Articulations in Translation at the Intersection of World Literature and Popular Culture: Film and TV Adaptations of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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From World Literature to Popular Culture

With the rapid development of globalization and new media technologies, the last two decades have witnessed the opening of a more pluralistic global literary space in which voices from and about the peripheries have been widely heard and appreciated. Discussions of world literature have increasingly attracted attention as scholars seek further understanding of this new literary space. Scholars such as David Damrosch have extended the concept of "world literature" as literature circulates beyond its "culture of origin" (4), and shifted the emphasis from the literariness of a text to a set of relationships including its production, circulation, and translation (6). This shift blurs the boundaries between historically mainstream and non-mainstream works; as Damrosch points out, instead of "works," world literature becomes "a network" (3). That is to say, when we look at a work, we need to know how it engages with its literary tradition of origin as well as with other literary traditions into which it has entered. This phenomenological approach underscores the travels of literature via translation, as well as other modes of interpretation such as "allusion, pastiche, parody and adaptation in another medium" (Eco 6). Translation enables the "international reception" (Venuti 180) of a work, and contributes to the "literary fame"

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(Lefevere 2) of the writer.

Film and TV adaptations are forms of cross-medium translation. In the increasingly globalized entertainment and media landscape, with the developments in media technology and the growing power of visual representation, film has played an increasingly greater role in the local and global circulation of literature. Ian McEwan's reception in China is a particularly illuminating example. When McEwan's novel *Atonement* was first translated into Chinese in 2005, it garnered very little attention, despite his status in the West; it was not until 2008, when the award-winning film adaptation of *Atonement*, featuring Keira Knightley and James McAvoy, was released in mainland China, that the novel became popular among Chinese readers (Liu). While accelerating the spread and reception of a literary work, film and TV adaptations also bring the work into the field of popular culture.

In cultural studies, the term "popular culture" has numerous definitions; for the purposes of this paper, rather than determining whether an adaptation is liked by many, I focus on the mechanisms behind the adaptation and circulation processes. To avoid dichotomy and reductionism, I draw on the post-Marxist view of popular culture as a "terrain" in which cultural practice is neither "imposed" by the "dominant group" nor "spontaneously oppositional" from "the people", but "is a terrain of exchange and negotiation between the two […] marked by resistance and incorporation" (Storey 10).

At the intersection of world literature and popular culture, film and TV adaptations can be regarded as vessels for the travel of literature, and as cultural practices that contain both the power of "resistance and incorporation" (Storey 10). This paper examines the British film adaptation and the Japanese TV adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, asking the following questions: what changes are made in different adaptations? How do these changes relate to the concepts of resistance and incorporation? In addition to the aesthetic choices of the screenwriters and directors, which factors influence these changes? While studies of translations and adaptations from a cultural perspective generally focus on comparisons between the literary systems and ideologies of the source and target texts, adopting such an analytical framework for the discussion of film and TV adaptations risks overlooking the global context and commercial appeal of these adaptations. The interaction, negotiation, and hybridization of these factors may lead to one-sided conclusions when tracing borders between them; therefore, this paper follows the post-Marxist concept of articulation.

Stuart Hall's Concept of Articulation

The word *articulation* has existed for centuries before cultural studies; it has various meanings in different contexts, and all of them imply a kind of "joining of parts to make a unity" (Slack 115). The concept of articulation in cultural studies was primar-

ily outlined by Ernesto Laclau and Stuart Hall in the 1970s; rather than embracing economic and political reductionism, they attempted to explore the ways in which different social elements join together in a complex structure (116). Hall chose the term *articulation* as an analogy to "a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but not necessarily be connected to one another" (Grossberg 53). Thus, an articulation is a state of "unity" created by a temporary "connection" of different elements "under certain conditions," and this connection is "not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all the time" (Grossberg 53). The concept of articulation thus helps us understand how, under certain conditions, ideological elements form a unity "within a discourse" (Grossberg 53), and how these elements connect, under certain circumstances, to "certain political subjects" (Grossberg 53). Accordingly, Hall argues that the meanings of texts and practices are not "inscribed" (Storey 84), but are social productions, or, in other words, results of multiple articulations. Texts and practices, therefore, "can be 'spoken' with different 'accents' by different people in different discourses and different social contexts for different politics" (Storey 84). For example, the American singer Bob Dylan's anti-war music expressed oppositional politics and may have encouraged people to protest against the US government's military actions overseas, but the profits it made could also go to the government via taxes to support those actions (Storey 85). Similarly, in the creation of a film adaptation of a literary work, the screenwriter's and director's personal interpretations of the source text are always and inevitably guided and influenced by factors such as the production and dissemination processes within local and global markets. With this in mind, we can compare the two adaptations of *Never Let Me Go* under discussion, and attempt to answer the questions raised above, in terms of articulation.

