Abstract

Although Japanese writers who experienced living in Indonesia in 1940-1945 witnessed the issue of racial disparity as the reality of a European colony, they were unable to depict it sufficiently because they were expected to portray a peaceful coexistence between Japanese and Southeast Asian peoples as the ideal picture of the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This paper explores the possibility of evaluating literary works written under the notion of the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere by analyzing Jun Takami’s short story “Shominzoku” (July 1941) using Marie Louise Pratt’s “contact zone” as an analytical tool. “Shominzoku” poses the problem of Japanese positioning in European colony; of how the protagonist sees himself and others, and how he wants to be seen by other races. Examining the narrative technique of the story to view Japanese positioning in the Netherlands East Indies, this paper argues that although “Shominzoku” can be evaluated as a criticism towards the notion of Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, it is actually an ambiguous work due to a reflection of the persisting idea that Japanese is, indeed, a superior race.

Keywords: contact zone, Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Japanese positioning, Jun Takami, “Shominzoku”

Introduction

Although researches on Southern Literature (nanpō bungaku) in Japan have started since 1980s, it remains, with regards to Indonesia, limited to biographical researches of individual authors who experienced living in Indonesia between 1940-1945, either by own intention or dispatched by the government as members of Propaganda Squad of the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy. Little has been done about how these authors raised the issue of “contact zone” (Marie Louise Pratt) as a reality of the colony they were witnessing.

Pratt (2008) defines “contact zone” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (p. 7). Indonesia as a “contact zone” can be proven from the issue of “race positioning” as a result of race-based social stratification constructed by the Dutch colonial government. In the Netherland East Indies, the Dutch, as well as other Europeans and Eurasians, was in the first rank, followed by Foreign Orientals, and indigenous people the last (Van der
Kroef, 1956, p. 139). And superior culture has customarily been represented by the white race. However, “the clear distinction between Europeans and Asians… was upset when the Japanese were equated with the Europeans at the end of the nineteenth century” (Fasseur, 1994, p. 37). The Japanese Law (Japannerwet, 1899) especially drove Chinese residents of the Netherlands East Indies to dissatisfaction. Moreover, after the break of the Second Sino-Japanese War in July 1937, the anti-Japanese feeling among Chinese intensified. Because “there is a big difference between the exact wording of a law and the way in which it will be understood and interpreted” (Fasseur, 1994, p. 41), Japanese were legally accepted as part of the “European” class, although socially regarded as “Asians”.

Under these circumstances, how Japanese positioned themselves and were being positioned could become a problem. These circumstances were the reality surrounding the Japanese writers during their stay in the colony. Depicting it as it is, however, is problematic, because Japanese literature in the first half of the 1940s was expected to portray a peaceful coexistence between Japanese and East-Asian as well as Southeast Asian peoples as the ideal picture of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. When manifested into literary works, it appears on typical motifs such as; “Europeans are the oppressor and Asians are the oppressed” or “Japanese and other Asians are equals”. Surely Japanese writers at that time were unable to depict this reality sufficiently. Thus, is it possible to evaluate literary works written under the notion of Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere? This paper explores such possibility by analyzing Jun Takami’s short story “Shominzoku” (1941) by using postcolonial approach as theoretical framework and deploying Pratt’s “contact zone” as analytical tool.

Jun Takami (1907-1965) was known as a proletarian writer who, along with his other leftish peers, performed an “ideological reversal” (tenkō) in early 1930s under duress. In January 1941, Jun Takami and his friend, painter Shōnōsuke Mikumo, went to the Netherlands East Indies and returned to Japan on May. Between 14-15 November 1941, along with other cultural workers, Jun Takami received a draft paper (shōshūreijō), known as the “white letter” (shiragami), to serve the country (Tsuzuki, 1986, p. 23). He was assigned to the Propaganda Squad (sendenhan) of the Army Press (rikugunhōdōhan’in), and on 23 November was dispatched to Burma. He stayed there for a year and returned to Japan in January 1943. In June 1944, he was, again, assigned to the same squad and dispatched to China (Kamei, 1971, p. 548). Based on this timeline, it is clear that Jun Takami’s status when staying in the Netherlands East Indies was not as a member of the said squad, but as a traveler. In spite of that, it does not mean that Jun Takami has more liberty at writing his experience of living in the colony. Because after the break of the second Sino-Japanese War until the end of Pacific War, Japanese literary world was not immune from the policy of supporting war imposed by the government.

