Revisiting Enlightenment Universalism: 18th-Century Lessons on Nonliteral Translations and Transcultural Storytelling

⊙ Wen JIN

East China Normal University

Abstract: A large number of transcultural fictions appeared in the 18th century, providing us with an important entry into discussing the task of comparative literature today. The 18th-century Oriental tales, stories authored by European writers that adapted from or modeled themselves after loose translations of folk tales from the East, practiced a kind of mental shapeshifting, blurring the boundaries between East and West. The same kind of cross-cultural identification is visible in many other literary narratives from the same period, indicative of a fluid, universalist politics regarding Europe's relations with the Orient that requires reevaluation. 18th-century transcultural fictions suggest a few tactics for mediating between the necessity of establishing grounds of comparison and the need to draw distinctions. In its search for ways of breaking through the stronghold of cultural nationalism, comparative literature in its contemporary incarnation does well to rethink Enlightenment universalism as encoded in the literary landscape of 18th century Europe.

Eighteenth-century European literature features a strange genre, the Oriental tale, which includes stories or episodic novels written by European authors, modeled upon *One Thousand and One Nights* and similar collections of tales translated into European languages at the turn of the 18th century. For example, in *Zadig* (1747), Voltaire writes of a Babylonian who is philosopher driven into exile by misfortunes and eventually learns the un-Christian lesson of submitting to the blind fate; in *The History of Rasselas* (1759), Doctor Johnson writes about an Ethiopian prince who wanders across Egypt in search of elusive happiness. The 18th-century Oriental tale often stages a miraculous kind of shapeshifting: European authors try to depict non-European characters in part by projecting their own experiences and in part through informed speculation about people

in the Orient. Thus, they produce fictional beings with a mixed genesis; cross-breeds, so to speak, between European and non-European minds. These fictional Oriental characters often figure as perpetual wanderers, crossing geographical borders and commenting on social experiences that refract the historical realities of both East and West. To be sure, Oriental tales catered to the 18th-century book market's hunger for fanciful stories set in exotic places. Thoroughly commercialized as they were, they performed an important intellectual and cultural function. They stage a playful mental exercise, that of seeking to inhabit culturally different minds while acknowledging their distinct reality, generating fictional minds with inherently doubled and multiplied perspectives. We can use the term "intellectual shapeshifting" to highlight the authorial performance entailed in this literary genre, which quickly dissipated after the 18th century. Orientalism from the 19th century onward treated the East as transparent, separate, and static, but the shapeshifting exercises from the 18th century understood the Oriental as an image arising from cultural mixing, entwined with Europe's project of understanding and reforming itself.

The 18th-century Oriental tale is emblematic of the playfulness and openness that marked Western culture on the cusp of the modern era, when rigid separations (between mind and matter, between Christian and pagan) started breaking down and new, equally rigid social structures based on class, race, and gender were not yet firmly in place. What I referred to as Enlightenment universalism in the title describes exactly this type of self-enrichment through hypothetical fusion with others. This is perhaps the most important legacy that 18th century fiction offers us.

The shapeshifting that we see in 18th-century fiction (not just in Oriental tales, but in sentimental novels and utopian novels too) cannot be equated with the ventriloquy seen in minstrel shows. It requires intelligent and informed guesses and so it is "speculative." Experience alone does not allow us to step into other minds, especially when there is not much experience yet available (as was the case with 18th-century European relations with the East). So what the European writers did in their fiction a few hundred years ago is not unlike what science fiction writers do today, when they write from the perspectives of things (as in Gwyneth Jones's "The Universe of Things") and robots (as in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*). We may do well to describe 18th-century Oriental fiction as embodying a special kind of speculative realism, by which I mean two almost contradictory things: 1) writing about the distant and unknown other as vibrant beings who constantly unsettle European frameworks of reference; and 2) conversely, assuming that the Eastern cultures have significant structural parallels with one's own culture and are thus legible through a mixture of empirical learning and imaginative speculation. In other words, the East figures as both different and accessible.

