

Return to Japan

After journeying to a fantasized or praised West, can the Japanese do anything but physically and mentally return to a Japan of nostalgia, and remain there forever? Such is the fascinating hypothesis examined in a series of papers collected under the title *Return to Japan from 'Pilgrimage' to the West*.

By Gérard Siary

Return to Japan from 'Pilgrimage' to the West is based on the argument, described on the back cover, that a number of modern and contemporary Japanese writers, critics, and intellectuals 'travelled to the West in praise of Western civilization only to revert to their conception of 'true' Japanese spiritual, social, cultural and aesthetic values'. It is composed of two main sections. The first is subdivided into two parts called 'Prototypes' and 'Variations' – subtitles that are nowhere justified. The second section consists of seventeen case studies extending from the Meiji era to the Heisei era.

In the keynote, Ian Reader, describes the process of pilgrimage as a looping pattern that could be used to account for the return to a Japan of nostalgia after the journey to a fantasized West. The journey to a sacred place or a fantasized West owes its origins to an escape from a Japan of reality. As pilgrimages are mental and symbolic constructs, they need not be real or physical. The return to the departing point may give the pilgrim the status or position he was dreaming of. It can also be 'a source of conflicting paradigms with the images of

Japan and Japanese identity' (p. 15). It then drives the former pilgrim to imagine or shape his homeland, as he would like it to be or thinks it used to be: hence the opposition between the West and Japan, modern Japan and the Japanese past, or the constructed *furusato*.

Hirakawa Sukehirō begins with Lafcadio Hearn's short story, *A Conservative*, as an illustration for the looping pattern of the return. Shigemi Nakagawa asserts that Yokomitsu Riichi's journey to Europe drove him to recognize the 'uniqueness' of the Japanese race and that *Nihon kaiki*, 'a conceptual product of modernity', crystallized into 'overcoming the modernity' (p. 158). According to Hae-Kyung Sung, Okakura Tenshin never ceased to maintain a relationship with the West, but came to defend Asian values, as embodied by Japan, against the selfishness of the West.

Kinya Tsuruta demonstrates that Tanizaki Junichirō fantasized about a West he never actually visited, adapted it to his quest of the Woman, and shifted to the celebration of Japanese values and uses of the Kansai. He never eliminated the presence of foreigners, however, and managed to create proper and concrete figures of Westerners. Yoichi Nagashima

retraces how Mori Ōgai, a translator of Western works who, failing to adapt the Western novel to Japanese literature, shifted to a new type of historical writing, called *shiden*, that was not always devoid of Western devices.

Stephen Dodd, meanwhile, explains that Kunikida Doppo, who never journeyed to the West, nevertheless, rediscovered the Japanese *furusato* through Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas* (1759), and various Chinese works. Katsuya Sugawara examines how Nagai Kafū's unwished-for experience of America and France helped him criticize the modern society of the Meiji era and revert to the artistic values of the decaying *shitamachi*. Inaga Shigemi discusses the *kaiki* pattern: Kinoshita Mokutarō criticized the Japanese craze for fashion; he contributed to the hybridization of Japanese culture, rehabilitated the work of Kobayashi Kiyochika through Impressionism, and rediscovered Tokugawa Japan by returning to the 'Japanism' reintroduced from the West.

In the second section of the book, the following personalities are examined, though with no clear indication of their importance over other Japanese personalities: Kobayashi Hideo, Itō Sei, Mishima Yukio, Endū Shūsaku,

Etō Jun, Ōba Minako, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Murakami Haruki. The case studies reveal, moreover, that the looping pattern does not always apply. Some authors actually went to a fantasized West, or dreamed of it, and then reactively reverted to a Japan of nostalgia of which they could find no tangible trace, except in a remote or reconstructed time, history, or place. A few others struggled against Western values in favour of the Japanese nation (Yokomitsu, Kobayashi) or Japanese protocol (Etō Jun) as a foil to the West. For the majority of them, however, the West provides a place to understand Japan from a distance and its past a posteriori; a means of social integration into the Japanese society (Itō Sei); a mere 'hypotext' to decipher Japan's reality or reshape Japan as a living place (Kunikida Doppo); a step in a quest that may extend far beyond Europe (Okakura, Endō); a cultural body taken for granted and not to be dissociated from a Japanese culture; or an option to be chosen, dropped, and chosen again (Murakami). In fact, some of the case studies clearly show that a fantasized West or a Japan of nostalgia can hardly be mentioned.

In his concluding remarks, Hirakawa Sukehirō insists upon the fact that the multi-layered phenomenon of *Nihon kaiki*, by no means limited to Japan, remains to be written in Japan as 'a truly comprehensive chapter of modern Japanese literary history' (p. 349). Unfortunately, he fails to provide the reader with a proper assessment of this hypothesis, except



for the sad announcement that 'Many of us aged members have already returned to Japan, if not emotionally at least in our food preferences' (p. 350). Whatever the defects of the book, it is full of insights about such problems as the hybridization of cultures or the Japanese psychosomatic reaction to the West, and is worth reading. <

- Nagashima Yoichi, (ed.), *Return to Japan from 'Pilgrimage' to the West*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press (2001), 363 pp., ISBN 87 7288 837 7, ill. and index.

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