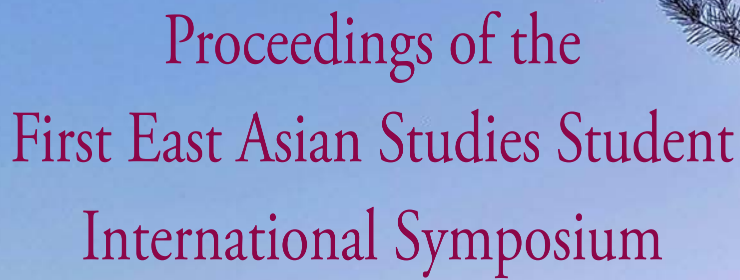

Proceedings of the First East Asian Studies Student International Symposium

May, 2025

Edited by George T. Sipos and Andrea Putnoky

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INTRODUCTION

CHARTING NEW COORDINATES: EAST ASIAN STUDIES IN TIMIȘOARA AND THE MAKING OF A SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY

George T. Sipos and Andrea Putnoky

The Inaugural East Asian Studies Student International Symposium

The present volume is the first of what we hope will become a long and distinguished series. It gathers a selection of papers presented at the First East Asian Studies Student International Symposium, held on May 16 and 17, 2025, at the West University of Timișoara, under the auspices of the Center for East Asian Studies of the Faculty of Letters, History, Philosophy and Theology. The symposium brought together, both in person and online, students and young researchers from three countries, Romania, Serbia, and Armenia, for two days of presentations, discussions, and the kind of informal intellectual exchange that is perhaps the most enduring gift any academic gathering can offer.

The symposium took place over two days in the late spring of 2025 and was organized around seven thematic panels, each bringing together presentations that, despite considerable diversity in subject matter and methodology, shared a common orientation toward rigorous inquiry, interdisciplinary curiosity, and genuine engagement with the cultures,

histories, languages, and literatures of East Asia. Panels ranged across religion and spirituality, culture and society, the Gothic in Japanese literature, East Asian cultural paradigms, linguistics and gender studies, media and social media representations in East Asia, and Japanese literature in comparative approaches. The symposium welcomed both in-person and online participants, a decision that allowed scholars from Yerevan to join colleagues in Timișoara and Belgrade in real time, a modest but meaningful enactment of the transnational character of the field itself.

The present volume does not reproduce all the papers delivered at the symposium. It offers instead a selection, twelve essays chosen for their quality of argumentation, the originality of their contributions to existing scholarship, and their capacity to speak to one another across the volume's two parts. The editors have exercised their judgment in making these choices, and they do so in full awareness that several papers not included here were equally deserving of recognition. The constraints of a first volume are what they are, and we, the editors, look forward to a more capacious future.

The Center for East Asian Studies and Its Mission

The Center for East Asian Studies (CSEA) at the West University of Timișoara was founded in 2021, and is, as such, a young but ambitious institution. Founded as part of the Faculty of Letters, History, Philosophy and Theology, the Center grew out of the conviction that East Asian studies, and Japanese studies in particular, remain still relatively peripheral to Romanian academic life, present as actual undergraduate and graduate degrees in only a couple of programs in public universities and in a couple more in private ones. The creation of the Center and, subsequently, of the Japanese Language and Literature program at the West University of Timișoara, is an attempt to remedy this situation.

The mission of the Center is at once pedagogical and scholarly. On the pedagogical side, it seeks to prepare students who are not merely competent readers and speakers of Japanese but who can engage critically with the cultural, literary, historical, and linguistic dimensions of East

Asian civilizations. This means, in practice, a curriculum that moves between language acquisition and literary analysis, between the close reading of a Heian-period poem and the theoretical frameworks that contemporary scholars bring to bear on questions of gender, identity, and cultural representation. On the scholarly side, the Center aims to produce and disseminate original research, to foster connections with institutions elsewhere in Europe, Asia, and beyond, and to create opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to participate in that research from early on in their academic careers.

Among the Center's guiding principles is the conviction that East Asian studies in Romania and Southeastern Europe need not be derivative of scholarship produced elsewhere. The field has its own questions to ask, its own traditions of reception to examine, its own historical relationships with the cultures of East Asia to explore. Romanian students reading Mishima or Kawabata, Serbian scholars engaging with the linguistics of the Japanese language, Armenian researchers tracing the intellectual genealogy of Orientalism, these are not just local instances of global trends. They are contributions, from particular vantage points, to a shared and evolving conversation. This symposium and this volume are meant to be part of that conversation.

Three Countries, Two Days, One Conversation: The International Dimension

The three countries represented at the first symposium, Romania, Serbia, and Armenia, share more than their belonging to the cultural space of Eastern Europe. They share a particular kind of relationship to East Asian cultures: one mediated by curiosity, by the relative novelty of the institutional study of East Asia in their respective academic contexts, and by the absence of the colonial or quasi-colonial entanglements that have shaped, and sometimes distorted, East Asian studies in Western Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This is not to romanticize the peripheral position, but simply to note that it creates certain freedoms. Scholars working from Timișoara, Belgrade, or Yerevan are not haunted, in the same way, by the ghosts of Orientalism that Edward Said documented

so memorably. They come to the texts and cultures of East Asia with a different set of questions, a different set of assumptions, and sometimes with a freshness and a precision of attention that more established centers might overlook.

The University of Belgrade, represented at the symposium by several of the strongest contributions in this volume, has a distinguished tradition of Japanese studies. The Faculty of Philology's department of Japanese language, literature, and culture has produced scholars of considerable achievement, and their presence at this symposium enriched it immeasurably. The papers by participants affiliated with Belgrade range from a meticulous corpus-based linguistic study of Japanese onomatopoeia to a comparative examination of divine triads in Japanese and Egyptian mythology, from a sociolinguistic investigation of gendered language to a transcultural analysis of the Tanabata legend. These contributions give a sense of the breadth and seriousness of the scholarly formation that Belgrade offers its students.

The Russian-Armenian University in Yerevan was represented by Anna Arutyunyan, whose paper on Techno-Orientalism as a new form of the "Yellow Peril" appears in this volume. Arutyunyan's perspective, informed by her background in regional studies with a focus on China, and sharpened by her ongoing research there, offers a view of East Asian modernity and its global reception that brings together post-colonial theory, political history, and cultural analysis in ways that reflect the particular vantage point of a scholar working at the intersection of several intellectual traditions.

The host institution, the West University of Timișoara, contributed the largest number of papers, which is only natural given that the symposium was organized under its auspices. But quantity aside, the Timișoara students showed a range of interests and a level of analytical engagement that speaks well for the program that has been built here. Their papers engage with questions of gender and social conditioning in modern Japanese fiction, with the body horror of Edogawa Ranpo, with antisocial personality disorder as a lens for reading postwar Japanese literature, with the Freudian dimensions of Satoshi Kon's animated films, and with the condition of women in the works of Ogawa Yōko and Murakami Haruki.

The hybrid format of the symposium, some participants presenting in person, others joining online from their home institutions, proved both workable and genuinely productive. It allowed voices from Yerevan and Bucharest to be heard in the same room as students from Timișoara and Belgrade. This is, in many ways, an acknowledgment that scholarly community is not only a matter of physical co-presence, and that the conversation the symposium was meant to start does not need to end when the conference room empties.

Textual Excursions: Literature, Identity, and the Examined Self

The volume is divided into two parts. The first, “Textual Excursions,” gathers seven essays whose primary object of analysis is literature and the broader question of what literature is for and what it does. The second, “Non-Textual Excursions,” brings together five essays whose approaches are variously mythological, linguistic, sociolinguistic, film-analytical, and cultural-theoretical. The division is not meant to be rigid, and the reader will notice that the concerns of one part constantly infiltrate the other. But it provides a useful initial orientation.

The opening essay of Part I, by Pavlina Mijatović Popić of the University of Belgrade, sets a rich and ambitious tone. Her paper on the Tanabata festival and its relationship to the folktale motif of the celestial maiden, drawing on Chinese sources, Japanese literary and ritual texts, and the comparative folklore tradition reaching from Yanagita Kunio to the international Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification, demonstrates that even the most familiar elements of East Asian popular culture are the site of layered intellectual complexity. Mijatović Popić traces the journey of the Tanabata narrative from its roots in Chinese astral cosmology to its Heian-period literary elaborations, its connections to indigenous Japanese weaving traditions centered on Amaterasu, and its resonances with swan maiden tales from subarctic Eurasia to the Korean Peninsula and Vietnam. The essay is a model of comparative cultural analysis: it holds a great deal of material in productive tension without reducing it to a single argument.

The second essay in Part I belongs to Andrei Ilban of the West University of Timișoara, who takes on the question of the purpose of literature in Japanese modernity by reading two canonical texts of the Taishō period, Edogawa Ranpo's *The Human Chair* (Ningen Isu, 1925) and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's "Hell Screen" (Jigokuhen, 1918), as competing *ars poeticae*. Ilban's argument is that both stories are, at their deepest level, reflections on what it means to create and what creation costs, but that they answer this question in antithetical ways: Ranpo's carpenter-narrator articulates a vision of literature as commercial art, as something that must sell and must be desired, while Akutagawa's Yoshihide, the painter who sacrifices everything, including his humanity, to complete his masterpiece, gives voice to the modernist ideal of art for art's sake. Ilban's essay is notable for its use of the French translation of *The Human Chair*, which contains four paragraphs absent from the English version, including a passage about a European ambassador that sheds important light on the story's cultural politics.

Alexia-Elena Faur, also of the West University of Timișoara, offers a careful reading of two stories by Higuchi Ichiyō, the author whose face graces the Japanese five-thousand-yen note, and whose brief life produced some of the most memorable short fiction of the Meiji period. Faur's essay examines the fate of two female protagonists, Oran from "Yamiyō" (Encounters on a Dark Night, 1894) and Oseki from "Jūsan'ya" (Thirteenth Night, 1895), situating their struggles within the socioeconomic context of the Meiji Restoration and the domestic ideology articulated in the contemporaneous essays of Iwamoto Yoshiharu. Her analysis is sensitive to the ways in which Ichiyō uses literary allusion, particularly to Heian texts and to the conventions of classical Japanese poetry, to frame these women's situations, and to the significance of the contrast between Oran's mythological dissolution and Oseki's more pragmatic, if painfully constrained, survival.

Anamaria Cvașa, a student of English and Japanese Studies at the West University of Timișoara, takes us back to Edogawa Ranpo to read *The Human Chair* through the lens of body horror. Drawing on the theoretical work of Xavier Aldana Reyes, on the tradition of Ero-Guro-Nansensu in Japanese popular culture of the 1920s and 1930s, and on Ranpo's own non-

fictional reflections on metamorphosis and the grotesque, Cvașa argues that the story's power lies in its careful staging of a progressive identity collapse: the protagonist does not merely hide in the chair he has made; he gradually becomes it, in a process that is simultaneously a fantasy of social transcendence, a form of sexual deviance, and a meditation on the relationship between maker and made. The essay's treatment of the omitted passages in the English translation complements Ilban's discussion of the same material, and the two essays together suggest that *The Human Chair* is a richer and stranger text than its canonical status as a detective-adjacent mystery might imply.

Daria-Adela Török brings a genuinely unusual perspective to her comparative reading of two canonical postwar Japanese novels: Osamu Dazai's *No Longer Human* (Ningen Shikkaku, 1948) and Yukio Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Kinkaku-ji, 1956). Reading the protagonists of these novels, Yōzō Ōba and Mizoguchi, respectively, through the diagnostic criteria of Antisocial Personality Disorder as defined in the DSM-5-TR, Török is careful to note that she is engaged in a literary and psychological analysis rather than a clinical one. Her argument is not that these characters can be diagnosed in any medical sense, but that the constellation of traits they exhibit—lack of empathy, instability in relationships, disregard for law, deceitfulness—can be illuminated by the conceptual framework of ASPD, and that the environmental factors that contribute to the development of such traits in real individuals have their fictional correlates in the childhood and adolescent experiences of Dazai's and Mishima's protagonists.

Alexandra-Chris Stănescu's contribution is the most explicitly historical of the seven essays in Part I, in that it situates its close reading of two contemporary Japanese novels within a detailed account of the history of women's condition in modern and contemporary Japan, from the Meiji-era ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* ("good wife, wise mother") through the postwar contradictions of formal gender equality and entrenched domestic expectation, to the M-curve phenomenon and the feminist movements of the present. The two novels she examines, Ogawa Yōko's *The Housekeeper and the Professor* (Hakase no aishita sūshiki, 2003) and Murakami Haruki's *Norwegian Wood* (Noruwei no Mori, 1987), offer, she argues,

complementary visions of the possibilities and constraints that Japanese society has historically extended to women. Ogawa's housekeeper, compelled into domestic labor by circumstances beyond her control, finds meaning in relationships rather than in career or independence. Murakami's three female characters, Naoko, Midori, and Reiko, represent a spectrum of responses to social conditioning, from tragic submission to courageous resistance.

