, published in 1890 and received wide popularity in the Western world.¹ Unexpectedly its reception in the East spawned diverse reactions that continue to shape academic discourse in China and Japan into the twenty-first century. Lydia Liu, a prominent scholar from Columbia University, analysed this book's impact on Lu Xun (1881–1936), a highly influential Chinese writer, in her 1995 book *Translingual Practice*. She explores the influence of Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* on Lu Xun, focusing on

¹ Lydia H. Liu, "The ghost of Arthur H. Smith in the mirror of cultural translation," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 20, no. 4 (2013): 406.

postcolonial concerns. After its 2002 Chinese translation, Liu's work stirred significant debate among Chinese scholars, many of whom approached it from the traditional Enlightenment framework advocated by Lu Xun.² Nevertheless, neither Liu nor the Chinese scholars overlooked the Japanese translation (1896) of Smith's book by Shibue Tamotsu, though Liu has noted that it was the only version Lu Xun read. Inspired by the question of why scholars have almost universally neglected in-depth studies of Tamotsu's translations, this paper explores how and why Smith's book has been interpreted in the United States, Japan, and China, and thereby illustrates the complexities of agential interpretations.

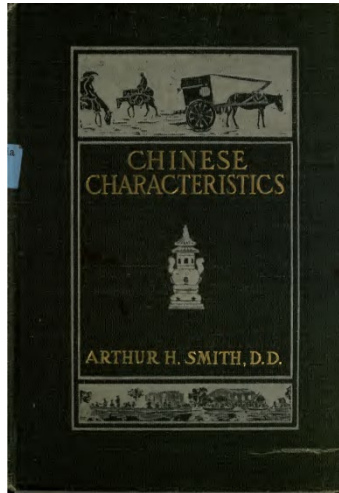
Through the lens of Karen Barad's theory, we can conceptualise the book's encounter beyond post-colonialism. According to Barad, people live in agential realism in which agencies are "not an attribute but the ongoing reconfiguring of the world". It is through "agential cut" (a particular type of materialising discursive practice) that the boundaries, properties and causal structures of the original phenomena become definite. "Entanglement" is a term to describe the interconnectedness and inseparability of the primary ontological unit before agential cuts, and it is through agential intra-action that not only clear boundaries and properties of the world but also the subject/agency emerge from an entangled state.³ As the way to make the subject/object emerge is determined by agential cuts, different agential cuts with a particular type of technique, apparatus and vantage point can materialise the entangled phenomena in different measurements.⁴

Traditional post-colonialism typically views Western scholarship as the biased party to be held accountable, but in Barad's light, we can claim that the idea of "Chinese characteristics" is an ever-expanding canvas of manifesting entangled experiences, existence, and relations by different agencies for an ever incomplete picture. Therefore, this paper also recognises western scholarship for gaining a more complete landscape of the object. It tries to illuminate how, in the process of reading and interpreting, not only the original entangled object emerges, but also the interpreters who exercise the agential cuts emerge. The choices and methods in the interpretation precisely determine and embody the characteristics of the scholars from the United States of America, Japan and China, revealing their background, identity and knowledge structure. Furthermore, it claims that intersubjective exchanges with wider spatial and temporal spans can contribute to the unveiling of more multi-dimensional subjects and objects.

² Chunxiao Zhang, *Voices of the Others: Reflection on the Dualistic Structure of Postcolonialism* (Peking University Press, 2021), 144-8.

³ Barad Karen, *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (Duke university Press, 2007), 139-41.

⁴ Weber Ron, "Taking the ontological and materialist turns: Agential realism, representation theory, and accounting information systems," *International Journal of Accounting Information Systems* 39, (2020): 100485.



The original version by
Arthur Smith (1894)

The American creation and deconstruction of Chinese personality

Smith arrived in Tianjin in 1872 to work with the North China Mission of the American Board, marking the start of his long stay in China.⁵ This experience inspired Smith to write a book on “Chinese personality.” From a contemporary perspective, Smith’s book is evidently imbued with Orientalism. He attempts to understand the “Chinese” through 27 keywords, such as “Face,” “Politeness,” “Conservatism.” This form of essentialism reveals an ambition to establish an authoritative Western discourse about “Oriental” people. He, describing the Chinese as “irrepressible” and “incomprehensible,” quotes O.W. Holmes’s assertion that “the scientific study of Man is the most difficult of all branches of knowledge” to underscore his determination to “scientifically study” the Chinese people.⁶ This passion for discovery exemplifies what Edward Said calls “Oriental enthusiasm” which regards all things Asiatic as exotic, mysterious, and profound and hence cultivates a special passion to collect, examine, and study Asia.⁷

