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〈論文〉

## Karl August Wittfogel's Proletarian Drama in Japan

Yufei ZHOU

Karl August Wittfogel (1896-1988) is notoriously among Japanese scholars and intellectuals as an anticommunist social scientist and Sinologist who articulated the prevailing backwardness and stagnancy of Asian societies. However, his name's first appearance in Japanese public life can be traced to his scriptwriting of a puppet play performed in Tokyo in 1926. Wittfogel's early contributions to proletarian dramaturgy and Marxist aesthetics have been largely translated and published in Japan's leftwing literature magazines and have attracted a great deal of attention among Japan's contemporary revolutionary literary circles.

This article explores the reception of Karl August Wittfogel's engagement with proletarian literature in Japan in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It analyzes the intentions, the criteria of selection and other objective circumstances of those introducing Wittfogel and reflections of his Japanese readers. By shedding light on the process of recontextualization of Wittfogel's literary pursuits in Japan, this article first tries to highlight the entanglements between Japan's early leftwing writers and the literary scene in Weimar Germany. Second, based on this case study of reception history, this article considers the general conditions that are indispensable for intellectuals to establish a legacy beyond their own cultural realms.

**Keywords:** Karl August Wittfogel, proletarian drama, puppet theater, Japanese leftwing literary movement, reception history

### Introduction

On a hot late summer evening in September 1926, the city Tokyo was still on the difficult road to recovery from the devastating damage caused by the 1923 Great Kantō Earth Quake. In Tsukiji Shōgekijō<sup>1)</sup> (築地小劇場 Tsukiji Little Theatre), the bridgehead of Japan's shingeki (新劇, modern theater) movement, built in 1924 thanks to the relaxation of regulatory and licensing procedures for recovery and reconstruction after the catastrophe, a puppet play entitled "Who was the biggest boob?" was brought on the stage. Like most of the plays performed during the early period of Tsukiji Little Theatre, this fairy-tale-like and imaginative puppet

play was also an importation from Europe and had the contemporary social conflicts between entrepreneurs and working class in Weimar Germany as its background.

The story took place in Saxony, an Eastern federal state of Germany with a deep-seated tradition of social democracy and labor movement. Its protagonist, the young weaver Franz and his childhood friend Gertrud were in love with each other. But the father of Gertrud, the weaving mill owner and capitalist Foxtrottl required Franz to give up his status as a weaver and succeed Foxtrottl's family business as the precondition to marry Gertrud. Franz's resolute refusal had greatly aggravated Foxtrottl. The latter, assuming Franz to be the biggest boob in the world, furiously threatened Franz that he would not permit his relationship with Gertrud unless Franz finds someone who is more foolish than himself.

On his round-world journey to find the biggest boob in the world, Franz encountered the servant of the Negro King Mongo in the dry desert of central Africa, who was willing to sacrifice his life to his majesty and prepared faithfully the firewood for making himself a gourmet for the king. On a Chinese island, Franz met the old Chinese merchant Du-Li-Ö, who was adhering to a superstition swindler and offered him all of his property. Franz considered Mongo and Du-Li-Ö much more foolish than himself and brought them to Foxtrottl.



Fig. 1. The stage of "Who is the biggest boob?" in the Tsukiji Little Theatre in Tokyo

As they arrived in Saxony, the weavers' voices for raising the wage levels were evoking an upheaval in Foxtrottl's cotton mill. At this moment, Du-Li-Ö spoke in front of the masses, claiming that Foxtrottl became rich only by ferocious exploitation of the weavers. But if they, the naïve and modest weavers, still let Foxtrottl be their master and endure his brutal oppression, they were much more foolish than himself. In the end, angry weavers rushed into Foxtrottl's office and occupied the cotton mill. The capitalist grumbled that he himself was actually the most foolish person of the world, and the curtains closed.

This play was originally written upon the request of the puppet theatre in Leipzig. Under the suggestion of Tsuji Tsunehiko 辻恒彦, a student of German literature and activist in Japan's early proletarian literature movement, the puppet play "Wer ist der Dümme?" (Who was the biggest boob?) was selected to be a part of the program of the Ningyōza's (人形座, puppet theatre) first public performance in Tsukiji Little Theatre. Its author, a certain Karl August Wittfogel, was for the first time introduced to the Japanese-speaking writers and intellectuals. Compared to his more eye-catching analysis of the Chinese society, Wittfogel's plays had no more than a peripheral role in history of Weimar Germany's workers' theater<sup>2)</sup> (Arbeitertheater). Nonetheless, following the performance of "Who was the biggest boob?", five of Wittfogel's eleven dramatic works were translated into Japanese during the second half of the 1920s, some of which were even performed on stage in

various circumstances. Until the Japanese proletarian literature movement faced its virtual demolition in the first half of the 1930s, the energetic young Japanese leftists, possessing considerable ability in reading German and having received the Communist baptism, had not only brought several of Wittfogel's dramas to the stage, but also translated a considerable number of his early polemic writings on various topics including Marxist aesthetics, theory of dramatic practice, as well as his analysis of proletarian culture in general. In 1931, as the Japan Proletarian Cultural Federation (Nihon Proletaria Bunka Renmei, or KOPF) was brought into being as a united front of Japan's leftwing organizations in the fields of literature, theatre, music, Esperanto and etc., Wittfogel, together with Maxim Gorki and Lu Xun 鲁迅 was even elected as an "honorary delegate" of the Federation.<sup>3)</sup> It thus seems to be reasonable to presume that Wittfogel's writings on drama may have played a much more significant role in Japan's early development in the field of proletarian dramaturgy than the available historiography tells us.

