

On Two Quotations in Lu Xun's *A Slap-Dash Diary*

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*A Slap-Dash Diary (continued)*¹⁾ is an article of seemingly informal style, written by Lu Xun in July of 1926. As the narration goes, on July 2nd²⁾, Lu Xun went to the East Asia Company where he bought a Japanese book about China, *The Chinese Character as Seen in Fiction*³⁾ by Hideo Yasuoka, which systematically criticized Chinese characteristics. Lu Xun always paid special attention to books by foreign authors that pointed out Chinese faults. During his early student period in Japan, he liked to read *Chinese Characteristics* by the American missionary Arthur Smith (1845-1932), and was much influenced by this book in pondering how the spiritual illness of his fellow countrymen could be cured. Lu Xun discovered that Mr. Yasuoka's book also was enlightened by the missionary's book, as he wrote, "Mr. Yasuoka seems to have great confidence in Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* judging by the number of times he quotes it." Because

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1) Lu Xun, *A Slap-Dash Diary(continued)* 《馬支日記Complete Works of Lu Xu, Vol. 3, Beijing, Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe20053:339-367

2) As recorded in Lu Xun's diary, he actually bought the book on Jun 26, 1926

3) Hideo Yasuoka *Chinese Character As seen in Fiction* 小説から見た支那民族性, 東聚芳閣、大正十五

4) Arthur Henderson Smith *Chinese Characteristic*, New York, Fleming H. Revell Company,

the implication to Lu Xun was that the Japanese book somewhat simulated Smith's, he offered no further comment in this article. In a letter to a friend eight years later, however, Lu Xun pointed out that although the book made some pertinent points, it also contained many distorted and far-fetched conclusions. "when I was in Beijing I bought a copy of the book which I left it there, so I can't tell you the detail of the publisher at this moment, and I am afraid it is difficult to get it in Japan now. There have been a lot of pamphlets like that in Japan, but easy come and easy go, few can last long. ... The conclusions (in *Chinese Character as Seen in Fiction*) often make readers laugh."⁵⁾

In the diary entry on July 4th recorded in this article, Lu Xun continued to discuss Yasuoka's book, shifting the topic to Chinese culinary dishes. In the last chapter of the book, *Licentiousness and General Lechery*, Yasuoka quoted a paragraph from *The Middle Kingdom* by the American missionary Samuel Wells Williams (1812-1884) which reads as follows, "Many articles of food are sought after by this sensual people for their supposed aphrodisiac qualities, and most of the singular productions brought from abroad for food are of this nature... A large proportion of the numerous made dishes seen at great feasts among the Chinese consists of such odd articles, most of which are supposed to possess some peculiar sex-strengthening quality..."⁶⁾

It is clear that Lu Xun didn't agree with this assessment. He said he could not stifle a laugh when he read this passage in which, he believed, the missionary's decryption was excessive. Lu Xun argued that a

1894 Japanese translation by Uka Shibue Tamotu, Toky, bowengua, 189. Lu Xun probably read the Japanese translation when he studied in Japan in the early 2nd century. See Li Dongmu, *On the Uka Shibue Tamots Translation of Chinese Characteristics*, Beijing Lu Xun Museum, ed. *Lu Xun Research Monthly*. 1999: 4, 5

5) Lu Xun *Letter to Ta angd* (October 27, 1933), *Complete Works of Lu Xu*, 12:468

6) Samuel Wells Williams *Middle Kingdom*, New York & London: Wiley & Putnam, 1848, Vol. 2, Ch. 13, P. 0

distinction should be made as to class and places with this question, "It is true that the food in Chinese feasts is rather rich, but this is not the daily fare of ordinary people. And although many rich Chinese are profligates, they would hardly go so far as to mix aphrodisiacs with their food."

The Middle Kingdom is a well-known book in western Sinology, which is of much greater length, and was published much earlier than Smith's book. For decades, this encyclopedic work was considered a classic and the most reliable source on China. Nevertheless, it enjoyed less popularity than Smith's book, probably since the latter was less voluminous.⁷⁾ As a matter of fact, Smith quoted quite often from Williams' book. Because Lu Xun did not read Williams' book and knew little about the missionary's life, the passage on Chinese dishes is the only one he quoted. From the article we are discussing, we can see that Lu Xun didn't know the Chinese name of the missionary. In the *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (Beijing Renmin Wenxue chubanshe, 2005), he note on the life and work of Williams to this article is quite simple. In any event, if the passage gave him, and through him, to his readers, a bad impression about Williams, it would not be an unfair conclusion under the circumstance that he labored under.