“Shominzoku”—means `each ethnic group’—was published in Kaizō in July 1941. Kaizō was known as a leftish magazine during Taishō (1911-1926) and early Showa periods until the break of the Pacific War. Afterwards, the magazine raised its rightish tone, as many others did at that time, mostly in order to survive (Kōno, 1977, p. 45). In February 1942, “Shominzoku” was published by Shinchōsha in a compilation of Jun Takami’s short stories bearing the same title. Next, it was republished in Nihon Shōsetsu Daihyōsaku Zenshū 8 (Complete Works of Representative Japanese Stories Volume 8) by Koyama Shoten in August 1942 and in
Sandaimeisaku Zenshū: Takami Jun Shū (Complete Works of Three Eras: Jun Takami Collection) by Kawade Shobō in July 1943. In his commentary for Sandaimeisaku Zenshū: Takami Jun Shū, the literary critic Ken Hirano (1907-1978) commented superficially that “Shominzoku” is “a souvenir of travel to the Netherlands East Indies” and “the sad destiny of indigenous people and Chinese residents is vividly written” (Hirano, 1943, p. 382). However, it seems that this short story was regarded as a minor work because there is no thorough literary review written about it at the same period.

Narrated from the first-person point of view, “Shominzoku” is not just a story about a Japanese traveler who is “making a contact with various ethnic groups in a bus, an experience that is impossible to happen in Japan” (Kawamura, 2012, p. 678). Its main theme is the protagonist’s emotional transformation—“from favor to contempt to introspection”—towards non-European races of the Netherlands East Indies. Through this theme, “Shominzoku” poses a problem of Japanese positioning in a European colony; of how “I” sees himself and others, and how he wants to be seen particularly by non-Europeans.

The goal of this paper is to examine the narrative technique used in “Shominzoku” to raise the issue of such positioning in a European colony and explore the possibility of reading it as a criticism towards the notion of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In conclusion, this paper argues that although “Shominzoku” can be evaluated as a criticism towards the said notion, it is actually an ambiguous work due to a reflection of the persisting idea that Japanese is, indeed, a superior race.

Previous Studies and Significance of Study

Started with researchers of Japanese writers who experienced travelling or living in China, Manchuria, Korean Peninsula and Taiwan, since 1980s researches on Southern Literature turn attention to Southeast Asia. Tadataka Kamiya (1984) sets the foundation of research on South-Commissioned Writers (nanpōchōyōsakka) by making a comprehensive list of writers and their works which are set in Southeast Asia. Since then, researches on authors, particularly who were dispatched to Indonesia as members of Propaganda Squad during Japanese occupation, has been studied. However, these studies tend to be author-oriented, particularly dealing with theme related to authors’ “southern experience” or perception on Indonesia. For example, Kazuaki Kimura (1992) shows that the characteristic of Tomoji Abe’s works is his interest on Indonesian culture and the history of Japan-Netherlands relations. Shinobu Tsuchiya (2013) presents an overview of Takeo Kitahara’s placement in Java and the works he published during duty. Syahrul Marta Dwususilo (2015) argues that Rintarō Takeda’s view on Java shares characteristic of Japanese orientalism whose emphasis is on the superiority of Oriental civilization.

Regarding “Shominzoku,” unfortunately there is no previous studies so far. There are only two essays about Jun Takami’s other work, Aru Hareta Hi Ni (On One Sunny Day, 1941) whose setting is in Bali. Kazuaki Kimura (1991) does a typical biographical research by showing the relationship between the author’s “southern experience” and topic of the novel. Shinobu Tsuchiya (1999) points out that Jun Takami depicts puputan to present different image of Balinese culture compared to the exotic ones which were already popular in Japan.
These studies do not specifically deal with the issues of how race based social stratification in the Netherland East Indies is perceived and problematized by Japanese writers. This paper is an attempt to fill this gap by emphasizing on how fiction engages with issues concerning racial disparity in a European colony and the notion of Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This paper contributes to existing researches on Southern Literature, particularly about representation of Indonesia in early 1940s.

