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Urban Sketching in Kiyooka Takayuki's Travelogue "Dalian in Early Winter"

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Abstract: Kiyooka Takayuki (1922–2006), a celebrated Japanese poet and novelist, was born in Dalian, China, where he spent his adolescence before repatriating to Japan in 1948. His work melds personal experience with lyricism. *Dalian under the Acacia Trees*, winner of the sixty-second Akutagawa Prize (1970), draws upon colonial urban memory. The opening story of *Collection of Dalian Sketches* (1983), "Dalian in Early Winter," records his observations upon revisiting the city after thirty-four years. The text's meticulous temporal, spatial, and characterological detail reflects an obsessive pursuit of authenticity—a drive to restore things to themselves. Set against the backdrop of 1980s Sino-Japanese relations, a period marked both by warmth and by persistent tensions such as the textbook controversy, the story offers not only a vivid urban portrait but also an implicit historical reckoning. Kiyooka's focus on the quotidian aligns him with the Introverted Generation, a dominant 1970s Japanese literary movement, yet his infusion of historical reflection signals a critical engagement with that tradition. Published during the ascendancy of "urban theory" in Japanese literary studies, "Dalian in Early Winter" may be read as a practical enactment of that framework. Through its

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layered attention to reality, history, and psychology, Kiyooka constructs a multidimensional space for dialogue with the contemporary reader.

Keywords: Kiyooka Takayuki; “Dalian in Early Winter”; travelogue; urban writing; contemporaneous studies

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Introduction

“Dalian in Early Winter” is a short story written by Kiyooka Takayuki following his visit to China in 1982, during which he revisited Dalian. The story was first published in the March 1983 issue of *Shinchō*, and later included in the collection *Dalian Sketches* (Kōdansha, 1983), which also featured three other works: “Zhongshan Square,” “Sakharov’s Fantasy,” and “By the Sea in Dalian.” In 1992, the story was further compiled into *The Complete Works of Takayuki Kiyooka’s Dalian Novels* (Volume 2) (Nihon Bungeisha), appearing as the opening piece in the “Records of a Revisiting Dalian” section, thereby underscoring its distinctive status and significance within the author’s literary oeuvre. The promotional text for the 1983 Kōdansha edition of *Dalian Sketches* states: “This collection of short stories depicts the author’s return to Dalian, the city of his birth and upbringing, after thirty-four years. Despite having experienced successive rule by Russia, Japan, and China, Dalian retains its unique and timeless beauty. The work poignantly articulates the bittersweet and complex nostalgia of an author who was a child of the colonial era.”¹ Meanwhile, the promotional copy for the 1992 Nihon Bungeisha edition of the complete works emphasizes: “Dalian—once an experimental city of Japanese modernization. From the Russo-Japanese War to the end of World War II, the glory and trauma of this city are forever captured by a Japanese writer born and raised there, through his unwavering pen. Immersed in boundless attachment and historical reflection, this deeply moving series of works has now been

¹ Kiyooka. *Dalian Sketches*. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1983. All subsequent quotations from “Dalian in Early Winter” are taken from this edition, with page numbers cited parenthetically

fully supplemented, revised, and published!”¹ Evidently, the promotional language of both editions centers on Dalian’s distinctive regional character (its historical connection to Japan) as well as the complex emotions—namely, nostalgia—projected onto it by the author. Yet the question of what constituted the appeal of “Dalian” and “nostalgia” to contemporary readers at the time, along with its causes and manifestations, requires analysis situated within the historical framework of the era.

Specialized research on “Dalian in Early Winter” remains relatively scarce. In “Hometown as the Origin of Existence,” Takahashi Hideo (1930-2019) positions *Dalian Sketches* as “the literary embodiment of Kiyooka Takayuki’s nostalgia.” He notes: “In 1982, at the age of sixty, Mr. Kiyooka finally obtained the opportunity to return to his hometown, Dalian. The profound significance of this homecoming is fully manifested in the subsequently compiled and published collection *Dalian Sketches*” (Takahashi, 50). He particularly emphasizes that “Dalian in Early Winter” reveals the author’s sense of relief in assuaging his nostalgia: “Returning after thirty-four years, the city remains magnificently beautiful. The old streets carrying memories and the city’s now renewed appearance surge with overwhelming emotion, flowing like a clear melody into his completely open heart. At every step, the transparent past and the vivid present merge and shimmer on the ground beneath his feet” (Takahashi, 2008, p.50). In “Six Ridgelines,” Takahashi adds that the poet’s revisit to Dalian, re-entering familiar spaces and even visiting his former residence, constituted a rare experience that was not merely nostalgic for the past but signified “the burning of life oriented towards the present. The revival of memory belongs to the present, not the past. The Chinese guide accompanying Kiyooka said on the cold Dalian streets, ‘You are so exhilarated by your homecoming, Mr. Kiyooka, that you hardly feel the cold’ (‘Dalian in Early Winter’). This indicates that the revived memory was making the poet’s blood boil” (Takahashi, 2008, p.53). Naka Tarō (1922-2014), in “Mr. Kiyooka Takayuki and Dalian-China,” views *Dalian Sketches* as a work confessing the author’s latent nostalgia. “The nostalgia that could still be quietly concealed within poetry is, in the prose short story collection *Dalian Sketches*, though suppressed by a profound awareness—where ‘a personal sentimental journey, reflection on his own country’s past aggression, and recognition

¹ Kiyooka. *Complete Dalian Novels of Takayuki Kiyooka, Volume 2*. Nihon Bungeisha, 1992.

of the present reality of a foreign land are interwoven at the level of consciousness’—nevertheless laid bare in an exceedingly persistent and meticulous manner” (Naka, 2008, p.155). Naka also points out the chain reaction in literary reception triggered by Kiyooka’s Dalian-themed fiction: “It will inevitably make readers keenly feel its close resonance with *Dalian under the Acacia Trees*, which was published over a decade earlier” (Naka, 2008, p.155). This is key to how Kiyooka constructed the image of Dalian within the context of modern Japanese literature and also reflects his reader-awareness during the creative process. Usami Hitoshi (1942-), in “The Space of Kiyooka Takayuki,” likewise summarizes *Dalian Sketches* as “a kind of homecoming novel” (Usami, 2008, p.404). The study also notes that in Kiyooka’s China-themed fiction and travel writings, the notation of time and space often exhibits an almost obsessive rigor: “In terms of numbers, whether it is the takeoff and landing times of planes or the length of time separating past and present, Kiyooka seems to strive for maximum precision with extreme scrupulousness. The same applies to expression of age. If we acknowledge that divisions like youth, middle age, and old age are merely relative concepts influenced by individual differences, historical changes, and environmental factors, then vague terms like ‘early old age’ should ideally be avoided—this mode of thinking seems to exist in his subconscious” (Usami, 2008, p.400).

