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Naomi Charlotte Fukuzawa, *Japan and Japonisme in Late Nineteenth Century Literature* (Routledge, 2025), 226 pp. ISBN 9781032545950

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Japan and Japonisme in Late Nineteenth Century Literature draws on diverse literary genres – 'the French novel, the modernist novella in proximity to the German *Bildungsroman* or the Anglo-Saxon short or ghost story'[1] – to explore how the 'poetic aestheticization' of Japan played a crucial role within 'an "eclectic" adoption of modernity' in fin-de-siècle literature both from Japan and the West (p. 1, p. 6). Following in the footsteps of Japanese studies scholars such as Rachael Hutchinson and Mark Williams (*Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature*, 2006), Fukuzawa argues that a 'mutual process of exoticism and autoexoticism' shaped 'the transnational modernization process in Meiji Japan (1868-1912)' (p. 2). This work is therefore a valuable addition to the trend, carried by scholars such as Stefano Evangelista and Jennifer Yee, approaching *Japonisme* and exoticism as multipolar phenomena at the intersection of discourses on colonialism, modernity, and self-identity.

The book opens with a chapter on Pierre Loti, where *Madame Chrysanthème*'s main female character is analysed as 'a national allegory for (early to mid-) Meiji Japan as a whole' embodying 'the dual nature of the nation, both its semi-subaltern status under Western influence and its resistance to Western hegemony through the strong attachment to Japanese customs' (p. 46). Fukuzawa carefully re-contextualizes Loti within the political and cultural history of France-Japan relations during the Meiji era, as well as the 'semi-documentary and semi-fictional nature of the book' (p. 47) in regard to its author's status as 'a military and diplomatic servant' (p. 38). What France represented for Meiji intellectuals and politicians such as Fukuzawa Yukichi – 'an aesthetic democratic republican ideal' (p. 39) – features alongside the more expected description of Japan

seen through French eyes, as the exotic other that 'doesn't fit easily into the categories for perpetrator and victim inherent to Orientalism' (p. 40).

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the works of Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki and their experiences in Europe – Germany for the former and England for the latter. The two chapters benefit from the same careful consideration of the different understanding attached to these two countries in Meiji Japan. 'Germany saw a "late" reception of Modernity in the nineteenth century that gave birth to a conservative modern nation-state, quite similar to the Japanese case' (p. 71), while England was Japan's 'first model of modernization', 'still proud of its expanding industrial and colonial Empire' (p. 101). Fukuzawa convincingly contrasts Ōgai's adoption of 'the European concept of the sovereign self, or more specifically, the German notion of emancipation from social circumstances' (p. 126), as portrayed in *The Dancing Girl*, 'a modern Japanese *Bildungsroman* […] symbolizing Japan's adoption of the military and medical leadership of Bismarck's young German Empire' (p. 79), to Sōseki's ambivalence in 'The Tower of London'. 'This novella […] represents an autoexoticist manifestation of Japanese self-identity […] contain[ing] an element of antagonism through its cleverly woven parody of the paradigmatic literary genre of the Victorian Gothic' (p. 127). This point is linked to a timely and well-handled discussion on the displacement and circulation of literary canons and genres across literary cultures. Fukuzawa rightly underlines how this often underappreciated text by Sōseki is key in 'conceptualizing the formation of Japan's national imagology through the analysis of exoticist and autoexoticist literary discourses of Self and Other together with processes of global translation' (p. 130).

These two chapters, which deal with two literary giants, will be of interest to scholars of decadence who are unfamiliar with Japanese literature. Fukuzawa's argument that Japanese modernity is founded on 'eclectic hybridity' is convincing when applied to the 'mutual othering within the modernist construction of "Japan" as *another* "in-between"', accomplished by both the 'Western gaze's exoticization' and 'the autoexoticization of Japan's self-constitution as found in modern Japanese exile literature' (p. 74). However, the post-colonial framework used to support

the argument does not always work in the author's favour. In particular, Fukuzawa relies on references from Marxist scholars, such as Katō Shūichi, who posits Japan's 'typical "hybrid" culture' by contrasting it to the supposedly 'typical "pure bred" cultures' of England and France, and on Sōseki specialist Komori Yōichi (pp. 8 and 9). The idea that some cultures can be 'pure bred' while others are 'hybrid' should surely have been questioned. The idea of a specifically and uniquely Japanese hybridity is based on an essentialist understanding of national characteristics, which post-colonial studies often fail to fully deconstruct. Similarly, Komori's controversial concept of 'self-colonization' to describe Meiji Japan's implementation of Western-style diplomacy and political reforms could have been handled with greater critical distance. The uncanny similarities between these scholarly discourses from the twentieth century and the fin-de-siècle exoticist laments over Japan losing its true self to Westernization would have been interesting to explore more fully.