**Theoretical Framework and Method**

This paper makes use of postcolonialism. Here, postcolonialism refers to “a reading strategy, bringing to bear questions that can help identify the traces of colonialism in critical as well as literary texts and evaluate the nature and significance of the textual effects of these traces” (Keith Foulcher & Tony Day, 2002, p. 2). This paper also deploys the concept of “contact zone” to elucidate “Indonesia” as a social space rather than merely geographical one.

This paper particularly utilizes sakuhinron method (equals with text-oriented analysis in Western literary criticism) in analyzing the object of study. Rather than focusing on the literary elements, sakuhinron focuses on the narrative technique and aims to unravel “the narrator’s ‘lie’, `emphasis`, or `contradiction’” (Hideaki Satō, 2016, p. 28). Although now sakuhinron is considered traditional method in Japanese literary criticism, this method is useful to reveal ideology within fiction without disregarding contexts of the story.

**Narrator’s Emotional Transformation towards Non-Europeans**

“Shominzoku” is a story about two Japanese travelers, “I”—the narrator/protagonist—and his friend, M, who journey to the Netherlands East Indies and stay in Bali for a month, in a hotel owned by a Chinese. “I” and M plan to go to Java Island and decide to buy bus tickets from the hotel manager. Because in the Netherlands East Indies, Japanese people are equated to “Europeans”, at first they want to buy first-class tickets. However, they change their mind after the hotel manager and Chinese guests recommend them to buy second-class tickets because “with second-class tickets Japanese can still sit in the front seats” (Takami, 1970, p. 84). On the bus, “I” and M sit in the front row which is categorized as first-class seats. During the trip, “I” experiences an emotional transformation due to the circumstances that will be elaborated further below.

As Pratt (2008) points out, in a colony, “the relation among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and ‘travelees,’ is not in term of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices, and often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 8). In “Shominzoku”, the narrator/protagonist is a Japanese traveler who is aware that the country he is visiting categorizes his race into the ruling class. Accordingly, the narrator already puts himself in a higher position compared to non-Europeans. Following the narrator’s emotional transformation—from favor to contempt to introspection—, it can be argued that “Shominzoku” raises the issue of how, within a race-based class society, Japanese sees himself and wants to be seen, indeed, as a superior race.
Concretely, the narrator’s emotional transformation is divided into three episodes; “before riding the bus”, “in the bus”, and “when the bus stops”. In the first episode, the narrator is depicted as a Japanese traveler who has feeling of favor towards Chinese and Indonesians, while in the second, “I” develops a feeling of contempt towards the other races but then being introspective about it. In the last episode, the narrator’s emotion towards the other races is depicted neutral.

The main setting of the first episode is the Chinese hotel where “I” and M stay. Because the narrator is unable to speak Chinese and Malay, while M speaks Beijing dialect that “doesn’t go with the Chinese who live here” (Takami, 1970, p. 83), the Chinese hotel manager writes a note for them to buy second-class bus tickets. Later, other Chinese guests come and talk enthusiastically, which “I” interprets as an encouragement for him and M to buy second-class tickets. In this episode, “I” expresses his favorable feeling towards Chinese by using phrases: “I looked around and smiled, expressing my gratitude and feeling of favor”, “I was touched”, and “that was the first time I saw how they care to Japanese like me and M” (Takami, 1970, p. 84).

