

From “Dehumanised” to “Co-perpetrator”: The Translingual Reconstruction of Lin Yutang’s Thought in Hotta Yoshie’s War Perspective

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Abstract

Lin Yutang’s works were introduced to Japan in the 1930s and gained widespread circulation. Moving beyond previous one-dimensional diffusion models, this paper examines the reception of Lin Yutang by Japanese “postwar school” writer Hotta Yoshie as a case study, focusing on how he, drawing on his personal experiences in Shanghai, reconstructed Lin’s core concept critiquing human alienation— “dehumanized”—into a political-ethical concept for analyzing war responsibility: “co-perpetrator”. This transformation exemplifies the recipient’s subjective agency in transnational intellectual flows, profoundly deepening the complexity of postwar Japanese discourse on war responsibility.

Keyword: Lin Yutang, Hotta Yoshie, dehumanised, co-perpetrator

For an extended period, Lin Yutang’s studies within Chinese and Japanese academic circles have predominantly focused on his connections with European and American cultures. However, as early as 1935, Lin and his works were introduced to Japan, where they sparked sustained and widespread reading and discussion. A review of existing Japanese-related research on Lin Yutang reveals that scholarly achievements have mainly concentrated on areas such as the history of the dissemination and reception of his works¹, biographical and ideological studies², comparative research with writers like Natsume Sōseki and Tanizaki

¹ For further reading on this aspect, refer to studies by Kawamura Masako (2007), Matsumoto Kazuya (2015), Zhang Xiuge (2015), Xing Yidan (2018), and Liu Anwei (2025).

² Relevant works include those by Qian Suoqiao (2019), Fan Liya (2010), Kudō Takamasa (2023), and Inoue Tomokazu (2007–2009).

Jun'ichirō³, and translation studies based on newly discovered translated manuscripts⁴. Although these studies have laid a necessary foundation, they largely adhere to a unidirectional “dissemination” paradigm, failing to adequately reveal the subjective acceptance and creative reinterpretation of his ideas within Japanese intellectual circles.

This paper seeks to transcend the existing research limitations by examining how Lin Yutang influenced the postwar Japanese writer Hotta Yoshie⁵ as a case study. Shifting the focus from the unidirectional “dissemination” of Lin Yutang in Japan to “reception” and “reinterpretation,” it analyzes how Hotta Yoshie transformed Lin’s concept of “dehumanized” into a “co-perpetrator”, thereby reshaping Japanese intellectuals’ understanding of war. Special emphasis is placed on the cross-linguistic journey of the concept of “dehumanization” from Lin Yutang to Hotta Yoshie and its significance in reconstructing the discourse on Japan’s war responsibility.

1. The Dissemination and Reception of Lin Yutang in Japan

Although Lin Yutang had never set foot in Japan prior to the end of World War II, his reputation and works were known and translated as early as the 1930s. This form of “absent presence” created a charged and tension-filled space for the reception and reinterpretation of his thought in Japan. The earliest introduction came from the Chinese Literature Research Association centered around Takeuchi Yoshimi. The inaugural article of its journal *Chinese Literature Monthly* (1935) was “The Popularity of Yuan Zhonglang Studies” written by Okazaki Toshio, who portrayed Lin Yutang to Japanese readers as the “resurrector” and “devotee” of Yuan Zhonglang (Okazaki Toshio, 1935, pp. 6-7). Subsequently, the journal published translations such as “On Laughter” (Matsueda Shigeo, 1935), “The Legacy of

³ See also related research by 6. Wang, Youxin. (2003), Cui Haiyan (2009).

⁴ A key reference is Song Dan’s *Collation and Study of the Japanese-Held Manuscript of Lin Yutang’s English Translation of Dream of the Red Chamber* (2023).

⁵ Hotta Yoshie (1918–1998) was a Japanese postwar school writer. He arrived in Shanghai in March 1945 as an employee of the Japan International Promotion Association. After Japan’s surrender, he remained employed by the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Nationalist Party until returning to Japan in January 1947. His representative works include *Loss of the Homeland* and *Loneliness in the Plaza*.

Xiaopin Wen” (Matsueda Shigeo, 1936), and “Talks on Hollywood” (trans. Inomata Shohachi, January 1938). It is worth noting that core members of the association, like Takeuchi Yoshimi and Okazaki Toshio, were cautious in their appraisal of Lin’s humorous literature, with only Takeda Taijun offering unreserved praise.