The seventh and final essay of Part I, by Michelle Stan, brings the collection's engagement with questions of gender, body, and social normativity to its sharpest pitch. Stan's comparative reading of two recent novels, Ichikawa Saō's *Hunchback* (Hanchibakku, 2023) and Murata Sayaka's *Earthlings* (Chikyu seijin, 2018), deploys queer theory and disability studies to analyze how both texts stage the body as a site of political contestation. Ichikawa's protagonist, Shaka, a disabled woman living in a medically dependent institutional setting, asserts her sexual and intellectual agency through erotic writing; Murata's Natsuki resolves her alienation from Japanese society's reproductive imperatives by, in one of contemporary fiction's most unsettling gestures, declaring herself an alien and, ultimately, participating in an act of cannibalism understood as liberation. Stan's essay is alive to the theoretical stakes of its material and reads these unconventional, sometimes disturbing texts with a care that prevents it from reducing them to mere illustrations of a thesis.

Non-Textual Excursions: Myth, Language, Discourse, Film, and Theory

The five essays gathered in Part II of this volume are united not by a single method but by a shared willingness to move beyond the literary text in the strictest sense and to engage with myth, linguistic data, sociolinguistic practice, film, and cultural theory as the primary materials of analysis.

Konstantin Kostić of the University of Belgrade opens this section with a comparative mythological study of divine triads in Japanese and Egyptian mythology. Working from a close reading of the *Kojiki*, the early eighth-century chronicle that serves as the primary source for Japanese mythology, in both its English translation by Gustav Heldt and its Serbian

version, Kostić examines the ways in which the formation and function of divine triads in these two very different mythological traditions reflect, in each case, the political and dynastic concerns of the societies that produced them. In Japanese mythology, the triad formed by Amaterasu, Tsukuyomi, and Susanoo is notable for the exclusion of its middle member: Tsukuyomi, assigned governance of the night, disappears from the narrative almost immediately, a phenomenon Kostić terms the "non-acting middle" and connects to the absence of any dynastic claim traceable to that deity. In Egyptian mythology, by contrast, divine triads proliferate in response to the frequent changes of dynasty and capital, producing a rich and sometimes bewildering variety of divine groupings whose political function is to legitimize each new ruling family's claim to divine descent.

Anđela Jovanović, conducting research at Kyōto University under the guidance of Professor Ruchira Palihawadana with the support of a MEXT scholarship, contributes the volume's most technically specialized essay. Her study of ABAB-type *gitaigo*—the doubled mimetic words, such as *kirakira* (glittering) or *harahara* (in suspense/things falling lightly), that are one of the most distinctive features of the Japanese lexicon—traces the development of these words from the Heian period to the present day, drawing on corpora maintained by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics. Using a sample of thirteen *gitaigo* that can be documented from the tenth century onward, Jovanović analyzes the changes in their grammatical behavior across five historical periods, focusing on three major phenomena: the strengthening of their adverbial nature and the consequent change in their relationship to the particle *to*; the development of verbal uses through combination with the verb *suru*; and the emergence of noun-modifying uses in the modern period. The essay's argument is that these changes are not arbitrary but reflect a systematic process in which the weakening of the words' sound-symbolic component allows for the derivation of more abstract meanings, which, in turn, opens up new grammatical possibilities.

Milica Nikodijević, a graduate of the University of Belgrade's Department of Japanese Language, Literature, and Culture who spent a year at Okayama University on a Heiwa Nakajima Foundation scholarship, turns her attention to the sociolinguistics of gender in Japanese. Her essay examines the gap

between the ideological construction of "women's language" (*josei kotoba*), a set of linguistic norms traceable to at least the twelfth century and elaborated through the Heian, Kamakura, Muromachi, Edo, and Meiji periods, and the actual linguistic practices of cisgender women in contemporary Japan, before turning to the rather different relationship that transgender women have with these same norms. Drawing on studies of farm women in Ibaraki and of lesbian bar talk in Shinjuku, Nikodijević shows that real women's linguistic practices are far more varied and contextually sensitive than any normative prescription can capture. The essay's most striking material concerns the ways in which Japanese transgender women actively engage with "women's language" as a resource for social transition, using it, in some contexts, as a tool of self-assertion and self-recognition, even as they navigate the complex terrain of visibility and passing in a society that remains deeply ambivalent about gender non-conformity.

Arintina-Maria Bobiț of the West University of Timișoara brings film analysis to the conversation with an essay on two of Satoshi Kon's most celebrated animated films, *Perfect Blue* (1998) and *Paprika* (2006), read through the lens of Freud's structural theory of the psyche. Bobiț's argument builds on but also refines earlier psychoanalytic readings of these films, particularly those that have focused on dream theory and sexuality. Her contribution is to show how the fragmentation and ultimate reintegration of the self in both films can be understood in terms of the conflict and eventual reconciliation of the Id, Ego, and Super Ego, a conflict that Kon externalizes, with characteristic visual brilliance, through the device of the body double. In *Perfect Blue*, the Idol Mima functions as the Super Ego, the civilian Mima as the Ego, and Rumi as the Id; in *Paprika*, Bobiț argues, refining a previous scholarly consensus, that it is doctor Chiba who represents the Super Ego and Paprika who represents the Id, with a third, intermediate figure, Atsuko, serving as the Ego. The violence through which integration is achieved in both films is read not as mere narrative excitement but as a structural necessity: the self cannot be reassembled without first being broken open.

Anna Arutyunyan's essay closes the volume by situating its concerns within the broadest of historical and theoretical frameworks. Her analysis of Techno-Orientalism, the discourse through which the West has imagined

East Asia as a site of hypertechnological development that is simultaneously admirable and threatening, traces the concept from its intellectual genealogy in Edward Said's *Orientalism* and its coinage by David Morley and Kevin Robins in the 1980s, through its manifestations in science fiction, cyberpunk cinema, popular music, and contemporary political rhetoric. Arutyunyan reads the imagery of neon-lit, robot-populated, AI-driven Asian dystopias that pervades Western popular culture, from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* to the vaporwave aesthetics of Vektroid's *Floral Shoppe*, as continuous with, and in some respects a transformation of, the older "Yellow Peril" ideology that portrayed East Asian populations as a demographic and racial threat to Western civilization. Her essay is a reminder that the cultural representation of East Asia is never innocent, and that the academic study of East Asian cultures has both an intellectual and a political responsibility.

Thematic Constellations Across the Volume

Read together, the twelve essays in this volume trace several lines of force that cross its two sections and connect papers that might not, at first glance, appear to share concerns.

The first and most persistent of these lines is the question of gender, of what it means to be a woman in Japanese (and, more broadly, East Asian) society, of the social and legal mechanisms by which women's roles have been defined and constrained, and of the various strategies—literary, linguistic, mythological, and embodied—by which women and others have responded to those constraints. This concern runs from Faur's reading of Higuchi Ichiyō's Meiji-era heroines through Stănescu's historical account of Japanese feminist movements and her reading of Ogawa and Murakami, through Stan's queer-theoretical analysis of bodily normativity, and through Nikodijević's sociolinguistic study of women's language, to Bobiț's analysis of Kon's female protagonists. It is a concern that the editors consider central to any serious engagement with Japanese culture, not because gender is the only lens through which culture can be examined, but because it is a lens that East Asian studies has historically been slow to bring into focus.

A second constellation of concerns circles around the body, its representation, its boundaries, its vulnerability, and its political significance. Cvașa's body horror analysis of Ranpo's "The Human Chair," Stan's examination of disability and bodily autonomy in Ichikawa and Murata, Bobiț's study of psychological fragmentation and integration in Kon's films, and Török's analysis of self-destructive behavior in Dazai and Mishima all engage, in different registers and from different theoretical positions, with the question of what bodies mean, what they suffer, and what they resist. This cluster of papers reflects a broader turn in literary and cultural studies toward corporeal analysis, but it also reflects something specific to Japanese cultural production: a tradition of attending, with unusual intensity, to the body in extremis.

A third set of connections emerges around the question of reception, of how East Asian cultures are perceived, imagined, and represented by those outside them. Arutyunyan's essay is the most explicit engagement with this question, but it is implicit in Mijatović Popić's analysis of how the Tanabata narrative traveled from China to Japan and from Japan to the broader world, in Ilban's exploration of how Japanese modernists negotiated the influence of European literary models, and in Kostić's cross-cultural comparison of mythological structures. The symposium, as an event bringing together students from three countries, was itself a kind of enactment of this question: a collective attempt to think about East Asian cultures from positions that are neither inside nor outside in any simple sense, but genuinely situated and genuinely curious.

On the Participants and Their Formation

A word is in order about the participants themselves. The contributors to this volume are students and early-career researchers at very different stages of their academic formation. Pavlina Mijatović Popić is a doctoral candidate with a record of published scholarship and the analytical confidence that comes from years of sustained engagement with a complex subject. Anđela Jovanović conducted her research as a visiting student at Kyōto University with the support of one of Japan's most prestigious international scholarships. Anna Arutyunyan has co-authored publications

in the field of Chinese literary studies and is currently deepening her research in China. At the other end of the spectrum, several contributors are publishing their first academic paper here, having presented at this symposium while still in the early years of their undergraduate programs.

What these contributors share, across the differences of institution, country, and stage of formation, is a seriousness of purpose and an investment in getting things right. The editors have been struck, in working through these essays, by the care with which the authors handle primary sources, by their willingness to engage with secondary scholarship in multiple languages (Japanese, English, French, Serbian, Romanian, and German all appear in the bibliographies of this volume), and by the quality of the questions they ask. These are not merely student exercises. They are contributions to an ongoing scholarly conversation, and they are offered here in that spirit.

The editors have, in preparing these essays for publication, applied the standards they would apply to any academic text. Authors were asked to revise and, in some cases, substantially rework their papers in response to editorial feedback. The essays as they appear here are stronger than the versions presented at the symposium; this is as it should be. Publication is not simply the preservation of what was said in a room on a May day in 2025. It is the transformation of that saying into something that can be read, argued with, cited, and responded to by scholars who were not in that room.

Acknowledgments

The editors wish to express their gratitude to all those whose efforts made both the symposium and this volume possible. The participants, those whose essays appear here and those whose presentations enriched the conversation without appearing in these pages, deserve the first and most emphatic acknowledgment. They traveled, in some cases from considerable distances, or arranged their online connections at inconvenient hours, to be part of something that was, by definition, untested and uncertain. Their willingness to take the risk of a first edition made it worth it.

The West University of Timișoara, and the Faculty of Letters, History, Philosophy and Theology provided the institutional and logistical support

without which no academic event of this kind is possible. The Center for East Asian Studies was the organizing force, and its staff and student volunteers worked with dedication and good humor to ensure that the two days of the symposium ran smoothly, that the room was ready, schedules were honored, lunches and dinners were shared, and that the guests from other cities and countries felt genuinely welcomed. Special thanks are due to the organizing committee, formed entirely of our second year students: Arintina Bobiţ, Ana-Maria Busuioc, Alexandra Chira, Anamaria Cvaşa, Miruna Demian, Alexia Faur, Andrei Ilban, Andreea Rus, Daria Török, Mihaela Şerban, and Teodora Tănase.

The colleagues, professors, and mentors who guided the development of these papers, named and unnamed in the essays themselves, deserve acknowledgment too. Behind every student paper is a conversation, a seminar, a course, a moment of encouragement, or a challenging question from a teacher. The scholarly formation represented in this volume is a collective achievement.

Finally, a word about the volume’s future readership. These essays are offered to students and scholars of East Asian studies, of comparative literature, of linguistics and sociolinguistics, of gender and cultural studies, and of anyone with a serious curiosity about the cultures, histories, and literatures of Japan, China, and the broader East Asian world. They are offered also to those who are not yet specialists, but who might find in these pages a reason to become one. The editors believe that East Asian studies in Eastern and Central Europe has a future as rich as its past, and they offer this volume as both evidence and invitation.

Timişoara, 2026

Part I:
Textual Excursions

TANABATA: A TRANSCULTURAL AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE WEAVER AND THE COWHERD LOVE STORY

Pavlina Mijatović Popić

Abstract: This paper examines the Tanabata festival through the lens of *Tennin nyōbō* folktale, which centers on the narrative of a heavenly maiden who descends to Earth and falls in love with a mortal man. Celebrated annually on the 7th of July, Tanabata traces its origins to a Chinese story about two star-crossed lovers, represented by the stars Vega and Altair. Upon reaching Japan, the folktale evolved, merging with local traditions and courtly aesthetics during the Heian period. Over time, it became a popular festival that blends celestial imagery with agricultural and ancestral practices. The paper explores the connection between Tanabata and the celestial maiden archetype, focusing on the *hagoromo setsuwa*, a type of folktale in which a heavenly maiden's feather robe is stolen, trapping her on Earth. Her eventual recovery of the robe and return to the celestial realm reflects themes of separation between the human and the divine, which are central to the broader swan maiden narrative found in folktales from different cultures. By examining the development of Tanabata and its relationship to recurring motifs in East Asian and global folktales, this study situates the celestial maiden narrative within a broader framework of traditional storytelling. It demonstrates how themes of separation, longing, and reunification find expression both in seasonal rituals and in universal narrative structures shared across cultures.