For better or for worse, the previous studies on Japan's proletarian literature movement have usually been undertaken within the framework of national history and focused primarily on works written by Japanese authors and discourses unfolded among them.<sup>4)</sup> On the other hand, Wittfogel's life and intellectual pursuits mostly laid their attentions on his notorious interpretations of Oriental societies. It remains largely unknown how Wittfogel's long forgotten plays and his undeveloped contemplation of the art of drama had provided his contemporary young literary enthusiasts in East Asia the impetus to reflect on the limits and potentials, the forms and contents of modern theatre. Based on positivistic analysis of Wittfogel's original texts and their Japanese translation, as well as of his contemporary Japanese readers' engagement with these texts, this article discusses the reception of Wittfogel's early literary pursuits in Japan and tries to answer the question, how the early Wittfogel was perceived and introduced to the network of Japanese leftwing intellectuals. By reconstructing the story of how Wittfogel, a Marxist advocator of secondary importance, was made known in Japan, this article tries to outline the networks and processes through which the Japanese leftists of the late 1920s encountered and introduced works of their contemporary German colleagues.

### **Importing a puppet play: The performance "Who was the biggest boob?" in Japan**

Soon after Wittfogel's puppet play "Who was the biggest boob?" had been performed on stage, Tsuji Tsunehiko highly praised its significance in his translator's preface written for the first Japanese edition of the play script. It is worded as follows: "On the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1926, the performance of this play by Ningyōza in Tsukiji Little Theatre had caused unusual influences. It's no exaggeration to say, this performance was an epoch-making moment of the theater history of our country."<sup>5)</sup>

As Tsuji has correctly conceived, 1926 was a crucial year in the history of Japan's modern puppet theatre. In the late Taishō and early Shōwa era, the rising needs of mass entertainment and increasing importation of contemporary European's new trends in art, literature, stagecraft and theater studies gave birth to a modern

form of avant-garde puppet theatre that differentiated radically from the traditional Bunraku 文楽. In large cities, young generations of the elite class began to create puppet theatre groups, as part of their dilettante artistic activity.<sup>6)</sup> Among the numerous dilettante puppet theatre groups that bourgeoned in Japan's urban areas, Ningyōza was the first to arrange a semi-public performance in November 1923. Initiated by the stage designer of Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Itō Kisaku 伊藤熹朔, his younger brother Senda Koreya 千田是也 and a couple of artists and musicians, Ningyōza had been launched in Tokyo in the late Taishō era. With the motto, to “overcome the aesthetic theory on marionettes of Edward Gordon Craig, to save the puppet theater from some artists’ pure amusement and to search for its social significance,”<sup>7)</sup> Ningyōza made a clear distinction to expressionism, which prevailed in Japan’s modern theatrical practices of the Taishō era and emphasizes primarily the emotional experience of people’s inner world. In accordance with Ningyōza’s guiding ideology, which strongly demonstrated the social aspect of the theatre, Tsuji Tsunehiko, a close associate of the group, suggested to produce on stage Wittfogel’s four-act-puppet play “Who was the biggest boob?” at Tsukiji Little Theatre. Tsuji was a determined translator and an “importer of foreign cultural goods” and had vigorously introduced the current trends in Soviet Union and Germany’s theatrical world in modern dramatic journals and leftwing literature magazines such as *Geki to hyōron* 劇と評論, *Senki* 戦旗, *Bungei Sensen* 文芸戦線, *Tsukiji Shōgekijō* 築地小劇場 and so on. Tsuji recalled that as the Ningyōza was to make their public performance for the first time, the associates “rummaged our brains, searching for an appropriate play to present to our audience. I suddenly thought of this grotesque fairy-tale-like play. Though the plot is unrealistic, it’s dense and has vivid irony, its sharp critics on modernity fits a puppet staging perfectly. And I hastily finished the translation, with some necessary modifications.”<sup>8)</sup>

On the day of the public staging, a September evening in Tsukiji Little Theatre, a few leftists such as Sano Seki 佐野碩, Ono Miyakichi 小野宮吉 and Seki Akiko 関鑑子 also joined the casting staff. Including Itō Toshiko 伊藤智子, Senda Koreya, Itō Kisaku and a couple of other associates of Ningyōza, the whole team of voice actors and puppeteers reached 12 actors.<sup>9)</sup> Due to the blatant proletarian bias in the plot, the performance was made semi-open to the public. Its audience was accordingly restricted to a narrow circle of the actors’ families, friends and like-minded acquaintances. Interestingly, the actors’ relatives, most of which belonged to the “bourgeoisie class”, did not necessarily hold the same political commitment as the actors did. The visitors of the actors’ parental generation, mostly bureaucrats of Tokyo’s city government, associates of the Imperial Household Agency, or owners of factories and their valued clients also poured into Tsukiji Shōgekijō, treating the occasion as merely a congregation of young gentlemen’s entertainment. To their



Fig. 2. Backstage of the puppet theater performance “Who is the biggest boob?”

shock and surprise, at the close of the performance, the puppet of old Foxtrottl, the representative of capitalist class, was brutally kicked and trampled by real muddy shoes. Obviously, this radical theatrical expression and the blatant provocation implicated in it had greatly scared parts of its audience. For instance, Senda recalled that his father “seemed to be shocked for the moment. After the performance, he came to warn me that I have to be more cautious. At that time, my dad’s factory had just developed into a rather big one, and a labor union under the direction of Japan Federation of Labor (Nihon Rōdō Sōdōmei) had been established, which had just begun to organize demonstrations and strikes.”<sup>10)</sup>

According to Itō Kisaku’s later memoir, Wittfogel’s “Who was the biggest boob?” had “gained overwhelming support among Japan’s leftwing youths due to the apparent leftist ideology it reveals.”<sup>11)</sup> Its only performance in Tsukiji Little Theatre “was soon taken up in gravure magazines, as a short report piece with color photos and commentary in English, which was rather exceptional for that time’s standard.”<sup>12)</sup> Other contemporary accounts also characterized this three-day-run performance as a great success, a highly welcomed event for those who were ardently watching the unfolding of a new proletarian drama in Japan. Akita Ujaku 秋田雨雀 for example, noted in his diary of 24<sup>th</sup> September 1926 on his visit to the performance in Tsukiji Little Theatre. It is worded as follows: “September 24. Rainy. I planned to catch a glimpse of the recent development of Japan’s puppet theatre and to see how the Ningyōza is doing. In the evening I went to Tsukiji to watch their performances. On the stage was Wittfogel’s ‘Who was the biggest boob?’ This Wittfogel is said to be a Communist. He sought to unveil the authoritarian power structure between the tribal people and their chief, as well as the superstitious nature of China’s religion. He had indicated that those who were maltreated most severely would laugh at the end.”<sup>13)</sup>