The year 1938 marked a significant turning point in Lin Yutang’s dissemination in Japan. In July of that year, Japanese translations of two of his major works, *My Country and My People* (trans. Nii Itaru, Japanese title: Waga Kuni·Waga Kokumin) and *The Importance of Living*, were published simultaneously. The latter even saw competing editions: a selected translation titled *On Essays* by Nagai Naoji and a complete version in two volumes (July and October) titled *The Discovery of Living* by Sakamoto Masaru. Statistics show that from 1938 to 1945, 14 Japanese translations (including selected and compiled translations) of Lin Yutang’s works were published in Japan. Beyond those mentioned, notable works included *The Wisdom of Confucius*, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China*, *Moment in Peking*, and *Between Tears and Laughter*. By the end of the 20th century, the total number of translations had exceeded 26 (Feng Yu, 2009, p. 42). Such an intensive wave of translation during the war period starkly reflected the intellectual community’s urgent desire, against the backdrop of Japanese aggression against China, to “understand” China and even seek some frame of reference for its policies. However, once these texts entered the public sphere, they quickly escaped the original intentions of translators and controllers, being torn apart into sharply contrasting images within the distorted ideological spectrum of wartime Japan. Consequently, their reception history presents a picture of mixed praise and blame, even one of sharp antagonism (Kawamura Masako, 2007, pp. 55–62).

The first dominant interpretive strategy was to instrumentalise Lin Yutang as an objective database for understanding China. A representative of this approach was Nii Itaru, translator of *My Country and My People*. He highly praised the book’s so-called “penetrating

objectivity,” claiming it revealed “the essence of the Chinese people and culture,” and explicitly argued that the “precise knowledge it provided was essential for Japanese people at that time.” In his portrayal, Lin Yutang was a “self-critic” operating from a patriotic stance, whose works became an authoritative basis for Japanese to understand the “truth about China” and thus for informing policy towards China. This reading, which reduced vibrant cultural critique to cold “objective knowledge,” ignoring the author’s subjective emotions and political stance to reconstruct him as a utilisable source of information. Similar views were quite common among translators and publishers. The translator of *Moment in Peking*, Oda Takeo, and the publisher Shiki Publishing similarly strenuously downplayed Lin Yutang’s ideological colour, attributing his value to “revealing a new history of China through fatalistic tragedy.”

In contrast, a second mode of reception romantically cast Lin Yutang as a spokesperson for “Eastern thought.” In this narrative, Lin was stripped of the specific context of his critical realism and abstracted into a symbolic figure used to resist the West and construct an Eastern cultural identity. Kawaguchi Hiroshi, translator of *The Wisdom of Confucius*, praised Lin Yutang for reconstructing Confucian thought from a modern perspective, breaking the shackles of classical exegesis and opening new paths for “new studies in Eastern thought.” The philosopher Miki Kiyoshi further believed that Lin Yutang enabled Japanese people to “discover themselves as Easterners,” thereby evoking a profound cultural resonance. Politician Ashida Hitoshi also admitted that it was precisely Lin Yutang’s identity as an “Easterner” that made his philosophy of life resonate with him personally, and he regarded Lin’s works as an important reference for understanding the “Chinese national character.” This interpretation attempted to appropriate Lin Yutang to bridge the actual rifts of aggression, creating an illusory, unified “Eastern” cultural community, while deliberately or inadvertently obscuring the distinct national stance in Lin’s thought and its critical edge against Japanese militarism.

The third perspective, which most acutely touched the core of Lin Yutang’s thought yet

was most dreaded by the Japanese authorities, identified his works as covert yet highly effective anti-Japanese propaganda. The critic Nakano Yoshio insightfully called *Moment in Peking* “the least propaganda-like propaganda literature, even national policy literature.” He sharply criticized Japanese publishers for competing to translate and introduce the book as “lacking principle,” denounced them for neglecting its essentially “defamatory towards Japan” nature, and even called for state censorship. The writer Abe Tomoji’s attitude was more complex: although he had earlier modeled a character Wang Ziming after Lin Yutang in his novel *Peking* (Wangcheng, 2005, p. 195), he simultaneously remained wary of Lin’s strategy of using Western audiences to shape an “Orientalism,” and even directly referred to *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China* as “a book one should read to understand the origins of today’s anti-Japanese China.” These comments uncannily captured the resilient national spirit and profound anti-aggression sentiment in Lin Yutang’s words—precisely the core that the two modes of reception had strenuously avoided or diluted.

