

The City as Liminal Protagonist in Takeda Taijun's *Shanghai no Hotaru* (Shanghai Firefly)*

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Abstract

This paper examines liminality in *Shanghai no hotaru* (Shanghai Firefly), the last and incomplete work of post-war writer, Takeda Taijun (1912-1976). I use the term liminality here in the sense of occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold and therefore implying the ambiguity and disorientation that is a strong characteristic of the *Shanghai Firefly* narrative. This liminal instability derives to some extent from the international character of Shanghai. It is also closely associated with the tension between subversion of and complicity with the policies of the invader Japanese administration that is apparent in the activities of both the city's local Shanghai-ese and Japanese minor functionary sojourners, including the novel's narrator himself. *Shanghai Firefly* is a series of fictional recollections of the author's time in Shanghai from June 1944 until mid-1945 during which time Japan's fanatical aspirations for victory in total war were clearly leading to disastrous outcomes for all. In this text, the author creates a narrative terrain which sees the narrator/protagonist aimlessly wandering the great Chinese city, an urban space that on occasions completely defies the young man's understanding. I will probe the liminality that underpins Takeda's representation of the city of Shanghai by providing a close reading of excerpts from the "Haïen" (Decaying Garden) chapter – the second last – of the novel.

Keywords

Takeda Taijun, Shanghai, liminality, imperial Japan

1. Introduction

This paper examines liminality in *Shanghai no hotaru* (Shanghai Firefly), the last and incomplete work of post-war writer, Takeda Taijun (1912-1976). I use the term liminality here in the sense of occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold (oxforddictionaries). Originally deriving from the Latin for threshold and used in anthropological studies to denote the suspension of a subject's status during ritual (Turner 1964), the term also has a sense of ambiguity and disorientation that is a strong characteristic of the *Shanghai Firefly* narrative. This liminal instability derives to some extent from the textual representation of the international character of Shanghai, the "port of last resort" for the stateless people of the pre-war and war-

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time eras,¹ but also a centre of global finance and capital during those times.² Liminality is further associated with the tension between subversion of and complicity with the policies of the invader Japanese administration that is apparent in the activities of both the city's local Shanghai-ese and Japanese minor functionary sojourners, including the novel's narrator himself. As a series of fictional recollections of the author's time in Shanghai from June 1944 until mid-1945, the *Shanghai Firefly* setting spans the time during which it became evident that Japan's fanatical aspirations for victory in total war were about to end in disaster for all concerned. Yet residents of the city were forced to follow a script of Japanese dominance in spite of the fact that the authority of the occupying regime was visibly crumbling.

The setting of mainland China is a persistent feature in a number of works by Takeda Taijun, a pre-war translator of and commentator upon Chinese literary material who became a prominent post-war novelist, essayist and dramatist. A key member of the *Chûgoku bungaku kenkyû kai* (China Literature Study Society), convened in 1934 by his Tokyo University colleague, Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977), Takeda was a regular contributor to the society's journal until its 1943 demise (Kawanishi, 2004).³ He first travelled to China in October 1937 as a conscript with the Japanese Imperial Army and general representations of war and its consequences for the people of China appear in many of his works.⁴ In *Shanghai Firefly*, however, the author draws on his time in the city of Shanghai between June 1944 and February 1946 to create a narrative terrain which sees the narrator/protagonist wandering the great Chinese city, understanding of which often eludes him. As the text progresses, moreover, the young man becomes increasingly aware of the capacity of the city and its residents to collude with, while also strongly resisting, the official Japanese presence. Here, the discursive space of China – including those sites outside Shanghai that are engulfed in bloody conflict – that unsettlingly erupts at intervals in many of Takeda's other texts is a constant presence that hovers nebula-like above the entire work from the first page to the last. I will probe Shanghai's liminality by providing a close reading of excerpts from the "Haien" (Decaying Garden) chapter – the second last – of the *Shanghai Firefly* novel.