Compared to Akita, Senda Koreya, who was actively involved in transforming Tsuji’s script into a more revolutionary and innovative stage performance, showed a more thorough comprehension of the author’s criticism of the capitalist system. For Senda, the intention of this play was to bring out one fact, that “the capitalists enslaved by money and living on labor exploitation, are comparable to the primitive human beings, who are befuddled by heresy and superstition, and much more stupid.”<sup>14)</sup> Senda’s interpretation revealed a general incitement for social reform stimulated by the triumph of the October Revolution and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship in the Soviet Union, a vision shared by leftists across borders. Senda’s ideological preoccupation – here the firm belief that artistic representation should not be valued by its aesthetic sophistication, but by its solicitude of social problems and its political connotation – enabled him to grasp unmistakably the message embedded in the content of Wittfogel’s puppet play, whilst the original author’s reflection on the play’s formalistic configurations remained outside his concern.

The first Japanese partial translation of the play’s script appeared in the October issue of *Geki to hyōron*, in which Tsuji Tsunehiko translated the script of the first scene in the second act. Thereafter, Tsuji deemed the whole script “a representative example for puppet theater and deserves to be kept in a written form”.<sup>15)</sup> He

completed the translation of the script, which was published by Kinseidō as the fifth volume of the book series “Shakai Bungei Sōsho” 社会文芸叢書.<sup>16)</sup> It is worth special mentioning that in the beginning of the volume, a letter written by Wittfogel to Tsuji was made public through the original author’s foreword. Wittfogel wrote to his unknown Japanese reader and translator: “In many parts of the world, my works have related me to other friends and acquaintances, for example, in Great Britain, in Russia and in the United States. But your writing brought me the first message from Japan. It seems that you have studied in Germany? (Following paragraphs omitted due to references to private matters of the translator) And I’d be very glad to hear your comments on my recent work *Das erwachende China*. I’m curious about how such a book would be perceived by people on your island. If you hear something, please drop me a line.”<sup>17)</sup>

### ***Bungei Sengen (Literary Front) as the main stage of Wittfogel’s plays***

At the time when “Who was the biggest boob?” was put on stage in September 1926, the literary circle in Japan, though with a slight delay compared to Europe, experienced a full flourishing of proletarian literature in various forms. A considerable number of communist-flavored literature magazines, such as *Musansha shimbun* 無産者新聞, *Bungei sengen* 文芸戦線, *Bungei shijō* 文芸市場 thrived in Japan after the Great Kantō Earthquake. The drastic upsurge of discussions on the various aspects of a democratized and revolutionized literature, such as materialism and literature, the task and prospect of proletarian literature, the relation of literature to the masses and so forth, was a part of the contemplations in both modern theatrical practices and proletarian drama theory. The severe lack of leading theatrical theory and the Japanese literary youth’s ardent longing for intellectual stimulation from the outside world has been perfectly rendered by Kawaguchi Hiroshi, member of the leftwing literary circle in the Imperial University Tokyo named *Shakai bungei kenkyūkai* 社会文芸研究会. From the viewpoint of a student of German literature, Kawaguchi recalled that in the mid-1920s, “those who read and translated foreign works were seeking with eager eyes for highlights in foreign works and remarkable contributions in theoretical enterprises. They are ransacking all the foreign magazines and new publications.”<sup>18)</sup>

According to Kawaguchi’s reminiscences, in summer of 1926, - before the staging of “Who was the biggest boob?”, Wittfogel’s article entitled “The limitations and tasks of revolutionary stagecraft – basic principles for a revolutionary dramaturgy” came to the attention of young students related to *Shakai bungei kenkyūkai*. This article seemed to be widely spread and hotly debated among the leftwing literary circle in Tokyo University. Originally written in 1923 and published as an appendix to the scripts of another two one-act plays “The Mother” and “The Fugitive” by the well-known leftwing Malik Verlag in Berlin, this was Wittfogel’s first attempt to theoretically intervene in the current debates in Germany about the possible performative and organizational forms of a working class oriented drama. It was first translated into Japanese by Kawaguchi and

published in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> number of *Bungei sensen*'s 1926 volume in the column of "new trends of foreign socialist literature".

In this lengthy article, Wittfogel shed light on the hotly debated question, how should the proletarian drama be freed from the old form of theatrical expression and develop an appropriate form in accordance with its new object of aesthetic contemplation. In the beginning, Wittfogel differentiated between a reformist view on art and a real art revolution. Applying Marxist historical materialism to cultural and literal problems, Wittfogel defined the former as a mere change in the way of artistic expression (*künstlerische Ausdrucksform*) whilst the prevailing mood (*Grundstimmung*) remains unaffected. Expressionism for example, was for him an innovative form based on the old bourgeoisie value proposition. On the contrary, a real art revolution requires forming proletarian revolutionary content in a new language. By differentiating the reformist bourgeois radicals from the authentic revolutionary drama, Wittfogel prompted criticism of the wide-spreading amateur play (*Laienspiel*)<sup>19)</sup> and designated it as "a certain kind of petit bourgeoisie utopianism" since its realization depends merely on the genial director's virtue to awake the aesthetic ability hidden in the masses.<sup>20)</sup> Instead of appreciating *Laienspiel* as an appropriate weapon to strengthen the solidarity of working class, Wittfogel suggested *Massenspiel* (mass play) puppet theater with a satirical plot and small-scale one-act-play with two or three characters as a useful means to be applied in the proletariat's class struggle.

