

Nostalgic Reconstruction of Japanese Aesthetics: Yone Noguchi's Poetics and Politics

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To read Yone Noguchi's poetry is to experience the movement of a split self between the authority of a singular voice of a Japanese critic and the unsaid desire of a poet for assimilation into English culture. Although Noguchi (1875-1947), until very recently, has been an obscure poet, not only in America, but also in Japan,¹ he was a crucial figure both in East-West literary interactions and in the history of American modernist poetry in the early twentieth century. After he came to San Francisco in 1893 as a frontiersman at the age of eighteen,² Noguchi became well acquainted with various writers, especially Joaquin Miller (1841?-1913), and published three collections of poetry in English before he returned to Japan in 1904. After his return, he introduced Western literature to Japan, while at the same time striving to make an impact on Western poetry by continuously publishing cultural criticism in English. One of the contributions he made is the introduction of *hokku*, a traditional Japanese form that consists of a total of seventeen syllables (5-7-5), to the West. His fifth collection *The Pilgrimage* (1909) carried his first English hokkus, and in 1913, when he was invited to Oxford to lecture about Japanese hokku poetry, he probably had conversations about it with W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. Noguchi successfully introduced the characteristically brief form of hokku to the Western public by associating the hokku poet Basho with Stéphane Mallarmé to make hokku poetry more comprehensible to the Western audience.

Before 2000, only a few critics had seriously investigated Noguchi's accomplishments as a cultural ambassador of the West. Yoshinobu Hakutani, however, who edited *Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi: An East-West Literary Assimilation* (1990), claims that Noguchi's prolific writings in English made "a lasting contribution to the East-West literary assimilation in modern times" (SEW 2 9), making a good case for Noguchi's influence on Pound.³ By uncovering a fragile yet persistent affinity between them, he sheds much light on a history of transpacific literary alliances in the early twentieth century.

However, his understanding of “the East-West literary assimilation” is not without problems. As his use of the word “assimilation” plainly suggests, Hakutani seems to presuppose that there naturally existed two static discrete traditions before Noguchi introduced Japanese culture to the West, and that it is inevitable that these two cultures would merge sooner or later. Yet, to say simply that Eastern and Western cultures were mutually influenced by each other is to ignore complex and dynamic processes of cultural exchanges in the contact zone, where different cultural groups negotiate, articulate, and delimit their own identities. The preliminary point to be made here is that culture or cultural tradition is not self-contained, bounded, and unchanging, and that we should challenge the essentialist understanding of culture. Comparative analyses can no longer consist of analyzing two stable independent cultures; rather, unstable, discontinuous, and heterogeneous cultural identities delimit themselves through multi-dimensional processes of transculturation. In understanding such dynamic cultural contacts, a multidimensional approach to the relation between East and West, attentive to numerous spheres of cultural contestation, is necessary.

In fact, the history of Japanese poetry at least since the Meiji era cannot be fully understood without considering the contestations between the East and West. Although nowadays people assume that *hokku* is a Japanese traditional poetic form, the literary history of the Meiji era indicates that this understanding of the Japanese poetic tradition did not exist independently and autonomously. It was *reinvented* through its contact with Western cultures or Westerners’ cultural representations of the East. In other words, the Japanese aesthetics of *hokku* in the Meiji era was constructed through its contact with romantic Orientalism, which extends from British and German Romanticism to Ralph Waldo Emerson in the American Renaissance and to Yeats and Pound in Modernism. Take for example the fact that much of Noguchi’s poetry and criticism shows great enthusiasm for the writers of the American Renaissance, especially Whitman and Poe. Although he was unfamiliar with Whitman and Thoreau until he learned their names from Miller in California, Noguchi was impressed by their lives and philosophies, which had certain affinities with Zen philosophy. Their poetics was so influential on Noguchi, that, despite the apparent differences in their diction, he even compared the famous Japanese *hokku* poet, Basho, with Whitman.⁴ The West offered a virtual image of Japan to Noguchi, through which he could create a vision of Japanese culture.⁵ Japan saw the West as if it were, to use Paul Gile’s words, “seeing native landscape

refracted or inverted in a foreign mirror" (Giles 2),⁶ and through the image of the self in the other, it created a vision of its own culture. Noguchi's contribution is, then, not merely his role as an interpreter of Japanese culture to the West nor as an introducer of Western culture to Japan, but as a reconstructor of Japanese modern aesthetics via his experience abroad.