Keywords: celestial maiden, Japanese folklore, Japanese literature, swan maiden, Tanabata.

Under the Stars: The Origin and Tales of Tanabata

On a starry summer night in Japan, slender bamboo stalks sway gently, adorned with multicolored *tanzaku*—strips of paper inscribed with wishes. This is *Tanabata*, celebrated annually on the seventh day of the seventh month, when human hopes are woven into the fabric of heaven. Central to the festival is the folktale of a celestial weaving maiden and a humble cowherd, whose love defies cosmic order yet is bound by it: separated by the *Amanogawa* (Milky Way), their luminous forms shine across the great river of stars and are permitted to reunite only once a year.

As Lafcadio Hearn observed in the early twentieth century, Tanabata was “the most romantic”[1] of Japanese festivals, with bamboos adorned with poems praising Orihime and Hikoboshi, later floated down rivers—a ritual blending human desire with cosmic symbolism. Hearn’s description captures both the aesthetic charm and the ritual significance of the festival during the Meiji period, though its narrative roots extend far deeper into East Asian folklore.

The folktale of the “star-crossed pair” originates in China, venerating Zhinu (the Weaving Maid) and Niulang (the Cowherd) within ancient cosmology. In early Chinese sources, dating back to 600 BC,[2] Weaver Star (Vega) is portrayed as diligent yet unfortunate, while the Draught Ox (Altair, later known as the Cowherd) remains idle; the two stars were initially unlinked, symbolizing toil and unfulfilled purpose. Over time, poets and storytellers romantically linked the two figures, depicting them as lovers separated by the Heavenly River, allowed to reunite only once a year with the help of magpies.[3] This narrative framework provided the foundation for the ritual and devotional practices of the *Qixi* festival, which

[1] Lafcadio Hearn, *The Romance of the Milky Way, and Other Studies and Stories* (Houghton Mifflin, 1905), 3–4.

[2] The earliest references to the celestial weaver maiden and the cowherd appear in a poem in the *Book of Odes*. See Poem 203 in Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes* (Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1974), 153–55.

[3] Anne Birrell, *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 54; 165–66. David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 376; for the astro-calendrical significance of Vega as the Weaving Maid, see ibid.

incorporated practices such as storytelling, prayers for skill in crafts and blessings in marriage, and offerings to the deities.[4]

Multiple versions of the folktale exist: some emphasize its astral dimension, highlighting the star lovers' separation as a consequence of neglecting their divine duties, while others foreground the motif of a celestial maiden whose descent to earth recalls the widespread swan maiden narrative, which forms the primary focus of this paper. In this tale type, a man takes the feather garment of a swan maiden, compelling her into marriage. When she eventually recovers it, she vanishes, and in many folktale variants the husband then embarks on a quest to find her, facing a series of extraordinary trials.[5] A prominent German sinologist, Wolfram Eberhard, presents this version of the tale as follows: a poor cowherd captures the robe of a heavenly weaving maiden, who becomes his wife and bears him children. When she regains her fairy garment, she flies back to heaven, and the cowherd pursues her. A ruler of heaven intervenes, ordering them to make peace. From that time on, they have remained on opposite sides of the celestial river, permitted to meet only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month, and the ring and shuttle they exchanged become the two stars beside them in the sky.[6]

In Japan, the folktale found a fertile ground in the *Tanabata* festival, where it merged with local traditions, courtly aesthetics, and weaving rituals and became closely associated with the *tennin nyōbō* (celestial wife) and *hagoromo* (feather robe) narratives, which similarly explore themes of love, separation, and eventual reunion. Apart from Japan, regional iterations of the narrative are also attested in Korea and Vietnam,[7]

[4] Ju Brown and John Brown, *China, Japan, Korea: Culture and Customs* (BookSurge, 2006), 72; Wu Bing'an, *Folk Heritage Review* (Changchun Publishing House, 2014), 70.

[5] Helge Holmström, *Studier över svanjungfrumotivet i Volundarkvida och annorstädes* (Maiander, 1919), 11.

[6] Wolfram Eberhard, ed. and trans., *Folktales of China*, foreword by Richard M. Dorson (University of Chicago Press, 1965), Tale 23, "The Bank of the Celestial Stream," 43–44. Building on his extensive survey of Chinese folktale types, Eberhard argues that although the astral elements appear in early records, later versions of the tale incorporate the swan-maiden motif, suggesting a layered development of narrative traditions, 209.

[7] See Tale 167, "The Heavenly Maiden and the Woodcutter," 370, in James H. Grayson, *Myths and Legends from Korea: An Annotated Compendium of Ancient and Modern Materials* (Routledge, 2001). In Vietnam, see "The Weaver Fairy and the Buffalo Boy" in Lynette Dyer Vuong, *Sky Legends of Vietnam* (HarperCollins, 1993), 54–80.

with each reflecting local contexts while preserving the central theme of love between a celestial weaver and a mortal herder. This paper further examines Tanabata through a transcultural and literary lens, tracing how these motifs were adapted and expressed within Japanese ritual, folklore, and seasonal practice.

Weaving, Ritual, and the Celestial Maiden: Tanabata in Japanese Context

The folktale of the weaver maiden and cowherd likely reached Japan by the Nara period or earlier, as early poetry and ritual calendars indicate.[8] Upon arrival, the narrative merged with indigenous beliefs and courtly aesthetics, gradually evolving into a festival that combined celestial imagery with weaving, ritual observation, and ancestral practices. The earliest textual mentions of a Tanabata weaving maiden appear in *Kojiki* and *Kogo Shūi*.[9] According to Takeda, the celestial weaver in these sources should not be conflated with the later Chinese "weaving maiden" of Vega[10] (or Orihime in Japanese), which may suggest that, in its original context, the motif functioned primarily as a symbol of sacred weaving, emphasizing ritual practice and craftsmanship rather than romantic narrative. This early symbolic role is further reflected in Japanese poetry, notably in the *Kaifūsō* and *Man'yōshū*.[11] The latter collection alone preserves over 120 poems connected to Tanabata, showing how the Cowherd and Weaver Maiden narrative was gradually woven into local literary culture, blending cosmological motifs with social customs and everyday life.[12] Hearn notes

[8] Michael Como, "Silkworms and Consorts in Nara Japan," *Asian Folklore Studies* 64, no.1 (2005): 113, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030360.

[9] In the *Kojiki*, Takahime no Mikoto sings of *Oto-Tanabata* (heavenly young weaving maiden) during the funeral of Ame no Wakahiko. See Donald L. Philippi, trans. and ed., *Kojiki* (Princeton University Press, 1968), 128. The *Kogoshūi* describes *Ame no Tanabata-hime* weaving divine robes. See Genchi Katō and Hikoshirō Hoshino, trans., *Kogoshūi: Gleanings from Ancient Stories*, 2nd ed. (Meiji Japan Society, 1925), 20.

[10] See Philippi, *Kojiki*, 128, citing Takeda Yukichi, *Kiki kayōshū zenkō* (*Collection of Ancient Songs*) (Meiji Shoin, 1956), 54.

[11] Como, "Silkworms and Consorts," 113.

[12] Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai, *The Manyoshu: The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai Translation of One Thousand Poems, with the Texts in Romaji*, with a new foreword by Donald Keene (Columbia University Press, 1965), lv.

that, although the romantic narrative originated in China, the poems in the collection reinterpret it within Japanese settings, portraying Tanabata-tsume and Hikoboshi in everyday landscapes and social customs, reflecting the sensibilities of twelfth-century Japan.[13] By the Heian era, Tanabata was observed primarily among the "Sinicized aristocracy," and its placement on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month—close to the Bon festival—helped ensure its continuity.[14] During this period, it was deeply integrated into courtly aesthetics, manifesting prominently in literary expressions such as *waka* and narrative works like *The Tale of Genji*, and through refined court rituals like the *Kikkōden*. This celebration was a significant part of aristocratic life, where nobles composed poetry, engaged in elaborate ceremonies, and demonstrated artistic taste and literary talent, often exploring themes of love and longing.[15] Over time, the festival extended beyond aristocratic circles, taking root in popular observances where bamboo, colorful paper strips, and ritual offerings connected communities to both the celestial narrative and agricultural cycles.[16] These practices intertwined human hopes with cosmological order, as seasonal rituals acknowledged deities responsible for weaving, grain, and family well-being.[17]

The etymology of Tanabata demonstrates how weaving, seasonal ritual, and divine oversight are intertwined in Japanese tradition. Hearn observes that the characters composing the word literally mean "weaving girl," though he also cites an alternative interpretation linking it to *tane* (seed or grain) and *hata* (loom), suggesting divine guardianship over both agriculture and weaving.[18] Miller emphasizes that the name "both reveals and conceals its connection with the religious meaning of weaving,"[19]

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[13] Hearn, *The Romance of the Milky Way*, 27–29.

[14] Alan L. Miller, "'Ame No Miso-Ori Me' (The Heavenly Weaving Maiden): The Cosmic Weaver in Early Shinto Myth and Ritual." *History of Religions* 24, no. 1 (1984): 40–41. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1062345.

[15] Etsuko Akama, "Heian Bungaku ni okeru Tanabata" ("Tanabata in Japanese Classical Literature of the Heian Era"), *Jumonji Gakuen Joshi Daigaku Tanki Daigakubu Kenkyū Kiyō* 44 (2014): 107–16.

[16] Hearn, *The Romance of the Milky Way*, 20.

[17] Como, "Silkworms and Consorts," 112–16.

[18] Hearn, *The Romance of the Milky Way*, 9.

[19] Miller, "'Ame No Miso-Ori Me'," 45.

adding that the modern kanji appear to signify "seventh night,"[20] reflecting the festival's calendrical date, yet this reading does not match the word's historical pronunciation. In the Heian period, he notes, Tanabata referred to *hata* ("weaving") and appears in the *Tale of Genji* as *tanabata-tsume*. He further points to *Kogojiten*, which records the first element, *tana*, as originally phonetic (*kami-dana*, the Shinto "god shelf").[21] Taken together, these readings highlight how *Tanabata* combines linguistic play with religious symbolism.

Beyond etymology, Tanabata also embodies the social and ritual significance of weaving, an exclusively female craft in historical Japan, linking celestial symbolism with everyday domestic practice. Miller defines Tanabata as "a women's festival connected with household arts like weaving and themes of childbirth."[22] Women were responsible not only for loom-work but also for tending silkworms, which placed them at the heart of household economic life.[23] This important female skill found clear expression in a wide range of myths and ritual practices. By the early Nara period, woven cloth, weaving tools, and even weaving maidens themselves had become among the most frequent offerings to the gods.[24] This sacred craft resonates deeply with indigenous Japanese spirituality, serving as a channel of divine authority and a means of maintaining cosmic harmony, which is vividly illustrated in the portrayal of Amaterasu, whose veneration as a "mother goddess is not limited to the solar principle" but also extends "to weaving and silk production."[25] Matsumura talks about silkworms as "culturally valuable products produced from the corpse of a goddess and then presented to Amaterasu which "indicates that silk was viewed as a sacred product originating in the heavenly world."[26] The main cult center for Amaterasu at Ise Shrine had a particular correlation with special offerings of

[20] *Tanabata* ( ) is the modern Japanese written form, literally "seventh night."

[21] Miller, "'Ame No Miso-Ori Me'," 45.

[22] Miller, "'Ame No Miso-Ori Me'," 40.

[23] Kazuo Matsumura, "'Alone among Women:' A Comparative Mythic Analysis of the Development of Amaterasu Theology." *Kami*, Kokugakuin University (1998): 57.

[24] Como, "Silkworms and Consorts," 116.

[25] Danijela Vasic, "Solar Deity in Japanese Mythology," *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU* 72, no. 1 (2024): 75, https://doi.org/10.2298/GEI2401059V.