Without knowing exactly at whom the author is referring, Yamada Seizaburō 山田清三郎, a vigorous leftwing essayist and novelist, had made a brief comment about Wittfogel's theoretical contribution in his editorial note in *Bungei sensen*'s next issue. Yamada did not recognize it as an attack against the German democrats and a propaganda-type manifesto for the "correct line" of proletarian drama. To cite his own words, Wittfogel's notion has "explicitly given us the key of solving the now widely debated problem concerning naturalism and expressionism. Wittfogel is not only an outstanding playwright, he is also a renown social scientist and holds an important position in KPD's educational section, as you all know."<sup>21)</sup>

The same article has been retranslated under the title "Kakumei engeki ron" (革命演劇論 On revolutionary drama) by Asō Yoshiteru 麻生義輝, a leftwing activist who was teaching aesthetics at the Imperial College for music. Together with A. Bogdanov's "The criticism of proletarian art" and three other articles, it was inserted into a collected volume entitled *On Proletarian Art* 無産階級芸術論 published also in 1926. Not very different from Yamada, Asō was also ignorant of the actuality of Wittfogel's aesthetic pursuit. In his translator's afterword, Asō praised that Wittfogel was attempting to "pave the way for a specific proletarian art apart from the new romanticism and new aristocracy 貴族性. In these days, both in theoretical endeavor and in literal practices of proletarian writers, this perspective has been widely applied. The European, or more concretely the German socialistic art and literature has already shown progressive developments in the direction which the author has pointed out."<sup>22)</sup>

It seems that both Asō and Yamada failed to understand the real intention of the author, which was



to oppose the “opportunistic and fraudulent” German Social Democrats (SPD), applauding the “typically proletarian art-form” such as *Massenspiel* and *Sprechchor* (speech choir), whilst denouncing the *Laienspiel* as a petit-bourgeoisie utopia, an art-form supported by the SPD. For Asō and Yamada, what a foreign author offers, is not so much simply developing an armchair theory, which may occasionally shed some illuminating light on Japan’s existing theoretical controversy, but was still essentially alien to Japan’s social practices.<sup>23)</sup>

Until 1928, the literary periodical *Bungei Sensen* was the main platform where Japanese translations of Wittfogel’s plays and literary criticisms were published. *Bungei sensen* was a revival of the formerly renowned left literary magazine *Tane maku hito* (種蒔く人, “Planters of Seeds”). Under the motto “standing on the artistic united front of proletarian emancipation”<sup>24)</sup>, the inner circle within *Tane maku hito* had reorganized itself in June 1924 under the new name *Bungei Sensen*. Needless to say, the unmistakably leftwing inclination of *Bungei sensen* made it a suitable platform for Wittfogel’s drama-related writings. However, its leading political ideology alone did not explain how those writings suddenly appeared in the second half of 1920s. Among the inner circle of *Bungei Sensen*, Sano Seki 佐野碩, a young leftwing stage director and known as the Japanese translator of the socialist anthem *The Internationale*, had the most active role in this process of knowledge transmission. Sano showed overwhelming interest in Wittfogel’s writings. As early as September 1926, Sano had participated in a joint review together with Senda Koreya and Yamada Seizaburō among other associates of *Bungei Sensen*, commenting on Wittfogel’s play script of “The Mother” published in the last number of the magazine. Sano highly praised this one-act-play as “thoroughly adapted in the reality of the labor movement and thus has a strong appeal to the proletariat”<sup>25)</sup>. For Sano, Wittfogel’s “reductionism in the actor’s lines in contrast to its complicated plot definitely marks the writer’s artistic skillfulness”. Moreover, according to Sano, the most illuminating element of Wittfogel’s play for the Japanese proletarian writers, was that he, “as an intellectual affiliated to the KPD, could feel and act exactly the same way as the toiling masses did. Only in grasping the spirit of the working class’ readiness for resistance, and transcending it into a higher form of a common class-consciousness of the proletariat, could the proletarian writers reach their goal of awakening the masses and stimulating a real proletarian revolution.”

In 1927, Sano not only introduced a couple of Wittfogel’s writing in *Bungei Sensen*, he also actively engaged in bringing Wittfogel’s plays to the stage. Except for his participation as narrator and stage designer in the performance of “Who is the biggest boob?”, Sano’s interest focused primarily on two of Wittfogel’s “small theaters”, namely “The Fugitive” and “The Skyscraper”. The former was a one-act-play published by Malik Verlag in 1923. It consisted of 7 telephone conversations and constructed vividly a prison break story of a young revolutionary activist “Neils Ypsilon”, who in the end decided to return to the prison, in order not to protect the severely damaged party organization. Neils’ lines “I understand, a class is like a flower, if nurtured by the blood of voluntary victims, it will flourish in the most compelling way”<sup>26)</sup> explicitly voices the quasi-religious ideology of self-sacrifice and the individual’s unconditional devotion to the welfare of the masses, a

dominating motif in most of Wittfogel's plays.

The short play "The Skyscraper" resembled "The Fugitive" both in its simple structure and its nature as the blatant agitation of the proletariat. This time, the protagonist Eveline Hunter, a sympathizer of the labor movement who at the same time works for the intelligence agency of the authorities, triggered the dynamite in her own room on the 46<sup>th</sup> floor of a skyscraper in Chicago to attack an enemy airship passing by. Shouting loudly "the welfare for all goes beyond the happiness of a single individual"<sup>27</sup>), the protagonist died in the resulting fire.