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Samuel Wells Williams, a Congregational layman, diplomat and Sinologue, was born in Utica, New York, USA, in 1812. In 1831, he entered Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Troy, New York. As a printer's

7) Uka Shibue Taotu also pointed this out in the preface to hi translation of Smit book, when he compared the two works

son, he was sent to Guangzhou as a printer for the American Board of Commissioner for Foreign Missions; there he was an editor, a contributor to, and a printer of *The Chinese Repository* (1838-51). In 1835, Williams went to Macao to complete the printing of Medhurst's *Hok-keen Dictionary*. He visited Japan in 1837 to escort home seven Japanese mariners who survived a shipwreck. During his time with these sailors, he studied Japanese and translated, with their assistance *Genesis*, *Matthew* and *John* into Japanese; at the same time, he began to print Elijah Coleman Bridgman's *Chinese Chrestomathy in the Canton Dialect*, to which he contributed one-half. From 1844 to 1848, Williams was away from China, spending three years in America, where he was instrumental in raising funds for a full font of Chinese type-set by delivering speeches to the American public about China. Those speeches were the prototype of his work *Middle Kingdom*. In 1853 and 1854, Williams was an interpreter for Commodore Perry's Japan expeditions; in 1855, he became secretary and interpreter for the U. S. Legation to Beijing. In 1858, he assisted Minister W. B. Reed in negotiating the Tianjin Treaty with China. He had been charge d'affaires nine times during his term as a secretary and interpreter in China. In 1877, Williams became professor of the Chinese language and literature at Yale University, the first academic placement of this kind in the United States.

In 1848, Williams had published *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Education, Social Life, Arts & Religion of the Chinese Empire & Its Inhabitants* Putnam and Wiley, rev., 1883, with 3 chapters added, and the subtitle changed as *The Middle Kingdom: A Survey of the Geography, Government, Literature, Social Life, Arts & History of the Chinese Empire & Its Inhabitants*. He was granted an LL. D by the American Union College, mainly owing to this comprehensive and authoritative book, which for decades was an essential to westerners who

wanted to study China, and for which Williams was considered perhaps the greatest expert on China in the 19th century.

Williams' purpose actually was to give a just appraisal of Chinese culture, presented both virtues and defects. In the preface, he wrote that the book would change the popular view that the Chinese were laughable and absurd people, and he tried to present their better characteristics. Williams condemned the opium trade and he revealed the despicable ploy used by Portuguese to trick Chinese workers into signing themselves into indentured servitude. He only Chinese tract, entitled *Words to Startle Those Who are Selling Their Bodies* ~~Abstract~~ ^{Abstract} 1859, was in this connection. "I get six of these tracts printed, and covers put on for a cent, and have had about 6,000 circulated within the past fortnight. The Chinese have been dreadfully misused by these coolie dealers; in Macao the Portuguese are not able to get workmen to come either to their house or ships, so great a dread have the natives of being stolen and packed off to the carracoons. Over ten thousand Chinamen have been sent away in 1858, and half this number are already gone this year from here. The Portuguese are ruthless and reckless, and they get hold of natives ten times more the children of hell than themselves, and make these act for them."⁸⁾ He also made valiant efforts to counter the mainstream's paranoid call for Chinese Exclusion in 1870s and 1880s. His most elaborate production in behalf of the miserable and maligned people was a paper on "Chinese Immigration", read before the Social Science Association at Saratoga, in September, 1879. One passage from it is worth quoting as an illustration of the lower state of knowledge about China in the States and his manner in treating an unpardonable sin which provoked most profound emotions. "The summary manner in which the courts of California converted

8) Frederic Williams, *Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL*. New York: G. P. Putnas Sons, 188, reprinted 1972 by SR Scholarly Resources IncPP325-326.

the Chinese in Indians, when it was desired to bring a law to bear against them, has a spice of the grotesque in it. The physiologist, Charles Pickering, includes race; but the Supreme Court there held that the tem Indian included the Chinese or Mongolian race. ' It thus upheld a wrong, while it enunciated a misconception. It placed the subjects of the oldest government now existing upon a parity with a race that has never risen above tribal relations. It included under one term a people whose literature dates its beginning before the Psalms or the Exodus, written in a language which the judge would not have called Indian if he had tried to learn it, and containing authors whose words have influenced more human beings than any other writings, with men whose highest attainments in writings have a few pictures and tokens drawn on a buffalo robe. It equalized all the qualities of industry, prudence, skill, learning, invention, and whatever gives security to life and property among mankind, with the instincts and habits of a hunter and a nomad. It stigmatized a people which has taught us how to make porcelain, silk, and gunpowder, given us the compass, shown us the use of tea, and offers us their system of selection officials by competitive examination, by classing them with a race which has despised labor, has had no arts, schools, or trade, and in the midst of the Californians themselves is content to dig roots for a living."⁹⁾

Williams' other works include *Easy Lessons in China*(1842), *Tonic Dictionary of the Chinese Language of Canton Dialect*(1856) *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*(1874), *Relations with Chinese Empire*(1877)

Samuel Wells Williams died in New Haven, Connecticut, on February 16, 1884.