[26] Matsumura, "'Alone among Women'," 56.

cloth, and specific festivals "centered around the preparation and presentation of garments to [her]."[27] These rituals often coincided with the annual first-fruits rituals, linking weaving, agriculture, and divine blessing in a single ceremonial act. Both *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* depict Amaterasu's divine power as manifested through her weaving of celestial garments[28]—an act which Miller describes as "the performance of a rite of cosmic weaving,"[29] one that upholds divine order and sovereignty. This sacred authority of weaving is dramatically tested when Susanō, the epitome of chaos, disturbs her loom. When her weaving is disrupted the goddess retreats into the celestial cave, and darkness envelops the world, emphasizing her role as both the bringer of light and the protector of sacred ritual.[30]

The motif of sacred weaving extends beyond the narrative of Amaterasu, finding broader expression in Japanese literature and ritual practices. As Como notes, in many early texts, we can "find goddesses, shamanesses (*miko*), and female immortals repeatedly represented as weaving maidens."[31] This imagery resonates with Orikuchi Shinobu's description of *Tanabatatsume* (Tanabata Maiden), believed to inhabit elevated platforms over water, weaving cloth while awaiting visiting deities.[32] Hence, the ritual production of sacred cloth by deities and priestesses symbolizes the mediation between human and divine realms. Within this context, the celestial weaver maiden Orihime embodies the sacredness of weaving and her craft sustains cosmic balance. This portrayal anticipates the Tanabata narrative, where her separation from and reunion with Hikoboshi reflect enduring themes of longing and reconnection between heaven and earth,

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[27] Miller, "'Ame No Miso-Ori Me'," 38.

[28] See Philippi, *Kojiki*, 80, and William Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to AD 697* (Kegan Paul, 1896), 41; 47.

[29] Miller, "'Ame No Miso-Ori Me'," 28.

[30] See *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* for Susanō's rage and Ama-no-Iwato ("celestial cave") narratives. In *Kojiki*, Susanō disrupted the weaving by desecrating the sacred hall and flaying a colt, causing the death of Amaterasu's servant, the heavenly weaving maiden. In *Nihongi*, Amaterasu herself is injured by the loom's shuttle. These variations highlight differing narrative emphases on divine agency and cosmic order (Miller, "'Ame No Miso-Ori Me'," 48; Vasić, "Solar Deity in Japanese Mythology," 75; Philippi, *Kojiki*, 79-86; Aston, *Nihongi*, 40–49.

[31] Como, "Silkworms and Consorts,"113.

[32] Orikuchi Shinobu, "Tanabata kuyō" (Tanabata Memorial Service), *Haiku Kenkyū* 2, no. 7 (1935), in *Orikuchi Shinobu Zenshū* (Complete Works by Orikuchi Shinobu), vol. 15.

revealing how Tanabata emerges from the convergence of indigenous Japanese weaving beliefs and ritual practices.

From Loom to Feathered Robe: The Swan Maiden Motif in Japan and Beyond

Beyond its weaving symbolism, the Tanabata story resonates with a broader transnational folktale motif: the celestial or swan maiden. Propp once remarked that "all rivers flow into the sea, and all folktales into the folktale,"[33] pointing to the shared structures that underpin world storytelling. Among these, the swan maiden folktale (Aarne–Thompson–Uther type 400[34]) occupies a striking place. It typically features a supernatural woman compelled into marriage by a mortal—often through the theft of her garment—who ultimately returns to her original home. Variants appear worldwide, from Indian apsaras to Icelandic valkyries, Scottish and Scandinavian seal maidens, Russian wolf-skin maidens, African water-spirits, Native American star wives, and Japanese celestial maidens,[35] which directly inspired the Tanabata narrative. Hatto traces this tale type to sub-arctic Eurasia and America, noting its migratory bird symbolism and shamanic roots, while highlighting East Asian variants in China, Japan, and Korea that reflect the recurring motif of celestial wives and cyclical reunion.[36]

Japanese oral tradition contains numerous folktales about celestial maidens who descend to earth wearing a feather robe and marry mortals. Collectively known as *hagoromo setsuwa* ("robe of feathers" tales), these stories reflect the international swan maiden motif, depicting a union between a divine woman and a mortal man, the magical garment

[33] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (University of Texas Press, 1968), 16.

[34] Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. Vol. 1. (Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004). See the category of "Supernatural or Enchanted Wife," and Type 400, *The Man on a Quest for His Lost Wife*, is detailed on page 231.

[35] Barbara Fass Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden: A Narrative on Folklore and Gender* (NYU Press, 1994).

[36] Arthur T. Hatto, "The Swan Maiden: A Folk-Tale of North Eurasian Origin?," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24, no. 2 (1961): 326–52. http://www.jstor.org/stable/610171.

that reveals her celestial nature, and her eventual return to the heavens.[37] According to Vasic, the oldest Japanese example is found in the *Fudoki* (*Records of Ancient Matters of Local Traditions*).[38] Drawing on the same source, Miller identifies the "purest" illustration of this narrative: eight celestial maidens descend to a lakeshore, and a man seizes the feather garment of the youngest, temporarily binding her to the mortal world. He builds a home with her, they have children, and eventually she finds her garment and returns to the celestial realm.[39]

Miller further situates the Japanese feather robe tradition within a nexus of shamanic imagery, emphasizing weaving, sacred garments, and its connection to Amaterasu as cosmic weaver, as well as the life-giving feminine power embodied by bird figures. He notes that the robe possesses transformative properties, enabling the celestial maiden's ascent to heaven while mediating the union of sacred and mortal realms.[40] Vasic similarly highlights the garment's transformative power: once worn, the maiden's heavenly essence prevails, and she returns to the sky.[41] In this view, the narrative functions not merely as a tale of marital union and separation, but as a mythic expression of transformation and cosmological order, with the garment serving as a conduit between human and divine realms. Weaving, as a primary female craft, further grounds this motif in both domestic and sacred dimensions—a resonance that is also evident in Tanabata traditions.

Building on these traditional narratives, scholars Yanagita Kunio and Seki Keigo undertook comprehensive documentation and analysis of celestial maiden tales, tracing their regional variations and situating them within both local cosmology and the broader swan maiden motif. In Yanagita's collections, the feather robe motif appears in stories such as *The Wife from the Sky World,* retold in the chapter "Unpromising Marriages that

[37] Danijela Vasic, "Size o braku smrtnika i vile (nebesnice) u srpskoj i japanskoj usmenoj knjizevnosti" (Marriage between mortal and vila (celestial being) in Serbian and Japanese oral literature), in *Savremena srpska folkloristika* 2 (2015): 251.

[38] Vasic, "Size o braku smrtnika i vile (nebesnice) u srpskoj i japanskoj usmenoj knjizevnosti," 252.

[39] Alan L. Miller, "The Swan-Maiden Revisited: Religious Significance of 'Divine-Wife' Folktales with Special Reference to Japan," *Asian Folklore Studies* 46, no. 1 (1987): 68, https://doi.org/10.2307/1177885.

[40] Miller, "The Swan-Maiden Revisited."

[41] Vasic, "Size o braku smrtnika i vile," 251; 256.

Became Happy."[42] Here a man seizes the robe of a bathing celestial maiden and compels her to remain on earth. Yanagita emphasizes not only the marital bond but also the cosmological dimension: the maiden is portrayed as a celestial weaver, and upon recovering her robe and ascending, her weaving is linked to the formation of the Tanabata stars Vega and Altair. Through this reading, the narrative becomes embedded in Japan's celestial imagination. His collections reveal numerous local variations, yet he consistently favored a holistic interpretation of folktales—foregrounding enduring cultural and religious themes—over the stricter typologies of Western folklore studies.[43]

By contrast, Seki, in "Types of Japanese Folktales,"[44] employed a comparative, classificatory approach while adapting it to the Japanese context. Under his category of "Supernatural Wives," *The Wife from the Upper World* (Type 149)[45] represents the standard narrative: a mortal man—often a fisherman or woodcutter—acquires a heavenly wife by seizing her robe, lives with her, and fathers children until she eventually recovers her garment and returns to the sky, sometimes with her offspring. In many variants, the husband's attempt to follow leads him to face tasks set by her celestial parents: climbing a bamboo stalk or a gourd vine, sometimes succeeding in reunion, sometimes failing. Seki thus distilled the tale to its structural essence, while still acknowledging its regional diversity.

Together, Yanagita and Seki illuminate how the swan maiden archetype was integrated into Japanese folklore, highlighting its cosmological and seasonal significance in the Tanabata narrative. These structural and thematic elements resonate closely with the story of Orihime and Hikoboshi, whose reunion across the Milky Way is facilitated by the magpie bridge once a year. The key difference between the Japanese adaptation and the classical international swan maiden motif lies precisely in this annual reunion, as well as the frequent inclusion of weaving symbolism, absent from Western versions.

[42] Fanny Hagin Mayer, *The Yanagita Kunio Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale* (Indiana University Press, 1986), 25.

[43] Mayer, *The Yanagita Kunio Guide to the Japanese Folk Tale*, x.

[44] Keigo Seki, "Nihon mukashibanashi shūi" ("Types of Japanese Folktales"), *Asian Folklore Studies* 25 (1966), https://doi.org/10.2307/1177478.

[45] Seki, "Nihon mukashibanashi shūi," 79.

Conclusion

The Tanabata festival, through its intertwined literary, ritual, and folkloric dimensions, exemplifies the enduring power of celestial narratives to mediate between human and divine realms. The folktale embedded in its tradition traces its origins from early Chinese accounts of the weaver maiden and cowherd to Japanese adaptations, illustrating how transnational motifs are reshaped by local aesthetics, cosmology, and ritual practice. In Japan, the swan maiden archetype manifests in the heavenly wife and feather robe tales, which reinterpret these transnational elements within a Japanese folkloric context. Central to these stories is the motif of weaving, which functions not only as a symbolic expression of cosmic order but also as a tangible, culturally grounded practice performed by women, linking domestic labor, ritual observance, and celestial imagery. The narrative thus combines the Chinese tale of star-crossed lovers with Japanese beliefs about sacred weaving, seasonal rites, and ritualized household arts, producing a distinctly localized and richly layered expression of a shared motif.

Embedded in cosmological imagery, regional adaptations, and ritual practice, the tale of Orihime and Hikoboshi's annual reunion across the Milky Way transcends a simple marital plot, reflecting longing, transformation, and the dynamic interplay between human desire and divine order.

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ON THE PURPOSE OF LITERATURE IN JAPANESE MODERNITY: *ARS POETICA* IN EDOGAWA RANPO AND AKUTAGAWA RYŪNOSUKE

Andrei Ilban

Abstract: The purpose of literature, as of art itself, has been a subject for debate since the earliest times of human literacy. Given that this battle is not over, this essay proposes the exploration of the theme in the Japanese interwar period, known as Taishō, through two short stories. As such, the goal of this paper is to compare two different literary visions, that of Edogawa Ranpo's *Ningen Isu* (Human Chair) and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's *Jigokuhen* (Hell Screen). The analysis confirms the first as a notable piece of literature for consumerism ideals, while the latter as literature for its own sake, as art for art's sake. In an attempt to achieve this, full use shall be made of one of the modernist literary period's most emblematic features: the *ars poetica*, how the two short stories relate to the two authors' visions on the role of art and the author in society. However, unconventional methods shall also be used, such as the examination of the French translation of *The Human Chair*, which includes several paragraphs omitted from the English translation, which help to better understand the point the essay is trying to make.

Keywords: Akutagawa, Edogawa, Modernism, purpose, Taishō literature.

Introduction

Defining literature has always been a subject of intrigue for the academic world. Great writers and critics alike have tried to find a meaning for it and to understand what its role in the world is supposed to be. From

Ancient Greece, we have Aristotle, in whose vision literature is seen as an imitation and representation of real life and is composed of three great categories: medium, object and mode. As written in the *Poetics* (Poetica),[46] a literary piece cannot exist without these elements. Moreover, he states his view on the role of the poet in society and his writing: "the poet's job is not relating what actually happened, but rather the kind of thing that would happen—that is to say, what is possible in terms of probability and necessity."[47] From Roman times, Horace hails the poet in his aptly titled *Art of poetry* (Ars poetica), referring to poetry as an "art." However, as he advises aspiring writers on matters such as choosing a subject familiar to them and to be consistent to the established literary canon,[48] his *ars poetica* becomes a mold in which writers were supposed to fit their pieces in.

It was only in the modernist era of 19th century Europe that the concept of *ars poetica* became relevant again. Thanks to improved social and welfare policies which increased literacy and culture, writers could live off their work. Therefore, now they had the time to reflect on the role of their writing in society, giving it a likeness to art, just like Horace did. One such example is Henry James' statement in one of his letters to H. G. Wells: "It is an art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance for our consideration and application of things (…)."[49] Therefore, one important feature of modernist literature is the incorporation of the creator's beliefs upon the process of creation and the role of literature in the world, creating a new *ars poetica* that was no longer a set of rules that writers had to obey in order to fit the norm.

In Japanese Meiji society, rapid improvements in social policies and infrastructure meant that more emphasis was placed on culture as well. The country's opening of its borders meant a start in trade with the West: not only merchandise trade, but also cultural trade. As Matthew Fraleigh points out, "one central element of Japanese literary modernity consists of

[46] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford University Press, 2013), 59.