In order to fully understand Noguchi's contribution to reinvention of the Japanese aesthetics of hokku, it is necessary to take into account under what kind of historical circumstances Noguchi assumed the crucial role both as a cultural critic and as a poet. When America was becoming a racially heterogeneous country, awaiting foreign cultural influences from within as well as from without, Japan was also in the process of nation building. As a consequence of Japan's Civil War in 1865, Modern Japan as a nation was born: the Tokugawa era came to an end with the Meiji Restoration, which literally meant the restoration of the emperor's imperial power. The transference of the power from Tokugawa Bakufu to the Meiji emperor signified much more than the exchange of one government for another: it was the end of feudalism in favor of a national government. In addition, the birth of a modern nation symbolized the end of national seclusion and the beginning of westernization of Japan. To ideologically and practically solidify the reception of the national government, the Meiji government employed slogans such as *Fukoku Kyouhei* ("Rich Country, Strong Military") and *Bunmei Kaika* ("Civilization and Enlightenment"), and instituted reforms such as the creation of a national land tax, the abolition of the samurai class, and the creation of a national conscript military. These kinds of reforms were done with one objective in mind: the restoration of Japan's independence from Western countries. Before the Meiji Era, the Tokugawa Bakufu persistently attempted to shut off the Western influences but was ironically forced to sign unequal treaties with Western powers. Therefore, the Meiji government, which learned a lesson from the Tokugawa Bakufu's failure in foreign policy, opened its door widely to the West and encouraged the influx of Western cultural influences. Japanese westernization was a means to regain its political power in opposition to the threat of Western imperial power.⁷ Once Japan opened its gate, Westernization developed very quickly.⁸ Encouraged by the governmental policy of westernization, students were sent to Europe to study European cultures, and foreign literature was introduced through translation. When Japanese writers began to read Western literature, they encountered powerful ideas and practices which they could employ to construct and promote a national

narrative of their own. Therefore, the two phenomena, i.e., westernization and nationalism, were neither merely parallel nor paradoxical; rather, the process was complementary. The more westernization was developed in Japan, the more people desired for their own national and regional narrative.

The complementary relation between westernization and nationalism may be derived from nostalgia. Svetlana Boym argues that historical upheavals—like the Japan Civil War or the rapid modernization in its aftermath—exacerbates nostalgia rather than cures it. Boym writes:

Globalization encouraged stronger local attachments. In counterpoint to our fascination with cyberspace and the virtual global village, there is no less a global epidemic of nostalgia, an effective yearning for a community with a collective memory longing for a community in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. (Boym xiv)

Nostalgia is not only fueled by a missing past but also embraces ambivalence about the present, motivating hope for a future. In this light, national or cultural traditions can no longer be considered to be something that merely exists in the past. Although there were most certainly dominant cultural ideologies and practices in the past, it is a future generation that rediscovers and reenacts it as a national tradition. The act of finding contemporary relevance in past traditions is one important way that traditions are founded anew and come to express more immediately the changing identities and lived experiences of the present.

The mutually enriching relationship between modernization and traditionalism, along with the tensions between westernization and nationalism in Japan, reached its apogee at the late stage of the Meiji Era, during which Noguchi went to America and introduced Japanese aesthetics to the Western audience by writing poetry and criticism in English. Noguchi's poetics of the Japanese Middle Ages, i.e., his interests in Noh plays, Zen Buddhism, and particularly hokku poetry, are not simply an extension of the existing Japanese aesthetics; rather, his experience in the midst of the East-West cultural contact zone triggered and nurtured them. In this sense, his personal experience is not so much personal as representative of the Meiji era, which struggled to construct a national tradition in the face of Western influence. Through negotiating with the Western audience, Noguchi nostalgically reflected on the

Japanese tradition from the Western viewpoint and virtually played a significant role in constructing the Japanese aesthetics of the Meiji era.

1. The National within the International: a Hermit as a National Bard

In his introduction to *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* (1914), Noguchi argues that outsiders of a given culture can rejuvenate the aesthetic potential of that culture's poetry and art by uncovering in it unnoticed beauty and hidden subtexts that have long been forgotten. Noguchi writes:

There are beauties and characteristics of poetry of any country which cannot be plainly seen by those who are born with them; it is often a foreigner's privilege to see them and use them, without a moment's hesitation, to his best advantage as he conceives it. I have seen examples of it in the work of Western artists in adopting our Japanese traits of art, the traits which turned meaningless for us a long time ago, and whose beauties were lost in time's dust. (SEW 2 55)

Japanese poetry is not only comprehensible to the West, but Western poets also have much to learn from Japanese poetry. Quite confident that Japanese poetry could make an impact on English poetry, he made the same statement more boldly in "Japanese Poetry" published in the same year: "I flatter myself that even Japan can do something towards the reformation or advancement of Western poetry, not only spiritually, but also physically" (SEW 2 59).