In 1927, "The Fugitive" and "The Skyscraper" had been brought to the stage several times by Sano during the "Trunk Theater" group's public performances. Trunk Theater, or Toranku Gekijō トランク劇場 was an acting group initiated by members of drama section of Nihon Puroretaria Bungei Renmei (日本プロレタリア文芸連盟, Japan League for Proletarian Art and Literature, abbreviated as Puroren), the first united front of Japan's leftwing writers, actors and musicians. As its name already indicated, Trunk Theater was usually a small group with modest costume and stage settings, aiming at small-scale performance for the working class where it was needed. On May 10<sup>th</sup> 1927, the Trunk Theater had performed Wittfogel's "The Fugitive" for the event "Musansha no yū" (無産者の夕, The Evening of Proletariat), the anniversary celebration for the most prominent socialist newspaper *Musansha Shimbun* 無産者新聞 in Tokyo's Shiba park. In May 1927, Sano also performed "The Fugitive" as a monodrama in Tsurumi-vaudeville (May 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>) and Ueno community hall (May 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>). On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, as Trunk Theater's performed at the tea party at the headquarters of Kantō Electric Company, Sano again brought Wittfogel's "The Skyscraper" on the stage. Sano seemed to have an extraordinary interest in these two pieces of one-man-plays and had even planned to insert them into the program of their Tōhoku-Hokkaidō tour and the drama section's own memorial performance for the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution in the same year. Yet Sano's plan had not been brought to fruition because the authorities' police and security department banned both the tour and the memorial event.

Soon after that, the Japanese proletarian literature witnessed turbulent splitting and reorganization of leftwing writers as a result of their conflicting attitudes toward the relationship between the party authorities and art organizations. In June 1927, the core members of *Bungei sensen*, including Aono Suekichi 青野季吉, Kaneko Yōbun 金子洋文, Kurahara Korehito 蔵原惟人 and other like-minded, who followed the more moderate line generated by Yamakawaism, withdrew from the Fukumotoism-oriented Japan League of Proletarian Art (Purogei) and reorganized themselves as League of Art for Workers and Peasants (Rōnō Geijutsu Renmei, abbreviated as Rōgei). They advocated the autonomous value of art and emphasized the alliance of intellectuals with the masses, whilst the Purogei artists and writers insisted that the primary value of proletarian literature and art was its supporting role in the class struggle. During the split, the former drama section of Purogei, now reorganized as Avant-Garde Theater (Zen'ei-za, 前衛座), joined Rōgei in June. In November, the Rōgei split again due to the inner dissension concerning whether or not to publish one of Yamakawa Hitoshi's articles.

A good number of Rōgei's members, especially the members of Avant-Garde Theater including Wittfogel's translators Kawaguchi Hiroshi and Tsuji Tsunehiko denounced Yamakawa's standpoint as eclecticism and attacked Aono and other camp fellows following Yamakawaism to be a "revolutionary block which cannot catch up with the recent revolutionary progress anymore". In November, the oppositional majority organized themselves as Vanguard Artists League (Zen'ei Geijutsuka Dōmei 前衛芸術家同盟, abbreviated as Zengei 前芸).

The withdrawal from *Bungei sensen* of Sano Seki, Tsuji Tsunehiko and Kawaguchi Hiroshi, the three most vigorous introducers of Wittfogel's endeavors as a playwright and literary critic explained to a certain extent why Wittfogel's name almost disappeared from *Bungei Sensen* after 1927. Except for three brief partial translations of his serial writing on Marxist aesthetics published originally in *Linkskurve*, Wittfogel was never in the presence of *Bungei Sensen's* audience again until the magazine was abolished in 1934.

#### **Hijikata Teiichi 土方定一 and the Controversy over Marxist aesthetics**

At the same time in Frankfurt, Wittfogel was captivated by the break down of the first united front between the Chinese Communists and the Chinese Nationalists and engaged vigorously in the debates concerning the materialistic basis and the law of motion of the Chinese society. From 1927 to 1930, his writings were primarily an analysis and prognosis of the current situation of the defeated Chinese revolution. After he moved his residence to Berlin in August 1929, Wittfogel came close to the radical literati and became a prominent member of the BPRS<sup>28)</sup> (Association of Proletarian-Revolutionary Authors). Nevertheless, except for his serial editorial on Marxist aesthetics published in BPRS's periodical *Die Linkskurve* in the summer-fall edition in 1930, Wittfogel's concern on the current proletarian cultural movement was very limited.

This serial, with seven installments<sup>29)</sup> was a critical response to August Thalheimer's introduction written for Franz Mehring's collective writings on literature edited by Eduard Fuchs and published in 1929.<sup>30)</sup> In his introduction, Thalheimer agreed with Mehring that the beauty "pleases human's feeling through its pure form". Thalheimer considered the writers, artists and intelligentsia as an "unproductive" part of economic life, and their endeavor therefore is highly dependent on the surplus value produced by the whole society's economy. Thalheimer then came to the conclusion that in the preparatory phase for the socialist revolution, the proletarian art and literature was with only secondary importance compared with pragmatic struggles for political and economic dominance. The role of proletarian art, according to Thalheimer's understanding of the current state of affairs, is nothing but a minor one.

In his attack on Thalheimer's unconditional commitment to the Kantian "formalistic and idealistic" aesthetics, Wittfogel accused the former for failing to recognize the materialistic aspect of Mehring's treatment on aesthetics. Relying on Hegel, Wittfogel insisted that the true task of the art was "to bring the highest interests of spirits to our minds. From this it follows at once that, so far as content is concerned, fine art cannot range in

wild unfettered fancy, since these spiritual interests set firm stopping-places to it for its content, no matter how multifarious and inexhaustible its forms and configurations."<sup>31)</sup> The form as well, is not to be arbitrarily chosen, because "not every artistic configuration is capable of expressing and displaying those interests, of absorbing and reproducing them; on the contrary, by a definite content the form appropriate to it is also made definite."<sup>32)</sup>

Applying Hegel's treatment on the relation between form and content in a materialistic and highly simplified way, Wittfogel transformed Hegel's concept of "interest of spirit" (*Interesse des Geistes*) into the materialistic concept of social and political struggles generated from the respective conditions of productive forces. The object of the art, or its content and material, is extracted from the experiences of social and political struggles. As far as class societies exist, all kinds of art are nothing but *Klassenkunst*, and therefore the contents and artistic forms of the ruling class are prevalent in any given class society. The attempt of challenging the art of the dominant class and establishing a new one with its specific content and form is a typical expression of class struggle in the sphere of art.<sup>33)</sup>