2. *Shanghai Firefly* and the liminal space of Shanghai

Commenced in early 1976 and left incomplete at the time of Takeda's death in October of the same year, *Shanghai Firefly* is a fictional although semi-autobiographical account of a young

¹ The term "port of last resort" is from the title of Marcia Reynders Ristiano's study of Jewish and Slavic diaspora and refugee communities in pre-1950 Shanghai (Ristiano, 2001).

² The scale of commerce in Shanghai is evident from figures given by Maeda Ai in his discussion of Yokomitsu Ri'ichi's 1928 novel, *Shanghai* (Shanghai). Maeda notes that in 1938, the Naigai Textile Factory (Naigaimen [kabushiki]geisha, (or Naigai Wata Company)'s nine mills in Shanghai generated capital of 33 000 000 yen and employed 17 000 workers (Maeda, 1992: 463).

³ Biographical details for Takeda are taken from Nishikawa Masa'aki's authoritative biography (Nishikawa, 2005).

⁴ In addition to material directly set on the Asian mainland, the discursive space of 'China' reverberates beneath the surface even of Takeda's works that have little apparent connection with that site. Readers are, moreover, often confronted with the unsettling unexpected eruption of this space. In the writer's novel entitled *Fuji* (ser. 1969-1971), for example, set in a psychiatric hospital located in the Fuji foothills in the summer of 1944, a woman patient is violently assaulted – ostensibly in self defence – by the narrator/protagonist intern, Ôshima. Upon learning of this, the *kenpeitai* officer stationed at the facility recalls atrocities against Chinese women committed by his countrymen on the continent (Takeda, 2003; 299-300).

man, Takeda (the same name as the author), who arrives in Shanghai (as the author himself did) in June, 1944, to take up a position (like the real-life Takeda) as a Chinese translator of Japanese cultural material. Produced with his wife, Takeda Yuriko (1925-1993), as amanuensis following his partial paralysis from a stroke in 1971 and when the author was in seriously failing health, the text – until its abrupt cessation upon the author's death – is an account of Japanese life in Shanghai from mid-1944 until an unspecified time in the summer of 1945 when the city is rife with rumours of an imminent American attack (Takeda, 2008: 208-209).

The central character of the novel is the narrator, one of many Japanese literary and cultural figures who feature in the pages of the text.⁵ Arguably, however, the real protagonist of this narrative is the city of Shanghai itself. An oasis of shelter for both Japanese officials and their Chinese collaborators – a concept that, as Parks M. Coble observes, is problematic in that a significant number of those so labelled fail to conform to the usual understandings of that term (Coble, 2003: 206) – the Shanghai of this novel is an insulated terrain in the hell of a war. While the lives of subjects in other parts of the empire, including the Japanese mainland, may have been pushed to the brink, daily routine in Shanghai continues – on the surface at least – with a disturbing semblance of normality. The visiting Ballet Russe performs *Coppelia* (Takeda, 2008: 93-95), the Lyceum Theatre features performances in which the Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) and warlord characters clearly evoke the Japanese military (Takeda, 2008: 23-24), and the residents are largely free from the harsh rationing imposed on inhabitants of the metropole where all available resources had been obsessively directed to Japan's war effort. In spite of its largesse, however, for protagonist Takeda the city remains a liminal site which, even within the confines of the well-resourced French concession requisitioned by the Japanese, refuses easy access. Wandering the streets and entering various public sites such as theatres and drinking establishments, this rather guileless young man from Japan might easily be mistaken for the Baudelaire/Benjamin flaneur (see, for example, White, 2001). This assumption would be a mistake, however, for the protagonist is disqualified from such categorisation not least of all by his mundane appearance – readers are given a highly unflattering first-person account of the young man's attire which includes bag-like roughly cut-off shorts with ankle socks pulled up to emulate the British colonial style in the steaming heat of the Shanghai summer (Takeda, 2008: 24). Rather than venturing out into the city to be observed as an object of admiration, narrator Takeda with his acute lack of panache randomly roams Shanghai tenuously viewing the streetscape before him with a vague sense of desperation. Part-way through the novel the protagonist states:

Somewhere in Shanghai there were things happening that I didn't know about or understand. I had no idea, even, of the exact location of Shanghai's [legendary] race-track. Whether it was to be expected, or whether it was strange, I spent my days immersed in this reality with which I was completely unfamiliar. In Tokyo, too, I had lived really only knowing about one small part of the city. However, after coming to Shanghai, I often – very often – had a sense of countless numbers of people crowded together outside of Shanghai and throughout the whole of China. And not only this, I was constantly aware of

⁵ A recent edition of *Shanghai no hotaru* includes extensive annotations by Ôhashi Takehiko, Zhao Mengyun, Takematsu Yoshiaki, Yamasaki Makiko and Kida Takafumi, which, among other things, provide details of the real-life persons upon whom each of the characters of the novel is based (Ôhashi et al., 2008).

the fact that in well-known places all around the world,⁶ people were moving about, working, resting, sleeping and waking up, making love together and killing each other (Takeda, 2008: 90-91).

The aimless perambulations of the narrator and his inability to grasp the significance of elements of the city around him are associated with the on-going sense of *unheimlich* – unhomeliness – that shrouds the young man. I use the term *unheimlich* here following Sigmund Freud’s use in the essay, *The Uncanny*, to mean something both puzzling and yet familiar (Freud, (undated): 4). Having come to the city as an “expert” on matters to do with China, the narrator is forcibly submerged in an environment that makes little sense and where, not surprisingly given the war raging outside the city, he has a strong sense of both the desire of human beings to survive, but also the death wish that curses the species. This sense of being neither one thing nor another derives partly at least from the fact that, while superficially complicit with representatives of the invading administration, both the urban terrain of Shanghai and its residents ultimately refuse to be disciplined by the despised Japanese.

Rhonda Lemke Sanford notes how, as much as the physical map, the emergence of the cognitive map and topological thinking in the early modern era permitted a definition of, or at least an attempt at achieving, a sense of self and the ascription of meaning to place (Sandford 2002: 3). Takeda’s efforts to create a workable cognitive map of the sprawling space of Shanghai, however, are continually undercut by his many encounters of the unexpected kind. This is particularly apparent with regards to language. In spite of his self-construction as a student of Chinese language and literature – he had provided commentary on Chinese language or literature matters on many occasions for the journal of the China Literature Study Society and had been employed in Shanghai as a translator – the local Shanghai dialect defies the narrator’s understanding. In fact, he notes that prior to departing Japan, he did not have one word of “*Shanghai-go*,” Shanghai dialect (Takeda, 2008: 13), the lingua franca of the local people. This is merely one of a number of obstacles which makes it impossible for him to master the skills necessary to attain Shanghai social enlightenment.

In order to demonstrate how liminality is specifically represented in *Shanghai Firefly*, I will conduct a close reading of excerpts from the first half of the second last chapter of the novel, entitled “Haien” or decaying garden, a metonym perhaps for the Japanese project in Shanghai. This chapter is a rich source of evidence of the liminal state of the protagonist and the city itself. The chapter is set in early to mid 1945,⁷ just, the narrator tells the reader, as “signs of spring were evident around the city” (Takeda, 2008; 152). My analysis will focus on three textual events which are: an account of Japanese reservist training in Jessfield (Zhongshan) Park, a visit by narrator Takeda and several work colleagues to the grave of the great modern Chinese novelist Lu Xun (1881-1936), and a gangland style assassination in a private nightclub by members of – in Japanese – the *ranisha*, or so-called Blueshirts. This was a secret-society type organisation associated with graduates of the Huangpu Military Academy who were loyal to Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975; Jiang Jieshi), and which from the late 1930s operated underground

⁶ Meichi – famous places – is possibly a misprint for kakuchi – every place.

⁷ While no specific dates are given in the excerpts discussed, reference is soon after made to February/March.

as a virtual political terror group.⁸ A detailed reading of these events provides useful insights into the fraught “betwixt and between” status of even the most well-intentioned Japanese in occupied Shanghai.