While we can interpret this bold manifesto of his pride in Japanese poetry as a mere extension of his critical activities as an introducer of Japanese culture, we must be careful not to ignore his role as an "English" poet. Admittedly, from a Westerners' viewpoint, Noguchi's appearance, art, and philosophy perfectly represent the exoticness of Japanese culture, and a number of Western critics comment that Noguchi's world view is "*so different from our Western way.*" Yet, some of his contemporary critics acknowledged Noguchi's activities as an English poet. For example, in the afterword to Noguchi's fifth collection, *The Pilgrimage* (1909), where he introduced hokku poetry, William Michael Rossetti, instead of accentuating Noguchi's uniqueness as Japanese praises him for being "more English," saying: "I find that he had progressed very considerably in the use of the English language, approximately as an English man or an American would use it. He is more English, without

failing to be equally Japanese" (*SEW* 1 161). It is very ironic that only when Noguchi began to introduce Japanese aesthetics openly, was he recognized as an "English poet." But even earlier, an American critic Richard Le Gallinne noted, "to my thinking Mr. Noguchi at his best is not so much a Japanese poet writing English as an English poet in love with Japan, and permeated with its atmosphere and dreaming its dreams."⁹ Given Noguchi's involvement with international activities and his extensive publication of poetry and criticism in English, his statement about the role of the foreign interpreter who can discover the hidden beauty and subtexts of poetry should also be taken in a reverse direction. Noguchi, who had the eye of a foreigner, could discover Japanese beauties buried in the past, and by adapting them in his own English poetry, he could rejuvenate them. Noguchi's attempts to found a Japanese poetic tradition may be comparable with Pound's invention of a new form of English poetry. Even though the form itself derived from Japanese tradition, once written in English, Japanese hokku poetry is displaced as a Japanese literary tradition in its own right. And if the hokku-like "In a Station of the Metro" was Pound's invention of a new kind of modernist *English* poem, then there seems to be no reason why Noguchi's hokku poems written in English cannot be taken as a new kind of *Japanese* poetry produced in the cultural interactions that became known as Modernism.

But, despite his ambition to be an influential literary figure both in Japan and in the West, it is also important to acknowledge the self-conscious and conflicted side of the person of double citizenship. Noguchi himself was conscious of the conflicting poetic identity within himself, and, in fact, his poetic consciousness that speaks out of his poetry shows us Noguchi as an exile both from Japan and the West. His split self, shaped by his experience of writing poetry in his non-native language, is exemplified in the introduction to his first collection of Japanese poetry "Niju Kokusekisha no Uta (A Poem of a Citizen of Two Nations)." He writes: "Japanese readers tell me, 'your Japanese poetry is awkward, but I guess you can write English poetry well.' Western readers tell me, 'Your English poetry is unbearable to read, but your Japanese poetry must be great.' To tell the truth, I am not confident either in my Japanese or English. I am, as it were, a citizen of two nations.... How sad it is to be neither a Japanese nor a Westerner" (*Niju Kokusekisha* 1-2). For Noguchi, appealing to the Western audience was not such an easy task. His first collection of poetry, *Seen and Unseen; or, Monologue of a Homeless Snail* (1897), indicates his anxiety about a readership. The subtitle of the collection,

“Monologue of a Homeless Snail,” suggests his anxiety that his poems would end in monologue without an audience. He was unable to take for granted any existing readership of his poetry either in Japan or in America, and his prologue in *Seen and Unseen* expresses his inability to envision the audience of his poetry:

AH, WHO WILL CARE FOR MY POETRY?
 I DO NOT KNOW YET BUT I DARE
 TO HOPE THAT THERE MAY BE SOME
 UNKNOWN FRIENDS AND TO THEM I
 LOVINGLY DEDICATE THESE MY SONGS. (SEW 1 57)

Noguchi withstood such a mental segregation, in hopes of one day finding a few like souls in either Japan or in the West. He was, as it were, distanced from his readership both spatially and temporally. Not only was he distanced from readers of his own time, but he was also distanced from his native country and its culture. Not surprisingly, his poems in this collection are laden with the motifs of loneliness. For instance, in “Alone in the Canyon,” he sings: “Good-bye my beloved family! / I am to-night buried under the sheeted coldness: the dark weights of loneliness make me immovable!” (SEW 1 67). There are many others of a similar tone in the collection such as “Am I Lonesome?” and “Sea of Loneliness.” Noguchi’s work space is located in, as it were, a no man’s land where one is neither fully comprehended in one’s native culture nor in one’s adopted culture.

Loneliness must have been anguishing for Noguchi, and yet, his personal experience of anonymity and alienation in the foreign country was fruitful for his poetics. When we consider the acknowledged influence of Basho’s hokku poetry on Noguchi’s later works, Noguchi’s loneliness in a foreign land must not only have contributed to his nostalgia for Japan, but must have also helped to nurture his sympathy toward Basho’s poetics of *sabi* (“loneliness”). Noguchi’s nostalgia is directed toward an imagined home which is distanced from him both spatially and temporally: Japan in the Middle Ages. In Japan, the reclusive poet had been a cultural icon since the Medieval Age. The idea of a “recluse” originally comes from *shukke* (“leaving the family”), an old concept basic to understanding the Buddhist path of spiritual development. In Buddhist practices, people who want to become professional priests must break the bonds of secular society to achieve a religious life with spiritual liberty. In