9) Frederic Williams, *Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL*. New York: G. P. Putnas Sons, 188, reprinted 1972 by SR Scholarly Resources IncP 7-431

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It is inaccurate to say that Williams' discussion of the relationship between Chinese dishes and sex was sheer fabrication. His *Middle Kingdom* was based mainly on his personal observations in China. Moreover, Chinese cuisine was, and still is, associated with the bold concept of somehow enhancing sexual ability. It is especially important to note that Williams lived for a long time in Southern China, where such beliefs and practices were more common than in the north. When Williams came to China, his impression of Chinese cuisine was not abnormal and had nothing to do with sex. In a letter to his mother, he wrote that most of the dishes in a sumptuous banquet he experienced were same as those in his home country, such as bird's nests, lily roots, pigs' tongues, fishes' stomachs, sharks' fins, biche-de-mer, fishes' heads, etc., etc.¹⁰⁾ In *the Middle Kingdom* he even pointed out that Chinese cuisine has not yet reached perfection.¹¹⁾ The association of cuisine with sex entered his mind probably because he observed some unfamiliar articles in traditional Chinese medicine and also perhaps because some animals such as cats, monkeys, etc. were presented on the dining table. If Lu Xun, who rejected traditional Chinese medicine, had read these passages, he would have considered Williams' observations to be very reasonable.

From the context in which he ridiculed Williams, it is apparent that Lu Xun's words were strongly influenced by his strong reaction to Yasuoka's writings. For example, Yasuoka had used bamboo shoots to verify Williams' statement: "Bamboo shoots mean just as much to the Chinese as prawns. In fact, bamboo shoots are even more popular here than in Japan. This

10) *Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams, LL.*, 69

11) *Middle Kingdom*, P781

may sound laughable, but it is probably because the erectness of the bamboo shoots reminds them of something else.”¹²⁾ Lu Xun’s comments were that bamboo shoots are an ordinary dish in his hometown and that he resented the exaggeration that there is a sexual element in many Chinese dishes.

Nevertheless, in all fairness, it should be noted that Lu Xun’s criticism also could be extreme at times. The traditional association between Chinese cuisine and sex cannot be totally denied. In this regard, there is an old Chinese saying that, “Material comforts lead to sexual desire.” Although this concept was more applicable to the wealthy and those in powerful positions, who could attend feasts and ingest food in which strengthening elements purportedly were added, it also is popular with ordinary people. Another venerable Chinese saying is, “People follow the example of their superiors.” Taking the prawn as an example, Lu Xun himself acknowledged that, “the prawn also has aphrodisiac properties. I have heard the same said in China too.”

There are more examples than bamboo shoots or prawn that support the concept that a shape can provoke sexual imagination. As Lu Xun wrote, “There is a plant—squaw root—which because of its appearance is considered to cure impotence.” Lu Xun argued that this rendered the plant an herbal medicine, not a vegetable. But if it can be ingested as an herbal medicine, it should be processed and presented to the dining table.

It is most likely that Lu Xun’s disgust with Yasuoka caused him to over-react to Williams’ commentary. In quoting *the Middle Kingdom*, Yasuoka didn’t note that the missionary wrote about bamboo shoots in Chapter 6, which dealt with China’s fauna and flora. Williams said that in China, monks raised bamboo in the temples for personal consumption or

12) *Chinese Character as Seen in Fictio*, P162-16

sale in the local marketplace. ¹³⁾If Yasuoka's sexual assertion were true, eating bamboo shoots would have been forbidden in Chinese temples.

