

Madman Narratives in East Asia: A Comparative Study of Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki Under Modernity Anxiety

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Abstracts. This study takes Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' and Natsume Soseki's 'I am a Cat' as the target of the 'madman' narrative, and based on the context of modernity anxiety in East Asia, we use textual close reading and cross-cultural comparison to explore the differences in the paths of the critique of Western modernity between the two. The analysis reveals that in the face of the common dilemma of Western modernity in East Asia, there is a need for a more comprehensive analysis of Western modernity. The analysis reveals that in the face of the common dilemma of 'colonial modernity' in East Asia from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Lu Xun The analysis reveals that in the face of the common dilemma of 'colonial modernity' in East Asia from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Lu Xun focused on the deconstruction of Confucian ethical violence, while Soseki concentrate on the problem of alienation in civilisation transplantation, respectively constructing the dual perspectives Lu Xun focused on the deconstruction of Confucian ethical violence, while Soseki concentrate on the problem of alienation in civilization transplantation, respectively constructing the dual perspectives of 'cultural gene critique' and 'diagnosis of civilisation The critique of the two constitutes the basis for the conceptualization of civilization. The critique of the two constitutes a double mirror image of the dialogue on modernity in East Asia - Lu Xun reveals the violent nature of traditional culture's self-alienation, as well as the need for a 'cultural gene critique' and a 'diagnosis of civilisation pathology'. The critique of the two constitutes a double mirror image of the dialogue on modernity in East Asia - Lu Xun reveals the violent nature of traditional culture's self-alienation, and Soseki exposes the crisis of subjectivity caused by the transplantation of civilisation. Paradigm of 'influence-reception' and proposes the 'madman' narrative as a methodology, which not only provides a critical path for the late-developed countries to deal with the tension between tradition and modernity, but also contributes to the Eastern perspective to be alert to the cultural and economic impact of civilization. Eastern perspective to be alert to the cultural colonisation in globalisation.

keywords: Lu Xun; Natsume Soseki; Critique of Modernity; Madman Narrative; Comparative East Asian Literature

1. Introduction

This paper takes Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' and Natsume Soseki's 'I am a Cat' as the object of study, focusing on the differences in their critical paths in the context of the anxieties of East Asian modernity. This paper takes Lu Xun's 'Diary of a Madman' and Natsume Soseki's 'I am a Cat' as the object of study, focusing on the differences in their critical paths in the context of the anxieties of East Asian modernity. First of all, it is necessary to clarify the core concept of 'anxiety of modernity in East Asia', which refers to the collective spiritual crisis that arose in the process of colonial modernity in East Asian countries. First of all, it is necessary to clarify the core concept of 'anxiety of modernity in East Asia', which refers to the collective spiritual crisis that arose in the process of colonial modernity in East Asian countries from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, and its essence is the dilemma of identity triggered by the collision of traditional civilisation system and the Western discourse of modernity. This concept contains three dimensions. Western colonial expansion forced countries such as China and Japan to complete within a few decades a modernisation transformation that would have taken hundreds of years, thus triggering the development of a modern civilization. Taken hundreds of years, thus triggering a structural conflict between the traditional value system and the rational principles of modernity, and thus triggering a structural conflict between the traditional value system and the rational principles

of modernity, and creating a deep-seated fear among the people of the loss of their cultural subject position in the transplantation of civilisation. Reflected in the works of famous writers Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki.

One important similarity between Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun, as 'national writers' in Japan and China, is that both of them have made extensive and penetrating analyses of national inferiority in their works. The use of novels to observe nationalism was a common angle of scrutiny for both Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun, and their critiques of this kind were linked to the general goal of strengthening the national state and were, therefore, admired by the nationals of both countries. [1] However, the inclusion of Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki in the same field of study is not only because they share the status of 'national' but also because they were not included in the same field of study. That they share the status of 'national writers' in the history of literature also stems from the deep-rooted dialogue on the experience of modernity in East Asia latent in their creations. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Western colonial expansion forced China and Japan into the historical, cultural, and political realm. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Western colonial expansion forced China and Japan into the historical vortex of 'colonial modernity'. Lu Xun was in the throes of the transformation of semi-colonial Chinese society in the late Qing Dynasty, while Natsume Soseki experienced the impact of the 'civilization and enlightenment.' Lu Xun was in the throes of the transformation of semi-colonial Chinese society in the late Qing Dynasty, while Natsume Soseki experienced the impact of the 'civilisation and enlightenment' of Meiji Japan on traditional society. During the period of social transformation from the perspective of a 'madman', but there are significant differences in Both writers examine the cultural conflicts during the period of social transformation from the perspective of a 'madman', but there are significant differences in their critical paths.