The cultural essentialism inherent to *Japonisme* is more clearly explored in the last two chapters, which deal with Lafcadio Hearn. Fukuzawa re-frames Hearn within an evolving and uneven reception, historically very different in Japan and in the West. She proposes that 'the lack of interest in Hearn outside Japan appears to be a symptom of the continued dominance of certain modes of perception shaped by Western hegemony' (p. 155), a situation that is rapidly changing today. Chapter 4 focuses on Hearn's novel *Kokoro* and demonstrates that 'Hearn's *Japonist* [writings] contributed to the exoticization of meta-narratives that actively created "the West" in opposition to "Japan" through intercultural translation processes' within the context of 'the *fin-de-siècle* imperial age of Social Darwinism, filled with ethnocentric assumptions, including the notion of a universal Celtic or Pagan culture' (p. 160). Fukuzawa also begins to re-evaluate Hirakawa Sukehiro's psychoanalytic interpretation of Hearn's relevance in Japan. Hirakawa explains Hearn's popularity in Japan by a subconscious affinity between the author who suffered 'the trauma of his early loss of his mother' and Japanese culture as a whole, supposedly marked by a 'sentiment of mother-longing […] called *amae*' (p. 141). This concept, among many others, has been amply criticized for

being rooted in the ethnocentric nationalist scholarship of the 1970s (*nihonjinron*), and there is an opportunity here to assess more robustly its problematic application to Hearn's works. It is surprising, perhaps, that Fukuzawa does not engage more closely with such critical reassessments.

Fukuzawa convincingly argues that 'Hearn's Romantic tribute to Japan's modernist national narrative […] expresses Meiji's transition from a threatened Oriental country to a modern imperialist power with its own Asian colonies and the belief in its own ethno-cultural superiority' (p. 146). The chapter incorporates familiar material on Hearn's views on women, positing that he 'contributed to the formation of a national hegemonic discourse on the ideal of Japanese femininity' (p. 163). The comparison with Loti on this topic seems somewhat simplistic in places, despite Hearn being rightly described as having a 'tendency towards an over-idealization of Japanese female gender […] as an antagonism to the individualism of Western society' (p. 163). Hearn is favourably opposed to the French author over two different quotes both drawing on the fact that the former was 'respectful towards women' and devoted to his Japanese wife (pp. 154 and 156). One wishes this comparison drew on their respective writings rather than biographies – not to mention that Loti owed his popular success in France by capitalizing on a chivalrous persona aimed at female readers. It might have been more fruitful to explore further the two authors' fixation on women as resulting from 'the same Orientalism' and 'narratological pattern of exoticism' (p. 164).

The last chapter deals with Hearn's ghost stories, *Kwaidan*, arguing that they should be read within 'a transnational historical background of planetary folklore' whose 'national romantic ethos […] can be found in Germany in the Grimm Brothers [or] in Denmark in Andersen' (p. 171). This part of the book briefly addresses decadence, positing that *Kwaidan* offers 'hybridized multicultural modernist transcriptions of Western and Japanese decadent traditions of the supernatural and folklore' (p. 172). Here, Hearn's biography is put to better use by drawing parallels between his stories on Japan and the tradition of the Anglo-Irish ghost story, in particular W. B. Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* (p. 175). Fukuzawa argues that these stories can be placed within the 'belittling,

whimsical imagology of *Japonisme*' by portraying the Japanese as 'a fairy-tale people' (p. 175). She shows how Hearn's 'exoticist intention to popularize this supernatural tradition in the West' and 'fus[ing] […] the Irish and Victorian Gothic […] with the uncanny literary tradition of Edo oral tales' have been incorporated within autoexoticizing and nationalist discourses about Japanese indigenous culture, such as folklorist Yanagita Kunio's (pp. 180, 197, 184).

This work, based on Fukuzawa's PhD thesis, offers a great deal of valuable information and is meticulously researched, but contains an abundance of secondary references that could have been quoted with more restraint. For example, a prominent place is given to the now well-established frameworks of twentieth-century theorists, such as Todorov, Barthes, Foucault, and Bhabha and this sometimes risks overshadowing more pertinent contributions by researchers on Japan and *Japonisme* – among whom recent scholars writing in Japanese are unfortunately very few. Better editing could have avoided some problems with repetition, the omission of references, and typographical errors. It is overall, however, part of a very welcome and highly relevant re-evaluation of *Japonisme* as a movement largely transcending the aesthetic to crystallize key questions on modernity.

[1] Naomi Charlotte Fukuzawa, *Japan and Japonisme in Late Nineteenth Century Literature* (Routledge, 2025), p. 212. All subsequent references are provided inline.