

# INTERNATIONALIZATION AND LITERATURE

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Generally described as mythological, the Japanese national mentality granted literature — both the elitist *jun bungaku* and mass *taishu bungaku* — an unique role in the formation of Japanese psychology and inimitable culture. Literature gave a certain specificity to many historical and social processes. It is hard to overestimate, for instance, its part in the internationalization process in Japan.

Cultural, in particular literary internationalization is, possibly, even of greater importance than economic. Without it, Japan can hardly aspire to climb the political and economic Olympus in the 21st century world.

The mid-1970s closed the modernization period. Started by the Meiji revolution, it brought Japan an economic parity with global leaders. Now the country was to reappraise its place and role in the emerging new world. That was how sweeping internationalization came to all spheres of Japanese life — not only the economy and politics but culture. Literature did not stand aloof to this stormy change which was to put an end to Japan's previous situation, marginal to an extent, and make it par and parcel of the new world arrangement with prospects for global leadership.

The new practical tasks demanded a theory to underlie them, and gave new aspects to the theories of *Nihon bunkaron* and *Nihonjinron*. The idea of reviving cultural values acquired a new popularity. The pioneer theory of contextualism (*kanjinshugi*, or *aidagarashugi*), appearing side-by-side with it, demanded subject action adequate to the expectations of the surrounding. For this, the subject needed self-identification — realization of the actual context and subsequent search for a status or a niche in it. That was how the national mentality turned from the idea of exceptionality to that of Japanization, which was to replace Westernization as a developmental model of contemporary capitalist society. This turn involved not only the so-called social technology but — even more so — literature and the other cultural spheres.

The reason for the change lay in the Japanese culture, traditionally impervious to external influence, and dark to Western and even Eastern understanding, which bred a specific rejection response and impeded Japan's global economic and cultural penetration — a factor which inevitably brought anxiety and discomfort to the Japanese mind, shaped by the *amae* tradition implying dependence on a benevolent surrounding.

The first symposium *Nihon wa sekai moderu ni naru ka?* (Can Japan Become a Model to the World?), convened in Osaka, 1982, was followed by regular events elaborating practical

programmes to implement the ideas of *kokusaika*.

Japanese and overseas experts came to the same conclusion: Japan had the chance to be Power Number One in the 21st century if it started today to promote worldwide not only its economy but culture — first of all, literature, this key to the human heart, which became one of the principal tools in the New Scenario, a complex of measures for economic, political and moral leadership in the century to come. Not exotic arts for the few connoisseurs but a semiotic culture based on texts and open to the mass (*katsuji bunka*) was to open the global mind to an understanding of Japan and confirm the priority of its spiritual and intellectual values.

That was how the early 1970s finished the era which could be described as passive adaptation, and ushered in an active adaptation. This turning point in modern Japanese history made the contemporary actively adapting country thoroughly different from the old Japan of passive adaptation. To see this difference, we ought to understand the principle of cultural adaptation in general — the traditional workings of cultural borrowing which, throughout its history, allowed Japan painlessly to enter the global cultural context.

At the dawn of Japanese studies, Nicholas Nevsky, a brilliant Russian ethnologist, folklorist and dialectologist, who specialized in Japanese cultural contacts with the neighbouring regions, came out with an insight of genius as he turned to one particular instance — the idea of resurrection embodied in the hare grinding powder for the potion of immortality in a mortar. Unaware in those days of the theoretical studies of *Nihonjinron* and *Nihon bunkaron*, he wrote, nevertheless: “We cannot regard this concept as purely Japanese, for it came from China with Chinese books (possibly, coming to China from India). Anyway, it took firm root in Japan — probably because of a certain affinity with its earlier beliefs.”

It is this type of borrowing, discovered by Nevsky, that we term “passive adaptation” here. Manifest the most graphically in literature and other cultural spheres, it worked according to a steady pattern: from an acquaintance with an outlandish cultural model to the borrowing of its elements akin to Japanese culture, when its situation was conducive to such borrowing; on to active Japanization of elements of this model till even its form changed beyond recognition, and on to the export of this Japanized model, when the world welcomed it.

The specificity of this mechanism of cultural adaptation lies in its dynamism and grand scale, which allowed Japan rapidly to cover the distance which had taken donor nations centuries or decades, at the quickest, and let cultural patterns from many eras coexist in Japan simultaneously.