Adventures of the Soul

Let me cite an emblematic scene from an exemplary piece of Oriental fiction, namely French writer Thomas-Simon Gueullette's *Les avantures merveilleuses du mandarin Fum-Hoam:*

contes chinois (1723), translated into English as *Chinese Tales: Or the Wonderful Adventures of the Mandarin Fum Hoam*. Gueullette (1683–1766) was born under the reign of Louis XIV, to a magistrate at the Châtelet de Paris. He himself became a magistrate at the age of 26. As he cultivated a habit in collecting legal cases, he kept a career in writing fantastic stories (*fées*) that drew heavily from loose translations of Eastern tales (Jean-Emile Gueullette 21). In *Contes chinois*, a Chinese mandarin Fum Hoam is entrusted by Prince Tongluck to convert a Muslim princess to the Buddhist faith, which includes the belief in transmigration, the notion that a soul passes into another body upon the death of the current host. (This doctrine is seen in Mahayana Buddhism more than in Chinese Buddhism, but Gueullette would not have known the difference.) Fum Hoam proceeds to tell the princess about what he experienced and witnessed through his previous lives.

This novel would not have been possible without the spread of *One Thousand and One Nights* in Europe starting from the beginning of the 18th century, which it resembles in structural and thematic ways. *Contes chinois* has a frame story that occasions a panoply of embedded stories, recalling the overall structure of the Arabic tales. The embedded stories unfold across a similar geographical canvas as that seen in *One Thousand and One Nights*, ranging from Damascus, Isfahan, and Agra, to as far as Greece and the Islamic Georgia. The frame story of *Contes chinois* was set in China, evoking the Hunchback story included in the Syrian manuscript of *One Thousand and One Nights* circulating from the 14th century onward and which made its way into volume 4 of Antoine Galland's rendition in the early 18th century.

One Thousand and One Nights is a collection of tales of Indian, Persian, and Arabic origins, circulated orally for centuries before being written down. The first definitive version of the stories, or the original version of the collection, took shape in the second half of the 13th century. This version, now lost, gave rise to competing early copies remarkably similar in style and substance. These copies in turn generated more manuscripts in Syrian and Egyptian. The Egyptian manuscripts incorporated new tales from various eastern languages and sources, giving rise to an unruly, hybridized set of stories. Interestingly the hybridization process foreshadowed the fate of the stories in European languages. Antoine Galland, who first translated the tales into French, used the Syrian manuscript, not only altered the presentation of the stories he translated but also went on to add more stories from other Eastern sources, including ones that he had heard from Hannah Diab, a Syrian Maronite from Aleppo (Makdisi and Nussbaum 35). Galland's volumes became so widely popular that they not only marked the beginning of a craze for Oriental stories, but also spurred authors like Gueullette to generate their own stories set in the Orient. These mimic stories have been referred to in recent literary criticism as the "Oriental Tale." This genre greatly supplemented the novels of domestic realism, which also originated in the 18th century, showing that an increasing interest in presenting the private, emotional lives of middle-stationed individuals was coupled with a desire to depict unknown parts of the world in ways that resonated with European minds. Gueullette's *Contes chinois*, as a key practitioner of this genre, embodies the exuberance of the cross-cultural imagination, inspired by the early anthropological knowledge

of the Orient. Like the other specimens of this genre, the novel entertains readers with exotic tales while investigating "universal" questions, i.e. questions believed to be relevant to both European and Asian experiences.

This literary phenomenon of the "Oriental tale" was representative of a larger cultural trend. Informed by Galland's mix of nonliteral translations and new writings, the Oriental tale is a kindred genre, mixing imitations and creative rewritings. It was thus intimately connected to the proliferation of pseudo-translations during this period, translations claiming to be based on an original that does not actually exist (Toury 40). Just like pseudo-translations that blur the boundary between the source language and the target language, the Oriental tale suggests a general belief in the porous divide between Eastern and Western writings in the 18th century.[1] Oriental tales were often published as bogus translations or anonymously, inviting the assumption of their being translations of certain Oriental originals. Publishers and readers alike did not concern themselves with where exactly these stories came from. "Shapeshifting" became a central trope of cross-cultural genres of narratives as Oriental tales and pseudo-translations.