Our focus, however, is on how American scholars have engaged with Smith’s work, not rehabilitating Smith. Here we analyse the papers respectively by Charles W. Hayford and Lydia Liu as examples. Hayford, the Emeritus Scholar focusing on American-East Asian relations, wrote an essay on Smith’s book in 1985. Although the “culturally imperialist vocabulary” is acknowledged, he aims to “salvage usable insights” from the book.⁸ He believes that Smith constructs a nuanced and

⁵ Liu, “The ghost of Arthur H. Smith,” 408.

⁶ Arthur H. Smith, *Chinese characteristics* (Revell, 1894), 8, 10-11.

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 51.

⁸ Charles W. Hayford, “Chinese and American Characteristics: Arthur H. Smith and His China Book,” in *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings*, ed. Suzanne Wilson Barnett and John King Fairbank (The Council on East Asian Studies of Harvard University, 1985), 154.

compelling perspective on certain Chinese characteristics that earlier writers had overlooked.⁹ While he attributes Smith's achievements to his new intellectual methodology (anthropology), he points out the book is flawed by the "immaturity of theory" and by "Smith's failure to examine his own middle-class American culture".¹⁰ In other words, Smith lacked the sensitivity to the interference of researchers' identities, a concern that is frequently highlighted in contemporary fieldwork. Smith's limitations, therefore, stem from the outdated nature of his methods compared to those of Hayford's era. However, Hayford acknowledges Smith as more advanced than the "scholars" before him, such as Marco Polo and S. Wells Williams, due to his use of "an almost anthropological way".¹¹ Hayford indicates a succession of "sinologists" each refining the methods of his predecessors, beginning with Marco Polo and S. Wells Williams, followed by Smith, and culminating with himself. For him, there was no essential difference between his and Marco Polo's positions, only an evolution in research methods. This attitude contrasts that of the new generation of scholars under Said's influence who were trying hard to disassociate themselves from the "Orientalists" of the old school. This is most likely since, as a researcher of American-East Asian relations, Hayford was influenced by Said relatively late in his career; after all, Said's *Orientalism* was primarily concerned with Middle Eastern issues. Hayford first referred to Said and used postcolonial theories in a paper in 1996,¹² and then devoted the next paper, published in 1998, to the topic of "Orientalism And Rhetoric."¹³ The timing of his acceptance of Said's theory may account for his rudimentary yet insufficient sensitivity to Western colonialism, as evidenced by his identification of the "imperialist vocabulary" without expanding into a broader discussion on colonialism.

Interestingly, Hayford also observes that Lu Xun "shares" some ideas with Smith. For him, this similarity validates Smith's insights through the perspective of a Chinese intellectual, but the chance for deeper exploration of the two writers' relationships is ignored. This implies that Hayford views the term "Chinese characteristics" primarily as a subject of Western scholarship, overlooking its connection to the Chinese intellectual tradition. This gap leaves room for other scholars. Lydia Liu, a Chinese-American scholar educated in China for more than a decade but acquiring her PhD degree at Harvard University, takes this opportunity. Drawing on her extensive experience within the Chinese academy, Liu employs the highly debated keyword "national character" to establish a foundational relationship between Lu Xun and Smith from the outset. In her essay published in 1995,

⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 165, 173.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹² Charles W. Hayford, "The Open Door Raj: Chinese-American Cultural Relations, 1900-1945," in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Warren I. Cohen (Columbia University, 1996), 139-162.

¹³ Charles W. Hayford, *The storm over the peasant: orientalism and rhetoric in construing China* (Lund University, 1998).