Kazuo Ishiguro and the Novel *Never Let Me Go*

Ishiguro is an Anglo-Japanese writer who writes in English. Born in Nagasaki, he moved to England with his parents in 1960 at the age of five, growing up attending British schools and speaking Japanese at home (Sim 6). His dual cultural identity can be easily noticed in his name: in English, his name is romanized, apparently according to the Hepburn system, as "Kazuo Ishiguro," while in Japanese, his name is spelled in katakana, as カズオ・イシグロ, as though it were a foreigner's name. This cultural duality serves as the main creative inspiration for Ishiguro's fiction in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time in Britain, the Thatcher government, propagating "imperial nostalgia" (Sim 124), tended to blame Britain's social and economic issues on non-white minorities, which lent a sense of "great urgency" to discussion of "multicultural Britain" (Sim 124). As a result, thanks to his novels about Japan, Ishiguro came to be regarded by readers and the media as a "spokesman" (Sim 13) on everything relating to Japan.

In 1989, Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* won the Man Booker Prize and

established his world literary fame. Since then, he has embarked on many international book tours and has communicated with readers from different cultures and languages. With the translation and circulation of his book in mind, he started to focus more on the "architecture" of stories, instead of "sentences" and "phrases" (qtd. in Walkowitz 219). Not seeing himself as a transplanted writer, Ishiguro regards his work as the creation of "international novel[s]" (Brandmark 155) that speak to people around the world. He intentionally avoids specific social and historical contexts to keep his novels translatable and cosmopolitan, so that his writing process is itself an act of participation in world literature. *The Remains of the Day* was adapted into a film that earned eight Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, in 1993, and is now considered a classic of British film. Ishiguro has supported the film adaptations of his work and has written two screenplays of his own, but as a novelist, he does not adapt his own novels nor steer the filmmaking process (Ishiguro, "*Never Let Me Go*: From Novel to Screen").

Published in 2005, *Never Let Me Go* is set in an alternative England in the 1990s. It is told by 31-year-old Kathy H., who works as a "carer" (3) nursing "donors" until they "complete" (101), and who reminisces about her childhood with her friends Ruth and Tommy at a boarding school, Hailsham. The school appears to be ordinary, but it is cautiously isolated. The students learn reading, writing, and painting, and are encouraged to be creative, but in fact, they are human clones made for organ harvests. They leave the school and move into Cottages when they turn sixteen; after some training sessions, they become "carers," then "donors," and "complete" after three or four donations. Hailsham was founded by several opponents of the donation system who seek to provide the clone children with a good education and encourage them to create artistic works, in order to prove that the clones are not just copies of biological bodies but have souls. Eventually, however, the school is shut down, and the students of Hailsham resign themselves to completion.

Never Let Me Go is beyond an ethical "critique of anthropocentrism" (Walkowitz 224), and its Orwellian metaphor becomes salient when seeing the clones as humans. Its power of resistance is rooted in Kathy's resigned, unreliable narrative voice that reveals the dominant group's control over knowledge, the operation of cultural hegemony, and the idealism and limitations of intellectuals. The specific political criticism present in the original novel changes in adaptations produced in different social contexts.

The British Film *Never Let Me Go*

The British film adaptation of *Never Let Me Go*, starring Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightley, and Andrew Garfield, was directed by Mark Romanek, based on Alexander Garland's adapted screenplay, and was produced by DNA Films and Film 4 Productions in 2010. Garland and Ishiguro have been friends since 1998; Garland's

film *28 Days Later* earned ten times its production budget in worldwide box-office figures and cemented his reputation as a filmmaker. After he read an uncorrected proof of *Never Let Me Go*, Garland was inspired to turn the novel into a screenplay, and Ishiguro agreed that with his talent for creating "orphaned" characters (Ishiguro, "*Never Let Me Go*: From Novel to Screen"), Garland was the best choice to adapt the story of the clone children. Garland has acknowledged that his interaction with Ishiguro ensured that the film's basic plot would be close to that of the novel: "I was always aware the writer was Kazuo, and I was working from his themes and his ideas" (Ehrlich). Thus, unlike typical Hollywood science-fiction films, *Never Let Me Go* does not feature futuristic and violent battle scenes, and has a calm and melancholy tone. However, the decision to present the triangular relationship between the three protagonists as its main storyline has, to some extent, mitigated the original novel's political critique.