Against this background, Chinese and Japanese academics have produced fruitful independent research on the two, but there is an obvious gap in systematic comparative research. Domestic studies of Lu Xun have mostly focused on his association with Russian literature and the Japanese 'Birch School', while Japanese academics have confined themselves to unidirectional analyses. Domestic studies of Lu Xun have mostly focused on his association with Russian literature and the Japanese 'Birch School', while Japanese academics have confined themselves to unidirectional analyses within the framework of the 'Critique of Meiji Civilization'. The existing sporadic comparisons have been made in the context of the 'Critique of Meiji Civilisation'. The existing sporadic comparative studies are either limited to historical evidence or confined to comparison of narrative techniques, failing to touch upon the core proposition of the 'critique of modernity'. In particular, there is a lack of theoretical perspectives based on an 'East Asian' approach, which has led to the comparison of transnational literatures falling into the category of 'modernity'. In particular, there is a lack of theoretical perspectives based on an 'East Asian' approach, which has led to the comparison of transnational literatures falling into a positivist mould. This paper breaks through the traditional 'influence-reception' paradigm and places Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki in the co-temporal framework of the anxiety of modernity in East Asia, revealing their differentiated critiques of Enlightenment. Differentiated critiques of Enlightenment rationality and the linear view of the history of progress through a close reading of the texts and providing new methodological possibilities for the reconstruction of the regional literary community.

2. The Historical Context of the Anxiety of Modernity

In the mid-to-late 19th century, the colonial expansion of the Western powers forced East Asian societies into a process of modernization. China and Japan chose different paths to cope with

similar external shocks: the Qing government initiated the 'Foreign Affairs Movement'. Japan chose different paths to cope with similar external shocks: the Qing government initiated the 'Foreign Affairs Movement' after the two Opium Wars in an attempt to maintain its rule through reforms at the material level, while Japan implemented the strategy of 'leaving Asia and entering Europe' through the 'World War II'. 'leaving Asia and entering Europe' through the Meiji Restoration, which led to the transformation of the country through the restructuring of its institutions. This differentiated trajectory of modernization has profoundly influenced the intellectual experience of intellectuals in both countries. This differentiated trajectory of modernization has profoundly influenced the intellectual experience of intellectuals in both countries.

Lu Xun (1881-1936) grew up in a period of transition that was characterized by violent social upheavals: the failure of the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898 exposed the corruption of the Qing court system; the abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905 cut off the promotion path of traditional scholars; and the warlord wars that followed the 1911 Revolution exacerbated social disorder. As a graduate of the Jiangnan Shui Shi Academy and the Mining Road Academy, Lu Xun was exposed to Western scientific knowledge at an early age, but the intellectual community on the eve of the founding of New Youth was generally in a state of spiritual confusion. The "lonely new literary garden, peaceful old battlefield" he described in *Scream-Preface* (Nahan zixu) is a true depiction of the uncertain state of mind of intellectuals at the time of the alternation of the old and new cultures.

Natsume Soseki's (1867-1916) career was marked by the rise and fall of Meiji Japan: his admission to the English Department of Tokyo Imperial University in 1884 enabled him to experience the wave of Westernization during the "Kagamikan Diplomacy", and his study tour to England in 1900 as one of the first foreign students of the Ministry of Education witnessed the realities of the industrial civilization's alienation of human nature. After returning to Japan, he worked at the Tokyo Higher Teachers' Training School, where he had a close-up view of the suppression of traditional culture by the Meiji education system. This cultural experience, spanning East and West, led him to make the poignant assertion that "civilization is sick" in his *Essay on Literature*, which laid the groundwork for the creation of *I Am a Cat*.