In the bus, “I” and M sit in the front seats. Next to “I” sits a young man who “wears black kopiah that resembles Turkish hat. That hat is not usually worn here. It seems that he is a Javanese” (Takami, 1970, p. 84) based from his outfit. During the journey to Gilimanuk, “I” observes other passengers: an Indian who stops the bus in the middle of the road because he was late; a Javanese man who sits next to him and Javanese women behind him; a Balinese; another Indonesian whom “I” is not sure which part of the archipelago he comes from; two Chinese; an Eurasian; and a European who sits “in the best seat, the one-person-only seat” (Takami, 1970, p. 88) next to the driver.

As time passes, “I” starts to feel uncomfortable because he is cramped at his seat. “I” is also annoyed with the Javanese next to him who “puts his briefcase between the wall and himself, and sits with his legs wide open” (Takami, 1970, p. 89). In the original text, the word used to describe the narrator’s feeling is “hara ga tatsu” and its combination,—“hara dachi” and “hara wo tateru”— which can be translated into ‘being angry’ or ‘being upset’. The narrator’s feeling is worsened by the fact that he is unable to speak Malay, thus he cannot tell the Javanese that he is annoyed. He silently grumbles: “Hey, why do you act self-importantly, sitting with thighs wide open like that? I am cramped here. Why don’t you refrain yourself a little bit?” (Takami, 1970, p. 89) and “`What`s with this native. He`s a native but sitting self-importantly with thighs wide open. Why can`t he refrain himself in front of a Japanese!” (Takami 1970, p. 90). In the original text, “I” uses the word dojin, which can be translated as `native`. It is now categorized as a derogatory term but in the 1940s it was considered neutral. In the text, however, this word seems to be deliberately used only to express “I”’s contempt towards the Javanese passenger. In the scenes in which “I” is observing indigenous passengers, exact ethnic group names—Balinese or Javanese—are used.

“I”’s feeling of contempt worsened when he is mistaken as Chinese by the Javanese passenger. In this scene, the Javanese speaks of something “I” cannot understand. The Javanese points at his wrist, a gesture “I” interprets as asking time. “I” then shows his watch to the Javanese, who looks at it and says “xiè xiè”, or “thank you” in Chinese. “I” reacts silently:
Xié xié. Has he mistaken me as Chinese?... It is unclear whether he really has mistaken me as Chinese, but if he really has, I feel uncomfortable. Strangely feeling uncomfortable. Is that the reason he’s sitting self-importantly like that? Because he has mistaken me as Chinese? (Takami, 1970, p. 91).

“I” is aware that in the Netherland East Indies, Japanese, Chinese, and Indonesians are categorized into three different classes: Japanese are the ruling class with Europeans, Chinese are Foreign Orientals, and Indonesians are in the bottom. He knows that he belongs to a higher class compared to Indonesians and Chinese. After being mistaken as Chinese, the racial prejudice towards Indonesians and Chinese grows inside him. While “I” is upset with Javanese who “always act timid and belittle themselves because they are subjugated by European”, he affirms the contradictory feeling he has due to the fact that “I feel disgusted when I see Javanese’s behavior that doesn’t show respect to me as I have expected” (Takami, 1970, p. 90). Furthermore, he wonders whether the Chinese hotel manager and guests earlier think that, “’There’s no way you buy first-class ticket as if you are first-class citizens. It is proper for you to buy second-class tickets just like Chinese do’” and suspects that they “have ulterior motives, perhaps to insult Japanese” (Takami, 1970, p. 91).

The depiction of “I”’s emotional transformation clearly shows that “I” demands the other races to be fully aware that there is racial disparity between him and them. Such depiction also shows the issue of Japanese positioning in a European colony particularly how a Japanese sees himself equal with Europeans, and wants to be seen so by the other races. As Japanese literary critic Minato Kawamura (1992) argues,

What Jun Takami saw in the South was the oppressed, the exploited, the colonized Indonesian. But such gaze is typical of a ‘civilized man’ from a civilized country—Japan—when seeing ‘natives’. Along with sympathy, appears hatred towards natives’ servileness and anger towards their insolence. This is a proof that a deep-rooted racial prejudice and discrimination exist within him (p. 78).