In reading “Dalian in Early Winter,” I noted Kiyooka Takayuki’s meticulous detailing. Whether in the precise marking of temporal points, the delicate depiction of spatial scenes, the elaborate portrayal of characters, or the detailed narration of events, the text everywhere exhibits the author’s high pursuit of authenticity and accuracy. On this point, Usami Hitoshi argues that the author suppresses emotion and devotes himself to objective descriptions, aiming to highlight the intrinsic value inherent in things themselves. “The restrained tone naturally emerges in the revisit to the old residence depicted in the first work, ‘Dalian in Early Winter’, and in the urban landscape portrayed in the second, ‘Zhongshan Square’. As noted at the outset, the profusion of numbers and proper nouns is particularly striking here. The author deliberately suppresses the inner fluctuations and emotional shifts that occasionally threaten to surface, striving instead to foreground a fixation on objective things. It is precisely through this method that he seems to attempt to unearth the intrinsic value possessed

by things themselves, transcending the barriers of national borders, time, and politics” (Usami, 2008, p.405). As Usami observes, forming an objective and concrete understanding of things is a necessary prerequisite for delving into their inner meaning. Yet shifting the perspective to readers—especially contemporary readers of the 1980s—raises another question worthy of in-depth exploration: what kind of reading experience would they have when encountering the novel’s depictions of Dalian’s streetscapes, the faces of its residents, the history of places, personal memories, and the daily details and emotional fluctuations during the revisit? I contend that an analysis of detailed writing from the perspective of reception is an aspect that cannot be overlooked when studying “Dalian in Early Winter” and, indeed, all of Kiyooka’s works on revisiting Dalian. Simultaneously, it offers a promising entry point for returning to the historical context and reinterpreting Kiyooka’s literary works from that period.

The detailed writing in “Dalian in Early Winter” can be divided into three parts: the precise anchoring of temporal and spatial coordinates, the careful presentation of human and factual elements, and the confessional account of the complex emotions during this revisit. Through these, a narrative space that is both palpably real and filled with tension is constructed. This paper will delve into the text, restore the historical field, and systematically examine—from a contemporary perspective, the specific practices and receptive significance of Kiyooka Takayuki’s detailed writing. It aims to reveal how his meticulous weaving of details was reflected in the eyes of contemporary readers and how it is embedded within the timeline of literature.

Resonating with Contemporary Issues: Testimonies of Reality and Historical Response

The 1980s represent a particularly distinctive phase in the history of Sino-Japanese relations, characterized by highly positive interactions in politics, economy, and culture. This period is widely regarded in academia as a “golden age” or “honeymoon period” for bilateral relations. High-level visits were frequent, non-governmental exchanges thrived, Japanese films, anime, and art gained widespread popularity in China, Japanese corporate investment interest increased significantly, and Chinese traditional culture and the reform and opening-up process garnered extensive attention from various

sectors of Japanese society. “Dalian in Early Winter” contains specific examples corroborating the friendly Sino-Japanese exchanges of this era. Describing Leng Lianquan, a staff member of the Dalian Foreign Affairs Office, the author records this detail: “In May of this year, Dalian gifted a panda to one of its sister cities, Kitakyushu” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.22). The “this year” refers to 1982, the year of Kiyooka’s revisit. Dalian and Kitakyushu had formally established sister-city relations in 1979, and since then have engaged in sustained exchanges and cooperation across multiple fields. Dalian has gifted animals such as blue sheep, lynxes, and red pandas to Kitakyushu, which in return has presented gorillas, giraffes, and zebras, reflecting the deepening of friendly ties. Furthermore, the novel mentions the author’s wife’s fondness for stained glass objects: “She is fond of stained glass, and at the Silk Road cultural relics exhibition held in Tokyo some time ago, she was utterly captivated by a green glass bottle from the Sui Dynasty” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.34). The exhibition referred to appears to be the “Silk Road Cultural Relics Exhibition of the People’s Republic of China” held at the Tokyo National Museum from March 20 to May 13, 1979. Its subtitle explicitly indicated the provenance and era of the relics as “Excavated from Shanxi, Gansu, Xinjiang; Han to Tang Dynasties,” which aligns with the historical background of the Sui Dynasty glass bottle. This further corroborates the reliability of Kiyooka’s historical details and reflects the close nature of Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges at the time.

According to records in the *Chronicle of Sino-Japanese Friendly Exchanges*, Sino-Japanese interaction in 1982 was frequent, encompassing film collaborations, cultural performances, and mutual visits and joint studies in fields such as social sciences, music and painting, literature, and economics. Notably, Kiyooka Takayuki’s visit to China as a member of a delegation from the Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association took place precisely in November 1982 (see the Appendix, *Chronicle of Sino-Japanese Friendly Exchanges 1982*, for related records). His travel narrative not only supplements concrete details of friendly exchanges at the official level but also highlights the friendliness and goodwill demonstrated by ordinary Dalian citizens in his personal interactions with them. As written in the text: “All the requests I had conveyed through the Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association in Tokyo to the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries in Beijing had been

thoughtfully incorporated into the itinerary. Gratitude welled up within me for the schedule, which so considerately allowed ample time for every visit” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.21). This description fully reflects the courtesy and preferential treatment received by Japanese visiting delegations in China. Yet such respect and friendliness were not confined to official channels; in Kiyooka’s detailed writing, the goodwill conveyed by ordinary people is equally moving. For example, after a visit to Lu Xun Park, faced with the last remaining candied hawthorn stick, a young mother wanted to offer it to the author: “I took out my wallet to buy it, only to notice a small child accompanying a mother of about forty, who seemed to have set their heart on the last remaining candied hawthorn stick. I held back and gently urged them to take it. She kindly demurred as well. I was moved by the simple goodwill in her smiling face” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.32). When describing the former residence where he spent his childhood, the narrative recounts how, upon stepping back into the old house at the Nanshan Street, the current owners - Mr. Lin and his son, warmly received “me”. Their reaction is particularly noted when they heard that “I” had lived there from the age of six months until twenty-four years old:

While listening to my story, a look would occasionally flicker across the host’s face—one of both bewilderment and sympathy toward me, or perhaps a touch of heartfelt discomfort. I felt a growing fondness for the character of Mr. Lin and his son. When I remarked how delicious the apple was that the son had peeled for me, the father said, “This apple is from Sanshilipu” (Kiyooka, 48). Meanwhile, Kiyooka deliberately has Lin Yigui add in the dialogue: “My son has now begun studying Japanese”. (Kiyooka, 1983, p. 49)

In the 1980s, it was not uncommon for young people in China to begin learning Japanese. By including this detail, the author not only bridges the distance between the eldest son of the Lin family and “me,” but also reflects the open-mindedness of the younger Chinese generation at that time, eager to engage with Japanese friends—foreshadowing positive prospects for friendly exchanges between the two countries. Within a single space shared by two generations of owners, the sympathy and

compassion shown by Mr. Lin and his son toward Kiyooka Takayuki constitute not merely an emotional resonance between individuals but also reveal the possibility of profound emotional dialogue between China and Japan when confronting historical issues. Such warmth-filled interpersonal details appear frequently throughout the text. With delicate and gentle words, Kiyooka records everyday encounters with ordinary Chinese people, bearing witness to the amicable realities of Sino-Japanese relations in the 1980s. He narrates these moving stories to his contemporary readers—particularly those keenly attentive to politics and international affairs—in a manner that soothes underlying anxieties, fortifies confidence in future exchanges, and ensures that the path of mutual progress continues unbroken.

However, even during this period of generally friendly and harmonious development, some discordant notes emerged. On June 26, 1982, the morning edition of Japan's *Asahi Shimbun* reported that, according to the Japanese Ministry of Education's textbook screening requirements, descriptions of the Japanese military's actions in North China during the Sino-Japanese War had been changed from "aggression" (*shinryaku*) to "advance" (*shinshutsu*). Based on this report, the Chinese government protested to the Japanese government and demanded accurate historical descriptions in the textbooks. Thus, the "textbook issue" became the first major diplomatic friction between the two countries concerning perceptions of history after the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations (Zheng, 2014, p.226). Subsequent investigations revealed inaccuracies in the initial media reports: the screening that year did not involve directly changing the word "aggression" to "advance." However, the Ministry of Education's review comments did propose "softening" the phrasing of certain specific acts of aggression (such as "the aggression in North China"), replacing them with more ambiguous terminology. This overall tendency to downplay the nature of the aggression was summarized and reported by the media as a direct substitution of terms (Zhang, 2018, p.161). Despite these inaccuracies, the international pressure and diplomatic crisis it triggered were very real for Japan. To quell the controversy, then Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi issued an official statement on August 26, 1982, known as the "Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Miyazawa Kiichi on History Textbooks" (Tian, 1997, p.370). The ruling Liberal Democratic Party added the

“neighboring countries clause” to the textbook screening criteria, establishing it as one of the standards: “Textbooks ought to show understanding and seek international harmony in their treatment of modern and contemporary historical events involving neighboring Asian countries” (Minamizuka). In summary, the “textbook issue” is a typical case rooted in Japan's perception of history, a problem that has recurred repeatedly over the following decades, becoming a structural challenge plaguing Sino-Japanese relations. For contemporary readers, especially those sensitive to historical issues, when reading works like “Dalian in Early Winter,” which touch upon Sino-Japanese relations and are set against the backdrop of a wartime colony, they would inevitably pay attention to how the author addresses this historical legacy, the “textbook issue”. It is worth noting that the text does not shy away from using the term “aggression”; on the contrary, it emphasizes this concept multiple times in the narrative.

This was because I had felt apprehensive since leaving Tokyo that even the slightest acknowledgment of the construction projects undertaken by the South Manchuria Railway might convey, however faintly, a tacit acceptance of the military aggression that lay behind or preceded them. Even if I were able, for my own part, to distinguish between the construction and the aggression, voicing such a distinction would be liable to be misconstrued. (Kiyooka, 1983, p.39)

In its explicit use of the term “aggression,” the author demonstrates no intention of evading or obscuring the historical essence. At the same time, the text’s deliberation on whether “construction” might be disentangled from “aggression” reads, within the specific historical context, as a pointed rejoinder to the “textbook issue”. Construction, or any other undertaking pursued under the shadow or precondition of military aggression, cannot be severed from the aggression itself. Aggression is aggression: it ought neither to be consigned to the penumbras of history nor dressed in euphemistic language. Even where no original intent to distort facts exists, such discursive maneuvers remain deeply susceptible to misreading. On this point, the text operates as both a caution and a reproach to the Japanese government’s recurrent efforts to minimize the record of past aggression. Diplomacy, being an indispensable dimension

of international relations, demands that historical questions be treated with the utmost seriousness, a vital foundation for the maintenance of amicable bilateral relations. Moreover, the text registers Kiyooka's insistence on a shared humanity and the interconnectedness of peoples. After his warm exchange with Mr. Lin and his son, Kiyooka Takayuki, upon leaving the former residence, finds himself moved to reflection.