On a more cognitive level, Lu Xun was on point in reacting to Williams' statement with sarcasm. According to Lu Xun, "When foreigners who study China probe too deep and are over-sensitive, they often end up by becoming more sex-conscious than the Chinese." Samuel Wells Williams was a missionary from a prominent New England Presbyterian family. In 1875, he returned to the United States via Europe, where he visited many churches. A letter he wrote expressing doubt on the educational function of the sculptures and paintings in European churches, provides a reflection of his inner puritan spirit. He concluded that the sculptures and paintings added nothing to religious piety because man standing in the Grand Church in Antwerp will pay more attention to Rubens' two paintings of the Cross than to the *Bible* or any sermon. "I am thankful, more than ever thankful, that I was not trained to worship God in a church like the cathedral at Antwerp... I have read lately with renewed interest the command given beforehand to Moses, that the pictures found in Canaan were to be altogether destroyed, as well as the images, lest the Israelites be led into idolatry... But when the associations of a pure faith are combined with statues and paintings of consummate art, spiritual things become to us degraded to the level of worldly things, carnal and sensuous." ¹⁴⁾ Williams' tone is similar to that of a Confucian moralist. In Williams' opinion, luxurious foods, especially with sexuality-strengthening elements, were pernicious to the human mind, just like the sensuous sculptures and paintings in European churches.

13) *Middle Kingdom*, P358

14) S. W. Williams *Letter to R. S. Williams* July 1, 1875) *Life and Letters of Samuel Wells Williams*, LE.408-409

The commentary about Hideo Yasuoka and his works in *The Complete Works of Lu Xun* was even less informative than that about Williams. It states that, *The Chinese Character as Seen in Fiction*, published by Gather Fragrance Pavilion Press, Tokyo, in April 1926, is “a book in which the author expressed despise on Chinese people.”¹⁵⁾ Unfortunately, these sweeping words gave no fair appraisal of the book. Hideo Yasuoka was born in 1873, and graduated from Keio University in 1892. From 1893, he worked for the newspaper *New Current Affairs* and became its chief commentator in 1923. His scholarly interests were in theology, literature, history, and fine arts. He also authored *Japan and China*.

The Chinese Character as Seen in Fiction used many examples taken from Chinese fictional works, such as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*, to describe Chinese characteristics. Although some of the examples were not appropriate, they showed that the author was familiar with Chinese culture. Works of fiction often contain much material about the so-called lesser traditions of a nation. As an expert in the study of Chinese fiction, Lu Xun wrote the famous scholarly work, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*. On June 26 of 1926, despite a lack of money, he purchased Yasuoka's book and wrote in the same article, “The knowledge of our people is mainly depends on fictions, even depends on the theatrical pieces adapted from fictions.” He affirmed the merit of the book by adding, “The national character as seen in fiction is a good subject.”

At the start of his article, Lu Xun admitted that as a Chinese he couldn't help breaking into a sweat, when he saw the sentence in the preface of Yasuoka's book, “Seeing how strong and widespread these habits

15) *omplete Works of Lu Xun*, Vol., P356-357

are in China, we need not scruple to call them Chinese characteristics.”¹⁶⁾ For example, both Smith and Yasuoka highlighted the undue emphasis on Face and Appearances in Chinese society. Lu Xun wrote, “If we look around and consider ourselves, we shall see that this is no malicious exaggeration.”

In asserting the purported relationship between Chinese cuisine and sex, Yasuoka followed the example not only of Williams, but also of another American author, William Sanger, who, in *The History of Prostitution* (1858), expostulated the same point of view as that of Williams.¹⁷⁾ It is obvious that the opinion was popular then.

Frankly speaking, Lu Xun's commentary was not completely objective. Today, it is popularly accepted by the Chinese people that some plants or foods have medicinal properties. That fact cannot be denied in order to redress an exaggerated perspective.

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Now it is a universal practice of strengthening sex capability through eating. Comparing to the eating of, say, Viagra in some countries, it is more naturally good to health and less dangerous through eating dishes or medicines extracted from herbs. Not only Chinese, but also people in other countries seek sex-enhancing elements in foods. Therefore it is too extreme to conclude that Chinese people have an especially strong inclination to sex, only because they pay attention to the body-strengthening function of dishes. As to the above-mentioned quotations in Lu Xun's article, the one