3. Training for the emperor

The chapter opens with narrator, Takeda, commenting on the relative lack of reservist training in Shanghai. This, he implies, is in contrast to the mainland where imperial subjects are in a never-ending state of preparing for an onslaught by the enemy. One of the key themes of the novel, as suggested above, is the distinction between the straightened circumstances of those in the metropole – where slogans such as “Luxury is the Enemy” and “Abstain until Victory” were rampant – and the relative comfort of daily life for Shanghai residents, who enjoy regular small and occasionally extravagant indulgences. Nevertheless, Takeda and a work colleague, a mild-mannered and respected scholar of Chinese economics whom we can call the professor, are occasionally dragooned with other members of the Shanghai Japanese community into undertaking reservist training in Jessfield Park, the public space established in 1914 by the Shanghai Municipal Council. As the narrator points out, both the participants and the instructor find this training tedious and are keen for the time to pass (Takeda, 2008: 152). In addition to being a valuable source of oblique commentary on the brutality of Japan’s imperial project, *Shanghai Firefly* provides a running commentary on the many absurdities that are carried out in the name of the emperor, with quasi-military training by listless civilians being just one example of these. Later, as he shares a meal with his companion, the narrator notes that the professor – whom we are elsewhere told has lived in Shanghai for the past thirty years and who is surely aware of Japan’s impending defeat – makes no comment on the inanity of the training. This, the narrator makes clear, is not out of fear or the need for caution, but rather from a sense of exhaustion at the energy expended in waiting for the training time to pass (Takeda, 2008: 154).

In terms of liminality, however, it is the response of the Shanghai residents that is equally the key to this scene. Daily performing a theatre of meaningless respect for and submission to the occupiers, local people can make no open comment as they observe the ludicrous spectacle of civilian Japanese training for war under such outlandish circumstance. As the Japanese go through their drills, dragging themselves on their elbows across the parkland grass in mock military fashion, local people gather in a distant circle. These Shanghai-ese look on bemusedly at the invaders – although well-disciplined to display no obvious sign “of cynicism or [to make] any whispered comments” (Takeda, 2008: 152) (at other times in the novel Takeda comments on the capacity of the locals to maintain a dignified lack of response in the face of mistreatment/abuse/or stupidity on the part of the occupying administration). Narrator Takeda’s reflections emphasise the yawning chasm that exists between the invading Japanese and local residents. While both might share the Shanghai soil and ostensibly give support to Japan’s now-disintegrating imperial designs, the concerns of the locals – in a permanent state of tension and alert – are “light years away from” (*senri mo hedatatteita*) (Takeda, 2008: 153) the thoughts of “we band of Japanese who crawled around from the grass to the bushes, from a gentle hill to the edge of the pond, ostensibly with some spiritual notion hidden in our breasts” (Takeda, 2008: 152). For neither the

⁸ For details of the debates that surround this groups and their “fascist” (or not) tendencies, see Wakeman, 1999.

Japanese nor locals, life in Shanghai bore no resemblance to the life of those in other parts of the continent who had experienced the terrifying “three alls” policy of the invaders. Here, in a completely different world from the “retreat, defeat, annihilation, rushed tactical moves, great battles and wholesale destruction” that marked much of China, “the most concerning thing [for residents] was the dramatic spike in the cost of living” (Takeda, 2008: 152). This is in spite of the constant state of alert which gripped locals in their interactions with Japanese and the need, noted above, for Chinese residents to take care not to offend their putative Japanese confreres. Although very occasionally the narrator refers to overt defiance, on most occasions any resistance is subtly subterranean and implemented with a passive visage.

Following the conclusion of the training, Takeda is invited by the professor to eat *o-kayu* – rice gruel. The liminality of Shanghai is to some extent suspended in this scene where the status of the city as an international interstitial space is subsumed by the energetic atmosphere of the local eatery as follows:

The *o-kayu* shop was large and patronised by the ordinary (*shomin teki*) people of Shanghai. The steam of the simmering *o-kayu* poured out of the windows of the old two-story wooden building and mixed with the body heat and conversation of the bustling crowd of customers. I was astounded by the range of *o-kayu* available. And in one dish that seemed to be a specialty of Guangdong, it was almost impossible to choose from (*erabu no ni komaru hodo*) the variety of fish, shell-fish, ham, sausage and quail, duck and chicken eggs on offer (Takeda, 2008: 153).