Medieval Japan, however, the idea of *shukke* became more and more secularized. Though most of the recluses pursued religious discipline, many others appeared who devoted themselves to the arts rather than religious practice. The life of a recluse is not only an escape from the realities of politics and society but also a gateway to religion. The act of becoming an aesthete-recluse, renouncing all worldly desires and resigning oneself to a life of honorable contemplation provided a basis for mental and spiritual development through the resignation of one's life to spiritual and aesthetic liberty. Since Medieval Japan, the aesthete-recluse was "a type of life characteristic of the free and cultured people," and, in Meiji era Japan, Basho perfectly exemplified the poet of this type.¹⁰

As Basho's case indicates, being an aesthete-hermit was considered to be the same thing as being poetry in itself. Basho's and Noguchi's poetics of lived poetry is far from the didacticism so typical of Victorian poetry, which is exemplified, for example, in Edwin Markham's ekphrasis "The Man with a Hoe." On the surface level, Noguchi's preference for a simple life proximate to nature, which entails loneliness, poverty, anonymity, and anxiety about the groundlessness of the world, echoes much of Markham's poem. Also, Markham seems to have shared with Noguchi the sensitivity necessary to see the sublime in the poor man, which resembles the Zen aesthetic of *wabi* ("beauty stemmed from poverty"). Despite these affinities in their aesthetics, Noguchi once severely criticized the poem, saying: "[M]y Japanese opinion, shaped by hereditary impulse and education, was terribly shattered quite many years ago when Edwin Markham's *The Man with a Hoe* made a furor in the American Press. I exclaimed: 'What! You say it is poetry? How it is possible?' It appeared to me to be a cry from the Socialist platform rather than a poem" (*SEW* 2 61). For Noguchi, there is no room left for moralism in poetry because the proper mode of poetic expression should be lived experience where there is little division between the perceiver and the perceived or human and nature. Noguchi maintains in "Spirit of Japanese Poetry" that "there is no strict boundary between the domains generally called subjective and objective; while some *hokku* poems appear to be objective, those poems are again by turns quite subjective through the great virtue of the writers having the fullest identification with the matter written on" (*SEW* 2 73). In his admiration of Basho who rejected worldly luxuries and lived mindfully with poverty, Noguchi goes so far as to claim that the publication of poetry is a secondary concern for a poet, saying: "[T]o live poetry is the main thing, and the question of the poems

written or published is indeed secondary; from such a reason I regard our Basho Matsuo" (SEW 2 58). Noguchi's rejection of Markham's famous poem suggests that for Noguchi poetry should be experienced rather than becoming an occasion for moral lectures to the reader.

In point of fact, Noguchi chose to live his poetics. In 1896, Noguchi began to live with Joaquin Miller, who was regarded by Japanese critics as a "hermit who lived on dews," at Miller's cottage called "Height" in California, and his lifestyle, shared by John Muir and Edwin Markham, was introduced in an article in the January 1900 issue of *Overland Monthly*, which celebrates "Some Hermit Homes of California Writers." The idea of hermitage in the article is romantically presented as a sort of primitive life style and as a means to "live away from the stress and hurly-burly of life." Compared with the other two writers, whose self-chosen recluse lifestyle is positively described as a sage comparable to Thoreau or as a speculative philosopher, Noguchi is rather presented as a comic recluse afraid of people and is described as running away and barring the door at the approach of the author, and only on recognition able to say, "Excuse me! . . . I thought it was people!" The author of the essay later recounted an episode in which Noguchi was embarrassed by a letter from his Japanese friend who urged him to try "a hazard of new fortunes beyond the Rockies":

"Come to New York," this letter urged. "It is the place of all places for you. We'll give you a boom; you really ought to come." His distress over the advice would have been funny had it not been genuine. "Must I go?" he asked me. "Ought I to go? I love life here in California. I have no thought even to go to my Japan again. I can work here; I can grow here. Why should I go to the East and be given 'a boom'? What is this thing, to be given 'a boom'? Is it not to hurt the work?" (Knapp 7)

However comically introduced to an audience, it is nonetheless true that Noguchi's hermit life style found a place in the literary community. As the author of the journal article's accessibility to Noguchi plainly suggests, it is not that Noguchi desired no contact with people. Nor did the Western audience simply reject him as a weirdo. Rather, Noguchi chose to limit his accessibility to only a certain select community and in fact was incorporated into it as a recluse. This space of partial reclusion was where Noguchi's aesthetics found its home.