The absence of the protocols and norms of "correct" translation, in other words, was culturally productive in a peculiar manner. The turn of the 18th century was an era in which translations among various vernacular languages, European or not, were common, mostly conducted in an anti-literalist style susceptible to alterations (largely in the categories of "amplification and omission") at the discretion of particular translations (McMurran 74). The latitude taken with translations had much to do with insufficient concern for copyrights and originality, for sure, but more importantly, it shows that translators felt that they could take personal preferences toward how best to use foreign materials, whether to enrich their own writings or to create a more transcultural type of narrative. The modern "national-cultural differentiation," which assumes that culture is isomorphic with national identity and both are delimited, was not yet fully present (6). 18th-century European writers did not have to acknowledge or tackle established norms of translation and the underlying ideology of cultural differences. They felt at liberty to experiment with multiple ways of dialoging with the East, be it through translations, rewritings, or a mix of both. For this very reason, the Enlightenment was an age of potentiality, before a binary order between East and West was secured. In fact, Guellette's first collection of fantastic tales, *Soirées Bretonnes: Nouveaux contes de fées* (*Breton Evenings: New Fairy Tales*, 1712), begins with a preface that presents the stories as being derived from a Breton manuscript, but we now know that there was never an original (Raleigh 702). *Contes chinois* and the collections that followed were not introduced as translations, but were constructed with the same principles as *Soirées*, all pastiches featuring materials adapted from or created in the vein of previous Orientalists and freewheeling translators of Oriental tales such as Antoine Galland and François Pétis de la Croix.[2]

The politics implicit in the Oriental tales created by Gueullette is captured in the final reversal of *Contes chinois*. At the very end of the novel, we see a strange scene in which the Alroamat, brother of the Islamic princess, reveals that he assumed Fum Hoam's shape and told the stories of transmigration on his behalf. He told the stories to underscore their ridiculousness. He then

castigates the Chinese prince for believing in transmigration and committing idolatry. The brother explains his own faith as follows: "We adore but one God, whose Power knows no bounds, and who according to the instructions of our Prophet, has occasions of no more than a little Dust to destroy his Enemies" (260). What is happening in this specific scene? First of all, there is a clear attempt to dismiss the idea of reincarnation associated with Buddhism, contrasting it with the monotheistic notion of the insoluble bond between each body and its soul, which bears out God's supreme power and rationality. Second, it is also implied that the one true God worshipped by Alroamat, who performs terrifying miracles, is not substantially different from the deities in Buddhism. This God also resorts to miracles that do not seem fully rational. He not only changes dust into weapons, but also allows Alroamat to shapeshift into Fum Hoam. The leveling of the one true God and other false deities becomes more explicit when Alroamat admits to have assumed Fum Hoam's appearances "by some cabalistical Words" that he knew (255). This scene, thus, implicitly places both Judaism and Islam, the other two Abrahamic religions aside from Christianity, on the same level as Buddhism.

Is there a third layer to this passage? Does this ending also contain an invisible reference to Christianity itself, especially to Catholicism? This is also a plausible reading. We can recall that the trope of shapeshifting is not absent from the Christian Bible. Christ himself is famously a shapeshifter. In Mark 9:2–3, we see that "[Jesus] metamorphosed before [Peter and others], and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them." The most explicit references to shapeshifting appeared in an apocryphal scripture in Coptic Egyptian, Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem's "On the Life and the Passion of Christ," but the New Testament contains traces of that ability too. Also in the Bible, the angels (including Satan) all assume human shapes. Indeed, French author Montesquieu creates a fusion tale in his own oriental fiction *Persian Letters* (1717) that refers to shapeshifting conventions in both Christianity and Arabic cultures. In that tale, a rich man named Ibrahim habitually dominates over his wives, one of whom dies and ascends to heaven. She then asks a young man in heaven to assume Ibrahim's shape to set free the women in the harem. Montesquieu's story is clearly a fusion story, referring to both shapeshifting conventions in Eastern stories like those in *One Thousand and One Nights* and to Biblical stories of angels assuming human shapes. This story in *Persian Letters*, the first one about shapeshifting written in a European language, is very likely the immediate precursor to the shapeshifting story in *Contes chinois*. Gueullette was probably aware of Montesquieu's famous novel and attempted a similar kind of cultural fusion centering on the trope of shapeshifting. As scholars have pointed out, many European Christians in the 18th century discussed Islam as a way of reflecting critically upon monotheistic religions in general, turning Islam into a "religious touchstone" (Hunt et al. 252). Gueullette was performing the same kind of mediation, complicating the picture by drawing Buddhism into the already triangulated relations among the monotheistic religions.