[47] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 79.

[48] Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica,* trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Harvard University Press, 1942), 443–444, 453.

[49] Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray, *Henry James and H.G. Wells: A Record of their Friendship, their Debate on the Art of Fiction, and their Quarrel* (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959), 267.

creative engagement with the culture and texts of the Western world,"[50] therefore it is no wonder that soon enough Japanese culture could produce influential texts of its own that fit Western literary canons. As this essay will point out, much of this was able to be done in the following Taishō period, an era of renewal in literature and clash between native Japanese and Western ideals about what it meant to write.

The Human Chair: Literature as Commercial Art

Prolific mystery and detective fiction writer Edogawa Ranpo (1894–1965) wrote the short story titled *Ningen isu* (The Human Chair) in 1925 about a female writer with high literary talent who receives a letter that describes a carpenter's obsession with his work, written from a first-person perspective. Upon receiving an order for a luxurious armchair to be bought by a foreign hotel in Tokyo, said carpenter decides to enter the armchair once finished, removing its interior and inserting himself in the process. He starts living inside of the armchair, having "love affairs" with the various women coming inside the hotel and sitting on it. With the hotel's ownership transferred, the armchair is sold off to a wealthy Japanese man, revealing him to be a female writer's husband. Upon receiving a second letter in the mail, the woman is flabbergasted to find the whole retelling was the manuscript of a fictional tale, presented by an admirer.

There are several aspects to consider when analyzing this short story from a modernist perspective, precisely, the carpenter's personal details: his ugliness "beyond description,"[51] his only reward "lay in the sheer delight of creating"[52] and the way he would sit on the luxurious chairs of his creation, imagining the sort of people who could sit on it, certainly of higher status. It all creates the image of a very insecure artist. Despite having the skill to create adorned pieces of art that are certainly appreciated,

[50] Matthew Fraleigh, "Kanshibun in the Late Edo Period," in *The Cambridge History of Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. Shirane Haruo, Suzuki Tomi, with David Laurie (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 470.

[51] Edogawa Ranpo, "The Human Chair," trans. James B. Harris in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel (Columbia University Press, 2011), 192.

[52] Ranpo, "The Human Chair," 193.

he cannot help but feel inferior to the people receiving his work due to his own perceived ugliness. The desire to defy his social status is immense and unbearable: “I derived no end of pleasure from imagining myself to be an influential figure in society.”[53] Secondly, his interactions with the various characters who sit on the armchair in the hotel lobby once he had inserted himself inside are also worth noting. The interactions with the foreign women, specifically of European origin, excite him carnally, but ultimately, he desires a return to his roots: “I then realized fully and deeply that as a Japanese I really craved a lover of my own kind.”[54]

Before an analysis of this fragment, it is of utmost importance to note the existence of four paragraphs removed from the English translation by the translator James B. Harris. In a 2022 research paper, Scott Mehl, Associate Professor of Japanese at Colgate University in Madison, NY, explores the paragraphs that were cut and the possible reasons for the shortening of the text in translation. The four omitted paragraphs refer to an incident in the hotel in which a European ambassador, better known as a poet of world literature, came to sit on the armchair, with the carpenter fantasizing about ending his life with a dagger in order to create international disorder. Mehl suggests several theories, among which the omission being attributed to the author himself, Edogawa, due to being a close collaborator in Harris’ translation of his works, or of the shortening being done as possible censorship fears due to American occupation of postwar Japan.[55] However, as he fails to arrive at a conclusion, he notes that the paragraphs were retained in the French translation, done by Jean-Christian Bouvier. Bouvier states in a footnote accompanying the paragraph in his translation that the French reader discovers here an exclusive episode from the life of Paul Claudel, ambassador of France to Japan at that time.[56] Paul Claudel was indeed ambassador to Japan between 1921–1927, while also being a noteworthy poet and playwright in his home country.[57]

[53] Ranpo, “The Human Chair,” 193.

[54] Ranpo, “The Human Chair,” 197.

[55] Scott Mehl, “An Unsolved Mystery,” *Japanese Language and Literature* 56, no. 2 (2022): 577–579, https://doi.org/10.5195/jll.2022.266.

[56] Edogawa Ranpo, “La chaise humaine,” in *La chambre rouge*, trans. Jean-Christian Bouvier (Éditions Philippe Picquier, 1995), 97.

[57] “Paul Louis Charles Claudel,” Encyclopedia, accessed January 23, 2025, https://www.

What can be gathered from these fragments is that *The Human Chair* is nothing more than a way for the author to reflect upon his views on his own work. As a beginning writer of Japanese origin, he feels inferior to people of higher social ranks that have, perhaps, "more important" professional pursuits and financial stability. He also feels allured or captivated by the great established writers of European origin, due to European culture being more established at the time of writing. Ultimately, he wants to make an impact in his country of origin ("I want a lover of my own kind") and cannot help but fantasize about the easy way out, i.e., getting rid of his foreign competition. This argument is further supported by how the French translation chose to phrase the carpenter's intentions: "It was only up to me to (…) sow the seeds of mourning and consternation in the world of letters,"[58] (personal translation from French) highlighting the fact he owned up to his ideals. Furthermore, the simple act of inserting oneself into the armchair is equal to the author wanting to identify himself with the reader. It indicates a critical self-perspective, of always wanting to be better himself, at the cost of the privacy of his own readership.

Finally, demonstrating that *The Human Chair* is an allegory in its entirety proves in turn that it is an *ars poetica*. As previously stated, the author used this piece as a way to reflect on his desire to achieve a higher social status as a writer, while keeping true to his origins and wanting to go beyond his literary rivals. Moreover, Edogawa Ranpo's definition of literature can be inferred as being something that needs to sell, in order for the writer to thrive financially.

Hell Screen: Literature for Literature's Sake

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's (1892–1927) 1918 short story *Jigokuhen* (Hell Screen) offers a considerably different perspective on what it means for an artist to create and how he handles criticism. The story revolves around Yoshihide, a skilled painter at the court of lord Horikawa, as he is tasked with painting a screen with scenes from hell. Ultimately, this labor would be his last, as shortly after finishing the painting he commits suicide.

encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/french-literature-biographies/paul-claudel.

[58] Ranpo, "La chaise humaine," 33.

The story is filled not only with passages describing his work process and the way his work is received, but also with how he receives his artwork in contrast to those around him.

An important aspect to notice about the narrative, when comparing it to *The Human Chair*, is that it is told from a third-person perspective, rather than a first-person one. The story is seen from the perspective of a court attendant, who offers his own views. This change forces the reader to learn about Yoshihide from the perspective of his critics, rather than from his own, as seen in the following examples: "the color red on his clothes gave an idea of bestiality and disgust about him,"[59] "he was greedy, rapacious, impudent, lazy, insatiable, but above all, insolent and prideful."[60] He is also widely disregarded in his community for being a "fraud" for painting Buddhist divinities, such as Kichijōten and Fudō-myōō, in new reinvented ways: the first as a prostitute, the latter as a vile policeman. These are sacred divinities in Buddhist philosophy and theology, and such depictions could be interpreted as sacrilegious and even blasphemous, in line with Yoshihide's behavior up to this point. However, his reinterpretation reflects a desire to bring novelty to an established canon, but the criticism he is being surrounded with only serves to alienate him further. The total disrespect of his person and his work is strongly evidenced by the way the court names a monkey after him, one of his disciples referring to him by the name of a Chinese monster, *Chira Eijuu* or even imagining fox spirits about him, a long-standing universal symbol of trickery.

The way Yoshihide talks about his work reflects both passion and internal struggle as not being recognized. One example is the way he disregards nasty comments about his representations of the Buddhist divinities: "Do you think the gods are just going to strike me with their lightning?"[61] Thus, it can be inferred he completely seeks to get rid of tradition, for the sake of reinventing his art. Additional comments made by the narrator, such as "One could say that this man became crazy about everything concerning painting,"[62] solidify this. The final act of hanging

[59] Ryūnosuke Akutagawa , "Figures infernales," trans. Arimasa Mori, in *Rashômon et autres contes* (Éditions Folio, 2005), 34.

[60] Akutagawa, "Figures infernales," 40.

[61] Akutagawa, "Figures infernales," 41.

[62] Akutagawa, "Figures infernales," 70–71.

himself after he finished the Hell screen reflects the most important aspect about Yoshihide: he lived and died for the art of his creation.

Therefore, it is no wonder that Yoshihide is nothing more than an alter-ego of Akutagawa, reflecting his creative convictions, as noted by literary critic Donald Keene: "The apparent identification of the author with Yoshihide, the painter of the *Hell Screen*, gives this story a moving quality absent from other works of this period, however skillfully constructed or stylistically distinguished."[63] Yoshihide is the portrayal of the modernist writer himself: trying to reinvent tradition, self-absorbed in his work, ultimately only living for the improvement of his creation.

Moreover, it also introduces Akutagawa's view on how the writer should represent the world in his writings. In his view, literature should be mimetic and represent life as it is, showing a sense of verisimilitude, as evidenced by Yoshihide's plea to the lord: "(…) I can only paint that which I have seen with my own eyes."[64] It also reflects the author's inability to write something of his own in the early stages of his literary career and the need to get inspiration from others before him, as Keene critically notes as a "lack of originality."[65] Furthermore, he also states that during his career, contemporary critics compared him "to a mosaist," rather than an actual writer, "piecing together fresh masterpieces out of the materials gleaned from many books."[66] This can also be seen in how he introduced the concept of aesthetics of ugly in Japanese literature through the many details explaining the gruesome and shocking scenes on the Hell Screen, a concept derived from Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*. This is further highlighted by Yoshihide's claim when being critiqued by his lord: "(…) the beauty of ugliness escapes the painters who only know to smear."[67]

Finally, it is through *Hell Screen* that Akutagawa Ryūnosuke reflects upon his creative process as a writer, as well as his profession's role in society. In his vision, a writer should always reinvent the established canon, so as to give new meanings and interpretations to well-known concepts.

[63] Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era. Fiction* (Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1984), 566.
[64] Akutagawa, "Figures infernales," 69.
[65] Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era. Fiction*, 565.
[66] Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era. Fiction, 565*.
[67] Akutagawa, "Figures infernales," 42.

Despite the criticism received, he is proud and firm on the stance of his writing. As Yoshihide's final act of suicide mirrors the real-life suicide of Akutagawa at the age of thirty-five, one thing is clear: both the character and his creator lived and died for the sake of their art. Akutagawa's *ars poetica* can be summed up as *ars gratia artis*. As the writer furthers his creative pursuit into art for art's sake, he is to abandon his own person.

Conclusion

Taking every analysis into account thus far, Edogawa Ranpo and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke have been able to advance the modernity of Japanese literature. The incorporation of foreign elements into their writing served as a big factor, but the finishing touch proved to be the very return to Japanese roots. Although *The Human Chair* and *Hell Screen* are very different in subject matter, they are both forms of *ars poetica*; both reflect their author's desire to bring novelty in the context of modernity. One may wonder now, one hundred years after their publication, whether these beliefs can still hold true. Akutagawa himself expressed with regard to the funerary stone of the painter of the Hell Screen: "But, as tens of years of rain and wind passed by, the inscription upon the little stone placed there cannot be read anymore."[68] As all existence, even that which is sacrificed for the creation of art, is temporary, so is any author's *ars poetica*.

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[68] Akutagawa, "Figures infernales," 85.

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STRUCK BY THE RESTORATION: THE STRUGGLES OF FEMALE SOCIAL OUTCASTS IN HIGUCHI ICHIYŌ'S *YAMIYŌ* AND *JŪSAN'YA*

Alexia-Elena Faur

Abstract: This paper seeks to analyze the fates of two of Higuchi Ichiyō's female protagonists: Oran from *Yamiyō* (Encounters on a Dark Night, 1894) and Oseki, from *Jūsan'ya* (Thirteenth Night, 1895) and how their nonconformity with the societal expectations of women during the Meiji Era is the cause of their suffering, which they either choose to bear or allow it to lead them to their ultimate doom.

Keywords: Meiji Restoration, modernization, outcast, womanhood.

Introduction

During the turn of 19th century Japan, society, economy, as well as politics started having much more influence over people, regardless of social status. Following the ever-changing scenery of the Meiji Restoration, writers of fiction put their heart into transporting the essence of the times onto their work. Such was Higuchi Ichiyō, who, despite her short lifespan of 27 years, left behind a legacy of short stories featuring women and their sentimentality in the center of attention.