In the car heading to the next destination, I was struck by a strange coincidence. When I returned Dalian before the end of the war, I was twenty-two years old, and my father was sixty-three at the time. My father, a civil engineer, had already retired from the South Manchuria Railway and was leisurely taking on small civil engineering contracts. This was precisely the same age combination as that of the Chinese father and son I had just met. So, my father was about that age back then, and I was that young! What a strange mirror. That son has lived in that house for twenty-two years. I turned twenty-three about three months later, then experienced the war's end, having lived there for roughly twenty-four years in total. Soon, my record will be surpassed. I had always believed, even after repatriation, that I loved that building the most, but that notion must be set aside from today. From the Lin family, I received an impression of serene contentment. This, too, was a source of joy for me (Kiyooka, 1983, p.50).

The Lin father and son now living in that house appear as a mirror image of Kiyooka and his own father. Two families from different eras and nations overlap in the narrative by virtue of this shared spatial anchor. At first glance, such an arrangement may seem a curious coincidence; upon closer examination, however, it suggests a kind of historical and existential inevitability—the commonalities between people and their underlying spiritual bonds, even if not explicitly recognized in their own time and place, nevertheless truly exist. Precisely because of this, despite differences in language and geographical separation, human beings can still achieve communication and understanding at certain junctures. Simultaneously, through his own experience, Kiyooka conveys to the reader a particular view of time and history: one must accept

the passage of time and the transformation of things, and confront those parts of the past we are reluctant to face, be they pain, error, or reality itself. Only through such acknowledgment and acceptance can one truly shed psychological burdens, thereby arriving at the state of “serene contentment” toward which the end of the text gestures.

A Dialogue with the General Reader: Travelogue and Guide to Dalian

The social context of friendly China–Japan exchanges has objectively created favorable conditions for Japanese citizens to visit China, while simultaneously fostering their interest in and curiosity about the country. Indeed, since the full implementation of China’s reform and opening-up policy in 1979, and reinforced by the positive spillover effects of Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Japan, Japanese society’s interest in China has grown markedly, with the willingness to travel to and study in China demonstrating a sustained upward trajectory.

A young firefighter said cheerfully, “I would even take a day off work to welcome the leader coming from the neighboring country. Well, I will definitely watch the live broadcast on TV. China is the country I most want to visit right now. I have been discussing a trip to China with my friends.”

A female university student studying Chinese said, “My dream is to study in China. It seems that Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Japan has brought me one step closer to realizing this dream. I’m so happy. I extend my warm welcome to him.” (Li, 2012)

According to news reports on the tourism industry: “During the 1980s, the tourism industry experienced rapid growth driven by the opening of Narita Airport, yen appreciation, and the Japanese government’s ‘Overseas Travel Doubling Plan’ (Ten Million Plan). Over this decade, the number of overseas travelers expanded sharply from 3.9 million in 1980 to 10 million by 1990, and new travel products tailored to experienced international tourists began to gain widespread adoption” (Travel Voice Editorial Department). It is evident, therefore, that the decade from 1980 to 1990 witnessed a remarkable surge in overseas travel among Japanese citizens. Official

exchange activities required documentation, and the public's overseas journeys demanded reliable information. Within this context, a substantial number of Chinese travelogues emerged to meet these needs. The following titles are drawn from *A New Compilation of Japanese Travel Accounts on China since the Meiji Era (Annotated Edition): The Modernization of One Billion People* (Asahi Shimbun China Reporting Team); *Stroking the Giant Elephant: Observations, Hearings, and Reflections on New China* (Hisashi Ōhisa); *Camera Report: China and the Masses* (Tetsuya Ōmura); *Journey on the Silk Road: Sand, Green and Sun* (Kyodo News Agency); *Comrade!! Bring Me a Cold Beer* (Daigo Kusano); *Journey to Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Shaoxing* (Huangpu Friends Association Friendship Delegation); *Wandering the Western China: Urumqi, Turpan, Lanzhou, Xi'an* (National Geographic Education Research Association Second Friendship Delegation); *China's Rivers: A Report on the Visit to the Yellow River, Yangtze River, and Pearl River, No. 1* (Japan River Development Research Council); *The Real China Seen Through a Housewife's Eyes: Records of the First Visit to China by the Soka Gakkai Women's Division* (Yumiko Yaya); and *The Bond Between Us and China* (China Visit Records Association).

Upon organizing and analyzing the major Chinese travelogues written by Japanese authors in the 1980s, it becomes evident that these works were both numerous and diverse in genre. Travel reports and documentary texts produced under official cultural exchanges remained dominant, reflecting the high market demand for information about China. Yet the relative scarcity of personalized travel records reveals the cautious curiosity of the general readership: while Japanese travelers harbored strong interest in China, they also felt a subtle unease toward this unfamiliar foreign land. Driven by this complex psychology, readers actively sought various kinds of information about China and were particularly sensitive to content in travel texts that could guide or inform their own experiences. Against this backdrop, "Dalian in Early Winter", which offers detailed depictions of both the city's landscapes and its cultural ambiance, served as a highly fitting "travel guide" that met readers' expectations. In the narrative, Kiyooka Takayuki's perspective constantly shifts between that of a "tourist" and a "returnee." As a tourist, he assumes the role of guiding readers through Dalian, vividly presenting the city's streetscapes, local customs, and personal experiences with meticulous attention

to detail. Following Kiyooka's footsteps, readers are invited to visit Dalian's landmark buildings, savor local specialty foods, and experience its unique customs and traditions. The content recorded by Kiyooka perfectly aligns with the information sought by readers curious about the city. For instance, he provides a detailed account of his visit to Lu Xun Park—Lu Xun being the most familiar modern Chinese writer to Japanese readers at the time, and describes the variety of people he encounters: young readers engrossed in books, elderly citizens sunbathing or performing unusual exercises in pavilions, and primary school students using stones as desks and chairs to solve arithmetic problems. These vivid character portrayals resonate across generations. Furthermore, Kiyooka introduces Dalian's specialty foods, including tanghulu with its transparent sweet-and-sour sugar coating, a variety of fresh seafood, smooth local baijiu, and apples produced in Sanshilipu. He also provides detailed accounts of Dalian's glass products, describing their types, appearances, and historical origins, thereby offering readers a comprehensive picture of both the material culture and the lived experience of the city.