It was this complex, pluralistic and even hostile reception landscape that made official Japanese authorities unable to ignore Lin Yutang’s influence. Due to his reputation for being “more influential than the most skilled diplomatic envoys,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) listed him as a key “resistance writer” under investigation, paying him even more attention than Wen Yiduo (Peng Cheng & Zhu Changbo, 2019, p. 36). Official media did not hesitate to distort his statements; for instance, *the Asahi Shimbun* on October 6, 1943, falsified and published a piece titled “America and Britain, Get Out of Asia,” attempting to borrow Lin Yutang’s name to justify its own war of aggression.

The end of the war did not conclude these variations in reception but opened a new chapter. With the postwar reckoning with militarism, the “anti-Japanese” themes in Lin Yutang’s works shed their “taboo” status and were reassessed. Takeuchi Yoshimi, who had previously evaluated Lin poorly, engaged in a critique from a pure literature perspective. He

argued that *Moment in Peking* was constrained by its semi-documentary form and failed to fully develop depictions of popular resistance, but he highly praised *Leaf in the Storm* as “the most distinctive” among novels on the anti-Japanese theme and personally translated it for introduction to Japan (Takeuchi Yoshimi, 1951, pp. 180-183). This marked a shift towards engaging with Lin Yutang’s serious reflections on war, humanity, and resistance.

In summary, the prewar and wartime Japanese reception of Lin Yutang constantly oscillated violently among multiple reflections: that of an “instrumentalised resource,” a “romanticised Eastern symbol,” and “dangerous political propaganda,” forming an interpretive field fraught with internal tension and profound fragmentation. This complex pre-understanding background profoundly shaped the initial conditions under which postwar Japanese intellectuals reread Lin Yutang. It meant that any subsequent re-reading and reconstruction had to first navigate through this fog woven from misinterpretation, distortion, and limited sincerity. And this was precisely the unique intellectual terrain facing the “postwar school” writer Hotta Yoshie as he made his entrance—it was from this vast and contradictory historical legacy that he embarked on his profound inquiry into transforming the “dehumanized” individual into a collective of “accomplices.”

2. The Genesis of Hotta Yoshie’s Reception and Creative Misreading of Lin Yutang

Given Lin Yutang’s established prominence in Japan since the 1930s, it is plausible that Hotta Yoshie may have been aware of his name, yet no definitive evidence substantiates this claim. What can be confirmed, however, is that Hotta—who remained in Shanghai after Japan’s surrender—made repeated references to Lin Yutang in his diaries and essays.

Hotta Yoshie’s encounter with Lin Yutang was far from accidental. The most significant catalyst was likely his close friend Takeshi Takeda, who had long been devoted to Lin’s humorous literary works. In March 1946, Takeda published “Chinese Literature and the World” in the inaugural issue of *Shinsei magazine*, co-edited by Hotta. The essay enthusiastically

praised Lin Yutang's *Moment in Peking* and *Between Tears and Laughter*, particularly lauding the latter's grand perspective of observing the "contemporary world" with a "world" in view, noting that beneath its sharp critiques lingered something "poetic and prayer-like" (Chen Ling, 2019, p. 75-76). As the receiving editor of the article and Takeda's confidant, Hotta Yoshie must have already encountered and internalized Takeda's high regard for Lin Yutang as early as January 1946, when the magazine was initially scheduled for publication. The delay until March was due to conflicts between the editor-in-chief Suda Teichi and the authorities during the typesetting process. In any case, Takeda's article provided both a direct impetus and a distinctive preparatory lens for Hotta Yoshie to actively and deeply engage with Lin Yutang's works.