The special life trajectories of these two writers have shaped their different critical perspectives: Lu Xun's experience of studying in Japan enabled him to witness the humiliation of his semi-colonial compatriots in the colonial sovereign state, and to form a nationalistic criticism of "lamenting their misfortune and enraging their indifference to struggle"; while Natsume Soseki's stay in the United Kingdom enabled him to reflect on the paradoxes of modernity at the center of the empire, and to develop a system of aesthetics critique of "impersonalism". This kind of ideological distinction based on localized experience makes their "madman" narratives not only share the undertones of the anxiety of modernity in East Asia but also present a unique cultural symptom. Lu Xun, for example, attaches more importance to the social utility of literature than Natsume Soseki, i.e., literature is not only to influence the society as a whole, but also to achieve the effect of improving the society by "breaking the peace of the filth and making the humanity evaporate".[2]

3. Comparison of the Image of the "Madman" in the Text

3.1 Narrative Strategies: Unreliable Narratives vs. Spectator Satire

Characterization relies on the author's narrative style in the text, and at this level, Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki present very different literary performances. In *Diary of a Madman*, Lu Xun creatively utilizes a dual narrative structure, creating cognitive tension through the textual tear between the literary preface and the vernacular text. The preface in the third person declares that the madman "has recovered and is waiting to be replaced somewhere," implying his return to the "normal" order, but the vernacular text unfolds from the madman's first-person point of view,

revealing the violent nature of the feudal ethic through the accusation of cannibalism, the re-reading of history, and other unconventional thinking. Wayne Booth, in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, points out that "the ultimate purpose of unreliable narration is to make the reader a co-conspirator in the truth", and that this "unreliable narration" forces the reader to re-examine the narrator's value judgments in the text, and ultimately to discover that This "unreliable narrative" forces the reader to re-examine the narrator's value judgment in the text, and ultimately to realize that the "madman" is the real sober one. In addition, the madman in the text is both the object of observation of the reader and the subject of the narrative, and his "crazy words" become a cognitive tool to help the reader break through conventional thinking. Through the maniac's tracing of the history of "cannibalism", the text realizes the sublimation of criticism from individual illness to collective unconsciousness. This narrative design enables enlightenment and criticism to directly affect the reader's cognition, forming a strong intellectual tremor.

In contrast, Natsume Soseki's narrative in *I Am a Cat* is more subtle. The novel uses the observation of a cat to link the family scenes of Bitter Saya and the fragments of society. The whole novel does not have a clear and coherent timeline or a complete storyline with a coherent beginning and end, but almost all of the fragments take place in Bitter Saya's house. Thus, through the aggregation function of the space of Bitter Saya's house, the structural creation of the novel is accomplished, and the satire on the social ills and the vulgarity and boredom of the characters is also displayed in such a spatial construction. [3] Cat not only participates in the daily conversations of Bitter Saya and others but also maintains a transcendent attitude, overlooking the comical group of Japanese intellectuals in the Meiji period as a "bystander", and completes the value judgment by means of detailed descriptions rather than direct judgments. For example, the portrayal of Mr. and Mrs. Kaneda's visit to the bitter shaman naturally shows the hypocritical nature of gold-worshipping through the cat's white description of the characters' gestures. This narrative strategy creates a tension between the limited nature of the animal's perspective and the complexity of human society, making the critique more universal and elevating specific social problems into metaphors for the dilemma of modernity.

3.2 Spatial Metaphors: Iron House (Lu Xun) vs. Bathhouse (Soseki)

In the novel, the characters are shown in spatial activities, and Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki express their criticism through the setting of different scenes. In *The Diary of a Madman*, the old mansion in Jiangnan where the madman lives is depicted as a dark complex with "gray" walls and "green and black" bamboo shadows, where only one person can huddle in a room with closed doors and windows. [4] This extreme compression of physical space creates a strong sense of claustrophobia, symbolizing the total confinement of the individual's spiritual world by feudal ethics - the walls blocking the light from the outside world, the door of the room becoming a figurative barrier to the rules of etiquette and discipline, and the kang table and rope constituting a device of power surveillance. Particularly noteworthy is the recurrence of the phrase "the moonlight shines through the cracks in the window pane," which not only suggests the possibility of the light of enlightenment penetrating the room, but also reflects, by way of contrast, the plight of the awakened who are trapped in the darkness of the cage. This is the same as Lu Xun's "iron room" in *The Scream* - Preface.