I carefully examined the glassware section on the second floor. I had heard that Dalian's glass products ranked first in China both in quality and quantity and were exported to various parts of the world. Sure enough, the shelves were lined with lovely crystal glasses, pitchers, bowls, whiskey glasses, and more. I bought two champagne glasses as a souvenir for my wife—their stems transparent with a deep indigo hue only where the wine is poured. (...)

In this field, which was still largely undeveloped in Japan at the time, surveys revealed that the Liaodong Peninsula was rich in high-quality raw materials for glassmaking. To refine their craft, they invited technicians from Bohemia and sent local artisans to study in Germany, successfully exporting exquisite crystal glass abroad even before the war. (Kiyooka, 1983, p.34)

Subsequently, Kiyooka adds practical notes on seasons and climate for traveling to Dalian. He recalls: "The first image that comes to my mind when thinking of Dalian's most enchanting season is late May - when the sweet, tantalizing fragrance of locust

blossoms drifts faintly through the air” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.14). Of November he writes: “The cold, dry outdoor air in the morning enters the nostrils and lungs, making the whole body feel comfortable” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.42). Beyond such basics, Kiyooka Takayuki extends his observations on various facets of Chinese society in the 1980s—social values, institutional construction, and commercial services. On social values, he records period slogans: “What was written on the bulletin board was the ‘Five Stresses and Four Beauties’. This was explained as a campaign emphasizing five aspects - civilisation, courtesy, hygiene, order, and morality - while striving to beautify four dimensions: the mind, language, behavior, and the environment. The specific objectives I heard at the time included the following: Not spitting or littering indiscriminately; Improving service quality in commerce and other fields; Maintaining order at stations and tourist sites; Enhancing the beauty of the city; Ensuring plants be made more abundant” (Kiyooka, 1983, pp.32-33). On institutional construction, he notes a key policy evolution: “Shortly after the collapse of the ‘Gang of Four’, the ‘Four Modernizations’—the modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology—began to be reaffirmed and consciously advanced as the lofty blueprint for building a material civilization. Six years later, at the National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was further proposed that alongside the construction of a high degree of material civilization, efforts must also be devoted to building a high level of socialist spiritual civilization” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.33). In commerce and services, he describes shopping venues and consumer experiences: at the Friendship Store, purchasing “Dalian postcards and a Dalian travel guide on the first floor” and carefully examining “the glassware section on the second floor” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.34); at the International Seamen’s Club, “I bought a Dalian map and postcards” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.35). He also notes a commendable service attitude: “I was deeply impressed by the young waitress’s enthusiastic and attentive service. She even took the trouble to open several boxes stored in the back, laying out a wide array of champagne glasses and giving me ample freedom to choose from the extensive selection” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.34). Finally, Kiyooka’s detailed character sketches offer Japanese readers then eager to visit China a glimpse of ordinary Chinese lives. Describing Zheng Minqin, his companion between Beijing and Dalian, he systematically outlines the figure’s

background, hometown, age, and appearance, shaping the portrait of a composed, introspective literary youth:

Seated beside me is Mr. Zheng Minqin, who has been quietly reading a book since earlier. When I, along with two other Japanese visitors, traveled to Luoyang under his guidance a few days ago, I observed the same tendency—he is genuinely fond of books, particularly literary works, it seems. He has been accompanying me on my round trip between Beijing and Dalian. A youth staff member of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, he was born in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, and graduated from the Japanese Department of Beijing Foreign Studies University. When asked about his birthday, he replied that it was July 5, 1946. Upon learning that he shared the same birth year as my wife, he showed a look of mild surprise. I considered explaining that my previous wife had passed away and that I had remarried, but in the end, I refrained. Mr. Zheng has a somewhat elongated face, a tall and muscular build, a calm manner of speaking, and tends to be sparing with his words (Kiyooka, 1983, p.11).

The information Kiyooka provides in his novel aligns closely with domestic biographical accounts of Zheng Minqin. Though I have not yet identified specialized research directly discussing their relationship, the inclusion of Kiyooka Takayuki's modern poem "Gypsum," translated by Zheng, in *Selected Love Poems by One Hundred Foreign Poets* corresponds to the episode in "Dalian in Early Winter" where Zheng consults Kiyooka on modern Japanese poetry. This corroborates their actual literary exchanges. At the same time, Kiyooka's insistence on specificity and authenticity renders his portrayal of individuals more vivid and convincing. Yet Kiyooka differs from ordinary tourists in that he holds a distinctive sentiment toward Dalian, regarding it as a kind of hometown. When his narrative shifts to the perspective of the returnee, the psychological details he unfolds offer readers not only the satisfaction of curiosity but also a powerful emotional impact: "Ah, was this the strangely quiet, tense instant—as if abruptly awakened from the long dream of thirty-four years of recollection? Or was it, rather, the moment of standing at a crossroads, stepping into a dream of four nights and five days—the intoxicated moment of falling into a dream of self-experiment both deeply longed for and profoundly feared (Kiyooka, 1983, p.17).

In Kiyooka Takayuki's poetic narrative, readers are made to feel viscerally the excitement, tension, and unease that surge within him upon his return to Dalian. Such emotional expression does more than narrow the distance between text and reader; it deepens curiosity: what kind of place could bear such intense emotional weight? In the general perception of the Japanese in the 1980s, Dalian was indeed a special city—it carried the historical memories of Japanese aggression and colonization, with remnants of Japanese-style architecture still scattered along its streets; at the same time, it stood as a representative of contemporary China's international cities, displaying the modern life of the Chinese people. Driving through Dalian, Kiyooka cannot help but sigh deeply: "I silently offered my blessings in my heart to the modern scene unfolding before me, and a refreshing sense of clarity welled up within me" (Kiyooka, 1983, p.19). Only profound affection for a city can fully reveal its charm. Through Kiyooka's interwoven perspectives—that of the tourist and the returnee, and through a mode of detailed writing that balances authenticity with emotion, Japanese readers, curious about China and eager to travel there, gained a more complete, comprehensive, and profound understanding of Dalian. Such writing served, without question, as an ideal travel guide for its era.