One example of the changes between Ishiguro's novel and Garland's film is that in the novel, Ruth and Tommy are in a sexual relationship and Kathy has a boyfriend when they leave Hailsham and move to Cottages, while in the film, Kathy is not sexually involved with anyone until she becomes Tommy's carer and they develop a relationship. On the other hand, Ruth is made more straightforward and "voracious" in contrast to Kathy, and she comes between Kathy and Tommy when the two are in love (Ehrlich). This alteration places more dramatic weight on the entangled romance between these distinct characters, but another change notably weakens the original novel's theme of political resistance. In the novel, Kathy buys a cassette of a jazz album, containing the eponymous song "Never Let Me Go," from a school sale, and while listening to it in her dorm, she sings along to the lyrics "Oh baby, baby, never let me go," while dancing with a pillow as if it were a baby. Although the song is meant as a love song, Kathy interprets it as describing an infertile woman suddenly having a miracle baby. Madame, one of the school founders, happens to witness this moment, and begins to cry. Since clones cannot have babies, Kathy's interpretation of the song might come from a deep longing for what is lost, as well as an implication of the clones' forlorn conditions. However, Madame's tears are not for Kathy or for other clones. At the end of the story, Madame tells Kathy that what she saw was a helpless little girl who could not let go of the kind old world. Her tears thus come from the struggles of intellectuals in a hegemonic social system while at the same time benefitting from that system. In the movie, the cassette is a gift from Tommy to Kathy, and Ruth is the one who walks in on Kathy's dance and realizes her feelings for Tommy, while Madame's scene is omitted, and with it the political undertone of the corresponding passage in the novel, as the song is reinterpreted as the starting point of a love triangle.

To further explore how and to whom the novel's power of resistance is articulated as it is adapted for film, it may be useful to look at the production companies that made and distributed the film. DNA Films is an independent British production company whose co-founder, Duncan Kenworthy, has produced several popular

British romantic comedies, including *Four Weddings and a Funeral, Notting Hill*, and *Love Actually*. The company has a long-term cooperative relationship with 20th Century Fox's subsidiary Fox Searchlight Pictures, under which Fox partakes in a proportion of financing and sometimes filmmaking, and manages global distribution for DNA Films. The company also receives lottery funding from the British Film Institute (BFI). According to the 2003 Memorandum that DNA Films submitted to the Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), since British film is expensive and the domestic market not large enough for sustainable development, the company needs to "attract international finance, distribution and box office appeal" ("Memorandum Submitted by DNA Films"), and the company is "committed to making British films for British and international audiences" ("Memorandum Submitted by DNA Films"). Film 4 Productions is owned by Channel Four Television Corporation, a public corporation of DCMS, and is committed to BFI to support British film. Film 4 mostly co-finances with local or international film companies to produce films set in the United Kingdom or relating to it, including *The Iron Lady* and *This is England*.

The commercial appeal and Britishness of the film further demonstrate how the incorporation of various factors connect to the downplaying of political subtexts in the original novel. One important factor in the commercial viability of a film is the presence of popular box-office draws such as, in this case, Keira Knightley, Carey Mulligan, and Andrew Garfield; though *Never Let Me Go* was made before Garfield became the second actor to play Spider-Man on film, his popularity thanks to the latter role would positively influence the reception of the DVD release. Here, however, the focus is mostly on the story. On the one hand, the film generally follows the original plot of the novel, while the promotional material emphasizes Ishiguro's literary fame in the Anglophone world, with the film trailer referring to his previous work, *The Remains of the Day*. On the other hand, the film develops the triangular relationship of the three main characters as its primary storyline; this decision is, to a degree, a universal strategy upon entering the global market to maximize capital income: developing a common factor that appeals to audiences around the world (Crane 5). When cultural differences are more salient, this strategy can be more explicit. For example, when the film was released in Hong Kong, its title was translated into Chinese as *Love: Never Let Me Go* (愛·別讓我走 in Chinese), and its Chinese promotional slogan translates as "the most beautiful and touching love triangle" (情牽最唯美窩心動人三角摯情 in Chinese). In addition, for an international media company, all categories of capital matter: Fox Searchlight mainly focuses on the development and distribution of independent films, while 20th Century Fox produces mainstream commercial blockbusters. Though the box-office revenue of the former bears little or no comparison to that of the latter, independent films do attract attention from highbrow, heavyweight film festivals and awards. The relationship between independent films and awards committees is itself one of supply and demand, as these films accumulate cultural and symbolic capital for the international financial group that