So Gueullette's *Contes chinois* both thematizes shapeshifting, which implies an analogy between transmigration and metamorphosis, and performs shapeshifting in creating Eastern figures. It is of course not an exception in its day. In one of Voltaire's philosophical dialogues, he

constructs the personas of Chinese philosophers Kou and Cu-su to debate the meanings of "heaven" and "soul," questions relevant to both European and Chinese cultures (74, 77).

Tales of Empathy with the Cultural Other

The shapeshifting in *Contes chinois* is symptomatic of larger intellectual and literary trends in the 18th century that exceed the boundaries of Oriental tales. A strong curiosity about what foreign lands and people represent and what they can bring to the West is not compartmentalized in isolated genres. Key Enlightenment writers such as Samuel Johnson and Laurence Sterne, who are not often associated with the Orient, were invariably involved in the patterns of cross-cultural identifications particular to their age.

Johnson was deeply drawn to Asian cultures, hungry for knowledge of languages and cultures. In 1775, he conveyed to James Boswell that he endorsed the decision of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to put out verses in ancient languages, including not only Greek and Latin, but also "Syriack, Arabick, and other more unknown tongues" (Boswell 1: 562). Johnson was also a diligent, well-informed practitioner in Oriental tales. He published five oriental tales in the *Rambler* and three in the *Idler*, in addition to the better known *Rasselas, the Prince of Abyssinia* (1759). Johnson's literary career has many linkages to early modern English Orientalism, including quite a number of original accounts of Arabic and Turkish lands, including Richard Knolles' *Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603) and Simon Ockley's *The History of the Saracens* (1708).

Johnson's first engagement with Eastern themes took the form of a historical play. *Irene* (1736) draws its plot from Knolles' *Generall Historie*, among other works of early Oriental learning, depicting the fortunes of a Greek Christian, named Irene, captured by Sultan Mahomet during the 1453 conquest of Constantinople. Johnson departs from his source by pitting Irene, who succumbs to the temptation of converting to Islam in exchange for security, against her more virtuous friend Aspasia. Written in sententious blank verse, the play is deeply mired in the binary imaginary that excludes the Turks from profound humanity. It plugs into the stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims going back to the stigmatization of both the dark-skinned Moor and Turkish troops shown in *Othello*. As he was writing Irene, however, Johnson was also translating Father Lobo's *Voyage historique d'Abyssinie* (1728), the French rendition of a manuscript by Portuguese missionary Father Jerónimo Lobo, into English and published the translation (non-literal as most translations were during this period) *A Voyage to Abyssinia* in 1735. In the preface prepared for the translation, Johnson praises Father Lobo for suggesting that "the Creator doth not appear partial in his distributions, but has balanced in most countries their particular inconveniences by particular favours," expressing an inclination to approach the Orient as a site of particularized presentations of universal human experiences (Lobo 12). It was not coincidental that Johnson went on to create moral fables in the *Rambler* and the *Tatler* modeled on Oriental tales.

The acknowledgement of the universality of human nature is shown clearly in *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1733), a moral fable in the guise of an Oriental tale. As Boswell points out in his account of Johnson's life, none of Johnson's other works is more "extensively diffused over Europe" than the tale rich in both Oriental imagery and important scenes of human life (1: 210). In the beginning of the story, Prince Rasselas feels inexplicable discontent about life in the Happy Valley, a royal retreat secluded from all worldly cares, and discusses this strange malaise with the poet Imlac. The two of them refer especially to the perceived happiness of Europeans, with mechanized comforts of life and infrastructure of communication that facilitates interchange of ideas among friends (Johnson 34). This topic shows clearly that Johnson, like many of his contemporaries, is concerned with comparative advantages of European culture in the throes of modernization and Asian cultural traditions. Unlike those invested in comparing institutions, religions, and customs, Johnson initiated a discussion of relative degrees of "happiness," a topic that did not become prominent until early 19th-century utilitarianism. His conclusion, that "Europeans are less unhappy" than Abyssinians but are not sufficiently happy, is a clear departure from the biased views toward the Orient that many Enlightenment elites, including Johnson himself, sometimes held (34). In Imlac's solo journey and in the journey that the poet undertook along with Rasselas, both of which pass through Egypt, Cairo is presented as a prosperous hub of regional commerce, with a congregation of travelers and merchants who sprinkled the city with mirth. Cairo is depicted as a precursor to the European cities undergoing commercialized transformations, not yet the colonized city that fell under Napoleon.