In "What Is a Hokku Poem?" (1913), Noguchi recounts how influential Japanese hokku was to him in his younger years, and he clarifies the complementary relationship between the poetics of hokku and the hermit-life style:

I did not forget to carry with me the Hokku collection of Basho or Buson or some other poet in my American life, even when I did the so-called tramp life in 1896-98 through the California field dull of buttercups, by the mountain where the cypress tree beckoned my soul to fly, not merely because the thought of home and longing for it was then my only comfort, but more because by the blessing of the book, I mean the Hokku book, I entered straight into the great heart of Nature; when I left the Pacific Slope in later years towards the Eastern cities built by the modern civilization and machineries, I suddenly thought I had lost the secret understanding of the Hokku poems born in Japan, insignificant like a lakeside reed and irresponsible like a dragonfly. (SEW 1 103)

The unique feature of Noguchi's four years in "the Height" can be characterized as a blending of the two styles of repose and action, exemplified by his secluded life and his public performance that advertised the medieval Japanese poets' traditional way of life. Noguchi's experience as a hermit is, on the one hand, a shrinking of experience, a retreat from public spheres or from sociability. Adamantly opposed to modernization, commercialism, and the hectic life in cities, he chose isolation so intense that it was unbearable. On the other hand, to live as a hermit made it possible for him to have a contact with nature that was necessary for the hokku poet to contemplate fully his lived experience. And, in this case, his hermit lifestyle is no longer a retreat from but rather a fulfillment of his public persona as a national publicist of Japanese aesthetics. For a hermit poet like Basho was considered to be a national icon and worthy of export to the West. Noguchi's choice to be an aesthete-hermit distanced from society was itself an action, rather than a mere inaction, and his celebration of what seemed to be an inaction turned out to be a highly political action to define and promulgate Japanese aesthetics for the consumption of a Western audience.

2. Poetics of Glocal: Masked Lyric and Hokku

Noguchi's personal experience as an exile evoked his nostalgia for the relatively static way of life in Middle Ages Japan and helped him to live his

poetics of wabi in the hermitage. However, while his life at the hermitage made it possible for him to become an embodiment of the cultural icon of the poet, his struggle as a person of dual citizenship is inscribed in his language and style inextricably alongside his commitment to wabi. Noguchi's longing for Japan spurred him to compose poetry of superimposition that by the global circumstances of its creation challenged him at every turn to rethink and reinvent his identity as both a native of Japan and as a resident of foreign lands. Or, put simply, he composed poetry of what Boym calls "global localism." According to Boym, "local internationalism" or "glocal" is the site where one discovers a "hybrid form of nostalgia that incorporate[s] global culture into the local context" (Boym 67). Noguchi used a global language, English, to express local color, while at the same time, by composing poetry in English, he expressed the universal validation of the Japanese language and Japanese aesthetics.

In his earlier poetry before *The Pilgrimage*, where Noguchi demonstrated his English hokku, "glocal" elements can be found mainly in his treatment of words, either in his choice of specific words or verbal constructions. First of all, his awkward or even weird word constructions, which look almost like neologisms, also serve to disclose the author's identity as a non-native speaker and to add an exotic quality to his poems. Adjectives and noun phrases are often violently connected by dashes, inviting, in the spirit of hokku, a sustained contemplation of the depth of modulations that make up the beauty of the surface of the world. For example, phrases such as "the known-unknown-bottomed gossamer waves of the field," "the secret-chattering grass-tops" or "sunful-eyed,--the crazy, one-inch butterfly" in one of his earliest poems "What about My Songs" appear like knots of long metrical lines, and beckon the reader to undo entangled images.¹¹ Also notable is his attempt to create the world of hokku by including specific words in poems. His frequent use of words such as a "frog" in poems like "waters of pond" reminds the reader of Basho's famous hokku ("The Old pond! / A frog leap into— / List, the water sound!" translated by Noguchi) (SEW 1 74), and the frequent appearance of "rain" in his poems indicates that Noguchi was highly conscious of kigo (seasonal words that exact a particular and powerful impact by having been formalized in hokku through a long and elaborate aesthetic tradition). Even in his third collection *From the Eastern Sea* (1903), which is apparently more conventional in its language, Noguchi's incessant use of Japanese nouns discloses his obsession with experiences untranslatable to any other language. Instead of neologisms,

this collection is filled with poems whose titles are in Japanese, such as "O Cho San" (Miss Cho), "Address to a Soyokaze" (Address to a Breeze), "Homekotoba" (Fair Words). Noguchi's insertion of Japanese words and use of kigo and neologism together contribute to creating his "exotic" poetry, in which certain Japanese elements lurk beneath the exuberant English lines to create surprising surface and depth effects that say just as much about poetry's relationship to the world as they do about the powerful tensions of living between two cultures.

Yet, as a whole, Noguchi's earlier poetry might be said to "pass." Although one can recognize the Japanese poetics underlying much of his earlier works, rare markers of overt cultural difference might imply his idealized present condition in which both East and West shared common aesthetics and spiritual and personal concerns. Noguchi's quotations of Whitman and Rossetti, and his comparison of French symbolism, especially Mallarmé, with Basho's hokku,¹² further support our understanding of his focus on an idealized present condition by demonstrating his deep commitment to intertextual participation in Western culture. One incident when he first sent his poems to the *Lark* is suggestive of how energetically Noguchi was saturated by a particular kind of English poetry available to him then. When Noguchi moved to Miller's "Heights" the only books he had were by Poe, Basho Matsuo, and a book on Zen Buddhism by Kochi (SEW 2 219), and perhaps because Miller was not a bibliophile, Poe became a dominant influence to the extent that Noguchi confessed later, "At the highest moment of my Poe saturation, I confess, I felt I was a Poe myself, and could not speak any other language but Poe's" (*The Story of Yone* 18). When his poems were published, he was bitterly accused in the Philistine magazine of plagiarizing Poe. In addition to Poe, in the first few collections of poetry Noguchi was not free from the strong influence of Whitman. The sweeping lines in free verse are apparently Whitman's influence, and a poem such as "I Hail Myself as I Do Homer" is hard to read without thinking of it as an awkward imitation of Whitman, if not a plagiarism.