Dialogue with and Transcendence of the "Introverted Generation"

In a literary column of the evening edition of the *Tokyo Shimbun* on March 23, 1971, Odagiri Hideo voiced his discontent with the prevailing literary trend, noting that "this generation of writers only seeks the genuine substance of their works solely within the self and personal circumstances; as an introspective literary group detached from ideology, they are forming a modern current of thought." He termed this group the "Introverted Generation." Representative writers of this school include Furui Yoshikichi, Kuroi Senji, Goto Meisei, Abe Akira, Ogawa Kunio, and Ōba Minako. Most were born in the 1930s, their life trajectories intricately intertwined with Japan's tumultuous social changes: experiencing war and defeat in childhood, confronting postwar reconstruction and intense student movements in youth, and encountering the societal transformations brought by rapid economic growth in middle age. From the end of World War II through the period of high-speed economic growth, the historical

upheavals and the uncertainty of value systems in Japanese society profoundly impacted these writers. They generally recognized the fragility of ideologies and the void of reality, advocating an art-for-art's-sake stance. In *Postwar Japanese Literary History Chronology*, Akiyama Shun summarized four characteristics of the “Introverted Generation”: a sense of discomfort and distrust toward the intellectual discourse that discusses “society”; the introduction of an “unreal world” into the everyday; the depiction of the living conditions of urban dwellers and urban life; and the portrayal of “meaningless people living meaningless lives in meaningless places” (Miyosi, 1989, p.125).

In literary practice, the “Introverted Generation” established its position through a series of award-winning works. *Ōba Minako's Three Crabs* (1968), portraying the alienation of Japanese intellectuals abroad, won the Akutagawa Prize. Furui Yoshikichi's *Yokō* (1970), employing a “slow-motion” narrative technique to delve into the inner world of an autistic patient, also received the Akutagawa Prize; its unique psychological depiction became one of the hallmarks of the school. Other representative works include Ogawa Kunio's *Light from the Sea*, Kuroi Senji's *Time*, Abe Akira's *The Commander's Leave* (1970), and Goto Meisei's *Between Attacks* (1973). As these works appeared in major literary magazines such as *Bungei* and *Gunzō* and frequently won prestigious awards, the influence of the “Introverted Generation” expanded. In 1977, Goto Meisei, Furui Yoshikichi, and others formed an editorial board and founded the coterie magazine *Buntai*, publishing works of the “Introverted Generation” in quarterly installments, pushing the school to its peak. Although *Buntai* ceased publication in 1980 and the influence of the “Introverted Generation” as a new wave gradually waned, its core ideas and literary paradigms profoundly shaped subsequent Japanese literature. When intellectuals or literary youths of the same era read “Dalian in Early Winter,” they would undoubtedly notice its affinities with the creative characteristics of the “Introverted Generation”: above all, an extreme focus on various micro-level, everyday details:

When I returned to Building Sixteen after breakfast, the morning sunlight had grown even brighter, sparkling with a radiant beauty. This was, of course, due to

the quality of the atmosphere, yet it gave me exactly that impression of transparent clarity I had experienced before. The winter sunlight shone dazzlingly upon my face, yet it seemed unwilling to penetrate beyond the skin, instead shattering refreshingly upon the surface and scattering away. (Kiyooka, 1983, p.42)

Kiyooka employs a highly poetic idiom to render, with painstaking precision, the morning light of Dalian in November across multiple sensory registers—visual and tactile alike. Training his lens on the precise instant when sunlight meets the skin, he transforms an exquisitely slight, ephemeral, and utterly quotidian sensory impression into a singular aesthetic moment, achieved through the amplification and prolongation enabled by language, and in doing so, shares it with the reader. At the same time, within Kiyooka Takayuki's realist accounts of his return to the everyday textures of Dalian, there are also interwoven writings of the unreal, dreams and fantasies, forming a narrative structure in which reality and imagination are held in tension.

For instance, the first-floor corridor facing Luxun Road. In a dream, I was running there barefoot. The evening sun streamed brightly through the double-layered window, and no one was around. Though I kept running, I wasn't moving forward. With my right hand, I was carefully lifting the leather strap of a steelyard, and on its weighing tray—of all things—rested a baby bottle. I paid meticulous attention to balancing it against the counterweight suspended from the beam. Why, despite running, did I not advance? Inside the rubber nipple of the baby bottle, the evening sun had tinged a faint red. (Kiyooka, 1983, p.45)

Kiyooka's characteristic technique of "the introduction of an 'unreal world' into the everyday" is typically embodied in the scene where, while physically in Dalian, he recalls a dream set in Tokyo. Why does he keep running yet make no progress? Why is a baby bottle placed on the weighing tray? And why does the "I" concentrate fully on maintaining the balance between the counterweight and the bottle? The image of the baby bottle frequently appears in Kiyooka's poetry as well, often interpreted by scholars as representing the young child from his remarriage or symbolizing his newly

reconstituted family. The counterweight, based on my reading of Kiyooka's other works, can be understood as the purity he constantly pursued, or what might be described as the "sweet death" he longed for. The "I" striving to maintain this state of balance reflects Kiyooka's psychological struggle between these two forces. On this level, Kiyooka's creative choices resonate with those of the "Introverted Generation", who "use non-realistic and surrealistic imagery to depict the so-called everyday world and the inner world of characters" (He, 2021, p.165). Yet, as Takahashi Hideo points out in his "Essay on Kiyooka Takayuki", "if his literature is understood merely as lucid and fluent lyrical prose, or as sketches of trivial daily scenes rendered with hazy memories into faintly poetic tableaux, that likely grasps only half of his literary world." While Kiyooka shares with the "Introverted Generation" a similar attention to the everyday, its core and essence are fundamentally different. The everyday portrayed by the latter is often de-historicized and non-directional, whereas many of the details Kiyooka writes about in *Early Winter in Dalian* resemble "fossils of memory"—each intimately connected to grand external narratives such as colonial history, wartime trauma, and national identity. When the author sees tanghulu in Luxun Park, for instance, it evokes a childhood memory of having longed to taste them yet never having had the chance—a longing whose reason is profoundly intertwined with the broader historical fabric: "As a timid child, I was already half-resigned from the start to the fact that this treat belonged to the lives of Chinese people and remained beyond my reach. Even if I had asked my mother or sister, they would likely have told me it was unacceptable because the candied haws were caked with dust. Besides, I had never developed the habits of receiving pocket money or buying snacks to eat alone"(Kiyooka, 1983, p.32).