Analysis

First, there is a need to provide socioeconomic context regarding the role of women in Meiji society as well as their importance regarding the

newly-established model of the nuclear family. As the Meiji Restoration flourished, the state demanded new rules regarding their ideal citizens, regardless of gender. Many were astonished by the idea of the Victorian woman, the graceful mother and caring wife.[69] Initially, the system prioritized the child-bearing role of the mother, concentrating more on the role of the patriarch, but this gradually changed in the mid-1890s, by marketing the importance of the *katei* (home), in which both male and female have a crucial role in serving the country. An important figure in enforcing these images was Iwamoto Yoshiharu (1863-1942), with his multiple essays featured in a column called *Kateiran* (Home), part of the *Taiyō* magazine, which ran from 1895 until 1902. In his essays, the ideal Victorian woman translates to the new ideal of the Meiji wife, the columns featuring various subjects, from mother-child relationship to physical health of the wife and offers tips on how the wife should properly behave in order to maintain the household. He combines the political aspect of the Meiji Restoration with the woman's duty as a wife, as seen in *Katei wa kokka nari* (The home is a nation), in which he believes women should play as much of an important role in building the state: "the home is a nation. Overseeing the home is a kind of politics, and thus each of you [housewives] is its prime minister."[70]

Later he goes on from praising the gift of motherhood to criticizing the mothers who are not properly educated. In *Haha no mugaku* (Ignorant mothers), published in 1895, Iwamoto claims that the wife not putting effort in her children's education inevitably harms them and prevents them from becoming proper future citizens and kills the child's enthusiasm for study.[71] Additionally, not only are the children harmed due to the wife's ignorance in basic education, but so is the husband, as a lack of knowledge of the world would not make for good conversation between the wife and the husband.

Coincidentally, the publication of Iwamoto's essays in the *Taiyō* magazine is set in about the same time Higuchi published *Encounters on a*

[69] Timothy J. Van Compernolle, "Happiness Foreclosed: Sentimentalism, the Suffering Heroine, and Social Critique in Higuchi Ichiyō's 'Jūsan'ya'," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 365. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25064492.

[70] Yoshiharu Iwamoto, "Katei wa kokka nari," *Taiyō* 2, no. 5 (1896): 147.

[71] Yoshiharu Iwamoto, "Haha no mugaku," *Taiyō* 2, no. 2 (1896): 127.

Dark Night and *The Thirteenth Night* (1894-1895). There is, however, no evidence that Higuchi actually read any of these essays or the magazine itself. Yet, the inability of her two female protagonists to adapt to this very standard leads to both their internal and external struggles.

The two tales have three characters essential to the plot which drive the story from different angles due to their difference in decision-making. First, there are the female protagonists: Oran and Oseki. Then, there are the two love interests: Namizaki Tadayou and Harada Isamu, both of high rank, successful and involved in politics, as opposed to Takaji Naojiro and Kosaka Roku, who are both in very unstable, dire situations, struck by poverty and misplaced in society. While Oseki is already born into a lower-rank family and needs Harada's support as a husband in order to sustain herself and climb the social ladder, Oran already has a higher title to her father's name. It is her reputation being ruined due to her father's suicide, that makes her refuse to engage with the outside of her estate again, making her a prisoner in her own home. Oran does not marry and we never see her in Oseki's tragic situation. Oran has no family left, therefore, nothing to hold her back. Yet it is this nothingness which makes her lonely and puts her in the position of a living ghost, not able to leave her place. This makes her empathize with Naojiro even more, as he is also struck by loneliness, with no human connection to cling onto. Their feelings toward each other grow and their final decision in assassinating Namizaki is based on the shared experience of having nothing left but each other, therefore the outcome does not matter. Oseki, on the other hand, has various people to support, from her own son, Taro, to both of her sorrowful parents and her brother Inosuke. She cannot find solace in Roku, as her struggle to keep her dear ones safe comes as a priority. The endings of both of the stories hold ambiguity, yet Oseki does have a future, whereas Oran disappears, remaining in her ghost-like position.

Another way one may differentiate the two female protagonists' relation to the current era in which their stories take place is by paying attention to Ichiyō's references to both the past and present, which serve as an inspiration to her gently contouring the settings and characterization of her two central characters. The Matsukawa estate is, from the very beginning, described as a mysterious, haunted place. "People often wondered just how

large the compound was, surrounded by its garden wall. How long had the front gate been boarded up? Storms had had their way with the place, and what remained was disquieting. There were none of the proverbial ferns running rank among the ruins, but on the rooftop weeds now choked the tiles. Who was it who lived there mourning the past?"[72] It is almost similar to a gothic setting, in which its residents are not human. Ichiyō evokes the word *past* as if the estate was not meant to co-exist with the current times. At the same time, *Genji Monogatari* is constantly referenced as a further reminder of Matsukawa's connection to the belated times of the Heian period such as in this passage: "It was like the empty villa where Prince Genji's love, Yugao, had died of fright."[73] It evokes the episode in which one of Prince Genji's lovers meets her demise at the hands of Rokujo, one of Genji's past lovers, overcome with jealousy. Yugao's death is awaited and felt by herself alone, due to the gloomy atmosphere of the villa in which Genji and she sleep. The spirit comes as no surprise, and much like the Matsukawa estate, it has a pond in which "Waves might disturb the surface, but, when one thought about it, the depths of the water were at peace. There, at the bottom of the pond, was a better refuge from the world than any mountain hut or cabin by the sea."[74]

While *Encounters on a Dark Night* is full of references to Edo, Heian and Chinese poetry, Oran being constantly compared with tragic heroines of classical East-Asian literature that Ichiyō is passionate about, when looking for such references in *The Thirteenth Night*, there are almost none, except for the traditions of the moon viewing party on the thirteenth night of the ninth month on which the story takes place. There are few connections with the past when it comes to Oseki, yet Ichiyō keeps using classic poetry symbols, such as the moon, the wind, the cry of the insects, in describing the surrounding atmosphere of the autumn night in which Oseki makes the decision to tell her parents about her mistreatment and her desire for a divorce. The seasonal setting itself brings about classical Heian motifs "ends, death, parting, and grief, an evocation perfectly in keeping with the

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[72] Robert Lyons Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves. The Life and Writings of Higuchi Ichiyo, A Woman of Letters in Meiji Japan* (Yale University Press, 1984), 182.

[73] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves*, 182.

[74] Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 68.

mood and temporal setting of Ichiyō's story."[75] Yet these references do not hold as much of an impact and are not as heavily pushed into the narrative as the ones in *Encounters on a Dark Night*. Oseki's current whereabouts and her internal struggles are what keeps the reader entranced. Whatever happened in the past, whether it was her childhood sweetheart's love, or her fairytale-like encounter with Harada, matters no more in the face of the big conclusion Oseki must reach in the present.

As established by now, the two female protagonists are strongly linked to the past and the present and both have a hard time fitting into the Meiji society. They face hardships at the hands of the men who surround them and disturb their peaceful solitude, nature giving them the necessary means to transcribe their feelings of grief. Nature speaks in their stead and a concrete decision on their part is never reached. One of Ichiyō's contemporaries and founder of the renowned *Seito* group, Hiratsuka Raicho (1886-1971), openly critiqued Ichiyō's female characters as they submit to male authority and do not represent strong women, their passiveness being more attractive to male readers, and their "sad fates"[76] only increase the already despicable arrogant nature of men. Her critique is valid, however, Raicho tends to forget that sensitivity and silence were often used as a way of protesting against social inequality, by igniting compassion towards the perpetrators of said injustice.

Ichiyō not only critiques the patriarchal views of Meiji society, but the social class difference as well. Harada Isamu is a government official, part of the "new middle class" in Meiji Japan. He acquired the position due to having the "necessary educational credentials."[77] His societal prestige could be compared to that of the European bourgeoisie. Namizaki Tadayou is of an even higher rank, as he is part of the lower house of the Diet, which was established in 1890, and his marriage into nobility also helped him climb the social ladder. Both Namizaki and Harada are respected men, admired for their positive qualities such as their oratorical talent, high level of education and overall intelligence. Despite these qualities, the two are viewed through

[75] Van Compernolle, "Happiness Foreclosed," 376.

[76] Hiratsuka Raichō, "Onna to shite no Higuchi Ichiyo joshi," in *Hiratsuka Raicho chosakushu Vol. 1,* ed. Ooka Shohei et al. (Otsuki Shoten, 1983): 154.

[77] Van Compernolle, "Happiness Foreclosed," 376.

the objectiveness of the narrator as self-absorbed and ignorant when it comes to the women they both, ironically, previously adored. Harada is infatuated with Oseki, their first encounter resembling the fairytale-like love at first-sight, as described by Oseki's mother: "Oh, he fancied you from the moment he first saw you, and right after that the go-betweens began hurrying to our door. I don't know how many times we refused. There was such a difference in your stations, we said. You hadn't received a proper education. […] He wouldn't hear any of it. […] It was his choice and it was you he wanted. There was no need to worry about status."[78]

Similarly, Namizaki bore strong feelings towards Oran: "Namizaki had said he would marry her. After matters had proceeded that far, he went abroad. The months passed, and by the time he returned her father was dead."[79] However, he does not proceed with marrying Oran and marries into nobility. Harada and Namizaki both end up in an unsatisfying marriage, only Oseki represents the disappointment of a wife and Oran receives the offer of becoming a potential mistress, which she refuses. The two women are both put into shameful positions, as Oseki bears the constant complaints from Harada for being an uneducated wife, despite the fact that he previously did not mind such a thing and Oran remains a spinster amounting to nothing and often even purposefully ignored by Namizaki. Their behavior is unethical to the reader, yet their superiority becomes acceptable, due to their success as men and their exemplary citizenship. They perfectly fit in the society in which the sorrowful women do not.

Even if found in a superior position, due to gender, the stories both feature a misfit male counterpart. Roku is Oseki's childhood sweetheart, who used to be her playmate and who ruins himself by becoming a homeless drunkard. Naojiro has an equally disastrous life, becoming aware of his role as a social outcast from early childhood. Roku escapes from the clutches of hardship in Oseki's company and even plans on marrying her, but after she leaves with Namizaki his life goes downhill. He is ashamed of facing Oseki when she recognizes him. Oseki is distraught by his decline, which "was so extraordinary, it seemed as if some evil spirit had taken hold of him."[80] Even if their sympathy towards each other never disappeared,

[78] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves*, 246.
[79] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leave*s, 195.
[80] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves,* 252.

they both have to go their separate ways, and the story ends with the line: "One living on the second floor of Murata's boardinghouse; the other, the wife of the great Harada: each knew his share of sadness in life."[81] They part ways, yet again, despite their struggles, but their encounter certainly brings about the hope that they will go on living, or at least in Oseki's case, this is heavily implied. Her encounter with a likewise broken Roku is what determines her to not abandon the people whose life she could still improve, her parents, her brother and her child. Naojiro and Oran's encounter and evolution has the complete opposite effect.

From the very beginning, Naojiro is brought to the Matsukawa estate as a broken young man with no will to live. His life is narrated as a tragedy in which not even the smallest hope of human empathy received from his grandfather amounts to anything. Naojiro grows up despised by every person he encounters and does not believe that Oran actually treats him with kindness and welcomes him along with her two devoted servants, Sasuke and Osoyo. Oran empathizes with Naojiro as they both fit into her solitary home bound by the past. Naojiro does not believe he is worthy of Oran's attention and even the narrator constantly depicts him as a failure with lower intelligence. Oran, much like Oseki, does not indulge in usual female habits, even if she is intelligent, charming and well-educated: "She was not one to sit on the veranda in the evening with a book of stories and a fan to cool herself beneath the moon."[82] It is her desire to avenge the person who raised her and ultimately ruined her reputation and imprisoned her into the Heian-inspired decorum. Her father's suicide, as well as Namizaki's mistreatment of her, makes Oran lose her humanity. When Naojiro discovers that the person who hurt him on purpose with his rickshaw and brought him to Oran in the first place is Namizaki, he acts upon his darkest instincts. He confesses his love for Oran, who realizes that there was indeed a person who shared her thirst for revenge and who bears the same hatred towards society. While Oseki and Roku have a realistic parting, accepting their fate, Oran and Naojiro decide to protest against the injustice done upon them, as they plot Namizaki's assassination.

[81] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves,* 253.
[82] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves,* 191.

The story presents fantastical elements throughout and thus has an even more ambiguous ending. Namizaki's fate is the only one the readers become precisely informed of: "There were headlines in the morning paper. A suspect was apprehended, a roughneck member of a rival faction, but eventually he was released for lack of evidence. The assailant was never found. In a month all talk of the incident died down. Namizaki's wounds healed even faster, within two weeks. Regrettably, his reputation did not suffer. He flaunted his scar as if it were a battle wound."[83] When it comes to Naojiro and Oran, the narrator only proposes a few potential what-if-scenarios: "How did he fare? His life was no doubt further circumscribed. Perhaps he found a river where he could drown himself. Perhaps he hid away somewhere in the mountains. Or perhaps this final failure forced him to become a new man. But even stranger was the fate of the Matsukawa house. Within three months, the pavement round the front gate had been handsomely repaired. Each day gardeners and carpenters were busy there. It seemed that someone new was living in the house. And where were Sasuke, Osoyo, and Oran?"[84] The actual answers become a mystery, similar to a legend or a myth. The last line is, however, the most impactful one "It's a wide world, after all. These days the trains run everywhere."[85] Ichiyō mentions trains, a modern symbol of the Industrial Revolution and of the western world. It is a symbol no longer associated with Oran and Naojiro, who not only were misfits but did not belong to the Meiji era.