I Am a Cat, on the other hand, utilizes a scattershot spatial layout. The main scenes of the novel switch back and forth between different social class spaces, such as Bitter Saya's study, the parlor of Kaneda's public house, and the tea ceremony hall. The cat, as a wandering observer, passes between the traditional scholarly family (Koushaya), the emerging capitalist group (Kaneda), and the civic society (the tea ceremony hall). This spatial mobility exposes the inherent contradictions of the Meiji social structure: the Koushaya's study is filled with Chinese antiquities and Western philosophical books, but it is unable to resist the encroachment of the power of money; the owner of the Kaneda mansion is busy plotting to squeeze the Koushaya's property; the tea ceremony hall is a place where the tea drinkers follow the traditional rituals on the surface, but secretly spread rumors

of gold-denomination. Especially in the bathhouse, a special space for people to "see each other honestly", "the rinsing room was covered with hot air up to the ceiling, and the crowded appearance of the monsters could be seen vaguely" [5], and the steam in the bathhouse blurred people's vision, just as the Ming dynasty did. The intellectuals' view of Western civilization is also like "looking at flowers in the fog", implying that the so-called "civilization and enlightenment" is only a self-deceiving show, and the irony reaches its peak. The juxtaposition of different spaces reveals the tearing of values caused by the transplantation of civilization and the colonization of traditional ethical spaces by the logic of capital.

3.3 Symbolism of the end: Desperate "Recovery" vs. Humorous Death

As far as the ending is concerned, Lu Xun's and Natsume Soseki's treatments form a sharp opposition, reflecting two different critical orientations.

The Diary of a Madman adopts an ironic ending, in which the surface of the text presents the official narrative that the madman "has been cured" after treatment and "has gone to a certain place to wait for a replacement", and the medical conclusion that "his spirit has been restored" and the accusation of "cannibalism" in the medical record imply that the madman has ceased to rebel, accepted the social rules and regulations, and become a part of the system. However, it is worth noting that the madman eventually chooses to "hide" his identity as an enlightened person, "sealing" the diary that reveals the evils of feudalism into the depths of history and issuing a desperate cry of "save the children" at the end. This ending design elevates the tragedy of the madman's failure to the social tragedy of the Enlightened One who succumbs to the strong social and cultural systematic pressure, just like the four years and eleven months of heavy rain in Macondo that washed away all traces of bloodstained and disastrous defeats. From this, we can also realize Lu Xun's ambivalence, "If all my flesh and blood is revealed, the end is unknown." [6] The real sobriety is silently forgotten, only leaving the reader with the question at the end: will our next generation suffer the same end as the madman?

The open-ended ending of I Am a Cat completes the ultimate critique through the death of the cat. At the end of the novel, the cat, who is both a bystander and a participant, falls into a water tank and drowns because of drunkenness, leaving behind only the sentence, "Peace comes only after death, and peace cannot be obtained by non-death". The cat, as the only sober observer, not only didn't struggle in the water tank but chanted Buddha's thanks, which can be regarded as the most sober relief. The gentleman who talks about "Zheng Chenggong is the source of Ching Ho-Yuan" and "Ah Min can't be trusted" in the bathhouse is the same as the cat who drunkenly sinks to the bottom of the water; both of them are lost under the impact of modern civilization. Unlike Lu Xun's closed ending, Soseki leaves a strong question through the unfinished narrative, i.e., the story comes to an abrupt end after the cat's death: when all critical voices sink to the bottom of the water, where should our civilization go?

4. Similarities and Differences in the Critique of Modernity

4.1 Common Ground: Skepticism of Enlightenment Rationality

Lu Xun's and Natsume Soseki's critiques of modernity share three core dimensions. First, both take the deconstruction of the myth of Western modernity as their starting point, refusing to adopt a global historical perspective that views modernization as a unidirectional process of progress. In The Diary of a Madman, Lu Xun exposes the irreconcilable contradiction between the Confucian ethical system and the construction of the modern nation-state through the accusation of cannibalism; while in I Am a Cat, Natsume Soseki uses the example of the Kinta capitalist group to criticize the alienation of human nature by the capitalist economic system. This critique is not a denial of modernization per se, but of its accompanying colonial cultural hegemony, the former addressing the aberration of the combination of traditional culture and modernity, the latter focusing on the crisis of subjectivity triggered by the transplantation of foreign civilizations.