When introducing Dalian's candied haws, Kiyooka Takayuki inserts a personal recollection that draws readers into a specific historical period, reflecting the segregation in living spaces between colonizers and the colonized under colonial rule while also highlighting the emotional and psychological distance between them. At the same time, within his account of visiting Dalian's everyday scenes, Kiyooka incorporates observations and reflections on contemporary realities in China, demonstrating his close attention to the external environment, particularly the conditions of Chinese society at that time. Seeing that the appearance of the residential

buildings is almost the same as during the war, he thinks: “Considering historical backgrounds such as the Korean War, famines, and the Cultural Revolution, the lag in the development of certain parts of public housing was unavoidable during such a period” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.20). Finding that the courtyard walls surrounding single-family houses have been demolished and long walls like those of school buildings have been built, he observes: “this particular form may also be related to the Residents’ Committees in the ‘new China’—an organization somewhat reminiscent of Japan’s tonarigumi (neighborhood associations) and one that serves as a grassroots mass organization for resident autonomy in urban areas” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.21). By infusing textual details and everyday narratives with a consciousness of historicity and external context, Kiyooka achieves a critical dialogue with and transcendence of the literary paradigm of the “Introverted Generation.” His detailed writing is neither an endpoint nor a goal in itself, but rather a starting point toward history and a pathway toward reality. In “Dalian in Early Winter,” he voices an inner plea: “Unrelated to construction or aggression, without troubling anyone, could I weep freely within this secret solitude?” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.41) He is not without a desire to follow the path of the “Introverted Generation”—to cast off the weight of history and the external world and turn solely toward the self and the inner realm. Yet, as he reflects, “If I could weep, I would weep freely. Yet something still holds me back” (Kiyooka, 1983, p.41). The dust of history remains entangled at the tip of his pen, while nostalgia for reality and the fullness of life also weigh upon his steps. Ultimately, he moves in a different direction, constructing the unique literary universe of Kiyooka Takayuki, and in this process, both incidentally and inevitably, engages in an early practice of what might be termed “urban theory.”

The Practice of Urban Theory

In 1960s Japan, domestic urban theory primarily addressed urban issues under rapid economic development from an economic perspective. By the 1980s, however, cultural concepts began to intervene in the field of urban studies—a shift that can be seen as the emergence of a cultural studies approach or the rise of a textual methodology. Scholars began interpreting urban spaces through the prism of literature, constituting a

significant paradigm shift. Maeda Manabu (1931-1987) was a pioneer in this turn. By analyzing literary works such as *The Dancing Girl* and *Children's Time*, he proposed a semiotic method of interpretation, emphasizing that, in contrast to earlier analytical approaches that dissected and integrated urban elements along an axis of “utility”, administration, production, transportation, exchange, his semiotic method aimed to decipher the deeper layers of the city that spill over from the network of utility and manifest as a sensitive plate for the emotions and desires of its inhabitants. Jinnai Hidenobu (1947-) captured the transformation from Edo to Tokyo from the perspectives of architecture and urban landscape theory. Through thorough fieldwork, he revealed the evolutionary trajectory of the concept “Tokyo = city.” He noted: “A city is an assemblage of various elements. However, neither buildings nor roads appear in isolation; they are structured by a certain grammar and related to each other within a context. If our method is appropriate, the city is not difficult to read. In Tokyo, the various characteristics that would later define the city were already hinted at when the great castle town of Edo began to form. For understanding the seemingly chaotic contemporary Tokyo, there is no more effective method than walking its streets, directly experiencing its topography, understanding the historical causes of its land-use patterns, and thereby comprehending the spatial skeleton underlying Tokyo’s chaos” (Jinnai, 1985, p.26). He stressed the relationality among urban elements, the continuity from Edo to Tokyo, and the importance of experience and practice in understanding the city. In addition, Yoshimi Toshiya (1957-) gradually revealed the essence of “Tokyo = city” by comparing urban spaces such as Asakusa, Ginza, Shinjuku, and Shibuya. He advocated understanding the relationship between the city and its residents as a relationship between <performance> and <audience/actor = role>, calling this the “performance studies perspective.” Yoshimi (1987) also systematically categorized textualist urban studies into four main types: (1) attempts mainly from literary studies, aiming to depict the city = text by analyzing literary works = texts; (2) journalistic methods involving firsthand visits to the city and translating lived experience into writing to read the city = text, commonly practiced by documentary writers, authors, and photographers; (3) architectural approaches conducting semiotic analysis of buildings and spatial forms as texts; and (4) social history perspectives that understand

the city as a festive space where people gather and seek the reasons prompting such assembly. In summary, during the 1980s in Japan, a textual methodology originating from literary criticism was widely introduced into urban theory. It broke the dominant functionalist analytical framework and profoundly transformed urban studies by focusing on the city's cultural symbols, historical layers, and the experiences of its residents, leaving a lasting impact on subsequent research.