In this excerpt, Takeda and his companion – having just completed an activity that indelibly signifies their status as invading Japanese – are now inexorably drawn into the Shanghai landscape and become part of their “foreign” environs. Yet neither – not even the professor who has lived in the city for three decades – can perhaps ever be fully part of this local terrain or enter what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as “the contact zone” in which the outsider traveller or sojourner can engage in full and frank exchange with the other (Pratt, 1992: 1-12). The tragedy of this fact is that this is not necessarily any personal fault on the part of the “new-boy” Takeda, much less the professor. Rather, it is a function of Japanese’s unjustified invasion and brutal implementation of its policies. Married to a Japanese woman, with his son at school in Japan, and employed by a semi-official Japanese organisation, the professor, no matter how well-intentioned, is, like the narrator, ineradicably marked with the sign of the invader. From a slightly different perspective, the narrator notes elsewhere with respect to the residences requisitioned by the Japanese administration that nothing in Shanghai really belonged to the invaders. “The true owners,” he observes, “of even the tiniest room [in Shanghai] were not we Japanese. It was the people of Shanghai who owned everything in the city.” As for the Japanese, they were mere “outsiders” (*yosomono*) (Takeda, 2008: 154-155).

Nevertheless, in having the professor invite the relatively inexperienced China-hand, Takeda, to this typical Shanghai-ese eating establishment, the author offers a representation of Chinese and Japanese coming together to share a meal – and, moreover, the Japanese deferring to the local cuisine. Here we see a fleeting example – the excerpt is barely a page – of the hybrid relations that might have been possible had the Japanese and Chinese *shomin* – everyday women and men, a term that Takeda deliberately chooses in his account of the *o-kayu* hall – met each other in circumstances not related to invasion or atrocity. As an aside to the issue of cuisine, we might note a certain reluctance on the part of resident Japanese to eat in local establishments. Joshua

Fogel has discussed the lengths to which Japanese in China went— under quite difficult circumstances given the tyranny of distance – to replicate the living conditions and lifestyle practiced by their country people in Japan. In the case of Shanghai, this included the daily import of fresh vegetables from Nagasaki (Fogel, 2000: 930-931). The visit by Takeda and the professor to the *o-kayu* hall is in marked difference to this tendency. Tragically, however, the overtures of the pair towards establishing productive relations with Shanghai people must come to naught.

Although my principal interest in this presentation is in the liminality of relations between China and Japan, the great metropolis of Shanghai was a melting-pot of many nationalities and these other nationalities, too, appear at regular intervals in the pages of the novel. When the *o-kayu* feast concludes, the professor, with whom Takeda has been boarding, suggests that he move out into a house that is now administered by their employers. This house was once the home of an English family. With the family interned, the house has been requisitioned by the invading Japanese (Takeda, 2008: 154). Takeda was known amongst his colleagues as one who never directly criticised. Many in the literary community, however, were said to have feared his indirect commentary (see, for example, Funaki, 2000: 127), perhaps even more than the full frontal assault of other more belligerent critics. This indirect style was similarly effective in fictional accounts. In this context, Takeda's gentle reference to the English family home with its toys abandoned – in mid-play so to speak – in the nursery is more evocative of the fate of the family at the hands of the Japanese than any lurid description of a home invasion with, drawing on references made in this and other texts by Takeda, the likely rape of women that occurred when the occupying authorities came to displace the former residents.