In Japan during the same period, the proletarian literature movement was only characterized by a serial of diverging debates, such as the debate over the form and content (内容形式論争), the debate on the popularization of art (芸術大衆化論争) and the debate about artistic values of proletarian literature (芸術価値論争). Within the debate over form and content, known as Keishikishugi Bungaku ronnsô (形式主義文学論争, debate over formalistic literature), Wittfogel's pursuit of a Marxist aesthetic appeared first in a partial translation in *Bungei sensen* in the late summer of 1930.<sup>34)</sup> The lack of resonance from Japanese literati seems to bespeak that it did not escape a very different fate than its contemporary in Germany<sup>35)</sup>, and the majority of his contemporary Japanese leftists largely ignored Wittfogel's contemplation on aesthetics. The only person who had shown an extraordinary interest in Wittfogel's views on Marxist aesthetics was Hijitaka Teiichi, later a prominent figure in Japan's art historiography.

Born in 1904 in Gifu Prefecture, Hijikata began his study of art history at the Imperial University Tokyo in 1927. After finishing his bachelor thesis on Hegel's aesthetics, Hijikata traveled to Berlin in May 1930 and established contact with the members of the Japanese leftwing circle in Berlin. It remains unknown whether or not Hijikata had any personal contact with Wittfogel, but he was certainly very familiar with articles printed in Germany's main magazines run by leftwing literature circles such as *Linkskurve*, *Der Rote Aufbau*, *Die Rote Fahne*, *Moskauer Rundschau* and alike. After Hijikata returned to Japan in 1931 due to his tuberculosis, he translated and edited a collective volume of articles published in German-speaking journals for the Second International Conference of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers held in Kharkov in November 1930. Interestingly, except for essays from Otto Biha and F. C. Weiskopf, representatives of the German delegation in the Kharkov conference, Hijikata also included an article of Wittfogel entitled "Cultural Crisis (*Kulturkrise*)", which predicted the destined economic and cultural decay of Europe's imperialistic powers and suggested the Socialism of the Soviet mode to be the only way for Weimar Germany to get itself out from the current double

crisis. Though Wittfogel did not attend the Kharkov conference, Hijikata translated this agitated writing and included it in his volume for the reason that Wittfogel “was one of the most outstanding theoreticians in the BPRS.”<sup>36)</sup>

In the first two years of the 1930s, Hijikata translated another two articles of Wittfogel’s<sup>37)</sup>. He also made clear his intellectual debt to Wittfogel in his first systematic treatment of Hegelian aesthetics: “The first one who scrutinized Hegel’s aesthetics and sought to establish a materialistic aesthetic based on it must be G. Plekhanov. However, Plekhanov’s contemplation of this problem was fragmental and unsystematic. Recently, Wittfogel’s article series opposing Thalheimer’s introduction to Franz Mehring’s selective works has contributed greatly in developing Hegel’s aesthetics in the direction of historical materialism. My current work owes a lot to Wittfogel.”<sup>38)</sup>

For example, in his attempt of reinterpreting Hegel’s idealistically reversed materialism, Hijikata relied on Wittfogel’s rhetoric methodology of giving Hegel a materialistic tone and took Hegel’s hymn to the Dutch painters’ artistic perfection. For Hijikata, Hegel’s claim that the treatment of a man’s inner nature was the poetical fundamental trait of most Dutch painters was not sufficient. Since the *Gestalt* of a masterpiece was not an abstract and timeless representation of human nature, but “an objective reality which was determined by its time and affected by certain social and class-related circumstances.”<sup>39)</sup> On some other places, Hijikata directly quoted Wittfogel’s interpretation of Hegel. When referring Hegel’s laudation of the heroic and pure Greek spirit generated from the Greeks’ immutable and substantial individuality, Hijikata accused Hegel’s posing the historical development as the process of perfecting the beautiful and eternal individuality. To strengthen his counterargument against Hegel’s idealistic interpretation of the greatness of the Greek art, Hijikata quoted Wittfogel’s materialistic interpretation of human being’s discovery of themselves: “It was not the completed perfection of individuality, which provides the art its great themes, but the heroic epoch itself. In this epoch, people began to recognize for the first time the joy of new discoveries, the joy of possessing new things, the joy of permitting themselves to new indulgence. All of these began to be made known by man. The man began to realize the power of his body, the dexterity of his hands, the intelligence of his mind, his bravery and so on.”<sup>40)</sup>

## Conclusion

Nowadays, the above-mentioned writings of Wittfogel concerning proletarian literature and aesthetics are not mentioned anymore in scholarly pursuits on Japan’s proletarian literary movement of the late 1920s and early 1930s, though his name still occasionally appears in some of his contemporary Japanese activists’ memoirs as well as in their biographies *en passant*. The account of the historical processes of how Wittfogel’s articles on art and literature have been introduced in Japan, as the present chapter has shown, reveals some specific features of the process of reception. First of all, these writings had been translated and selected by the author’s contemporary like-minded readers from another linguistic area. In this particular milieu, in which

the cross-border intellectual flows were undertaken primarily through the strong transnational cooperation between the party organizations of the respective countries/areas, the reputation that Wittfogel enjoyed, above all his official position in his home party organization played a significant role when his foreign readers and introducers made their selection. A number of Japan's leftwing literati such as Kawaguchi Hiroshi, Tsuji Tsunehiko, Sano Seki, Hijikata Teichi had contributed to translating the writings of Wittfogel on proletarian literature. However, there was no representative introducer, who intensively engaged in translating and interpreting a certain foreign author's works. In the end, Wittfogel's literary writings have neither generated any opposing view, nor have they evoked a systematic debate.