Liu delineates how modern Chinese intellectuals regarded Chinese national character as the root of China's backwardness and then how Lu Xun learnt "Chinese characteristics" from Smith's book and deployed them in his fiction.¹⁴ Equipped with post-modern theories, she goes further to the translation issue of what Smith's discourse creates and shapes in his unintended Chinese audience. Her examination concludes that Lu Xun transcends missionary discourse through radical rewriting, an approach which attributes to Chinese culture the creativity to forge new paths different from Western culture. Notably, at the end of the Chinese translation of this essay, Liu includes a paragraph from another essay, written in Chinese and published in China. In this additional text, she contends that the problematic essentialism in the discourse of national character is not rooted in any specific culture or individual but in the nature of language itself.¹⁵

The differences between the two scholars are notable: Hayford revisits Smith's book with a clear practical intent to make use of it, while Liu focuses on Chinese reception of Western culture and the linguistic challenges of translation. This distinction seems related to the historical context of area studies. Initially developed in the U.S. after World War II to gather intelligence on perceived enemies, area studies later expanded to regions seen as politically important during the Cold War.¹⁶ This pragmatic environment is evident in Hayford's endeavour to "salvage usable insights" for understanding the Chinese. The fact that part of Hayford's scholarly interest is in American-East Asian political relations may also explain the pragmatism of his articles. However, Area studies encountered new intellectual challenges during the 1980s and 1990s, as postcolonial and postmodern scholars began questioning the links between knowledge and power. Liu's 1995 article reflects this shift, embracing a post-colonial approach. Additionally, the agency of interpreters should also be acknowledged. As a native Chinese speaker, Liu was fascinated by what has happened to the modern Chinese language since its exposure to foreign languages.¹⁷ Therefore, from the very beginning, Liu tended to prioritise a Chinese viewpoint over the pragmatic American approach. The more in-depth discussion of national character in the Chinese version seems to imply that Liu believes that the topic of "Smith and Lu Xun" itself is more suitable for discussion in the context of Chinese language and culture.

Overall, the interpretations of these scholars are shaped by their personal experiences, academic interests, and the broader intellectual climate of their times. Their readings of the same text reveal more about their own agency than the book itself, demonstrating how individual perspectives can

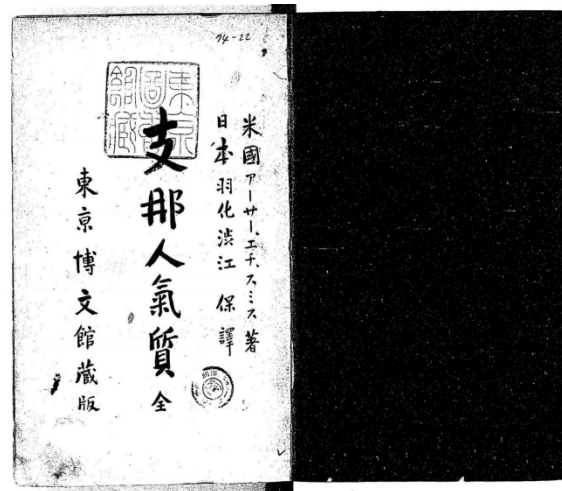
¹⁴ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual practice: Literature, national culture, and translated modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford University Press, 1995), 45-76.

¹⁵ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual practice: Literature, national culture, and translated modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Chinese version) (Joint Publishing Company, 2002), 88-89.

¹⁶ Harry D. Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi, "Introduction: the 'Afterlife 'of area studies,'" in *Learning places: The afterlives of area studies*, ed. Harry D. Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi (Duke University Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁷ Liu, "Translingual practice," xvi.

yield diverse insights. This highlights how the agential cuts of scholars can significantly impact their interpretations, allowing a single book to reveal multiple facets and insights. However, Liu overlooks the impact of Japanese academia on the topic of Chinese characteristics. This begs the question: if the Japanese translation differed significantly from the original, would Liu's research not be fundamentally flawed? It is crucial to consider this context given that Lu Xun studied in Japan for several years without ever travelling to the West. Therefore, we will proceed to examine Japanese academics perspective on Chinese personality and its influence on China.



The Japanese version translated by
Shibue Tamotsu (1896)

***Toyoshi*: locating Japan through re-fixing China**

Before delving into Tamotsu's translation, it is essential to gain insight into the Japanese academic environment between 1895 and 1910, as it influenced his translation choices. During the late Meiji era, a major system of Sinology was established in Japan. From 1877 to 1906, independent departments or institutes for Chinese studies was established at the University of Tokyo, Imperial Universities, and Kyoto Imperial University.¹⁸ These developments coincided with two key shifts in Japanese Sinology. First, Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War led to a change in general attitudes towards China, shifting from respect to contempt.¹⁹ However, Japan also positioned itself as the protector of ancient Chinese culture due to China's "weakness" and "conservatism." This perspective was crucial because the formation of this understanding of *Shina* (China) stemmed from

¹⁸ Lin Zhu, "Kindai nihonni okeru chishikijin no chuugoku ninshiki——chuugoku bungaku kenkyuukai chuushinni" 近代日本における知識人の中国認識——中国文学研究会を中心に (Intellectuals' perceptions of China in modern Japan: with a focus on the Society for the Study of Chinese Literature), PhD diss., (Tohoku University, 2017).