Japanese history is an unbroken chain of borrowings from other cultures from Chinese hieroglyphics to Western science and technology. These borrowings never harmed indigenous culture. On the contrary, thoroughly adjusted to local conditions, they evolved into something purely Japanese.

In fact, Japanese cultural development is not a vertical but a smooth ascending spiral involving a wide range of accompanying elements, indigenous and alien, to surge up to a

higher coil.

This, however, leaves *kokusaika* theoreticians dissatisfied, as to this day Japan has not duly promoted its culture abroad. "But the situation is changing and active promotion of this kind will be a major aim of Japanese publishers from now on," says *Questions and Answers Concerning Publishing in Japan*, a booklet put out by the Japanese Publishers' Association for Cultural Exchange in 1986. This passage brings out the difference between passive and active adaptation — between the receding modernization era and the new time of internationalization.

Cultural internationalization in general, and literary in particular, reveal two trends: Japanization of the world and globalization of Japan — the former implying active promotion of the Japanese cultural patterns, morals, and mode of life; the latter, the approach of contemporary Japanese culture and community to world standards. In fact, it continues the process of Westernization, though preserving traditional culture intact. Both are essential manifestations of the centuries-old pattern of cultural adaptation — the first active, and the second passive. Literature is the engine of this machinery.

Contemporary Japan attaches tremendous importance to Japanization of the world. Cultural internationalization approaches the status of government policy. As the entire cultural management, Japanization of the world — active adaptation of the outer cultural environment — is in the hands of government offices closely cooperating with big companies' charitable foundations. The Japan Foundation and the Japanese Publishers' Association for Cultural Exchange (both working in contact with the Foreign Ministry) lead the government effort. They make target-oriented allocations to overseas publishers promoting Japanese literature, and encourage its translation abroad. The choice of literature is the main criterion in subsidizing, with marked preference for classics, though contemporary literature is not neglected. Kodansha International, Charles E. Tuttle Co. Inc. and some other publishers — especially the former, with the Kodansha English Library Series and Kodansha Modern Library Series, which comprise English versions of old and modern Japanese literature — are the most active promoters of Japanese culture abroad, and dynamic sellers of their editions on a global scale, with emphasis on English-speaking countries.

Subsidies to foreign-language editions of Japanese literature — which cover up to a half of total translating and publishing expenditures — are meant, above all, to give other nations an idea of Japanese culture, form a beneficial image of the country and its people, and improve mutual understanding between Japan and the world. The intensity of this target-oriented subsidizing changes with the political situation in each particular region, and Japanese economic interests in it. Traditionally located in South and Southeast Asia, the best-favoured nation status has now gone to Europe and America. Much interest has been lately paid to former Soviet countries, especially Russia. With financial support from the Japanese Foundation, my country recently put out the classical masterpiece *Genji-monogatari* and *The Anthology of Contemporary Japanese Women Writers*. Another mediaeval masterpiece, the verse anthology *Kokinwakashu*, is shortly to appear. Translations of the *Kojiki* and the collection

*Mishima Yukio zenshu* are well underway.

Of special interest for study is the process of globalization of Japan — further passive adaptation of the domestic cultural environment to the world around — with two trends to it: artificial stimulation and autochthonous changes spontaneously rising in the depths of contemporary Japanese culture, in particular literature — mainly mass.

Such genres, supranational by nature, as the detective story, the mystery and science fiction opened the first to globalization in the realm of mass culture. These genres know no bounds and easily overcome all available barriers and stereotypes, and so can catalyze the globalization of the Japanese mentality and ethos.

The last decade gave birth to a very interesting trend in Japanese detective writing, which literary critics couldn't pass unnoticed: many authors place their action abroad, especially in international adventure and spy novels, and thrillers. In another variant, the investigator protagonist is an alien observing Japanese actuality from the side — a device producing the dual effect of bringing the Japanese reader closer to European perceptions, and adapting the Japanese book to the Western mind, which facilitates its access to the world book market and the Western reader. This is not mere fashion but fruit of deep-going socio-psychological shifts sweeping Japan. Actively incorporating into the global structure, and racing for leadership thanks to its spectacular economic success, that country unexpectedly came against the formidable barrier of psychological and cultural misunderstanding between nations. Its cultural specificity, and a certain historically conditioned marginality and insularity are blocking Japan's way to global leadership in the century to come. Traditional literature and other cultural phenomena are rather easy to promote worldwide — but there is a huge block of contemporary Japanese culture, which came from the West with the modernization era and has been passively adapted to an extent which finally severed it off from the native Western soil and made it too Japanese to be of interest to the Western public mind. Turns were no rarity in Japanese literature and other cultural spheres. Now too, mass literature easily turned face to the Western world in the stormy spontaneous “re-Westernizing” of the previously borrowed patterns to get them closer to the Western originals.