4. Searching for Lu Xun

The international character of Shanghai is further profiled when Takeda visits the grave of Lu Xun in the company of colleagues from the Shanghai branch of the *Kokusai bunka shinkô kai* – The International Cultural Promotion Committee - an organisation originally chaired by future prime minister Konoe Fumimaro (1891-1945) and formed in 1934 to promote Japan's international cultural profile. The great Chinese writer has been interned in a plot in the expensive Shanghai foreigner cemetery. Narrator Takeda observes that in spite of the name of the cemetery – *Bankoku kôbo*, or The International Public Cemetery – it is only those with wealth who can be interned there (Takeda, 2008: 156). As they search for the site of Lu Xun's resting place, the narrator further notes the Western style grave of a child with the inscription: *Jijo wa shiseru ni arazu. Nemureru nari* – “The child has not passed away. She merely sleeps” (Takeda, 2008: 156). Again, as in the depiction of the empty nursery, the reference to the absent child evokes a pathos-filled reader response. This brief reference also entrenches the liminality of the city with its cemetery where children from foreign lands are interned. But the focus of the party's attention is Lu Xun and the puzzling fact that his resting place, the headstone image of which has been vandalised, is in a foreigner cemetery. How did this grave come to be located in such a place? Why was Lu Xun not originally buried in Shanghai's Chinese cemetery? What extraordinary circumstances led to this development? Narrator Takeda is as puzzled as the reader. Perhaps, he ponders, it was the decision of Uchiyama Kanzô (1885-1959), the Japanese Shanghai bookshop

proprietor and great friend of Lu Xun.⁹ Uchiyama, notes Takeda, was a Christian and might therefore have arranged for Lu Xun's internment in this place surrounded by and yet so removed from his countrypeople. Whether this was the case or not, Zhao Meng-yun confirms that it was indeed Uchiyama who is said to have had the defaced headstone repaired (Ohashi et al., 2008: 157). In 1947 (post-Takeda's fictional recollections), Lu Xun's wife and a number of friends restored the grave with materials from Shaoxing, the writer's Zhejiang hometown. In 1956, the grave was moved to the present site in the park in Hongkou that houses the Lu Xun Museum.

There is a bleakness around this site, however, that suggests the difficulty of the hybrid relations that Lu Xun sought to maintain with Uchiyama Kanzô and that also emphasises the liminality of Shanghai. Here we have perhaps the greatest Chinese writer of the modern era interred in the city's foreigner cemetery. Furthermore, the portrait on the headstone has been defaced. The narrator observes that there are currently (in early 1945) no Shanghai-ese who hold animosity against Lu Xun. This is an indirect reference, it might be assumed, to the Chinese writer's time of living in fear of Nationalist persecution or even execution (Lee, 1976: 284), and perhaps also to his disputes with leftists (Pickowicz, 1976). Thus, the damage to the grave is probably, Takeda speculates, merely the work of naughty children (*akudô*). Nevertheless, where the infant's grave referred to above had a bunch of decaying flowers before it, there are no offerings of any sort at Lu Xun's grave. For Takeda, this is *itamashii*, painful, and a "cold chill swept over me" (Takeda, 2008: 157). All that remains of the amazing literary contribution of the figure who, upon famously viewing, while a medical student in Sendai, a lantern slide of a member of the Japanese military on the point of decapitating a Chinese head – apocryphal or not as that tale may be¹⁰ – dedicated his life to rescuing the Chinese nation from its history, is a nondescript grey concrete headstone with a vandalised image of the deceased.

5. Blueshirt pandemonium in the suburbs of Shanghai

The final event I will discuss is a recollection by the narrator of a story that he has heard of the gangland style assassination probably by members of what is known in Japanese as the *ranisha*, and in English as the Blueshirt Society.¹¹ This was effectively a right-wing terrorist group with connections, as noted above, to the Huangpu Military Academy graduates who devoted themselves to Chiang Kai-Shek's leadership during the 1930s, the period often referred to as "the Nanjing decade" (see, for example, Wakeman Jr., 1997). Always controversial, by 1945, the time of Takeda's text, the group had long been underground. As the narrator leaves the cemetery to wander the district on foot, he immediately (*ippo* – taking one step) enters a precinct that "seems to bear little relation to the religious atmosphere [of the cemetery]" (Takeda, 2008: 158). Mixed in with the grey residences of local people are small picture theatres – inferring perhaps pornographic cinema or its equivalent of the time – and cabarets, with neon lights that only illuminate in the middle of the night (*shinya*) (Takeda, 2008: 158). One particularly imposing

⁹ For an English language account of this friendship see, Christopher Keaveney, *Beyond Brushtalk: Sino-Japanese Literary Exchange in the Interwar Period*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008. In Japanese see Koizumi Yuzuru, *Hyôden: Rojin to Uchiyama Kanzô*, Tokyo: Tosho shuppan, 1989.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the debate around the claim that upon seeing a magic lantern (*gentô*) slide of a Japanese decapitating a Chinese at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Lu Xun gave up medicine to become an artist who would rehabilitate the enervated Chinese spirit see Robins, 2007.