¹⁹ Urs Matthias Zachmann, *China and Japan in the late Meiji period: China policy and the Japanese discourse on national identity, 1895-1904* (Vol. 5) (Routledge, 2010), 2.

its ability to bring order to Japan's chaotic world.²⁰ In the idealistic turmoil arising from facing the Western powers, the only way for Japan to quickly find a position in the new global system while not totally shattering its old worldview was to reinterpret the history of East Asia and shape a new image of China, the old cultural suzerain. This also brought the second alteration: the extensive use of Western scholarship at the century's end, in contrast to the early Meiji period during which Chinese academic methodology dominated.²¹ Rather than merely adapting Western scholarship, the goal was to "catch up with" Western studies on Asia. Consequently, from the 1890s traditional *kangaku* (sinology) gradually gave way to the specialised discipline of *Toyoshi*, which was the Japanese response to Western universal history with its ambition to render Asia separate from yet equal to the West.²² Therefore, *Toyoshi* is such an ambivalent study that its strive for East Asia's equal status to the West is founded on Japan's superiority and the objectification of China.

Tamotsu's translation of Smith's book in 1896 was published in *Toyoshi*'s prime. Founded on *Toyoshi*'s premise, which objectified China while preserving Oriental culture, Tamotsu significantly altered Smith's work. Ri Dongmu, a Chinese scholar working in Japan, identified numerous additions in Tamotsu's version, including a preface, chapter summaries, and over 400 annotations.²³ It is regrettable that Ri's analysis never extends to content and ideological comparisons between the two versions. To my knowledge, he has written five essays on the topic; in the first two, he focuses on Tamotsu's personal life and the background of the publishing company, while in the remaining three, he examines the influence of the Japanese version on Lu Xun. Strangely, Ri avoids comparing the content, arguing that these notes generally help readers better understand Smith's text.²⁴ Ri's intriguing neglect will be explored in the third section. Here, we analyse the translated version by examining Chapters One and Four, demonstrating how Tamotsu significantly alters the content through four strategies to heighten the negative portrayal of China. Importantly, Tamotsu's reworking also offers some defence of Chinese culture shared with Japan, rather than simply presenting a one-sided condemnation.

At the start of Chapter Four, Tamotsu diverges from Smith's perspective, which views China as similar to other East Asian countries, and instead asserts that Chinese rituals starkly contrast with those of other East Asian nations:

²⁰ Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: rendering pasts into history* (University of California Press, 1995), 188.

²¹ Joseph P. McDermott, "Uses of Sinology in Modern Japan." *社会科学ジャーナル* = The Journal of social science 25, no. 2 (1987): p127-156.

²² Margaret Mehl, "Chinese Learning (kangaku) in Meiji Japan (1868–1912)," *History* 85, no. 277 (2000): 63-4.

²³ Dongmu Ri, "Shibue Tamotsu yaku sinazin kishitsuyo rozin ge" 渋江保訳《支那人气質》与鲁迅(下) (Shibue Tamotsu Translation of "Chineseness" and Lu Xun (2)), *Journal of inquiry and research*, 68 (1998): 184.

²⁴ Ri, "Shibue Tamotsu yaku sinazin kishitsuyo rozin ge."

Smith: “There are two quite different aspects in which the politeness of the Chinese, and of Oriental peoples generally, may be viewed—the one of appreciation, the other of criticism.” (p.35)

Tamotsu: “The rituals of the *shina* people are completely different from that of all Oriental people. It has two aspects, one is appreciation and the other is criticism.”