Secondly, both critiques are rooted in local cultural experiences, forming a unique path of interpretation. Lu Xun sets the "madman" as an awakened enlightened person, reinterpreting traditional texts such as the Twenty-four Filial Piety Pictures and the Diary of a Madman through his inverted cognitive perspective, revealing the cannibalistic nature of rituals; Soseki, on the other hand, uses the cat as a "useless" bystander to record the spiritual predicament of intellectuals in the Meiji period. This locally based critical strategy not only avoids copying Western theories but also elevates specific cultural issues into modern propositions of universal significance. For example, Lu Xun's group of "spectators" and Soseki's portrayal of "cynics", though belonging to different cultural contexts, jointly reveal the passivity of the people and the difficulty of accepting critical discourse in the Enlightenment process, which also reflects the incomplete nature of the Enlightenment for the nationals of the two countries.

Finally, both of them reconstruct critical subjectivity through literary narratives. Lu Xun creates "Madman", a literary image with both artistic value and depth of thought, and realizes the artistic demand of criticizing the national nature through the metaphor of being forced to eat "human flesh", [7] sublimating the individual's tragic destiny into a national cultural crisis; while Soseki carries out a diversified criticism through cats, criticizing not only the decay of modern Japanese civilization, but also the intellectuals such as Bitter Saya and his friend Miaoting, who have no ambition, have nothing to do, live an empty life, and sell themselves to the public. Soseki not only criticizes the decadence of modern Japanese civilization, but also criticizes the cowardice and pedantry of the intellectuals, such as Bitter Saya and his friends, Mystic Pavilion and Cold Moon, who have no ambition, have nothing to do, lead an empty life, and sell their knowledge in a pretense of elegance; and he also criticizes the bourgeoisie's gold-digging, for example, Master Kaneda's "three deficiencies" of becoming rich in the article: lack of righteousness, lack of human kindness, and lack of shame. They are treacherous, vicious, and detestable; at the same time, they also criticize the many dark sides of social reality. [8] The innovation of this narrative strategy makes the critique break through the traditional didactic mode, and together, they prove that literary creation can be an effective method to fight against the alienation of modernity, showing the absurd situation and spiritual dilemma of the modern enlightened people in an absurd and peculiar artistic way.

The commonality of the two paths of critique shows that the critique of East Asian modernity has a very different characteristic from the critique of capitalism alone, which is manifested in the fact that the critique always unfolds in a dual dimension: it needs to break the shackles of traditional culture and resist the colonization of Western civilization at the same time; it needs to awaken the people's enlightened thinking, and at the same time guard against the fact that this modernization thinking has degenerated into a poor imitation of the Western system. As stated in Professor Sun Ge's monograph, *In Search of Asia - Creating Another Way of Knowing the World*, it is necessary for us to face up to the specific contexts, terrains, histories, and experiences of Asia and to produce theories belonging to Asia from them. [9] The prototype of such a theory is fully embodied in the works of Lu Xun and Soseki, which provide both critical and constructive intellectual resources for the exploration of modernity in the late-developing countries.

4.2 Differences: Lu Xun's "Cultural Gene Criticism" vs. Soseki's "Pathological Diagnosis of Civilization"

Although Lu Xun's and Natsume Soseki's critiques of modernity share the overall goal of resisting the hegemony of Western modernity, there are essential differences in their specific paths and values. Lu Xun's critique focuses on the internal problems of traditional Chinese culture, exposing the symbiotic relationship between "benevolence, righteousness, and morality" and hierarchical oppression in the Confucian ethical system through the metaphor of cannibalism in *Diary of a Madman*. Lu Xun himself does not deny the necessity of modernization, but rather emphasizes the alienation of feudalism itself in the process of modernization in old China-even without foreign impact, the order it maintains is essentially an oppressive power structure, not to mention that under the impact of foreign capitalism, the oppression continues unabated, which is

also reflected in Lu Xun's works *Medicine* and *The Everlasting Light*. After a period of silence and reflection from 1912 to 1918, Lu Xun had a deeper understanding of Chinese society: numbness had been engraved on the faces and hearts of Chinese people. Lu Xun launched his critique through the perspective of the madman, an awakened person, and transformed the state of individual madness into a cognitive tool for deconstructing the collective unconscious in an attempt to show that the enlightenment work at that time had not been able to penetrate the hearts of the people, and had not been stirred up in the Spiritual House, and naturally it was not possible to make the humanitarianism and humanity propagated at that time widely disseminated, nor could it produce any effect. [10] The "Save the Children" at the end of the poem is Lu Xun's practical appeal for enlightenment and salvation: the "children" symbolize the hope of the nation, and the salvation of the "children" symbolizes the salvation of the nation.