The detective story — the most international of all genres — was the quickest to respond.

Its boom was triggered off in 1988 by the very specific factor of intensified material stimulation policy, thus repeating the pattern of Japanization. The impressive number of literary prizes was extended by the four established by leading publishers and television concerns. The ambitious sums — five to ten million yen — were even more attractive with the obligatory filming of the Grand Prix book. There was another attraction — the launching of two prestigious hard-cover series, by which Shinchosha and Tokyo sogensha publishers meant to encourage gifted beginners. Very often, the race was won by authors who had travelled a longer way than their rivals on the re-Westernizing road leading to a globalized Japanese culture.

Science fiction revealed the same trends. Not so long ago, it was no special success with the world reader. The giants of the genre — Abe Kobo, Komatsu Sakyō, Hammura Ryo,

Toyota Aritsune and several others — were the only exceptions. In Japan, too, SF fans steadily preferred Western books. Quite recently, one had every reason to say that Japan had assimilated science fiction the way it adapted many other borrowings from Western civilization, and was turning it into something purely Japanese. Now, the situation has changed beyond recognition. The 1980s firmly established the cyber-pank — a thoroughly international presence — in Japanese science fiction. Then came Murakami Haruki, who conquered East and West by merging them in his bestselling *Hitsuji o meguri boken* and *Sekai-no owari to hado boirudo wandarando*, brilliant breakthroughs to globalization and re-Westernization.

The great Endo Shusaku, who stood at the cradle of Japanese literary internationalization, went through doubt and intellectual predicament when he attempted to dress the Japanese in the swaddling European attire, too hard to remodel into the good old kimono, as he figuratively described his effort. Unlike him, Murakami knows no problems of the kind, because a generation divides these two intrinsically international authors. The reader for whom Murakami is working is different from Endo's this throughly modern Japanese feeling at home with contemporary world culture thanks to successful globalizing policy. There is no task of "kimono remodelling" for Murakami, who is part and parcel of both Western and Eastern culture. You can't tell East from West in his novels, whose heroes inhabit a supranational environment. Quotations from American, Russian and French books intersperse their conversation. They have an erudite knowledge of Western music and films, these cosmopolitans born of global culture. Japanese place names and exotic dishes coming up in his books are the only indications of Murakami's ethnic background.

Yet all this reveals itself only to the superficial reader. Take a more profound look, and you will find yourself at a loss classifying his books according to genre — these unique mixtures of the industrial espionage novel, the thriller, science fiction, and the traditional Japanese *kaidan*, also internationalized. The author deliberately highlights his allusions to Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, Beagle Peter Soyer and other Western literary celebrities. No less emphatically dose he bring out his parallels with the traditional Japanese fantasy, with he genre of *kaidan*. Influences of Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Lafcadio Hearn and partly Edogawa Rampo come out at first glance. Murakami treats the foreign reader to an exotic Japanese stuffing of his excellently baked Western pie, and the reader relishes it, sometimes having no idea that he is devouring a Japanese specialty. The emphasized, sometimes obsessive parallels to the generally known Western books also carry a message all their own, meant to inform and sometimes to shock. The author demonstrates his proud flight above all national barriers, this writer of the future age when cultures and literatures merge, and one will no longer tell between East and West, North and South after interantionalization makes the whole world one indivisible cultural and psychological environment. Murakami Haruki is tremendous success with readers and book dealers alike throughout East and West to graphically prove how viable his convictions and aspirations are. It also proves that the internationalization of Japan is a rapid and victorious process; that the cultural and literary strategy elaborated by *kokusaika*

theoreticians is true and fruitful; that the mass Japanese mentality and personality are changing apace to come at one with the whole world, and lead it in the 21st century; and, last but not least, that in literature, internationalization is even quicker than in any other sphere.

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