## NOTES

- 1 ) On Tsukiji Shōgekijō see Brian Powell, Japan's first modern theater. The Tsukiji Shōgekijō and its company 1924-26. *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 30, no. 1 (spring 1975), pp. 69-85.
- 2 ) The engagement of reexamining the leftwing theatrical movement during Weimar Germany has been monopolized by DDR's ideologues for a long time after the end of the WWII. It was not until Helga Gallas's revision of the development of Marxist literature theory among the BPRS members indicated that Wittfogel's critique of the field of aesthetics and literature theory was for the first time brought to light. See Helga Galls, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie. Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*. Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1971.
- 3 ) "Taishū no soko made tō no seishin wo shinjun, bunpitsu o tsūjite takumi na senden," *Osaka Asahi Shimbun*, Apr. 10<sup>th</sup> 1932.
- 4 ) There are three overviewing descriptions on the rise and decay of Japan's proletarian literature movement, particularly on the development of the modern theatrical theories and practices: Yamada Seizaburō, *Puroretaria Bungakushi*. Rironsha, 1968. Kurihara Yukio, *Puroretaria Bungaku to sono jidai*. Heibonsha, 1971. Brian Powell, *Japan's modern theatre: a century of change and continuity*. Japan Library, 2002.
- 5 ) See Tsuji Tsunehiko, "The translator's preface," in Wittfogel (translated by Tsuji Tsunehiko), *Dare ga ichiban baka da*. Kinseidō, 1927, pp. 1-3.
- 6 ) Katō Akiko, *Nihon no ningyōgeki 1867—2007*, Hōsei daigaku shuppansha, 2007, p. 52.
- 7 ) Fujita Fujio, "1920 nendai no Itō Kisaku," in *Kokubungaku*, vol. 48, no. 5, p. 98.
- 8 ) See Tsuji Tsunehiko, ed. cit., pp. 1-3.
- 9 ) Other participants included: Ōhashi Takeji, Itō Toshiko, Magario Mitsuaki, Senda Koreya, Kawamura Kunishige, Kimura Tarō, Sano Seki, Itō Kisaku, Kawada Ku, Nozaki Tatsurō, etc. See Takizawa Kyōji, "Bijutsu no shinshutsu: Ningyōza ni miru taishō shinkō bijutsu undo no yōtai," in *Ritsumei gengo bunga kenkyū*, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 17-33.
- 10) Senda Koreya, *Mō hitotsu no shingekishi: Senda Koreya jiden*. Chikuma Shobō, 1975, pp. 116f.
- 11) Itō Kisaku, "Mokusan Migoto ni hazureta Karuizawa no ningyō kōen," in *Tokyō shimbun* (evening edition), September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1969.
- 12) Memories of Katami Eimei (瀧見英明), the founder and director of the library for puppet theater in Ōtsu. Cited from Katō, p. 55.
- 13) Ozaki Hirotsugu (ed.), *Akita Ujaku nikki, vol. I*, Miraisha, 1965, p. 435.

- 14) Senda Koreya, ed. cit., p. 116.
- 15) Tsuji Tsunehiko, ed. cit., pp. 1-3.
- 16) In 1928, the complete translation of “Who was the biggest boob?” was selected together with Gerhart Hauptmann’s “Florian Geyer”, Carl Sternheim’s “Bürger Schippel” and Lu Märten’s “Bergarbeiter” in the 18th volume (volume of German literature) of Heibonsha’s series “Shin bungaku zenshū” (collection of new literature). Two years later, the Kinseidō version of the complete translation was reprinted and selected as the 8th volume of Heibonsha’s series for proletarian literature “Sekai puroretaria kessaku senshū”. Moreover, the Japanese-educated Chinese writer Tao Jingsun 陶晶孫, who was greatly fascinated by Japan’s leftwing literature has produced the first Chinese translation of “Who is the biggest boob?” based on Tsuji’s Japanese version in the literary monthly Dazhong Wenyi 大眾文藝. Among all of Wittfogel’s engagement as a playwright and literary critic, Tao’s translation was the only one made known to the Chinese literati.
- 17) Tsuji Tsunehiko, ed. cit., p.4.
- 18) Kawaguchi Hiroshi, *Bungaku undo no naka ni ikite: waga seishun no kaisō*, Chuo daigaku shuppanbu, 1971, p. 146.
- 19) *Laienspiel* originated in the nationalistic youth movement in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. It was carried out by working and middle class youths and functioned as a demonstration against the modern industrial civilization. Unlike *Dilettantenspiel* (amateur play), which was merely a brusque replacement of professional theater, the *Laienspiel* sought to make clear the identity of amateur play. Instead of imitating professional theater, *Laienspiel* often utilized motifs of medieval mysteries, danse macrabe, Easter Passion play, Shrovetide play and other folk theater, and was usually performed in a simplistic style in the open air. After 1918, the theatrical association *Freie Volksbühne* (FVB), closely linked with the Social Democratic Party, deemed the *Laienspiel* as an effective means for promoting the class-consciousness and establishing a community culture among the working class proletariat.
- 20) K. A. Wittfogel, “Grenzen und Aufgaben der revolutionären Bühnenkunst”, in *Die Mutter, Der Flüchtling (Zwei Einakter)*, Malik Verlag, 1922, pp.43-44.
- 21) Yamada Seizaburō, editorial notes, *Bungei sensen*, vol.3, no. 4, 1926, p. 69.
- 22) Asō Yoshiteru, “The translator’s foreword”, *Musan kaikyū geijutsu ron*, jinbunkai shuppansha, 1926, p. 2.
- 23) By 1930, five of Wittfogel’s eleven plays had been translated into Japanese. These include: “The Mother” (translated by Kawaguchi Hiroshi, *Bungei sensen*, vol. 3, no. 9, 1926), Who was the biggest boob? (translated by Tsuji Tsunehiko, Kinseidō, 1927), “The Fugitive” (translated by Sano Seki and Suzuki Ryōzō, *Puroretaria Geijutsu*, vol.1, no. 2, 1927), “The Skyscraper” (translated by Sano Seki and Ema Sadao, *Bungei Sensen*, vol. 4, no. 5, 1927), and “The Man with one Idea” (translated by Tōjō Tadao, Isukura kaku, 1929). Furthermore, five of Wittfogel’s literary critical pieces and his scrutiny of proletarian culture were known among Japanese leftist intellectuals and activists: “The limitations and tasks of revolutionary stagecraft” (translated by Kawaguchi Hiroshi, *Bungei Sensen*, vol. 3, no. 4/5, 1926), “Bernard Shaw” (translated by Sano Seki, *Bungei Sensen*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1927), “Questions on Marxist aesthetics” (translated by Nagano Kenichirō, *Bungei Sensen*, vol. 5, no. 7/8/9), “Novels on the Imperialistic War” (translator unknown, *Puroretaria kagaku*, vol. 2, no. 10, 1930), and “Developmental stages and efficacy of proletarian-revolutionary cultural activities” (translator unknown, *Shisō*, no. 107).
- 24) See “Bungei sensen sha dōjin oyobi kōryō kiyaku” in *Nihon puroretaria bungaku taikai*, vol. II, Sanichi shobō, 1954, p. 193.
- 25) Hisaita Eijirō, Mizuno Masatsugu, Sano Seki, Senda Koreya, Tani Hajime, Yamada, Seizaburō, “Zengō no sakuhin kara,” in *Bungei sensen*, vol. 3, no. 10, p. 77.