Hotta's reading trajectory of Lin Yutang is clearly documented in his 1946 diary. From his first reading of *Moment in Peking* at "N's" home on January 9 (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, p. 127), to discussing Lin Yutang with a friend on July 11 and tentatively categorizing him as a "foreign Chinese," then purchasing the Shanghai edition of *The Vigil of a Nation* at Kelly & Walsh that same afternoon (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, p. 201), followed by a July 14 entry noting that he had "begun translating Lin Yutang," (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, p. 203) and finally writing a lengthy reflection on July 16 (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, p. 206). This series of intensive actions outlines a clear trajectory: Hotta was eagerly using Lin Yutang as an "Other" through whose eyes he could examine and interpret the complex realities of a recently defeated Japan and a China embroiled in civil war.

It was through reading *The Vigil of a Nation* that Hotta made a crucial, yet paradoxical, intellectual leap. He swiftly discarded the superficial label of "foreign Chinese" and deeply embraced a "Chinese-style" logic of war cognition embedded in Lin Yutang's analysis. In his diary, he wrote that he "acutely felt": for China, the War of Resistance was essentially more akin to a prolonged state of "civil war" than a foreign war with clear beginnings and endings;

Japanese aggression (the “China Incident”) was, to some extent, incorporated into this long sequence of “Chinese-style warfare.” The subsequent Pacific War, launched to give meaning to the “China Incident,” instead distorted and dissolved the potential “Chinese meaning” the latter might have had, due to its non-Chinese characteristics (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, pp. 206-207).

This line of thinking reveals both the complexity and the peril of Hotta’s thought. Its groundbreaking nature resides in the audacious dismantling of Japan’s official “holy war” narrative and the simplistic paradigm of nation-state antagonism. By situating the conflict within a broader geopolitical and ideological matrix encompassing Sino-Japanese-Soviet-American relations and the Kuomintang-Communist struggle, Hotta demonstrated rare historiographical courage in confronting the war’s ontological chaos.

However, its danger and essence of misreading also reside here: he skillfully executed a discursive substitution, redefining a clear-cut war of aggression and resistance (a national contradiction) as a regional “Eastern, Asian civil war” (an internal contradiction). This constitutes an incipient act of “responsibility diffusion,” partially absolving Japan of its singular culpability as the aggressor and redistributing it across an amorphous “entanglement” of co-responsible actors—including Japanese militarists, the Kuomintang, the Communist Party, and later the United States. As he explicitly acknowledged in his private diary, “such candor would enrage the Chinese,” this suppressed admission inadvertently exposes the ethical bankruptcy underlying his analytical framework.

This analysis reveals that Hotta Yoshie’s first systematic engagement with Lin Yutang’s oeuvre was not a passive reception but rather a tension-filled “creative misreading.” The war trauma and “dehumanized” individual destinies depicted in Lin’s texts provided him with raw material for geopolitical deconstruction, initially forming an analytical framework for reconstructing war cognition. This methodological approach—which obscures concrete culpability by framing it as structural contradiction—served as a seminal intellectual seed,

laying profound groundwork for his later decisive transition from narratives of “dehumanized” victims to complicit perpetrator discourses.

3. Early War Perspectives of Hotta Yoshie and the Influence of Lin Yutang

In June 1946, Hotta Yoshie published the essay *Reflection and Hope in China's Gaizao Daily*, which for the first time systematically articulated his new reflections on war and Sino-Japanese relations. This essay marks a significant turning point in his ideology of the war—a shift closely related to his reading and absorption of Lin Yutang's *Between Tears and Laughter*. In the article, he sharply criticized Japan's past approach to handling Sino-Japanese relations. Drawing on the wisdom of Laozi, he warned that such so-called “solutions” often lead to greater unsolved dilemmas. He ultimately emphasized that “the resolution of international problems” and “the problem of human nature” were the most critical issues of the century—a conclusion directly derived from Lin Yutang's *Between Tears and Laughter*.

To put it bluntly, the “heart-to-heart” issue between China and Japan has remained unresolved over the past few decades. Not to mention the utterly futile resort to military solutions. As Lin Yutang emphasised in *Between Tears and Laughter*, “the solution of international problems” and the problem of human nature are the greatest issues of this century (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, p. 359).