Conclusion

Higuchi Ichiyō sought to represent the fate of social failures in the Meiji Era, specifically the women who found themselves struck by the changes of societal norms. Oseki has the hope of overcoming her struggles, whereas Oran sinks into the past, remaining a shadow of an era long gone. Much like them, Higuchi Ichiyō became a prolific name at the turn of the century. Her work did not feature, indeed, as her contemporary Hiratsuka Raicho pointed out, outstanding and independent female protagonists, but Ichiyō's

[83] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves*, 204.
[84] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves,* 204.
[85] Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves,* 204.

heroines reached out to a bigger number of readers and made many aware of the struggles the average Meiji women faced in silence. The sensitive voices are loud and even keep a rather violent tempo underneath, their grief encapsulating both the past and the future of short Japanese prose featuring women at the center of the stage. Therefore, Higuchi Ichiyō's name marks her throughout the history of Japan as a distinguished link of many themes in literature.

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NINGEN ISU BY EDOGAWA RANPO AS BODY HORROR: THE HORROR OF METAMORPHOSIS

ANAMARIA CVAȘA

Abstract: In Ningen Isu ("The Human Chair") by Edogawa Ranpo, the protagonist, driven by his sexual cravings and his desire to be seen as beautiful, resolves to live within a luxurious chair of his own creation, the life he lives inside of it becoming more and more appealing as the days go by. In the end, he leaves his safe haven under the illusion that the woman of his dreams has taken a liking to him, even though she has never met him. This delusion stems from the character's gradual psychological transformation, as he shifts his self-perceived identity from the maker of the chair to the reverie of becoming his own idealized creation. In this essay, The Human Chair is analyzed from the perspective of body horror, proving that viewing it as such accentuates the disturbing nature of the story and sheds a new light on the protagonist's thought process.

Keywords: body horror, Edogawa Ranpo, Gothic literature, metamorphosis, *The Human Chair*.

WHAT IS "BODY HORROR"?

As a genre, "[horror] is preoccupied with the general mechanics of 'fear'."[86] It explores what makes us uncomfortable, what we find repulsive or sickening and urges us to embrace the existence of these parts of life.

[86] Xavier Aldana-Reyes, "Part II Genres: Body Horror," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Horror,* ed. Stephen Shapiro and Mark Storey (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 107.

Quite often, consuming horror fiction can put our day-to-day problems into perspective or offer us just the right amount of thrill in order to stimulate the brain's production of "feel-good" hormones. But on a deeper level, to be in touch with the darkest parts of the human psyche means to understand both yourself and society better.

When it comes to "body horror", Xavier Aldana Reyes describes the term as "a type of fiction […] where corporeality constitutes the main site of fear, anxiety and sometimes even disgust for the characters and, by extension, the intended readers/viewers. Its workings involve the inscription of horror onto the human body by virtue of a change, or series of them, that transforms the perceived 'normal' body into a negatively exceptional and/or painful version of itself."[87] For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the grotesque and erotically driven example of transformation found in the aforementioned Japanese short story.

Xavier also mentions one of Ranpo's literary role models, Edgar Allan Poe, as an example of an author who embraced "body horror" elements frequently in his writings. His fascinating and haunting short stories have always been quintessential reads for every horror fan around the globe; and Tarō Hirai was no exception. The consumption of the American author's works was so significant to Tarō's literary career that his pen name was inspired by Poe's. Thus came the alias "Edogawa Ranpo."[88]

Another aspect of Poe's style that inspired Ranpo was the focus on the criminal's perspective and motives, rather than the "cat and mouse" dynamic between the perpetrator and the detective. While both Poe and Ranpo had detective characters: Auguste Dupin and Kogoro Akechi respectively, some of their most famous and intriguing stories focus on first-person narratives told from the criminal or victim's perspective. Examples can be found in works such as *The Tell-Tale Heart* or *The Cask of Amontillado* for the American writer and *The Caterpillar* or *The Human Chair* for his Japanese counterpart. Being presented from the "doer" or "sufferer" point of view, the stories benefit from a deeper and more enticing way of

[87] Xavier Aldana-Reyes, "The Body in Pieces: Body Horror," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, ed. Clive Bloom (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 52.

[88] Recommended further reading on the connection between Ranpo and Poe: Marling, William. "Vision and Putrescence: Edogawa Rampo Rereading Edgar Allan Poe." Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism, 35 (2002): 22–30.

presenting a protagonist's inner turmoil. As such, readers build a deeper connection with the characters and are able to find the motives behind their actions, oftentimes fueled by inner, repressed desires. These types of feelings tie into the general themes of Poe's Dark Romanticism, which in Ranpo's case more closely follows the Japanese literary trend of Ero-Guro-Nansensu (Japanese portmanteau word made from the combination of "erotic," "grotesque" and "nonsense").

"Ero-Guro" refers to the combination of sexual depravity and grotesque actions or descriptions within the Japanese Literature of the 1920s and 30s, its popularity usually being attributed to the post-war chaos and consumerist bourgeoisie of Japanese society.[89] Works of literature that adhered to this artistic current aimed to shock and captivate the audience based on the assumption that they would engage their natural curiosity and they would thus enjoy hearing about others' sick fantasies, almost in a voyeuristic manner. While this could encapsulate a broad variety of subjects, one of the preferred targets of horrific change was none other than the human body.

The body is ever-changing by its nature. It differs from person to person, but also goes through several modifications during a person's lifetime, so it can safely be said that 'body horror' will, by extension, tackle a wide variety of concepts and transformations. It includes all horror-inducing aspects that affect the body in some way or another, so authors find themselves often using it as a literary device. But we must ask ourselves: "Why is this topic so often approached in literature and media? Why do we find it scary? What makes it fulfill its purpose so effectively?"

Body Insecurity

For a long time now and with each new generation, humans have been trying to conform to the societally imposed, "trendy" body type. As the subject matter discussed in horror media is almost always taboo in its nature, body insecurity is not spared. "Not only is body image integrally a

[89] Edogawa Ranpo and Jim Reichert, "Deviance and Social Darwinism in Edogawa Ranpo's Erotic-Grotesque Thriller 'Kotō No Oni.'," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 112–15. https://doi.org/10.2307/3591938.

socially constructed phenomenon, it is reciprocally related to how people experience their interactions with others."[90] Our protagonist is a prime example of personal image struggles interfering with social capabilities. He describes himself as "ugly beyond description,"[91] showing that he considers his self-image to be a hindrance. His appearance is most definitely a factor that contributes to his feelings of loneliness and perceived rejection from society, but at the same time, he doesn't prioritize caring for it, almost thinking of it as a lost cause: "I even skipped food and sleep."[92] Although he would prefer his body to be subservient to his needs in a society so reliant on outer image, it does not cooperate. Seeing as he cannot fulfill his needs in other ways because of his disregard for himself, he resolves to satisfy his need for closeness and his sexual fantasies in a voyeuristic way, moving inside the chair he creates.

Fetishization and "The Outside World" vs "The Inside Bubble"

Maryellen T. Mori describes Ranpo as having a "fascination with the bizarre, grotesque, and sexually taboo,"[93] as these themes seem to be extremely prevalent in his writing. Two non-fiction examples that tackle these subjects are essays titled *Gurotesuku to erochishizumu* ("The grotesque and eroticism") and *Ningyō* ("Doll"). In these works, he presents the dark desires of the mind, sometimes presented as perfectly ordinary thoughts that he considers integral parts of being human. Additionally, he mentions the fact that "the erotic" is oftentimes presented in a bad light, even when it isn't presenting any damaging behavior. By doing this, society creates a culture of shame that ultimately creates recluses and promotes the alienation of individuals.

[90] Thomas F. Cash and Linda Smolak, Body Image: A Handbook of Science, Practice, and Prevention (Guilford Press, 2012), 90.
[91] Edogawa Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, trans. James. B. Harris (Tuttle Publishing, 1956), 2.
[92] Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 3.
[93] Maryellen T. Mori, "Three Tales of Doll-Love by Edogawa Ranpo," *Japan Review*, no. 12 (2000): 232, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25791055.

Circling back to fiction writing, Mori goes so far as to say that "probably the majority of Ranpo's stories informed by motifs of metamorphosis or disguise have subtle or overt sexual overtones."[94] In "The Human Chair," this sexual dimension plays a big role in the feelings of uneasiness that the horror story aims to instill in its readers. The protagonist describes in detail the "far greater source of weird joy which (he) managed to discover,"[95] which is to analyze, spy on and fantasize about the people that choose to sit in his chair. He ponders what thoughts might be going through their heads as they sit on the luxurious armchair he is hidden in. This appetite for psychoanalysis that our main character has is also a trait of late 19th and 20th century writing, deeply influenced by scientists such as Freud, who is especially relevant in this case, considering his works in the area of sexual depravity and the human mind. One of the most fitting would be his description of "The Pleasure Principle," which refers to the constant pursuit of gratification, with as little hindrance as possible.[96] Our protagonist, like any human, wants to feel satisfied, so he searches for ways in which he can do that, sometimes within scenarios in his imagination.

In our story, the craftsman fantasizes about and becomes especially enamored with the women who sit on his chair on a regular basis, which will prove to be a short-lived thought, afterwards surpassed by a greater ambition of exclusivity and long-term commitment, similar to a typical romantic relationship. His change of perception may also be due to the space itself, which acts as a cocoon for his ultimate transformation. The armchair he makes is sold to a hotel, a place where travelers, usually foreigners or at least people who aren't residents of that particular place, find a place to dwell for a short period of time. His subsequent need to leave is a necessary switch from the unfamiliar, transitory space of the hotel, to the home of a respected Japanese family, thus a more traditional space. The fleeting nature of the setting's characters gives the protagonist short bursts of dopamine, but they end up becoming far from enough for

[94] Mori, "Three Tales of Doll-Love by Edogawa Ranpo," 232.
[95] Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 5.
[96] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (W. W. Norton & Company, 1961).

him. Leaving the space of constant change and alienation for the stability of the traditional home can be considered an attempt at social critique by the author.

Before moving on, it is important to address a passage that does not appear in the 1956 translation of the short story, but can be found in the original Japanese text and other selected translations. It refers to a high-status man, which our protagonist describes with the same passion that he does the women he obsesses over. In this instance though, the descriptive fantasy turns violent and the protagonist imagines plunging a dagger into the man's back, while still enclosed in the chair. This omitted fragment allows us to further peek into the deranged man's mind, completing the picture of his sexual depravity with an affirmed penchant for violence, but it might have a hidden meaning as well. This is the only man mentioned in one of the protagonist's fantasies, which are usually sexual in nature, so the attack could also be read as a symbol for repressed homosexual desire. Edogawa Ranpo has put, on multiple occasions, a focus on the high regard to which he holds homoerotic male relationships,[97] so it would not be unusual for him to mention, even metaphorically, the idea of it in one of his stories. In this case, it is represented as an unfulfilled desire, which provokes feelings of confusion and violence within the main character's mind. He is unable to act on his urges, so he sticks to his "safe space" of imagination.

Analyzing the paragraphs above, we can observe the two distinct sides that our main character divides his headspace into: "the inside bubble," of fantasy, where he is desired and free to enjoy himself, and "the outside world," of reality, where he is hideous and unwanted. The problem arises when he desires to transcend this limit. His body is unfit for his ambitions, so he fashions himself a new one.

Transformation

In his essay, titled *Henshin ganbō* ("A Desire for Transformation"), Edogawa Ranpo reflects on the idea of metamorphosis, with an emphasis on self-inflicted changes: "Human beings are not content with themselves

[97] Mori, "Three Tales of Doll-Love by Edogawa Ranpo," 232-3.

as they are. To wish to be a handsome prince or a knight or a beautiful princess is a most common desire, and indeed, popular novels that feature attractive men, beautiful women, and great heroes are written to satisfy such desires […] The desire to transform oneself."[98]. When one is dissatisfied, they will seek to solve said nuisance, or like in the context of "The Pleasure Principle," we wish to avoid pain and feelings of discomfort. In *The Human Chair*, the transformation's catalyst is the dichotomy between the protagonist's inside and outside world.