支那人及び一般東洋人の禮には彼比全く異なりたる兩箇の觀相あり。——感服の觀相、及び批評の觀相是れ也。(p.35)

Through this change, Tamotsu separates China from Japan, distancing Smith’s critique from Japan. Secondly, at the end of this chapter, Smith praises Chinese politeness, expressing hope that Westerners could learn from China:

“Happy the man who is able to combine all that is best in the East and in the West, and who can walk securely along the narrow and often thorny path of the Golden Mean.” (p.40)

Nevertheless, Tamotsu inexplicably omits this entire paragraph, leaving readers to question his motives. Without any explanation from the translator, it seems likely that this omission was a deliberate effort to downplay positive views of China. Third, Smith’s scientific language, which has garnered high praise from contemporary Chinese scholars,²⁵ is occasionally transformed into a more subjective form:

Smith: “The entire theory and practice of the use of honorific terms, so bewildering, not to say maddening, to the Occidental, is simply that these expressions help to keep in view those fixed relations of graduated superiority which are regarded as essential to the conservation of society.” (p.36)

Tamotsu: “From a Western perspective, the *shina*’s honorific terms, which can indeed be misleadingly confusing, if not maddening, is necessary to maintain social order and social hierarchies are often praised for being put before one’s eyes.”

支那人の款待ち西洋人より見れば、たとひ人を狂せしむるといはざるも、確かに人を迷はしむべさ款待は、社會の秩序を保つに必要と思考せらる、階級等差の制を常に人目の前に置くの功ありと稱す。(pp.36-37)

Tamotsu’s addition, “social hierarchies are often praised for being put before one’s eyes,” suggests that the Chinese prefer to openly display strict hierarchies. This shifts Smith’s neutral description of

²⁵ Mengyang Zhang, “Shimisi he tade zhongguoren qizhi” 史密斯和他的《中国人气质》(Smith and his Chinese Characteristics), *Shuwu* 书屋, (1996): 9.

societal structures into a subjective assessment of Chinese cultural values. Fourth, there are certain subtle modifications discernible only within the East Asian societal context, exemplified by the substitution of “巧み” (*takumi*, p.12) for “properly to execute” in Chapter One:

Smith: “Properly to execute acts like these in all the complex relations of life, is to have ‘face.’ To fail of them, to ignore them, to be thwarted in the performance of them, this is to ‘lose face.’”(p.17)

巧み in Japanese or 巧 (*qiao*) in Chinese carries both positive and negative connotations, implying either skilful artistry or cunning trickery. In the context of speech, which is central here, it tends towards the latter. This is because Confucius asserts in the *Analects*: “Fine (巧) words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue.”²⁶ “巧” in this context implies the use of tricks for one’s own purposes. For Confucianism, the respect of others should be gained through one’s own virtue, not through trickery, such as employing slick words to whitewash one’s behaviour. In contrast, Smith’s original phrase, “properly to execute acts,” is neutral, merely describing the effectiveness of actions without moral judgment. Tamotsu’s translation subtly inserts a Confucian critique, implying that such behaviour is deceptive and unvirtuous.

Furthermore, Tamotsu notably softens Smith’s criticisms when the cultural practices Smith mocks are also shared by the Japanese. For example, when Smith criticises rural hosts in China for sweeping the floor, causing guests to choke on dust, Tamotsu translates this literally but then cites the *Book of Rites* to explain that the practice follows Confucian principles (p.38). Another instance occurs when Smith satirises the Chinese readiness to kowtow to the emperor:

“The bride had performed her prostration to the north because that is the direction of the abode of the Emperor,... she, at least, would show that she knew in what direction to knock her head!”(p.39)

The background of this incident is that a western guest visited a Chinese woman’s home and found that the hostess must sit on a seat in a certain direction. As kowtowing was also important in Japan, Tamotsu shifts the fault onto the ignorance of the Western guests:

“This was because the guests did not know where they were supposed to sit, and it was not the fault of the bride. Haha.”

然れば客人が座を占むべき位置を知らざりしの過にて、新婦の過にはあらざりしあり。呵々。(p.40)

²⁶ Confucius, *The analects* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2016).

Moreover, Smith's neutral description, "upon subsequent inquiry" (p.38), becomes exaggerated in Tamotsu's version. He describes how the foreign lady, confused for a long time, finally learned the meaning of the bride's action by asking a *yusokuka* (有職家), an expert in imperial court etiquette:

"After separation, the foreign lady pondered over its reason a hundred times, but could not understand. It was only by asking someone with knowledge subsequently that she realised, the new bride was so busy showing respect to the direction of the north, namely the direction of Imperial Palace."

別かれて後、外国婦人は、百方その理由を熟考それども詳かにすること能はず。

既にして其の理由を或る有職家に質せしに、彼の新婦は、北方、即ち宮城所在の方位に敬禮を表することに汲々とし。(p.40)

In Tamotsu's exaggerated descriptions, we can perceive an obvious sense of pride in the profundity of this etiquette.