Hotta's concept of the “heart-to-heart” issue intriguingly mirrors the “inner question of human hearts” he recorded in his diary on August 11, 1945. While both emphasizing “innerness,” their stances and nature underwent a fundamental reversal. The pre-defeat rhetoric—framing “the transformation of the Chinese” as an “inner problem” to be communicated to the “home islands”—was voiced from the standpoint of an imperial Japanese cultural official, critiquing the military's failure to win Chinese hearts. In contrast, *Reflection and Hope* phrases like “my personal fate” and “the heart-to-heart between China and Japan” reveal his unequivocal opposition to both “individual” and “national” narratives, anchoring

Sino-Japanese relations not in grand political discourse but in individual destinies and emotional bonds. In essence, Hotta at this stage freed himself from the shackles of the state and ideology, shifting his focus from politics to personal fates and advocating that “heart-to-heart contact” was the crux of the matter. This ideological pivot was crucial—it enabled Hotta to “reconstruct” Lin Yutang’s ideas creatively rather than merely “accept” them.

It was precisely based on this new personalized standpoint that Hotta found profound resonance with Lin Yutang’s critical logic and transformed it into a tool for self-reflection. In *Between Tears and Laughter*, Lin vehemently criticized Western politicians and experts for relying on formulas, data, and mechanical logic to discuss peace while neglecting the most fundamental “governance of moral hearts and minds,” arguing that “the problem of peace is the problem of our belief in human relations and human nature (Lin Yutang, 2017, p. 77).” Hotta creatively redirected this critical framework from Lin’s “critique of foreign powers” to his own “critique of the motherland,” directing its sharp edge at Japan itself: “Diplomats and soldiers did not seriously contemplate and overcome the Sino-Japanese issue as a problem of their own life and fate; they only mechanically attempted to ‘resolve’ it (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, p. 359).” The weapon Lin Yutang used to criticize Western powers was repurposed by Hotta to dissect the root causes of Japan’s failed aggression, accomplishing a crucial intellectual “reconstruction.”

Another decisive aspect of this reconstructive process was Hotta’s discovery and grasp of the core concept of “dehumanized” in Lin Yutang’s thought. In the second volume of *Between Tears and Laughter*, titled *Tao and Its Technique*, Lin expounded on the relationship between rites/music and peace, accurately translating the state of human alienation into English as “dehumanized.” Lin used this to argue that when the human heart is enslaved by external matters and loses its authenticity (becomes dehumanized), it becomes the ultimate source of rebellion, deceit, immorality, and great chaos in the world. Therefore, the foundation of

governance lies in “rectifying the human heart”. The original text reads:

When man is constantly exposed to the things of the material world which affect him and does not control his likes and dislikes, then he is overwhelmed by the material reality and becomes dehumanised or materialistic. When a man becomes dehumanised or materialistic, then the principle of Reason in nature is destroyed, and the man is submerged in his own desires. From this arise rebellion, disobedience, cunning and deceit, and general immorality. We have then a picture of the strong bullying the weak, the majority persecuting the minority, the physically brave going for violence, the sick and crippled not being taken care of, and the aged and the young and helpless not cared for. This is the way of chaos (Lin Yutang, 1943, p. 42-43).

Lin Yutang’s concept of “dehumanized” provided Hotta with a philosophical discourse that transcended political and economic analysis, directly addressing the dimensions of humanity and morality, thereby endowing his critique of war with unprecedented depth. This aspect will be discussed in detail in Part IV of this paper.

Although Hotta did not explicitly use the term “dehumanized” in “Reflection and Hope,” the entirety of his argument is entirely isomorphic with the core of this concept. He criticized those who treated Sino-Japanese relations merely as “work” rather than a “life issue”—a critique whose essence aligns precisely with the “dehumanization” resulting from the “mechanistic nature” condemned by Lin Yutang. Moreover, he argued that the fundamental error of Japan’s China policy lay in “disregarding humanity (by no means a matter of the depth of research on Chinese national character, etc.), that is, in the belief that as long as policies were implemented under the banner of official purposes, the disregard of humanity could be forgiven.” At the end of the essay, he emphatically declared: “The Sino-Japanese issue is absolutely not a mere political problem—it is our very own life problem (Hotta Yoshie, 2008, p. 359).”