enabled their creation. Garland's adaptation of *Never Let Me Go* opened the 54th BFI London Film Festival and was screened in many other international festivals; it was also nominated for and won various awards including the British Independent Film Awards. Although its total box-office revenue is only about 9.5 million dollars, while its production budget was almost 15 million, the film's capital gains are far beyond that.

The Britishness of the film is another of its distinctive features. Although the novel is set in an alternative post-war England, Ishiguro deliberately avoids specific social and cultural characteristics in favour of a more universal reach. By comparison, the film features a British cast and many British cultural elements, so that it becomes a recognizably British film. For instance, the beginning of the film includes an added scene of the Hailsham students singing the school anthem, an adaptation of the Harrow song "Forty Years On," accompanied by a pipe organ. The song was composed in 1872 for Harrow Football's "sporting triumphalism" (Tyerman 348), and later became a school anthem due to its "stately, rousing" tune and the lyrics' "twin bonds of shared experience and nostalgia […] to unite Harrovians past and present" (Tyerman 348). On the one hand, the song refers to looking "forward and back simultaneously on school and youth" (348), which perfectly suits the context of the protagonists' relationship with Hailsham. On the other hand, the Harrow song evokes the imperial image of Victorian Britain, during which the English tradition of elite education was codified. Between 1870 and 1902, as the British Empire expanded to its zenith, acquiring 4,750,000 square miles of territory, the Crown required greater numbers of eligible governors for its foreign colonies (Sturgis 85). Harrow, like many other British public schools, experienced reforms and changes, becoming an exemplar of the British elite boarding school. Its signature song "Forty Years On" is still sung today and is used as a school anthem by many prestigious educational institutions in former colonies of the British Empire, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong. Because of its connotations of cultural homogeneity, the Harrow song marks the film version of *Never Let Me Go* as a British cultural export in a global context.

Garland's film of Ishiguro's novel thus articulates the political critique of the source text to the international media company that produced the adaptation and the British cultural export strategy that informs its production. However, there is no precise dividing line between resistance and incorporation, and these two forces do not offset each other but rather are intertwined; similarly, Garland's film still carries the connotations of resistance that are present in Ishiguro's novel and is equally capable of various political and cultural commentaries.

The Japanese Television Series *Never Let Me Go*

Ishiguro's reception in Japan is interwoven with his dual cultural identity. In contrast

to Western readers' focus on his Japaneseness, he is depicted in Japanese media as a "quiet and peaceful […] very Japanese author" (Dasgupta 14) who has "fed into collective national self-orientalizing stereotypes" (Dasgupta 14), while several Japanese critics have pointed out that his knowledge of Japan, mostly from English translations of Japanese literature and film, is based more on Western imagination than on Japanese reality. Since *The Remains of the Day*, this situation has improved, as his works have been translated into Japanese and adapted into other media. For example, *Never Let Me Go* and the short story collection *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* have both been adapted into stage plays.

The television adaptation of *Never Let Me Go*, starring Haruka Ayase, Haruma Miura, and Asami Mizukawa, was produced by Tokyo Broadcasting System Television (TBS), and appeared on Friday nights in January 2016. The screenplay was written by Yoshiko Morishita, who had previously adapted Keigo Higashino's mystery novel *Journey Under the Midnight Sun* and Motoka Murakami's sci-fi manga *Jin*.

The ten-episode series elaborates on the love and friendship among the three protagonists, while also manifesting the tension between dominant and subordinate in the hegemonic control of discourse. As Ishiguro notes in an interview with TBS, the series delves into several unanswered questions of his novel, such as "the resistance of enforced compliance" ("Ishiguro Sensei Kara no Komento").