Through his transformation of Smith's book, Tamotsu differentiated between China and Japan by attributing negative characteristics to the Chinese, while valorising the etiquette shared by Japan. This fluid identity allowed the Japanese to showcase their shared cultural depth with China when convenient, but also to mock China's backwardness in comparison to the West.

Generally, Tamotsu, a Japanese man of the late 19th century, reacted quite differently from American scholars and changed Smith's book totally. This is a good demonstration of Barad's theory that agency and object arise simultaneously from the agential cut and how they are originally entangled together. It was Tamotsu's own Japanese identity, the *Toyoshi* environment in which he dwelled, and the world's political landscape at the time that combined to shape his reading of Smith's book. Additionally, Tamotsu actually creates a new book through those modifications, which makes it more problematic for Liu to leave Tamotsu aside. This makes us more curious about the effects of Tamotsu's translation in China.

The amnesia of Chinese scholars

The fact that Tamotsu's translation created an entirely new book makes the lack of attention from Chinese scholars towards it even more perplexing. In fact, as Lu Xun's academic sojourn in Japan from 1902 to 1908 coincided with the prevalence of *Toyoshi*, the discourse on Chinese characteristics possibly impacted him deeply.

Japanese scholars in the Meiji era portrayed Chinese traits as conservatism, cowardice, and stagnation and attributed them to the oppression of northern races. For instance, Yamaji Aizan (1865-1917) claims in 1907 that China's vast geography and challenging transportation weakened its

various races as one race dominated, while Japan's race had the advantage of assimilating foreign cultures more quickly.²⁷ Building on this, Shiratori Kurakichi (1865–1942) asserts that northern threats forced the Chinese to transform Confucianism into a conservative system, contributing to China's decline.²⁸ Lu Xun's friend Xu Shouchang reported that Lu Xun expressed similar ideas in Japan:

“What is the root of the disease of the Chinese nation? ... At that time, we felt that what our nation lacked most was sincerity and love - in other words, we were deeply involved in the problem of deceit, shamelessness and suspicion. ... As for the crux, ... being enslaved to northern foreign races twice is considered to be the biggest and deepest root of the disease.”²⁹

The notion of racial oppression as the root of Chinese disease echoed with the two Japanese scholars above while the “disease” of national character can be seen in *Chinese Characteristics* translated by Tamotsu, which includes chapters titled “Mutual Suspicion” and “The Absence of Sincerity.” While Japanese scholars may have drawn upon Smith's work, they developed their own interpretations of Chinese character flaws, connecting them to racial oppression. Lu Xun's analysis mirrors these ideas, suggesting that Japanese intellectual thought could have a significant impact on him.

Further supporting this, Lu Xun adopted certain terms from Tamotsu's translation. For example, he critiqued Chinese people using the phrase “巧滑” - slick and worldly but insincere,³⁰ in which 巧 is used by Tamotsu to translate “properly to execute” and 滑 (*hua*, lubricating) was also used by Tamotsu to satirise the cunning in Chinese politeness on Page 35. Additionally, Ri Dongmu points out that Lu Xun's views on behaviors such as almsgiving, begging, and servitude were also shaped by Tamotsu's translation, which highlighted the insincerity behind seemingly good deeds. These ideas profoundly influenced Lu Xun's literary depictions of insincere charity.³¹

Despite strong likelihood that Lu Xun was profoundly influenced by Japanese *Toyoshi*, few scholars pay attention to Tamotsu's translation. A search on CNKI, the Chinese academic resource website, reveals only two essays on Tamotsu and his translation, both by Ri Dongmu. However, from

²⁷ Yamaji Aizan, *Shina shisou shi-nichi kan bunmei idou ron* 支那思想史・日漢文明異同論 (History of China's Thought: Japanese-Chinese Civilisation Differences and Similarities) (Kanao Bun'endo, 1907).

²⁸ Tanaka, “Japan's Orient,” 116.

²⁹ Shouchang Xu, *Wosuo renshide Lu Xun* 我所认识的鲁迅 (Lu Xun I know) (People's Literature Publishing House, 1978), 59-60.

³⁰ Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji (diyijuan)* 鲁迅全集 (第一卷) (Complete works of Lu Xun, Volume 1) (People's Literature Publishing House, 2005), 254.