¹¹ For more on the formation of early activities of this group see Wakeman Jr., 1997.

residence, which sits hidden discreetly behind a stand of “rustling poplars and willows swaying in the breeze” (Takeda, 2008: 158) is a club, entry to which is the province of a select group of members. Rumour has it that this is the sometime gathering place of the members of the now underground but clearly still active Blueshirts.

Takeda was not only a novelist, but a dramatist of note. The text then switches to a cinemagraphic description of an assassination that is said to have taken place behind the doors of the stately looking edifice before which the author stands.

In front of the customers who had crowded together at the club, the Blueshirt boss whispered something to an underling. A short while after the underling left, the boss stood up. The customers continued drinking and eating heartily. Just then, a door flew open and a man rushed in, pointed a pistol at a customer and fired. The bullet found its target and the customer fell to the floor.

Not surprisingly, although guests at this clandestine location must surely have been aware of the possibility of such an incident, pandemonium ensues.

The gathering immediately dispersed as the customers, their faces pale, fled from the room. It was not reported whether or not the suspect wore dark glasses. The boss was said to be a small and softly-spoken man.

Explaining that events such as these delighted readers of the non-mainstream press, Takeda notes how “the boss left the club as if nothing had happened”(Takeda, 2008: 159).

In other sections of the novel, as suggested above, narrator Takeda makes clear that the authorities, with imperial Japan in its death throes, had moved to new heights of both absurdity and brutality in their attempts to hang onto the power that was slipping from their grip. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that this right-wing terror taskforce remains active and achieves its desired results. The narrator reflects:

I had no idea where the Blueshirts were in Shanghai or what plans they had in mind. How were the activities of this underground group communicated to others? But there was no doubt that nationalist forces from both the right and the left wandered freely through the streets of Shanghai. And no matter how impatient and frustrated the Japanese military may have become with this situation, there was nothing they could do to stop it (Takeda, 2008: 159).

This is one of many passages in the *Shanghai Firefly* text that emphasises the ill-fated destiny of the Japanese imperial project in Asia. In spite of the murder, massacre, rape and scorched earth activities of the invaders, determined resistance remained in this slow and bloody war of attrition that had such devastating consequences for individuals and groups throughout East and South East Asia. Here the resistance may have a criminal element and the reason for the assassination is unclear. Nevertheless, the event demonstrates the manner in which control of the environment has eluded the putatively all-powerful Japanese. The fact that both the boss who directs the assassination and the underling who carries it out may have, in the daylight hours, worked in an official capacity side-by-side with the invaders, is a stunning reminder of the two sides of collaboration and resistance in the liminal space of Shanghai.

6. Conclusion

Exploiting the notion of an Asian alliance, imperial Japan sought to subjugate all of East and South East Asia in its thrall. As a minor cog in that brutal machine, Takeda Taijun spent his time in Shanghai struggling to understand the great Chinese metropolis and its people, while also incisively observing the irrational acts of the invading Japanese. Often occupying the liminal status of Chinese sympathiser/Japanese functionary, he found that, ultimately, full knowledge of the city eluded his grasp. While, as the meal with the professor at the *o-kayu* hall demonstrated, there were brief interludes during which time he became part of the fabric of Shanghai, these interludes were negated by the need to perform his role as member of an invading occupation administration. This role saw him engaged at times in meaningless acts such as civilian reserve force training in Shanghai's famous Jessfield Park. Although on the surface the city and its residents colluded with the occupiers, resistance was on-going. While sometimes passive, in the form of the be-mused observations of the Chinese visiting the park at the time of the mock military drill, it could also take more violent and underground forms, such as criminal acts by terrorists groups. In the final analysis, the city remained an entity unto itself, constantly reminding the invaders that they were never more than outsiders, *yosomono*, marginalised by their own delusional aspirations for power and control.

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