It is important to pay attention to “the bus” as the main setting of the story. In the Netherlands East Indies, “all aspects of life were racially distinguished, from train tickets to toilets” (Vickers, 2005, p. 28). However, the colonial society did not work simply based on race-based social stratification because class, too, played a significant role. Members of any race might enjoy the luxury of first-class service as long as they could afford it. Public places such as cinemas or buses enable various races to gather and witness how they were clearly being separated by race and class.

As Jun Takami (1941a) himself witnessed when he was in the Netherlands East Indies, in case of cinemas, “the seats are arranged according to the entrance fee. Front seats, where you cannot see the show clearly, are the cheapest, while the rear seats are more expensive.” (p. 16). On the other hand, although bus seats were separated by class, as indicated in the story, “the seats are separated into two types; front row was first class and rear row, where the jolt is
stronger, is second class” (Takami, 1970, p. 84), they are also characterized by narrowness that enable both “superior” and “inferior” races to have direct contacts with each other.

Although “I” is aware that the colonial society of the Netherlands East Indies operates under race-based social stratification, as a foreign traveler he is unfamiliar with the fact that it also works under social class differences, represented in the story by the ambiguous bus seating arrangements. “I” thinks that, as a Japanese, he has a privilege to sit at the front seat. When he sees a Javanese, whose appearance he describes as “different from poor inhabitants I saw in the streets of Java…he is probably rich or has some status” (Takami, 1970, p. 90), also sits at the front seat, racial prejudice starts growing inside him.

When a policeman boards on the bus with a memo book, asking each passenger to write down their name, destination, and purpose of coming to Bali, “I” deliberately changes his purpose of coming to Bali, from “Study of Art” to “Sight-seeing” (English term is used in the original text). And “I” silently mutters: “Hey, look carefully. I am Japanese. Suck on it!” (Takami, 1970, p. 92). It is important to note that in “Shominzoku”, while M is described as a painter, “I”’s profession remains unclear. For readers who are familiar with Jun Takami’s personal life, M must refer to Shōnosuke Mikumo, Takami’s traveling partner in the Netherlands East Indies. Although “I” must remind readers about M’s profession by saying, “Oh, I almost forgot to say that M is a Western-style painter” (Takami, 1970, p. 83), M actually has no significant role in this story. Only, it can be inferred that, by mentioning “Study of Art” as his purpose, “I” equals himself with M, an intellectual who wants to actively participate in learning different culture. But when “I” changes it into “Sight-seeing”, it clearly shows that “I” positions himself as a complete outsider who will observe Bali merely for the pleasure of the eye. Nevertheless, both purposes imply that, since the beginning, “I” already positions himself as more superior than other races.

Subsequently, “I” immediately gets introspective about his own feeling by thinking that what he feels is “shameful” (asamashii) and “absolutely improper” (zettai ikan). “Japan indeed is in war with China, but it is a war for the sake of great peace in the Orient and for the better alliance between Japan and China. You are not supposed to look down on your ally. And I don’t want to look down on Javanese people… . I don’t want to be like the Dutch who look down on indigenous people, thinking that they are inferior” (Takami, 1970, p. 93). It can be argued that this passage has double-meaning: to legitimize the notion of Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere while at the same time criticizing Japanese imperialism as no more than mimicking Western imperialism which perceives people with color are inferior to white race. There is a possibility that the author deliberately inserts expressions that the rightists would love to hear: “for the sake of a great peace in the Orient” and “for the better alliance”. At that time, this short story must hardly be considered as a criticism of the notion of Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and could be published without enduring censorship.