By this point, utilising Lin Yutang's intellectual resources, Hotta Yoshie had preliminarily completed the cross-linguistic reconstruction of his war ideology. He was no longer the nationalist who tragically bore his personal fate. Still, he had transformed into a critic starting from the "track of human nature," attempting to reckon with the enormous crimes of the state. He turned Lin Yutang's externally directed critical theory into a sharp tool for inward reflection and subtly extracted the profound concept of "dehumanised" from its modern interpretation within Chinese classical philosophy, implanting it into the core of his reflection on Japan's war responsibility. All this paved the way for his ultimate reconstruction of the narrative of "victims dehumanised by war" into one of "accomplices who, actively or passively, lost their humanity within structural violence." In the following section, we will see how this core concept fully unfolds in his literary creation and thought, ultimately shaping his unique "co-perpetrator" view of war.

4. The Consciousness of "Co-perpetratorship": The Core of Hotta Yoshie's Ethics of War Responsibility

As previously discussed, Hotta Yoshie strongly endorsed Lin Yutang's argument in *Between Tears and Laughter* that resolving international issues hinges on the reshaping of human nature. This perspective, which examines war through the lens of "internality," became a pivotal turning point in his intellectual evolution. The embryonic form of this idea was further developed after his return to Japan and was systematically articulated in his essay *The Co-perpetrator* (Hotta Yoshie, 1994, pp. 3-4), published in the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shimbun* (June 20, 1950).

In this essay, Hotta established a unique perspective on history: "At times, I view human history as a vast chronicle of crimes. Consider, for example, war crimes—centering on the idea that all wars are inherently criminal. Much of political history is, in fact, a record of crimes." From this critical stance, he further elucidated the modern individual's predicament: "Crime or

criminality is quintessentially modern. In this context, what am I? A co-perpetrator.” Drawing on the French writer François Mauriac’s theories, he argued that the true horror lies not in ideological opposition but in the convergence and erosion of human value systems, leading him to conclude that modern “co-perpetration” is a universal condition—individual consciousness mirrors global consciousness. Based on this, he posed two core questions: How does this situation arise? And how can one avoid becoming a co-perpetrator?

In addressing these questions, Hotta meticulously distinguishes between “anti-humanism” and “dehumanization.” He maintains that the prefix “anti-” signifies a conscious, adversarial ideological stance (such as “anti-Christian”) with a clear opposing force, whereas “de-” indicates a systematic, structural process of stripping and deprivation typically perpetrated by anonymous “historical institutions or mechanisms.” Hotta contends that the twentieth century’s characteristic feature is not overt “anti-humanism” but rather this more insidious and pervasive process of “dehumanization” embedded within ideologies and state apparatuses. Confronted with this predicament, employing “homeopathic methods” (i.e., using new institutions or material solutions to cure old ills) would only perpetuate a vicious cycle of “human-led, human-directed enslavement and dehumanization of humanity.” He cites his observations in China as evidence: “In China, I witnessed brutal soldiers and intelligence agents acting with impunity. In retrospect, they were all co-perpetrators who believed they could do anything.” Therefore, the only resistance lies in consciously documenting and exposing these mechanisms of “anti-” or “de-,” which he considers essential for individuals to extricate themselves from co-perpetrator structures and return to humanist thought. This resistance necessitates strengthening conscious awareness as a weapon through examining historical patterns of co-perpetrator throughout human history as a history of crime. He concludes with a grave warning: “Once consciousness of ‘anti-’ or ‘de-’ diminishes under internal and external pressures, war will inevitably return!”

Through *The Co-perpetrator*, Hotta crystallised his understanding of “modernity”: human history as a chronicle of crimes, with modernity representing its apex; modern individuals are all “co-perpetrators,” their punishment being confinement within this co-perpetrator structure and the consequent loss of freedom. Accordingly, he categorised “co-perpetrators” into two types: the consciously aware co-perpetrators who approach humanism by exposing the “anti-” or “de-” mechanisms of social machinery; and the utterly unaware co-perpetrators who commit crimes against others while simultaneously enslaving themselves. Hotta resolutely chose the former path. His postwar works *The Solitude of the Square* (1951) and *The Loss of Homeland* (1950), both focus on human existence and choices in turbulent times, with their characters similarly divisible into these two categories: various forms of the fallen, and the sole narrator possessing co-perpetrator consciousness who takes writing as his vocation⁶. This demonstrates how Hotta directly projected his wartime consciousness and critique of modernity into literary practice, wielding it as a weapon for reflecting on war and resisting oblivion.