Johnson's divided views of the Orient capture the central paradox of the ways in which the Orient figured in 18th-century Europe. Eastern customs and knowledge generated both sympathetic admiration and defensive disdain in Enlightenment thinkers, hovering around their writings like shadows that never settled into fixed patterns. Indeed, before his death, Johnson recalled that he used, when sleepless in bed, to "read like a Turk" (Boswell 2: 604). The "Turk" in this claim, associated with Johnson's voracious appetite for books, carries ambiguous connotations, implying both vibrancy and excess.

Laurence Sterne, who advocates gentle sentiments in his works, is also a curious example of cross-cultural empathy. He not only identifies with the Indian Brahmin in his letters, but also alludes to Confucius in his most important work *Tristram Shandy*. If Johnson was invested in universal human inclinations, Sterne was intimately concerned with how modernity felt. Sterne's sentimentalism points to a different kind of universalism. He turns to the East for alternatives to the West, presenting Indian and Chinese cultures as remote parallels to his own critical reflections on incipient modern conditions.

Sterne's most direct engagement with the East came from his relationship with Eliza Draper. Eliza was born Elizabeth Sclater at Anjengo, India in 1744. Educated at a boarding school in England, she returned to her grandfather in Bombay in 1757 and was married at 14 to Daniel Draper, Accountant General in Bombay. She returned to England in 1765 to take her children home for education and met Sterne in early 1767. They were in London together for three months,

after which Eliza returned to Bombay. They kept up correspondence for a year afterwards, until Sterne died of consumption, and the letters from Sterne were published first in 1773 as *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* and retitled in 1904 as *Journal to Eliza*.

Carol Watts has pointed out that in his letters to Eliza, Sterne adopts the persona of a Brahmin as an embodiment of benevolence and transcendence, projecting on it the Enlightenment ideal of universal love. However, Sterne was writing at a time when the Indian Brahmin projected a divided image in English culture; it was both scorned as a figure of slavish "self-annihilation" and idolized as a source of wisdom, showing the tensions between imperial ideology and the Enlightenment faith in love (271). By neglecting in his letters England's colonial presence in India, Sterne tacitly condoned the ideology of empire, underscoring the limits of his own sentimental understandings of love. This argument, though incisive, does not capture the complete picture of Sterne's relations to the East. Sterne's attitudes to India cannot be reduced to the recycling of the Brahmin cliché. In his letters to Eliza, he refers consistently to his physical debilitation and psychic misery, acutely aware of how love, instead of being transcendent, is intimately bound up with death and trauma. Exposing oneself to love often means setting "[one's] wounds a-bleeding every day afresh," revealing one's vulnerability for dissection (150). His identification with the Brahmin can be seen as an ironic performance that undercuts the self-serving sentimentality implicit in the ideology of the incipient British empire.

This move is continuous with *Tristram Shandy*, which subverts the very literary sentimentalism that it embodies. Even as it practices sentimentalism, it quietly changes the meaning of the sentimental novel. It not only showcases the possibility of adhering to the noble heart despite social ills, as early sentimental novels tried to do, but also shows the opposite scenarios, the ways in which the diseases of modern society—its warfare and its drive for order and progress—crush the heart, driving it into prolonged melancholy. As the novel employs a digressive narrative to mimic this melancholic mindset, the narrator invokes Confucius as his intellectual ally. Sterne presents Confucius as a haphazard narrator apt to "go backwards and forwards" in telling a story, who helps justify Shandy's effort to lay bare the darker sides of modern life (93). Sterne not only shows the extent to which Asia figured in the minds of English authors whom we traditionally disassociate with international contexts, but also shows how the East was relevant to immanent critiques of the British Empire as it first took shape during the Seven Years' War.