- 26) K. A. Wittfogel, *Die Mutter, Der Flüchtling*. Der Malik-Verlag, 1923, p. 37.
- 27) K. A. Wittfogel, *Der Wolkenkratzer, amerikanischer Sketch*, Malik Verlag 1924, p. 14.
- 28) On Wittfogel's reunion with Berlin's leftwing writer organizations see G. L. Ulmen, *The Science of Society, towards an Understanding of the Life and Work of Karl August Wittfogel*, Mouton, 1978, pp. 105f.
- 29) These seven installments include: "Zur Frage der marxistischen Ästhetik," in *Linkskurve*, vol. 2, no. 5 (May), no. 6 (June), "Weiteres zur Frage einer marxistischen Ästhetik," in *Linkskurve*, vol. 2, no. 7 (July), no. 8 (August), "Nochmals zur Frage einer marxistischen Ästhetik," in *Linkskurve* vol. 2, no. 9 (September), "Noch einmal zur Frage einer marxistischen Ästhetik," in *Linkskurve* vol. 10 (Oct.), no. 11 (Nov.).
- 30) See Franz Mehring, *Gesammelte Schriften und Aufsätze, vol. II: Zur Literaturgeschichte*, edited by Eduard Fuchs, Soziologische Verlagsanstalt, 1929.
- 31) *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on fine art*. Translated by T. M. Knox, vol. I, p. 13.
- 32) Ibid.
- 33) K. A. Wittfogel, "Weiteres zur Frage einer marxistischen Ästhetik," in *Linkskurve*, vol. 2, no. 7, pp. 23-24.
- 34) See K. A. Wittfogel, (translated by Nagano Kenichirō), "Marukusu shugi bigaku no mondai," in *Bungei sensen*, vol. 7, no. 7, 8, 9.
- 35) Helga Gallas quite rightly showed that even in *Linkskurve*, the periodical of BPRS (Association of Proletarian-Revolutionary Authors) where Wittfogel's treatment of aesthetics was published, there was no resonance from German speaking writers to his series. See Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie. Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*. Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1971, p. 54.
- 36) Yai Sanichi (penname of Hijikata Teiichi), "Yakusha no reigen," in *Harikofu kaigi no hōkoku sono ta*, Mokusei sha shoin, 1931, p. 2.
- 37) These two articles are: K. A. Wittfogel (translated by Hijikata Teiichi), "Geijutsu rironka toshite no furantsu meeringu," in *Kikan hihyō*, July number, 1937. K. A. Wittfogel (translated by Hijikata Teiichi), "Geete no 'matsuri'?" in Ōtsuka Kinnosuke (ed.) *Geete kenkyū, Ryūshōkaku*, 1932.
- 38) Hijikata Teiichi, Heegeru bigaku: Yuibutsuron bigaku he no kiyo, Mokusei sha shoin, 1932, pp. 8f.
- 39) Ibid., p. 26f.
- 40) K. A. Wittfogel, "Weiteres zur Frage einer marxistischen Ästhetik," in *Die Linkskurve*, vol. 2, no. 8, p. 16, cited in *ibid.*, p. 121.



## ワイマール期プロレタリア演劇の日本受容 —— K.A. ウィットフォーゲルの作品を中心に

周 雨霏

### 論文要旨

本稿は日本におけるK. A. ウィットフォーゲル劇作、文芸理論の受容史を取り上げる。二十年代前半、ドイツ共産党機関誌『赤旗』の文芸欄編集担当を務めていたウィットフォーゲルは一連の演劇作品を発表し、マルクス主義的美学をめぐる論争にも積極的に関わっていて、ワイマール期における社会主義文学運動の中で重要な担い手となっている。1926年、ウィットフォーゲルの風刺劇「誰が一番馬鹿か？」が東京築地小劇場で上演されたのは、彼の名が初めて日本で脚光を浴びた時である。二十年代半ばから三十年代初頭にかけて、辻恒彦、川口浩などドイツ文学者をはじめとする左翼文筆家や文芸理論家の翻訳・紹介によって、ウィットフォーゲルの劇本作品4点、文学・美学理論作10点が日本で公にされたことからみて、日本の初期プロレタリア文学運動の中で、彼の作品と理論が与えた反響は無視できない存在だったと思われる。

本稿において、ウィットフォーゲルの文学作品・文学理論が日本で紹介された経緯について、歴史的に考証する。そして、それらテキストが再文脈化された過程において、新たな言語・社会的コンテクストの変化の中で果たす新たな機能を検証する。このように、日本の左翼文芸運動における国際的要因に光を当てることによって、左翼文学に関する叙述は如何に「一国史」の限界を越えるかについて、新たな可能性を提示していきたい。

### キーワード

ウィットフォーゲル、プロレタリア演劇、左翼文学運動、新興人形劇、思想受容史