Using a language not native to his speech, Noguchi forced himself in certain directions instructive to his English poetry and made the whole trajectory of his thought, unsettled between two languages and two cultures in transition, become ambiguous and difficult to interpret at points. Worth noting is his use of religious vocabulary; he borrowed English religious terms that could give misleading ideas about his own beliefs. In his second collection *The Voice of the Valley* (1897), based on his pilgrimage to Yosemite Valley by himself, Noguchi

sings about God. He writes in "Song of Day in Yosemite Valley," for example: "Behold! The genii of the forest chant Peace unto the Lord from an unknown shrine in the Valley temple. / O mighty chapel of God." (SEW 1 80). In another, the last line of the "Song of Night in Yosemite Valley" is replete with Christian terminology and concepts: "Nay, the mighty sword of the Judgment Day blazes down the Heaven to the gate of Hell!" (SEW 1 81). The rugged mountainous valley was often associated with religious test grounds, so that it is not difficult to imagine that Noguchi appropriated religious vocabularies and images from someone else. Edward Marx points out that in *The Voice* Noguchi plundered the legacy of Milton, whose works were his companions on the tour of Yosemite.¹³ Whoever influenced Noguchi the most at that time, given the fact that he was not a Christian but a son of a devout Buddhist family, we cannot but conclude that, even when he wrote "lyrics," his lyrics expressed not so much his own religious beliefs as his performance as a poet composing poetry in the language of the other. Instead of expressing "pure" eastern philosophies, he employed English biblical words, and as a consequence, his poems became a kind of masked lyrics. Although Noguchi's early poetry in English was informed with stereotypical images and borrowed religious vocabularies, it is not simply an anxious emulation of the values of Western society. Adopting English models and religious motifs in his poetry provided a way for Noguchi to maintain the authenticity of his aesthetic by controlling its excess. Like a Noh mask, the form made his poetry more controlled and reserved yet more suggestive of its latent beauty. In his later years, Noguchi, who was fascinated by Noh plays, maintains: "[T]he mask is made to reserve its feeling, and the actors wonderfully well protect themselves from falling into the bathos of the so-called realism through the virtue of poetry and prayer" (SEW 2 60). Noguchi seems to have redirected the difficulties he was having expressing his Zen philosophies in English to the creation of hybrid poetic forms, and further to an aesthetic of the mask.

It was not until his fifth collection *The Pilgrimage* (1909), that Noguchi began to pursue Japanese aesthetics without the use of English models to serve as surface masks for his evolving poetry. With the "Hokku" sequence, or to use his own words, his "English adaptations of this peculiar style of poetry," Noguchi took on a more radical experiment than the surface effects of neologism in his early poetry. His active experimentation with the Japanese hokku style provided him with a means of addressing Japanese aesthetics before his Western audience in a more open manner. By introducing a

the term “hokku” is in fact appropriate for conveying his sense of the poem as both concealing and revealing at the same time. Though nowadays the term “haiku” or “haikai” is more popular, Noguchi persistently used the term hokku instead of other terms. The difference between haiku and hokku seems to relate to how much a given poem is thought to be complete in itself. Though haiku must have been regarded as an independent poetic form by the eighteenth-century, hokku (5-7-5, the seventeen-syllable Japanese poetic form), which literally means a “beginning phrase” or a “phrase which begins,” originally referred to only the first part of *tanka* (5-7-5-7-7, the thirty-one-syllable poetic form). As long as he calls his poems hokku, therefore, it suggests that something remains unwritten and awaits discovery.¹⁴ The term “hokku” epitomizes his aesthetic of revelation and concealment, and serves to highlight it effectively.

3. Transplanting Japanese Aesthetics to Japanese Soil

By the time Noguchi introduced Japanese hokku to the West, some important books had already introduced the poetic form to the West. Among them were William George Aston’s *A History of Japanese Literature* (1898) and Basil Hall Chamberlain’s *Things Japanese* (1904), both of which were referred to in Noguchi’s *Japanese Hokkus* (1920). Both Aston and Chamberlain mentioned Basho as a hokku poet, and yet, even these British scholars were not entirely positive toward Japanese hokku forms. Nor did they consider hokku to be representative of Japanese poetry or its aesthetics. Aston explains that the hokku form is too brief to express ideas, and argues that “the Haikai, even in the hands of an acknowledged master like Basho, is too narrow in its compass to have any value as literature” (Aston 293). He also mentions that a “very large proportion of Basho’s Haikai are so obscurely allusive as to transcend the comprehension of the uninitiated foreigner” (Aston 294). Similarly, Chamberlain, who was well versed in Japanese poetry and one of the earliest translators of Japanese hokku, did not hide his hesitation about its brevity. He says:

The nearest European parallel to the Japanese poems of thirty-one or seventeen syllables is the epigram, using that term in its earlier sense. Or we might say of the seventeen-syllable poems in particular, that they correspond to such prominent half-stanzas as

"The linnet born within the cage,
That never knew the summer woods,"
Or

"And Autumn laying here and there
A fiery finger on the leaves,"

which, in the hands of our poets, are evolved as parts of members of a complex organic whole, but would in Japanese literature each stand alone as an independent composition. Naturally, the brevity needed to put any statement into so narrow a compass soon led to an elliptical and enigmatic style, which continually crosses the border-line of obscurity. (Chamberlain 377-78)

When Noguchi introduced hokku to the West, even in Japan, hokku was not thought of as an established poetic form, but rather as a set of fragments from which the Japanese poet could extract.

In fact, in the Meiji Era, many forms of hokku from the Middle Ages were still largely unknown. Or, we might even say that the history of modern poetry in Japan opened by negating the value of short forms of poetry like the *waka* or hokku. For instance, Shoyo Tsubouchi claimed that "the essence of the novel is poetry," indicating that the brief form like hokku or waka is too narrow and too brief to express ideas, and that the philosophies expressible in such a brief form are too shallow. Shoyo's rejection of hokku and his admiration of novels plainly suggest the ideal of the Meiji era that Japan should create a national novel by imitating Western literature. In *A History of Japanese Literature*, Aston devoted one section to the "Tokio Period (1867-1898)," and explicates the literary situation surrounding modern poetry in Japan. He writes:

Toyama and his colleagues, finding the ancient classical language unequal to the expression of the new ideas, and largely unintelligible to a modern public, frankly adopted the ordinary written language of the day, which had hitherto been only used for popular poetry of the humblest presentations. In their choice of themes, in the length of their poems, and in the general tone of thought, the influence of European models is plainly traceable. . . . The day of Tanka and Haikai seems to have passed. These miniatures of poetry are now the exception and not the rule. (Aston 394-95)

Despite the pressures on Meiji writers to contribute to the great nation-building project of the age, Noguchi did not celebrate the nation's heroic struggle against and ultimate victory over the nineteenth century imperialist West. Instead of writing in the popular epic style of the age, Noguchi employed and introduced hokku to his audience.

Although Noguchi's poems were written in English, he also spoke to a Japanese audience in an indirect way. Noguchi's publication history of hokku poems demonstrates that Noguchi's intended readership was first and foremost Japanese intellectuals who could appreciate or at least understand Noguchi's accomplishments abroad. By the time Noguchi left for Japan in 1904, he was already energetically looking for his literary community in Japan. He submitted not only some poems from *Seen and Unseen* but also new hokku poems, which would be later reprinted in *The Pilgrimages* (1909), to the two Japanese magazines, the *Teikoku Bungaku* and the *Waseda Bungaku*. The fact that Noguchi sent English hokkus first to a Japanese magazine, and then reprinted them in his collection widely distributed in the West indicates his desire for influencing Japanese literary circles as much as the Western audience.

Obviously, his return to Japan in 1904 is a turning point in Noguchi's career, but we should not take it merely as a focal shift from the West to the East. His return was the fruit of his success in the West, without which Noguchi would not have been able to have the literary cache to influence a Japanese audience. His fame in the West created by the publication of *From the Eastern Sea* in London made it possible for him to appeal to Japanese intellectuals, and his Japanese aesthetics nurtured in Western countries gave him the hybrid credentials that they would have seen as essential to compete with the West. In order to appeal to the Japanese reader, Noguchi needed the recognition of Western readers, and even when he spoke to a Japanese audience, he introduced it not merely as a "pure" Japanese tradition but as a product of an ongoing and vital exchange with the West. In "The Japanese Hokku Poetry" (1914), Noguchi writes about one task as a Japanese critic: "There have been, since the Grand Restoration, a few bold attempts at a Hokku revival, notably that of Shiki Masaoka; but it is not my present aim to follow after their historical record. What I hope to do at this moment is to point out to you the very value of the Japanese poetry of this peculiar form" (SWN 2 78). That Noguchi does not attempt to create a hokku revival should not be taken merely as his complete resignation to his Japanese audience. As I have argued, what he was trying to do is first to appeal to the West and then to transport

rejuvenated hokkus to Japan.