Long before urban studies became a prominent field, Kiyooka Takayuki had already consciously shaped the space of “Dalian” as the very subject, rather than merely the backdrop of his literary writing. In his series of works themed on Dalian, the city's particularity and symbolism are pushed to the extreme. “Dalian in Early Winter,” a travelogue documenting Kiyooka's revisit to the city, contains detailed descriptions of travel routes and locations. These depictions not only possess semiotic value within urban theory but also deepen the text's historical dimension and emotional resonance. Upon arriving in Dalian, the protagonist “I” first travels by car from Zhoushuizi Airport to Nanshan Hotel, thereby completing a preliminary tour of the city. During this process, “I” passes through “Stalin Square” (formerly the square in front of the Kwantung Government Office), “Dalian Institute of Science and Physics” (formerly the Central Laboratory of the South Manchuria Railway), “Dalian Zoo” (formerly the Electric Amusement Park). This route is not merely a geographical trajectory but also a narrative thread through which Kiyooka guides readers to retrace history and revisit the past. In introducing each building, the author deliberately notes its former name and interweaves related historical fragments or personal memories, allowing readers, while witnessing the reality of Dalian in the 1980s, to transcend time and space and uncover the historical veil of the city's colonial past. The interactive contrast between the present space and the historical space causes the city within the text to expand and swell, accommodating more experiences, understandings, encounters, and collisions.

Simultaneously, Kiyooka closely intertwines the city with human beings and bodily experience. By analogizing the early winter of Dalian with the early stages of aging in life, he constructs an aesthetic dimension where time, space, and life are mutually illuminating: “So it is—perhaps in what might be my final homecoming, early aging and early winter have overlapped with such apt coincidence” (Kiyooka, 1983,

p.9). He further uses the imperceptibility of the human aging process as a metaphor for the subtlety of Dalian's urban transformation: "The former Yayoi Pond Park had become Lu Xun Park, much like a person entering the early old age of sixty-two; yet in terms of its ambiance, the past and present seemed entirely unchanged" (Kiyooka, 1983, p.30). Additionally, Kiyooka employs detailed descriptions of space and environment to symbolize characters' inner psychological states and emotional shifts. After the narrator visits his former residence in Dalian and has a cordial conversation with Mr. Lin and his son, "I" notices that the room once used as a study has now been turned into a kitchen: "I looked into the room and was astonished. To my surprise, it had been turned into a kitchen. Moreover, there stood a bright and unassuming girl of about seventeen. I shook hands with her again. She looked slightly embarrassed. The rooms on the second floor were all tidy and impeccably clean. I couldn't help but feel glad" (Kiyooka, 49).

On a realistic level, this description reveals the spatial changes within the protagonist's former residence. From a psychological perspective, however, it reflects the author's consciousness of tracing the past and his profound acceptance of present transformations. More importantly, these changes are permeated with imagery of cleanliness and brightness, signifying that through this revisit, the author's feelings toward Dalian undergo a transition: from nostalgia and unease, to surprise and acceptance, and ultimately, to heartfelt blessing. The "tidy and impeccably clean" rooms and the "bright and unassuming" girl within them—the characteristics of space and environment serve as projections of the author's inner state. As he exclaims upon leaving the Lin family's home: "From the Lin family, I received an impression of serene contentment. This, too, was a source of joy for me" (Kiyooka, 1983, p.50). This moment also foreshadows the shift in tone in Kiyooka's later Dalian series. As Ogasawara Kenji observes in "The Destination of Antinomy—Kiyooka Takayuki's Dalian Experience", "What changes emerged in *Dalian Sketches* and *In Dalian Port*, which draw on his third-phase experiences? In short, a sense of tranquility and happiness began to flow within his antinomical sensibilities" (Ogasawara, 2008, p.343). Kiyooka Takayuki's writing can thus be regarded as a significant and ahead-of-time literary practice within the "urban theory" of Japanese literature. His detailed descriptions serve as an effective

tool: they lead readers to observe the actual landscape of the city of Dalian, to delve into the historical spaces behind it, and finally to meet and engage in dialogue within the literary world he constructs, thereby granting Dalian a personalized interpretation.

Conclusions

In his travelogue novel “Dalian in Early Winter,” Kiyooka Takayuki constructs a vivid portrayal of the city's urban landscape and social atmosphere in the 1980s, grounded in rich descriptive detail. By interweaving historical references and personal recollections within the realistic narrative, he creates a juxtaposition of past and present, rendering the passage of time palpable and allowing emotion to emerge with restrained naturalness. When interpreting the work, it is essential to recognize its structural significance as a pivotal component of Kiyooka's Dalian series—particularly as the opening piece of the short story collection published following his return visit to the city. Simultaneously, the work should be contextualized within its contemporaneous era, acknowledging its synchronic connections with Japan's social issues and literary trends around the 1980s, as well as its dynamic interaction with contemporary readers. This study focuses on Kiyooka's detailed depictions of time, space, imagery, and psychology. Adopting the perspective of “contemporaneous studies,” it effectively bridges close textual analysis with external historical context, attempting to reconstruct the diverse reading experiences of contemporary audiences and thereby uncover richer interpretive possibilities for *Dalian in Early Winter*. Through an analysis of the detailed descriptions in the work, it becomes evident that these are not merely expressions of personal idiosyncrasy or realist technique. Rather, they constitute a highly self-conscious literary methodology developed through the author's deep engagement with contemporary intellectual debates (such as the textbook controversy) and theoretical trends (including the “Introverted Generation” and “urban theory”). This approach represents a distinctive response to the expectations of contemporary readers and the core issues of the era. Thus, an author who may appear to be solely indulging in “nostalgia” or lyrical expression could, in fact, be positioned at the forefront of contemporary thought, employing a unique literary mode to participate in and advance the development of travel writing as a genre.

In urban literature, detailed description serves as a powerful vehicle for conveying ideas, connecting history, engaging with reality, and constructing literary space. In *Dalian in Early Winter*, Kiyooka employs detailed writing to build an intricate three-dimensional structure encompassing everyday reality, historical memory, and psychological emotion. These three dimensions interweave to form a literary Dalian that exists simultaneously as a geographical and a psychological space. Within such an urban literary space, contemporary readers find points of entry relevant to their own concerns, step into the textual world, and follow the meticulously outlined pathways provided by Kiyooka toward varied interpretive directions. We are products of our environment, yet also its shapers. The various issues and intellectual currents of the 1980s influenced the reading preferences and cognitive frameworks of readers at the time. Simultaneously, however, those readers drew diverse experiences from the same text, freely constructing individual worlds of reading uniquely their own.

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