The Suspiciously Introspective Japanese

In “Shominzoku”, the theme of a Japanese superior positioning is emphasized through the choice of an “inland Japanese” (’naichi’ nihonjin) character, rather than a Japanese resident
in the colony, as the narrator-protagonist of the story. Modern Japanese novels between Taishō period to the end of the Pacific War (1920s to 1945) with settings in the South—Pacific Islands or Southeast Asia—usually use the same technic: “an inland Japanese” travels to the South, makes contacts with indigenous people, and through them discovers the savage or exotic image of the South. In “Shominzoku”, the contacts between “I” with other races is, in fact, almost non-existent due to his inability to speak Malay or Chinese. Thus, “I” can only interpret what Indonesian or Chinese characters are saying through their facial expressions or gestures, such as: “If she didn’t smile nicely, I could probably think that she was lashing me out” (Takami, 1970, p. 83) or “Probably he is upset with me and showing it by spreading his legs and sitting self-importantly” (Takami, 1970, p. 90). The effect of using first-person point of view is that the story is one-sidedly told through “I”’s speech and thoughts. Therefore, the issue of Japanese positioning posed by “Shominzoku” is not simply the problem of one positions oneself and being positioned, but rather, the problem of “one sees oneself and others, and wants to be seen by others”.

“Sight”, in fact, is the main motive of the story. Although “I” seems to be conscious about his contradictive feelings towards non-Europeans and later becomes introspective about it, he consistently puts himself in a higher position and sees others through haughty gaze. It can be proven from the way he portrays other races’ physical appearances by focusing on unusual aspects. In the Chinese hotel, he describes Chinese guests using phrases: “a fat Chinese woman in a Chinese dress is sitting like a man in a rattan chair, putting her elbows on chair-arm and sticking out her belly” and “behind her stands a young man in flashily pajama (Chinese who live here walking in and out in a pajama)” (Takami, 1970, p. 83). On the bus, “I” depicts the Indian’s physical appearance using phrases such as “fat body” (futotta shintai), “protruded belly” (tsukidasita hara), or “majestic” (dōdōtoshita). “I” also associates this physical appearance with the Indian’s at leisure (yūzen to) behavior:

Seeing how he pays the taxi driver at leisure and walks towards the bus also at leisure, passengers can be heard yelping. His “at leisure” movement might be related to his big body, or he seems moving that way because he is fat. So, he doesn’t do it on purpose (Takami, 1970, p. 89).

When Japanese discovered “natives” in the Pacific Islands, Taiwan, China, Korea, Manchuria, and Southeast Asia, they attributed traits such as culturally inferior, undeveloped, weird, primitive, or savage to “natives”, planting self-esteem to themselves that they are civilized people (Kawamura, 2012, p. 54). For example, in two novels set in Taiwan, Machō (Demon Bird, 1923) by Haruo Satō and Yabanjin (The Savage, 1935) by Taku Ōshika, the indigenous people are portrayed as “barbaric”. Writings set in Southeast Asia actually present a slightly different image because, after all, Southeast Asia already embodied Western modernism. However, the “uncivilized” image of the Southeast Asian indigenous people still can be found albeit in subtle ways. For example, Michiyo Mori in Singapōru no Yado (Singapore Inn, 1942) writes about amok performed by Malays and Javanese as a representation of the hidden frustration of the colonized people (Kawamura, 2012, p. 71).
Despite the fact that “I” introspects about his sudden racial prejudice, he consistently sees other races through haughty gaze. While in the beginning “I” focuses his observation merely on the unusual aspect of other races’ physical appearance, in the last episode, he observes the “uncivilized” or “inhuman” aspects of them. In this scene, the bus stops temporarily at a small village before continuing the journey to Gilimanuk. “I” remains at his seat, looking at the view outside the bus.

There is a Balinese shop selling fruits and drinks by the bus. Chinese passengers get down from the bus and have cold drinks there. The drink is dirty, and we are afraid that it is probably not drinkable, but they drink it appetizingly. While drinking, they are talking in a high-pitched voice as if quarrelling. In front of them, the Indian puts his hands on his back, sticks out his big belly, and walks at leisure. He smiles, then turns back. Somehow, he looks like a bear at a zoo, funny and amusing. The women in the back talk to their children and laugh. Everyone seems happy and peaceful. The European buys a banana and munches it at his seat. He stares intently at the front. I can’t help but to look at the front too. And there, in a dirty small river that leads to unknown places, there are Balinese girls taking a bath. The river is so dirty, to call it a drainage will be more appropriate…. They are looking at the European. He pretends that he is not looking, but he keeps an eye on them. This is amusing. He turns his head slowly. Apparently, the girls have moved to a place where there is a tree blocking the European’s sight. Again, I feel it is funny. I giggle in spite of myself (Takami, 1970, p. 93).