Politics of Enlightenment Universalism

The literary examples introduced above illustrate what I refer to as Enlightenment universalism, a system of discourses constructing inexact analogies between the religions, ideas, and cultural customs of the West and rest of the world, including in particular the East. Starting from the 16th century, European explorers, missionaries, and merchants brought back to Europe reports of different religious, linguistic, and cultural traditions. The shock of cultural differences

that undermined the monolithic, Christian worldview did lead in significant ways to the construction of a hierarchy of civilizations. As numerous scholars from Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze to Silvia Sebastiani have shown, the Enlightenment paved the way for 19th-century nationalism and racism. This prejudice was compounded by the establishment of a progressive notion of human history, which placed commercial society on the highest level of human civilization. The Enlightenment era was undoubtedly crucial to founding European self-justification on secular and historical rather than on divinely sanctioned reasons.

At the same time, however, Europeans also sought to comprehend the unfamiliar through analogical thinking, approaching the cultural others as structurally similar and epistemologically accessible. From the perspective of world history, the era of European navigations and "discoveries" marked the beginning of globalization, opening the entire world for commercial penetration. This process, however, was not an isolated one. It fell in the wake of the integration of Eurasia that originated in antiquity and increased in the medieval period. Europeans who landed in a city like Surat (the first city that Imlac visits in *Rasselas*) followed in the footsteps of great Islamic and Chinese merchants. Eighteenth-century European writers were not unaware of this. Many of them recognized the temporal and geographical proximity between East and West and embraced the ethos of shapeshifting. The more orthodox Christians traced this similarity to a shared genesis from the Christian God, whereas the religious iconoclasts attributed this similarity to common human conditions, including their embeddedness in the material world. On the one hand, Dutch theologian and classics scholar G. J. Vossius published *De theologia gentili et physiologia Christiana, sive de origine ac progressu idololatriae* (*Gentile Theology and Christian Physiology, or the Origin of the Progression of Idolatry*, 1641) to posit the hypothesis that all human populations descended from Noah and all primitive religions disguised a monotheistic core. On the other, the more radical branches of Enlightenment thought also posited potential communicability between East and West. The deists, for example, alluded systematically to ancient pagan religious beliefs, especially those regarding the soul. Unlike Vossius who sought to establish that pagans formed notions of the immortality of the soul through reason, the deists enlisted pagan beliefs to make the opposite argument, namely that it is impossible to establish the immortality of the soul rationally. Thomas Burnet (with theological ideas close to deism) and John Toland both expressed the belief that transmigration was a mistaken version of the idea of the unceasing transformation of the material world and thus could be incorporated into their own thought (Yang 122).

The same analogical thinking is implied in literary writings. Aside from the examples outlined above, we can also point out Voltaire's various plays (especially *Zaire* and *Mahomet*) and novels, where the author has characters in the East question idolatry and religious bigotry (to imply that these are problems applicable to both Catholicism and religions in the East) and to argue for the universal validity of a benevolent God. Earlier than that, a more obscure novel written by French writer Simon Tyssot de Patot, titled *Voyages et avantures de Jacques Massé* (1707) presents a fictional dialogue between French travelers and the priest of an idealized island country, juxtaposing Spinoza's questioning of the Bible's authority in the late 17th-century Dutch Republic

with the natural religion of an unknown island.

Shapeshifting, the ways in which Europeans identify with and morph into their distant counterparts in the East, is a central feature of the early phase of Western modernity. In shapeshifting, the soul is no longer a spiritual substance that unites with a particular body according to the divine will. It moves through different bodies and where it moves is indeterminate, susceptible to human actions and choices. The soul then becomes immanent, emmeshed with the material world, and can enlarge itself through experience, secular learning, and imaginings. The idea of the immanent soul explored and debated in 18th-century European philosophy and fiction was in dialogue with the new religious and political theories that emerged at the turn of the 18th century. Deism and its close relative pantheism both gestured toward a materialist outlook that sees the world as self-organizing and generative of its own essence, not in need of external spiritual forces represented by the transcendent soul. In political philosophy, new theories of sovereignty were also contingent upon the immanent soul. The embodied people, when coming together to form a society, are capable of producing the "general will," which relates to the people as the "soul" relates to the "body" in a private person. Here, I am quoting from Rousseau's *Social Contract* (92). The physicality of the soul was very much a key point of contention in the 18th century: some physiologists associated the cognitive and emotional functions of the soul with the brain and nerves, but most people were simply unsure and adhered to a "synthesis of innatism and naturalism," as Herder and Kant did, believing that the soul gains its knowledge from natural experiences as well as from pre-given mental categories or faculties (Lifshitz 189).