³¹ Dongmu Ri, “Qishi zhe yu qishi - Lu Xun yu zhinaren qizhi guanxi de yixiang kaocha” “乞食者”与“乞食”--鲁迅与《支那人气质》关系的一项考察 (“Beggars” and “Begging for Food”: An Examination of Lu Xun's Relationship with Chinese Characteristics), *Journal of the Faculty of Letters / 佛教大学研究推進機構会議 文学部論集編集会議 編 89*, no.3 (2005): 73-89.

1990 to 2014, there were 28 articles directly related to Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*.³² This suggests that the disregard is not accidental but stems from certain complex psychological factors.

Lu Xun is the one formulating and embodying this particular mentality. Lu Xun refers to *Chinese Characteristics* four times in all of his works, in which, conspicuously, he holds two opinions. On one hand, Lu Xun admired Smith's work, advocating for its translation to foster self-reflection and reform among the Chinese populace.³³ On the other hand, Lu Xun criticised Japanese sinology in the Meiji era, claiming that while it was influenced by Smith's work,³⁴ it contained superficial and exaggerated claims.³⁵ Ironically, Lu Xun was unaware that what he considered to be Smith's superior research had been significantly modified by Japanese scholarship and was actually more coherent with the latter. Additionally, although, according to Zhou Zuoren's diary, Lu Xun read and enjoyed works translated by Tamotsu, including *History of the Polish War* and *Chinese Characteristics*, he never mentioned Tamotsu in his writing.³⁶ Heretofore, Lu Xun, despite his education in Japan, seemed to discriminate against Japanese sinology while to some degree admire the Westerner Smith.

Many Chinese scholars inherited similar viewpoints from Lu Xun. Contemporary scholar Zhang Mengyang praises Smith's achievements without mentioning Tamotsu's contribution and indicates his own alignment with Lu Xun's permissive views on Japanese sinology during the Meiji era.³⁷ Tao Dongfeng, another leading scholar, directly challenges post-colonial critiques of Smith's Orientalism, arguing that Chinese intellectuals can still benefit from reading biased Western missionary accounts as long as they maintain sufficient confidence and discernment.³⁸ By the tolerance, Tao not only perpetuates and staunchly defends Lu Xun's stance but also naturally disregards the Japanese intermediaries.

The sights of these Chinese scholars are focused on the East-West relationship, but the indispensable intermediary country, Japan, is "forgotten." In this sense Tanaka's criticism for *Toyoshi* in turn holds true for China. By despising peripheral nations such as Japan, but admiring Western achievements, China gains a sense of security and certainty. However, with this attitude China also unconsciously suffers from colonial "common sense" wherein "knowing is disabled, attention is redirected, things are renamed, and disregard is revived and sustained", manifesting as a symptom

³² Hui Yang, "Quest for the Chinese Identity: An Analysis of the Reception of A.H. Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* in Contemporary China, 1990–2014," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37, no.1 (2016): 85.

³³ Lu Xun, "Lu Xun quanji (Vol.6)," 649.

³⁴ Lu Xun, "Lu Xun quanji (Vol.6)," 275.

³⁵ Lu Xun, "Lu Xun quanji (Vol.12)," 468.

³⁶ Ri, "Shibue Tamotsu yaku sinazin kishitsuyo rozin jo," 274.

³⁷ Zhang, "Shimisi he tade zhongguoren qizhi", 8-11.

³⁸ Dongfeng Tao, "Guominxing shenhua de shenhua" "国民性神话"的神话 (The myth of national character's myth), *Gansu Social Sciences*, no.5 (2006): 24.

termed “Colonial Aphasia”.³⁹ In other words, due to the (post)colonial system, the vision of Chinese intellectuals from different perspectives is fixed in a particular direction centred around the West. The neglect of Japan is a manifestation of this limitation of vision.

The Chinese reaction to Liu’s post-colonialism is indeed rooted in a multifaceted intellectual context. There are two opposing tendencies in Chinese academia: one idealising traditional Chinese values and the other criticising them through a Western Enlightenment perspective.⁴⁰ Consequently, postcolonialism in China can be co-opted by the former to support ultranationalism and cultural conservatism. In contrast, scholars who align with the Enlightenment ideals championed by Lu Xun often resist this inclination, advocating for Enlightenment values as a counter to such nationalist tendencies.⁴¹ Tao’s sharp criticism of Liu’s postcolonial stance reveals his commitment to upholding these Enlightenment ideals, as does the work of Wang Weidong, a prominent scholar studying Lu Xun. Wang asserts that Chinese “post-theories” have colluded with the cultural conservatism and “New Left” to promote a Chinese-centric stance while completely rejecting the heritage of the May Fourth Enlightenment.⁴²