Conclusion

Noguchi played a significant role in reviving hokku poetry and in establishing it as the center of Japanese culture by introducing to a Western audience Basho and his hokku aesthetic, which was largely unknown in the West and disregarded in Japan. His personal experiences as a poet of dual nationality—especially his loneliness, his difficulties writing in English, and his desire for a readership—evoked nostalgia for an aesthetic that would help him to find purpose in his lived experience in America, and this allowed him to look freshly at Japan with a foreign critic's eye. Noguchi's aesthetics of Middle Ages Japan, i.e., aesthetics of hermits, of masks, and of hokkus, were, therefore, not simply born out of his intimacy with Japanese culture; rather, it was produced out of his deliberate and sustained contemplation of the deep and meaningful contact between the two cultures. Noguchi was in fact a poet-critic culturally between and unable to gain a privileged view of the course which his aesthetics or criticism should take from the vantage point of either culture. His poetry as an overheard speech-act working in the West rather than in the East repurposed itself in the service of Noguchi's critical concerns about the Japanese tradition while protecting his support of hokku, an apparently out-dated poetic form, from immediate counter-argument or outright dismissal.

Notes

¹ Hiroaki Sato points out that the most likely reason for the indifference of many critics to Noguchi and for his unpopularity can be found in the role he played in the rise of Japanese imperialist war. Sato also argues that, although critics tend to read early and later Noguchi as discrete periods, his later career as a ultra-nationalist is considered to be continuation of his internationalism as a promoter of "Japanism" in his early years.

² To use his son's, a famous sculptor Isamu Noguchi's words, Noguchi was "eager to know [the] energy of the American frontier" (SEW 1 39).

³ See Hakutani's introduction to the first volume of the *Selected English Writings of Yone Noguchi* and "Ezra Pound, Yone Noguchi, and Imagism." Hakutani argues that, despite Pound's negation of Noguchi as an influence, we can find a direct link between their literary activities and poetics.

⁴ It should be noted that the same process was happening in American reception of Eastern arts. What attracted Pound and Yeats to the Orient was the affinities between what they had had in their Western tradition and the Eastern culture rather than the differences between them. For example, Ira Nadel argues that Fenollosa, "Philadelphia Orientalisms," and Emerson together helped Pound to create his vision of the Orient and to blend Oriental with American symbolism. Just as Pound juxtaposed the Orient with Transcendentalism in his excavation and rehabilitation of poetry, Noguchi's Oriental poetics was born out of his interest in Transcendentalism.

⁵ For example, the review of *Seen and Unseen* in the *Kansas City Star* shows a typical Orientalist view of Asian male, i.e., infantilization of Asians. In it, Noguchi, who was already in his twenties, was often called "a Japanese boy." The review ends with the following line: "Working in an unmastered tongue, confused by the immaturity of his thought; finding his speech unready and his fancies elusive, Yone Noguchi yet charms us into the region of high imagination" (*seen* 1). When he republished the second edition in 1920, he included this review in it, appropriating these derogatory words to describe his early years. Noguchi writes: "'Seen and Unseen,' because it is my first born, and under its wild fugitive words sounding almost like a child's babbles, I succeeded in making myself more naked and true" (*seen* 16).

⁶ Although Giles's focus is the transatlantic studies, his idea of virtual construction of nations is applicable to the transpacific.

⁷ Of the Meiji period of Japan, see, for example, Perez.

⁸ Noguchi wrote about how fast and widely English education was spread among the public, pointing out that newspapers enthusiastically added English columns. In an article in the April 1904 issue of *The Bookman*, Noguchi writes: "[T]here is another phenomenon, which is the English column. Undoubtedly it is to fulfill the public demand. . . . English readers are wonderfully increasing every year. Nearly all the schools teach English. The papers want to encourage them with their English, and the students may be benefited by them in their training. It may sound absurd to say that the papers are issued for the benefit of the school students. But it is true in Japan. The Japanese students study them" ("Journalism in Japan" 150). Considering the spread of English knowledge in Japan, it seems likely that the readership of Noguchi's English poetry was not limited to the Western audience.

⁹ Le Gallienne's commentary on Noguchi was originally included in his fourth collection *The Summer Cloud* (1906). This review is reprinted in *SEW* 1 117.

¹⁰ Of the aesthete-recluse in Medieval Japan, see, for example, Maezaki 154.

¹¹ Concerning the reason why Noguchi coined words by using a dash, Shunsuke Kamei points out the similarity between Noguchi's word construction and the Japanese set phrase made of plural Chinese characters. See Kamei 16. Also Edward Marx argues that Noguchi's neologism imitates the miniaturism of hokku. See Marx 43.

¹² Madoka Hori perspicaciously observes that Noguchi's association of Basho with Mallarmé, who was at the center of the most fashionable movement then, had a significant impact on the development of hokku poetry in the Meiji era. See Hori 57-89.

¹³ See Marx 43.

¹⁴ Noguchi himself did not mention his choice of the term, but he strongly resisted understanding hokku as a kind of "epigram." For Noguchi, an epigram is like "a still almost dead pond" where thought or fancy, hardly changes or procreates itself. In contrast, Noguchi continues, "the real *Hokkus*, at least in my mind, are a running living water of poetry where you can reflect yourself to find your own identification" (SEW 2 77).

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