This scene can be interpreted as a reflection of the idea of Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, in which various races of the Netherlands East Indies—Chinese, Indian, indigenous peoples, European, and Japanese—are equals and coexist peacefully. However, it is important to note that “I” is not part of the view he is watching; he positions himself as a bystander. Furthermore, “I” no longer focuses his sight on the unusual aspects of other races’ physical appearance but on subtly “uncivilized or “inhuman” ones. Thus, this scene particularly makes the introspective “I” seems suspicious because the idea of superior Japanese persists in the way he is watching the other races.

Firstly, “I” am watching Chinese passengers drinking cold drinks that he thinks are “dirty and probably not drinkable”. He emphasizes the “dirtiness” by using first-person plural pronoun “we”, which must refer to M and himself as the only Japanese on the bus. The passage does not explain how long the distance is between “I” and the Chinese passengers. But because “I” remains at his seat and the Chinese are outside, the way “I” can “clearly” see that the drinks are dirty is unconvincing.

Secondly, “I” compares the Indian passenger to “a bear at a zoo”. Even since the first time “I” sees the Indian on the bus, he associates him with animal when likening his exposed hairy foot” (roshutsu shiteiru kemujakara no ashi) (Takami, 1970, p. 88) to an elephant’s foot (zō no ashi). In the previous passage, “I”, again, focuses his observation to the Indian’s protruded
belly and “at leisure” behavior. He thinks that the Indian looks “funny and amusing” and compares him to a “bear at a zoo”.

Lastly is the scene in which “I” is watching the European passenger eating a banana while staring intently at Balinese girls who are taking a bath in a dirty small river. It is important to pay attention to how “I” depicts the European is depicted can be associated with the image of a monkey. On the other hand, the way “I” depicts Balinese girls who are taking a bath in a river differs from the common technic of exoticizing indigenous women, as Rintarō Takeda (1944) points out, “frequently found in indecent sentences” (p. 24). Rather, “I” emphasizes on the “dirtiness” of the small river where the Balinese girls are taking a bath by thinking, “The river is so dirty, to call it a drainage will be more appropriate”.

“I”’s emotional transformation—from contempt to introspection—implies that he is an educated person who is aware of his contradictive feelings towards other races and acknowledges that it is wrong. However, as indicated in the last episode, “I” seemly positions himself higher than other races by focusing his sight to their “uncivilized” and “inhuman” aspects. It is interesting to note that the male Javanese passenger who sits next to “I”, whom he describes as “probably rich or has some status” or “handsome and look noble” (Takami, 1970, p. 90), is suddenly out of his sight. This scene, particularly, makes “I”’s introspection becomes unconvincing.

**Conclusion**

Although witnessing a “contact zone” as the reality of a colony, Japanese writers are often unable to depict it sufficiently due to the limitation imposed by the notion of Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Writing sets in Southeast Asia between 1940-1945 tend to depict the colony with typical images: “Westerners are the oppressor and Asians are the oppressed” or “Japanese and other Asians are equals”. In this case, “Shominzoku” deserves an evaluation because it shows different characteristics by raising the issue of “contact zone” in the Netherland East Indies through the problem of Japanese positioning. By setting the narrator/protagonist as being drawn into the complexities of a colonial society that operates under race-based social stratification and social class differences, this story poses the problem of how Japanese sees himself and others, and wants to be seen as a superior race.

At dangerous time such as warfare, however, it is necessary for writers who are against the war to balance criticism with expressions seemingly supporting the government. Writings that contain double-meaning are not uncommon. The same strategy seems being used in “Shominzoku”. Thus, this story contains elements of criticism as well as expressions of legitimizing the war. Nevertheless, through a close reading, even the elements of criticism seem ambiguous because the idea of Japanese as a superior race persists. Such ambivalence might imply the author’s own limitation towards criticizing government.
References