If colonial aphasia and the anxiety around postmodernism help explain the choices of some Chinese scholars, Ri Dongmu, being in the same academic circle with Wang, shares some scholarly interests. One of them is a reliance on pre-20th-century Western thought, which limits their engagement with contemporary theories like deconstructionism and postcolonialism. This perspective largely limits Ri to tracing the direct influence of the Japanese version on Lu Xun, while neglecting the complex dynamics in translation. For instance, Ri focuses on how the depiction of Chinese “insincerity” in almsgiving in the Japanese version influenced Lu Xun’s views, even comparing the linguistic similarities between Tamotsu’s use of “乞食 (*kojiki*)” and Lu Xun’s “乞食者 (*qishizhe*)” to argue for the impact.⁴³ This approach oversimplifies intercultural translation, reducing it to a straightforward influencer-influenced relationship, hindering deeper engagement with East-West dynamics. While Lydia Liu views translation as a complex process involving domination, resistance, and appropriation,⁴⁴ Ri argues that Lu Xun’s “borrowing” from Smith shapes his creative development of Chinese “servility” (*nuxing*), which is the most significant Chinese personality but

³⁹ Ann Stoler, “Colonial aphasia: Race and disabled histories in France.” *Public culture* 23, no. 1 (2011): 153.

⁴⁰ Ming D. Gu, *Sinologism: An alternative to orientalism and postcolonialism* (Routledge, 2012), 7.

⁴¹ Zhang, “Voices of the Others,” 148-149.

⁴² Weidong Wang, “Views of Scholars: In the Twenty-first Century, Is Lu Xun Also Needed?” *Journal of University of Science and Technology* (Social Sciences Edition) 29, no.4 (2013): 12-13.

⁴³ Ri, Dongmu Ri, “Qishi zhe yu qishi - Lu Xun yu zhinaren qizhi guanxide yixiang kaocha.”

⁴⁴ Liu, “Translingual practice,” 25.

overlooked by Smith.⁴⁵ This not only reflects Ri's tendency to reduce the cross-cultural text dissemination to notions of "borrowing" and "developing" but also his disregard for postcolonial theory in his adherence to Enlightenment ideals.

Overall, major Chinese scholars exhibit a form of colonial aphasia by neglecting Tamotsu's intermediary role, while Ri fails to conduct more profound research due to personal interests and Enlightenment perspectives. In other words, both within and beyond colonial aphasia and Enlightenment, scholars form unique yet somewhat flawed judgments shaped by their experiences, interests, and academic contexts. This indicates the need to move beyond the simplistic East-West dichotomy of postcolonialism and engage with a diverse range of agencies across different geographies, time periods, and perspectives. This sort of exchange is exactly what Barad envisages: the changing topologies of the world entail an ongoing reworking of dynamics, which is a matter of properties changing in different space-time topologies. In the dynamics of changing space and time, the possibilities of the world can unfold perfectly.⁴⁶

Conclusion

This paper explores the varied interpretations of Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* by scholars from America, Japan, and China. Late Meiji Japanese scholars sought to reinterpret China through Smith's work, aiming to assert Japan's cultural and political standing. American scholars, on the other hand, approached the text with pragmatic or reflective attitudes shaped by the development of area studies and their own academic priorities. Chinese scholars, often limited by colonial aphasia, have tended to overlook Tamotsu's mediating role while developing unique perspectives on Western postmodernism. These differing interpretations reveal how individual scholars' unique conditions shape their views, with their distinct agencies emerging through their vantage points. Based on this, this paper argues that cross-continental and cross-temporal readings, alongside academic exchange, provide a fuller understanding of Smith's work, moving beyond traditional postcolonial frameworks.

⁴⁵ Dongmu Ri, "Congpu baoyi yu xi (sai): Lu Xun yu zhinaren qizhi guanxi de yixiang kaocha" 從僕・包依与西〔サイ〕—魯迅与《支那人氣質》關係的一項考察 (On 'Servant': An Examination of Lu Xun's Relationship with Chinese Characteristics), *Journal of the Faculty of Letters / 佛教大学研究推進機構會議, 文学部論集編集會議 編90*, (2006): 113–127.

⁴⁶ Barad, "Meeting the universe halfway," 141.

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