However vague in meaning, the immanent soul signified the possibility that human society can develop viable knowledge and rules through collective practice and reflections thereupon, thus opening the gate for modern transformation. European contact with the East was central to the formation of this new understanding of the soul. For one thing, the idea of transmigration, introduced through Oriental learning and Oriental tales, gave impetus to debates over the status of the soul. More importantly, Eastern cultures presented both parallels and alternatives that illustrated the viability of the practice of speculating on the unknown through analogy. The various experiments with analogical thinking can be seen as acts of mental shapeshifting illustrating the immanent and dynamic nature of the human soul, and they constitute the core of what I have been referring to as Enlightenment universalism.

Enlightenment universalism, a term often mistakenly equated with naïve beliefs in common humanity, is actually continuous with Jonathan Israel's description of the "radical Enlightenment." For Israel, the "radical Enlightenment" involves strains of thought originating from Spinoza's political and theological theories and criticism of Christian monarchism and emerging Eurocentrism. Having evolved within the context of cultural exchange enabled by the first wave of globalization, Enlightenment universalism is aligned with the radical ethos of critical self-reflections. I have argued that it can be understood to primarily mean two things: 1) Enlightenment thinkers were spurred by their encounter with cultural differences to expand their epistemic paradigms and to account for both the convergences and divergences of different nations; and

2) cross-cultural comparisons undertaken in the 18th century not only displayed intriguingly diverse attitudes toward Eastern cultures, but also provided an important impetus for the modern transformation of European minds.

Conclusion

Compared with 19th-century configurations of East-West relations, 18th-century notions of the East were more fluid, undergirded by strong improvisation and genuine openness. During the Romantic period, English, French, and German authors all acquired more knowledge of the East, but it dovetailed with the increasing colonization of the Eastern world, including the conquest of Egypt and the consolidation of the colonization of India. Consequently, the Romantic discussion of the East could not detach itself from the imperial geopolitics or (in the case of Germany) ascendant nationalism. In the course of the 19th century, a number of European literary elites extended the tradition of Enlightenment universalism and borrowed in productive manners from the Eastern ethos and poetics. Notable examples would include Judith Gautier's *Le livre de jade* (Paris, 1867), Gustave Flaubert's Carthage novel *Salammbô* (1862), Sainte-Beuve's championing of the 10th-century epic *Shâh Nâmeh (Book of Kings)* by the Persian poet Ferdowsi, and Matthew Arnold's borrowing from the epic in his long narrative poem "Sohrab and Rustum," which highlights its pathos and humanity. But this trend manifested itself much more strongly in the 18th century.

The notion of immanent transcendence, championed in the postmodern Western philosophy, originates from the historical moment on which this essay focuses. It first arose from the debates over the soul across the 18th-century philosophy and literature and through the ubiquitous literary performances of shapeshifting. Europeans seemingly dismissed the un-Christian belief of transmigration, but actually derived from it a trope of border-crossing possibilities, or shapeshifting, that launched the West onto a path of modernity. The 18th century has a lot more to teach us today than we realize. Trapped in the double bind of hegemony and cultural relativism, it is time we revisit the art of knowing and incorporating the other without muffling its power to shock and change. Comparative literature, more than any other modern discipline, benefits from its flourishing.

Notes

1. So far, there has been little discussion of how pseudo-translations performed cultural functions. In making the following remarks on what bogus translations might have done culturally, I am indebted to the research of my doctoral student Zhang Zhiyao in his dissertation.

2. Raleigh lists other sources, including "Christian lore, fables, the *Gesta romanorum*, the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* and related Italian works, tales of chivalry, the *Pantchatantra*, the Talmud, the Qur'an, travel narratives, Barthélemy Herbelot's *Bibliothèque orientale*, Herodotus, Ovid, and fairy tales" (701).

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