16) *Chinese Character as Seen in Fictio*, preface

17) *Ibid*180

by Williams is somewhat biased against Chinese people, while that of Yasuoka is imaginary, even ridiculous, in Lu Xun's opinion. Judging by the context, we can see that Lu Xun's quotes didn't alter the original intention of the two authors. However, as we have discussed above, these quotations are not typical of the two books, especially of the former one. So the question arises that why these two quotations roused Lu Xun's resent, even his anger? Are there any other causes beyond the ridiculousness of their statement about sex? Not only his criticism on Yasuoka's point of view, but also, by extension, did he express despise on other Japanese Sinologues. Lu Xun read many books about Chinese characteristics written by Japanese authors, of which we can find some examples in his book collection¹⁸⁾, such as Kouno Yatakichi's *Shina Kenkyu*(ni satsu, 1924-1925), Gotou Asatarou's *Shina Bunka Kenkyu* (Tokyo, Fuzanbou, 1925) and *Sougaku no Shina* (Tokyo, Nihon Yusen Kaisha, 1925), Kinoshita Yatarou's *Shina Nanpoku Ki* (Tokyo, Kaizousha, 1926), Nihon Shinagakusha hen *Shinagaku* (1929), Ikeda Ryuzou's *Chugokujin oyobi Chugoku Shakai Kenkyu* (Tokyo, Ikeda Mujin Kenkyusho, 1931), Tachibana Boku's *Shina Shakai Kenkyu* (Tokyo, Nihon Hyoronsha, 1936) etc. etc. In the eyes of his and many Chinese readers, some of these books had unfriendly, malicious or political intentions. In the same letter to Tao Kangde, Lu Xun wrote that, "Now Kouno Yatakichi is well-known as an expert on China, but actually his study is superficial, and it seems that he has already lost readers in Japan. There are some newly produced China experts in Japan as they claim, but there are few real Sinologists there. The books they produced to attack Chinese national character so far, have been following the example of Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* which there was a translation in that country 40 years

18) SeBeijing Lu Xun Museum ed *Catalogue of LXuManuscripts and Collecte Boo*, 1959, inner circulation

ago, and which was better than that written by Japanese."¹⁹) Therefore Lu Xun preferred to the book written by Smith.

In the years past, some critics argued that Lu Xun's severe criticism on Chinese characteristics was highly influenced by foreign missionaries, and in this way he helped to the depreciation of Chinese national characteristics. But as seen from this diary-style article, it is certain that Lu Xun had his own criterion and stand firm in retorting the malicious depreciation of the Chinese characteristics, even went to his own extreme.

Generally speaking, Lu Xun always kept a sense of propriety in valuing two authors, even in this kind of cursive writing. And In the discussion of eating bamboo shoots, readers can taste a flavor of Lu Xun's dialectic art.

Lu Xun was interested in and heartily welcomed the critical books foreigners wrote about China, however fierce the criticisms might be. Fourteen days before his death, Lu Xun wrote in an essay that "Actually, the Chinese do have sense enough to know themselves... I am still looking forward to the time when Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* will be translated into Chinese. We should read this, reflect and analyse ourselves to see whether he has said anything correctly or not, then make reforms, struggle and change ourselves without asking others for their forgiveness or praise. So we shall prove what the Chinese are really like."²⁰) Although he expressed a dislike on Yasuoka's book, his words about Smith's book can also be used to the books by Williams and Yasuoka. As the Chinese version of *The Middle Kingdom* has already been published ²¹), I would

19) Lu Xun, *Letter to Ta angd*(October 27, 1933), *Complete Works of Lu Xu*, 12:468

20) Lu Xu *For Future Reference Li ci cun zha*), *Complete Works of Lu Xu*, 6:4-649. Here I use Yang Hsien-y and Gladys Yang's translation, see *Selected Work of Lu Xu*, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 4:0-2. There have been at least 4 Chinese translations of Smith's book published after the Great Cultural Revolution in mainland China

21) Zhongguo Tonglu (《中國通論》) two volumes, translated by Chen Ju, Shanghai, Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2004

like to suggest that the Japanese book also be translated into Chinese. Readers will see a specimen of Japanese Sinology in mid-1920s.

<Abstract>

On Two Quotations in Lu Xun's *A Slap-Dash Diary*

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Written in 1926, *A Slap-Dash Diary (continued)* partly dealt with the topic of Chinese characteristics. In discussing the relationship between Chinese dishes and sex, Lu Xun quoted two paragraphs of foreign authors, Samuel Wells Williams of the United States and Hideo Yasuoka of Japan. Lu Xun pointed out their prejudice against Chinese people and refuted their arguments in a mocking tone. But Lu Xun went to the other extreme in denying the relationship of Chinese cuisine and sex. These two foreign books from which the two quotations were taken should be reread and studied by Chinese, who can see how they were depicted then and how they should make reforms. And Chinese readers can see in them the specimens of Japanese and American Sinology at that time.

Key words : Lu Xun, Hideo Yasuoka, Samuel Wells Williams, Chinese characteristics, Chinese dishes, sex

투 고 일 : 2008년 7월 15일 / 게재확정일 : 2008년 8월 15일