The Japanese adaptation moves the story's setting from post-war England to contemporary Japan. Hailsham becomes Sunshine School (陽光学苑 in Japanese). Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy become Kyoko, Miwa, and Tomohiko; and they are joined by a new character, Manami, (真実 in Japanese), whose name means 'truth' or 'reality.' Like the three protagonists, Manami is also a clone student at Sunshine School. Beginning with the first time they are told of their fate as organ donors, Manami is skeptical about the headmaster's turns of phrase, such as "responsible," "mission," and "angel." After leaving school, Manami meets other fellow clones who likewise seek to resist their predetermined fate and organize speeches and discussions to call on more clones to fight for their rights to life. The series includes interpolated scenes of the clones studying the organization of nation-states, such as monarchy and republicanism, and Manami further notes that their efforts have been shunned and censored by the news media. Eventually, the government cracks down on their revolutionary community. Combined with the meaning of Manami's name, the left-leaning and almost communistic overtones of this episode highlight its critique of the hegemonic control of discourse and coercive instruments. Furthermore, Noemie Nakai, who portrays Manami, is mixed-race; Nakai's distinctive racial hybridity, like Ishiguro's cultural hybridity, underscores the adaptation's fusion of the foreign and the indigenous. In the process of cultural globalization, the indigenous sometimes transforms the foreign in order to destabilize local power relations. Where Garland's film focuses on and interpolates British elements for a global market, the Japanese series takes on a more domestic focus, directing the political critique of the original novel toward Japanese society. One such example is the renaming of Hailsham to

Sunshine School, with the sun being a symbol of Japan. In ancient Japanese mythology, the solar deity Amaterasu (whose name literally means 'shining in heaven') is regarded as the creator of the cosmos, the highest lord of the universe, and the ancestor of the Imperial family, to secure and legitimize the hierarchy (Takeshi 3). Accordingly, the name "Sunshine School" is more than simply a localized translation of "Hailsham"; it similarly redirects the novel's power of resistance toward the prevalence of right-wing conservatism in post-war Japanese politics. At the end of the series, Sunshine School, whose counterpart in the novel was closed and abandoned, is converted into a prison-like institution for clones, which further exposes the nature and real intention of the conservative hegemony behind its public image of preserving tradition and advocating nationalism.

The political tone of the series and its source text casts a depressing tone over the story, so that despite the reputations of author Ishiguro and screenwriter Morishita, and the all-star cast and prime-time appearance of the series, its audience rating was one of the lowest in TBS's history for a winter program. Even so, like Garland's film, the series still earned cultural and symbolic capital for its sponsors and producers. Moreover, as the series circulates throughout Asia, it is, to a certain degree, articulated to the Japanese government's cultural diplomacy. Japanese foreign policy makers have been aware and made use of the power of media culture since the late 1980s; for example, in 2006, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially launched its project of "pop-cultural diplomacy" (Iwabuchi 420), using Japanese pop culture, together with traditional culture and art, as "primary tools" to "further the understanding and trust of Japan" (Iwabuchi 420). This strategy not only aims to export Japanese national value through cultural products and services such as anime, manga, and video games, but also tries to portray Japan as multicultural, peace-loving, and democratic, in order to relieve diplomatic tensions created or exacerbated by the government's right-leaning politics, and enhance the state's soft power. Accordingly, in the Japanese TV adaptation of *Never Let Me Go*, the theme of resistance present in the original novel is highlighted, localized, and articulated to the TV company and its sponsors, as well as the Japanese government's pop-cultural diplomacy program when distributed abroad. Even with all this in mind, the show still stands as a poignant criticism of Japan's social and political issues, and facilitates mutual understanding and interactions overseas.

Conclusion

Through the relatively loose concept of articulation, we see how the powers of incorporation from various contexts can influence the process of translation between different media, languages, and cultures. Regarding cultural products as means to achieve capital gains or as embodiments of ideologies both run the risk of eventually falling into the pit of economic or political reductionism. The significance of

articulation lies in its epistemological perspective: it regards the production, circulation, and reception of transnational cultural products as neither top-down nor bottom-up, but rather as pluralistic and vibrant interplays of multiple factors, such as aesthetic attitudes, sociocultural circumstances, commercial requirements, and political agendas. The outcomes of such interplays may be accepted or criticized by different audiences through different interpretations as the works enter a new process of production and reception. In the global context in which no society is ever truly free from the influence of others, translations occur not only between two cultures, but among multiple cultures, media, and forms. These phenomena demonstrate the viability of articulation as an epistemological or theoretical approach, alongside polycentric and interdisciplinary perspectives, to help us analyze and further understand the increasingly complex processes of cultural translation.

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