The formation of Hotta’s anti-war thought is deeply rooted in his profound Shanghai experience (March 1945-January 1947). Arriving in Shanghai as a cultural official of the Japan International Cultural Association, he inevitably became part of the imperial propaganda machinery. After Japan’s defeat, colonial superiority vanished utterly, his identity abruptly transforming into that of a defeated nation’s overseas citizen, later being retained by the Kuomintang’s propaganda department. This series of experiences—being passively shuffled between different power structures, particularly witnessing Kuomintang internal corruption—gave him deep insight into individual alienation and powerlessness within vast bureaucratic machines. He realized that without consciousness, people would, as he described, “move

⁶ For analysis of the “co-perpetrator” motif in *Loneliness in the Plaza* and *Loss of the Motherland*, see: Zeng Rong, (2012), “Co-perpetration” in *Loss of the Motherland* and the “Commitment” in *Loneliness in the Plaza: Perceptions of War and Narrative Techniques in Early Hotta Yoshie*, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, October.

incessantly from one institution to another, devoid of freedom.” These experiences constitute the most authentic personal annotations to his understanding of “co-perpetrator.”

Lin Yutang’s *Between Tears and Laughter* provides a crucial philosophical lens for this analysis. The concept of “dehumanized” critiqued by Lin refers to the enslavement of human minds by external material forces, resulting in the stripping away of humanity. With remarkable creativity, Hotta re-contextualized Lin’s relatively abstract notion of “material” and reconstructed it as concrete “public institutions and organizations.” In other words, Lin’s philosophical diagnosis was activated through Hotta’s traumatic experiences, transforming into a precise critique of the dehumanizing violence inherent in modern state machinery. From this perspective, examining history through the lens of “humanity,” Hotta arrived at the conclusion that “history is a chronicle of crimes, and humans are complicit.” This marked an essential transcendence of his earlier critiques limited to the Japanese military, shifting instead to interrogate individual agency and existential conditions. Thus, he developed the core of his distinctive anti-war philosophy: sustained vigilance against “dehumanization” and ethical awareness of “complicity.”

This ideological framework finds its fullest expression in Hotta Yoshie’s early literary works, culminating in his Akutagawa Prize-winning novel *Loneliness in the Plaza* (1951). Nearly all characters in the novel, whether past or present, have participated in war or factional conflicts—all are “co-perpetrators” in various forms. Even the protagonist Kigaki’s wife, an ordinary housewife, inadvertently leaked intelligence in Shanghai during the war, becoming a triple agent. The awakening of the protagonist Kigaki’s consciousness as a “co-perpetrator” proves particularly symbolic: while translating the word “commit,” he realizes that his professional duty—adding the prefix “enemy” to “North Korea” in dispatches as ordered—himself constitutes a “commitment”, making him complicit in the war propaganda machine (Hotta Yoshie, 2018, p. 8). Following this awakening, he refuses alignment with any faction (left, right,

or even stateless businessmen) and ultimately chooses writing as his weapon to awaken more sleepers. Hotta revealed in his notes: “It’s said Japan was colonized; this is true. But can there exist any profession completely unrelated to this colonization (Hotta Yoshie, 1951)?” This extends his theory of co-perpetrator into colonial contexts: under pervasive structural violence, no one remains entirely innocent. The sole resistance lies in relentless awareness and exposure of one’s embeddedness in complicit structures.

In conclusion, Kigaki’s refusal in *Loneliness in the Plaza* to subordinate himself to any organizational ideology constitutes a literary projection of Hotta Yoshie’s own historical perspective. His repeated and radical shifts in identity during his Shanghai experience prompted profound reflections on the power structures that fueled the war machinery. Throughout this process, the influence of Lin Yutang cannot be overlooked. Through his creative appropriation and reinterpretation of Lin Yutang’s ideas, Hotta transcended the simplistic binary narrative of “victim/perpetrator,” endowing his theory of war responsibility with profound ethical depth. For Hotta, Lin Yutang was far more than a mere symbol of cross-cultural transmission; he became an indispensable participatory force in Hotta’s postwar intellectual transformation. The journey from Lin Yutang’s concept of “Dehumanized” to Hotta’s notion of co-perpetrator vividly exemplifies the “subjective creativity of the receiver” in the transnational flow of ideas—texts are not only read but also rewritten by the historical circumstances of their readers, ultimately becoming intellectual tools for diagnosing eras and reconstructing realities.

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