Natsume Soseki's criticism is aimed at Meiji Japan's blind transplantation of Western civilization, in the *I am a cat*, the Kaneda Capital Group shows the absurd combination of the capitalist economic system with the traditional spirit of Bushido and Buddhist beliefs; the bitter shaman's study is piled high with Kant and the *Analects of Confucius*, but I only use it as a show-off in my speech; Coldmoon will be the subject of her PhD thesis, "The effect of ultraviolet light on the electromagnetic effect of the eyeballs of frogs". Han Yue's doctoral dissertation topic is "The effect of ultraviolet light on the electromagnetic effect of frog's eyeballs", which is also an imitation of scientific rationality. ; and Mrs. Kaneda's "three-dimensional nose" and Suzuki Toshijiro's philosophy of "money-oriented", which exposes the corrosion of human nature by capitalism and utilitarianism. Corrosion of human nature by capitalism and utilitarianism. What he exposes is not the shortcomings of modernization per se, but the double alienation of human beings in the process of cultural grafting: the expansion of capital has found a vehicle in traditional Japanese bushido, and Western material civilization is in conflict with Eastern spiritual beliefs. This critique unfolds through the perspective of a cat, objectively presenting the spiritual dilemma of Japanese intellectuals during the Meiji period, and revealing through the cat the dilemma of the "sober" - when intellectuals are addicted to utilitarian discourses, their ability to think independently has long since been reduced to capital, money, and foreign cultures. When intellectuals are addicted to utilitarian discourse, their ability to think independently has long fallen into the captivity of capital and foreign cultures. Through the death of the cat, Soseki ultimately questions whether human beings can maintain independent thinking in the process of modernity.

The fundamental difference between the two stems from the different national conditions of the two countries: China faced the conflict between traditional ethics and the construction of a modern nation-state at the moment of national peril, so Lu Xun faced the dregs of traditional culture and tried to rebuild the subjectivity of human beings in the process of deconstruction, and the compromising gesture of "hiding the journal" in the ending of *The Diary of a Madman* hinted at the resilience of the Enlightenment; Japan, on the other hand Japan, on the other hand, suffered from the loss of identity in the transplantation of civilization during the Meiji Restoration, therefore Soseki was wary of colonization by foreign cultures and devoted himself to guarding the subjectivity of human beings in the collision of cultures, and in the ending, the death of a cat warned of the crisis of the absorption of critical discourse by the society. This difference not only reflects the different paths of modernization between China and Japan but also reveals the common dilemma in the exploration of modernity in new nation-states - how to find a balance between criticizing the dregs of tradition and resisting the hegemony of Western culture. The intellectual resources provided by Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki are strongly complementary: the former provides insights into how emerging nations should deal with their local cultural traditions, while the latter contributes a critical dimension to guard against cultural invasion in the process of modernization.

5. Concluding remarks

The "madman" narratives of Lu Xun and Natsume Soseki demonstrate the dual reflection of East Asian intellectuals on the hegemony of Western modernity. Lu Xun uses the perspective of the "madman" to expose the cultural violence of traditional culture, which is based on ethical principles, and to criticize the suppression of freedom of human nature by Confucianism; Natsume Soseki, on the other hand, observes the poor imitation of Western civilization by Japan during the Meiji period through a cat, and reveals the invasion and corrosion of local culture by Western culture in the process of modernization. Both of them are based on local experiences and break the universal narrative based on the West with literary practices. This critical dialogue shows that modernity is not a one-way history of Western expansion but a history of resistance and reconstruction of multiple cultural subjects. At a time when globalization is facing a crisis, revisiting the two critical paths of East Asian modernity not only helps to reflect on cultural power relations in history but also provides intellectual resources for non-Western discourse to participate in the reconstruction of modernity. This provides new insights for cultural critique in the postcolonial context: the construction of modernity by oppressed cultures requires not only "taking the best and removing the dross" but also vigilance against new cultural invasions from foreign lands.

This study is only a preliminary exploration, and there are two limitations: first, the cross-cultural comparison of the "madman" narrative has not yet been extended to other East Asian writers, such as Lee Kwang-soo from Korea and Tagore from India. Secondly, the deep integration of postcolonial theory and modern Chinese literature still needs more empirical support. Future research could further focus on the multiple faces of colonial modernity and how non-Western literature constructs a discourse of subjectivity through narrative innovation.

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