At first, the text contains evidence of the mental separation between maker and creation, such as "my chair—and I"[99] or "the soft 'cushion' on which they were sitting was actually human flesh with blood circulating in its veins—confined in a strange world of darkness,"[100] which clearly distinguishes between the two roles. But as the story progresses, the line blurs when the main character searches for the same admiration his chair receives: "Inside the chair, I could visualize myself hugging her, kissing her snowy white neck—if only I could remove that layer of leather..."[101]

The chair serves as a haven for his human body, but also an idealized vessel for it. The luxurious material, beautiful shape and sought-after comfort of the armchair are all positive traits that make the object desirable. His resistance to his "human form" can be seen in the increasing difficulty with which he exists outside the chair: "I became so attached to my "quarters" that I adjusted them more and more to permanent living"[102] or "I began to crawl instead of walk to the washroom."[103] His struggles to leave persist, but the desire to be noticed wins over his better judgement. The initial warning to the lady of the house, gives us a glimpse of the regard to which he holds his humanity: "you may be shocked and horrified at the sight of my face—after so many months of unsanitary living."[104] But even as the chair starts chipping at his human integrity, he chooses to continue

98 Edogawa Ranpo, "Henshin Ganbō," in *Zoku Gen'eijō. Edogawa Ranpo Suiri Bunko*, vol. 52 (Kōdansha, 1988), 282–88, translation by Maryellen T. Mori.

99 Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 5.

100 Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination, 18.*

101 Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 7.

102 Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 7.

103 Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 8.

104 Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 2.

living inside of it for months. We see this magnetism towards the chair in a passage from the description of its making: “every fiber of the wood I used seemingly linked to my heart and soul.”[105] Bit by bit, he refuses to part with his creation, then he wishes to resemble it, emulate it, and finally even be it. So when and where does the chair end and the man begin?

Conclusion

The Human Chair is an archetypal Ranpo literary work, because as Maryellen Mori puts it, “in Ranpo’s fiction, disguise and other modes of self-metamorphosis allow characters to enjoy trying out different identities, and also to conceal their ordinary identities in order to indulge shameful desires or commit illicit acts under a mantle of anonymity”[106] and this story manages to do both: he assumes the identity of his creation and indulges his shameful desires of holding people which would not have reciprocated his affection under normal conditions, but he also satisfies his desire to commit illicit acts through his nightly theft. An interesting aspect is the fact that, though stealing was his initial preferred activity, it is gradually replaced by his perverse nature and need for closeness, as well as for release through violence in a society that cast him aside, proving that an individual’s psychological needs are greater than the physical in modern society. Even with the money to ensure his food and shelter, should he wish to get them, he chooses to at least try to tame his interior disturbance.

His ideal body comes to him by accident, through his own creation. When he sets out to make this particular chair he does not expect to form such a bond with it, but after laying eyes on a perfect-looking object, he finds himself wishing for someone to stare at him in the same way. As he quickly realizes that he might never be able to reach that in the society he lives in, no matter what he does, he makes the decision to become one with it.

The novelty that *The Human Chair* brings is the leading character’s radical changes over the course of this short story as his delusions bring

[105] Ranpo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 3.
[106] Mori, “Three Tales of Doll-Love by Edogawa Ranpo,” 232.

him to unite, at least on a mental level, with his creation, his body and the object becoming one from his warped perspective. Adjusting our point of view in order to accommodate the idea of this 'spiritual' merge makes the story that much more disturbing.

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ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER DEPICTED THROUGH PROTAGONISTS OF POSTWAR JAPANESE LITERATURE

Daria-Adela Török

Abstract: This research intends to analyze and compare the protagonists of two Japanese postwar novels, Yōzō Ōba from Osamu Dazai's *No Longer Human* and Mizoguchi from Yukio Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, from a psychological standpoint. Many postwar Japanese literary works convey dark themes that portray Japan in the aftermath of World War II, a crucial event which left its toll on many countries. Many authors like Yukio Mishima and Osamu Dazai expressed their thoughts in literary works which might have been greatly influenced by Japan's loss in World War II, works which present Japanese society through the eyes of characters with a different mindset that separate them from the world around them. Yōzō Ōba and Mizoguchi are accurate examples of characters with pessimistic mindsets that isolate them from the society they live in, leading them to engage in illegal activities, these traits often being identified in individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD for short).

Keywords: antisocial personality disorder, literary analysis, mental health in Japan, postwar Japanese literature, psychoanalytic approach.

Antisocial Personality Disorder in the Context of Postwar Japanese Literature

The goal of this research is to individually analyze as well as compare two fictional characters from a psychological perspective. Yōzō Ōba from Osamu Dazai's *Ningen Shikkaku* (No Longer Human)

and Mizoguchi from Yukio Mishima's *Kinkaku-ji* (The Temple of the Golden Pavilion), both protagonists in their respective novels, are characters who show traits similar to symptoms of individuals often diagnosed with Antisocial Personality Disorder. In order to clarify possible issues interfering with the psychological aspect of this research, the symptoms mentioned in this paper will be referred to as traits or characteristics similar to the symptoms of Antisocial Personality Disorder, as this research focuses on the psychological analysis of the characters in the area of literature, and therefore is by no means intended to be used as a form of diagnosis.

Many postwar Japanese literary works convey dark messages, whether they are transmitted through the narrative, the detailed description of postwar Japan or the characters themselves. Their vision, ideas and principles tend to be cynical, chaotic and pessimistic due to the events which impacted society at the time. World War II is a crucial event that left its toll on many countries, including Japan, which happened to be on the losing side. Authors such as Yukio Mishima and Osamu Dazai expressed some thoughts in their literary works which might have been greatly influenced by the loss of Japan in World War II. Their works present Japanese society through the eyes of characters with a different mindset that separates them from the world around them. Protagonists like Yōzō Ōba from Dazai's *No Longer Human* and Mizoguchi from Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* particularly represent accurate examples of characters with pessimistic mindsets and a misanthropic nature that isolates them from the society they live in, leading them to engage in illegal activities. These are characteristics often seen in individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD for short).

The Portrayal Of Antisocial Personality Disorder In Ōba And Mizoguchi

Antisocial Personality Disorder is a personality disorder characterized by a prevalent pattern of disregard for other individuals, animals and even objects. People with ASPD may resort to committing violent, illegal and manipulative acts without feeling any remorse, as they often gain

satisfaction or other types of stimuli from having done so. Common notable characteristics among these individuals involve: trying to justify their abusive reactions or behaviors, blaming the victim for being vulnerable, and treating the negative impact their own actions left on others with indifference. Contributing factors to individuals developing Antisocial Personality Disorder can be either genetic (history of family members suffering from personality disorders, not necessarily ASPD) or environmental (for example abuse during childhood).[107]

Both protagonists had environmental factors increasing their chances of developing antisocial behaviors, which would later turn into traits which accurately depict specific symptoms of ASPD. There are a variety of traits specific to Antisocial Personality Disorder noticeable in Yōzō and Mizoguchi present in their respective novels, visible in their behavior, dialogue, thoughts, relationships, attitude towards other characters, events, and even themselves.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* a patient must present three or more of the symptoms mentioned in the diagnostic criteria.[108] This analysis will be focusing on the symptoms specific to ASPD present in the characters' behavior, and the environmental factors leading to them developing those behaviors. The first section of this analysis consists of analyzing the characters considering the following list of symptoms specific to ASPD: lack of empathy, instability in intimate relationships or work relationships, harming other people for one's own benefit, disregard for law, and deceitfulness. The second section of this analysis consists of analyzing the environmental factors that are potential causes in the characters' development of antisocial traits. Among the environmental factors mentioned under the "Risk and Prognostic Factors" section of the DSM-5-TR, the following factors are going to be the focus of this section: child abuse, neglect, and inconsistent parental discipline.

[107] Mark Zimmerman, "Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD)," *MSD Manual Professional Edition*, January 20, 2026, https://www.msdmanuals.com/professional/psychiatric-disorders/personality-disorders/antisocial-personality-disorder-aspd.

[108] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5-TR*, 2022.

Traits Of Antisocial Personality Disorder Depicted Through Ōba And Mizoguchi

Lack of empathy: Yōzō admitted several times that he feels disconnected from other humans, not finding a place where he belongs in social groups, even going as far as claiming he does not understand why other humans seek living a meaningful life: “I find it difficult to understand the kind of human being who lives, or who is sure he can live, purely, happily, serenely while engaged in deceit.”[109] Mizoguchi is shown to also lack empathy. He wished and prayed for Uiko’s death, “Day and night I wished for Uiko’s death”[110] until he got to witness it, leading him to believe he had cursed her fate: “a few months later my curse was realized.”[111] However, after he had just witnessed her die, he got lost in his thoughts and disconnected from reality, the event not seeming to impact him in a way to make him feel guilt: “My only feeling was that all this was taking place in the distant past.”[112]

Instability in intimate relationships or work relationships: Both Mizoguchi and Yōzō started neglecting their university studies and lost the trust of their superiors or parental figures (Tayama Dosen, Yōzō’s father) due to their lack of responsibility and reckless actions. Yōzō had a couple of intimate relationships with women, Shizuko, for example. One of the few jobs he was able to maintain for a while was his job at Shizuko’s magazine as an illustrator. He ended up using most of the compensation he earned on alcohol and cigarettes, sinking deeper into his depression. Mizoguchi was meant to follow in Dosen’s footsteps, after graduating from university, but he ended up spending his tuition on other activities (harlotry), and he was no longer trying to keep up with his studies just for his superior’s sake. In fact, he was hoping that Dosen would expel him after getting himself into so many dangerous situations.

[109] Osamu Dazai, *No Longer Human*, trans. Donald Keene (New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1958), 37.

[110] Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, trans. Ivan Morris (Tuttle Publishing, 1959), 12.

[111] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 12.

[112] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 18.

Harming others for their own benefit: during an encounter Mizoguchi had with a drunk American soldier at the temple, he was ordered to trample over a pregnant woman's belly, whom the soldier had left pregnant. Mizoguchi obeyed. Considering the historical context, this behavior could perhaps be justified by fear, as Japan was occupied by the victorious Allies of World War II. However, as he obeyed the soldier's order, not only did he not feel remorse, he felt some sort of satisfaction from having hurt the woman: "The sense of discord that I had felt when I first stepped on her gave way now to a sort of bubbling joy."[113] The American soldier was satisfied and gave him two cartons of cigarettes, which Mizoguchi intended to give to his superior as a gift. However, he did not intend to confess what he had just done, attempting to justify his actions as fear for his own safety: "There was no need for me to confess anything that had happened. I had only acted as I had because I was ordered and constrained. If I had opposed the American, I do not know what plight I might not have suffered myself."[114] Mizoguchi did not feel guilty because he had harmed the woman, he was more worried about his superior's opinion about him, or the matter concerning him, this being a sign of narcissism as well. However, showing some symptoms of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) does not necessarily mean an individual has it, since many personality disorders share similar symptoms, but the causes of the symptoms and the way they affect the individual may be different.[115] In order to be referred to as symptoms, however, any signs that may resemble those specific to a personality disorder should be diagnosed by a specialist in the field of psychiatry, and they should fit the criteria for diagnosis presented in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.*[116] In Yōzō's relationship with Tsuneko, he relied on her and used her for his own benefit, knowing she was feeling unhappy and hopeless. Yōzō still continued spending time with her despite him knowing he was going to make her situation worse. They decided they would commit suicide

[113] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 77.
[114] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 78.
[115] Zimmerman, "Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD)."
[116] Mark Zimmerman, "Overview of Personality Disorders," *MSD Manual Professional Edition*, January 16, 2026, https://www.msdmanuals.com/professional/psychiatric-disorders/personality-disorders/overview-of-personality-disorders.

together. Following their attempt at suicide, only Yōzō managed to survive, Tsuneko becoming a victim of a spontaneous, reckless choice the protagonist influenced her to make. Although he acknowledged he "(...) felt pity for Tsuneko; for the first time in my life I was conscious of a positive (if feeble) movement of love in my heart,"[117] he went even further claiming "Of all the people I had ever known, that miserable Tsuneko really was the only one I loved."[118] It is possible he was only trying to justify what happened to Tsuneko as something she had done because of their "love."

Disregard for law: As Mizoguchi's mental state had worsened, his desire to burn The Golden Temple became a goal, which he had been planning for a while in advance. Although he did not intend to leave the temple alive, he intended to die in the Kukkyōchō: "What I dreamed of finding in the Kukyocho was a place to die,"[119] but his plan failed. He did not manage to open the door to the Kukkyōchō as it was locked. His desire to die in that place was not a coincidence, the Kukkyōchō being the third floor of The Golden Temple, regarded as an especially valuable and important part of the temple: "I cannot explain how desperately I was longing for that radiant little room as I stood there knocking at the door. If only I could reach it, I thought, everything would be all right."[120] Similar to the death of the author who brought Mizoguchi's character to life in his literary work (Yukio Mishima committed seppuku in the traditional manner, having one of his students assist him in the ritual by decapitating him),[121] Mizoguchi wanted an honorable death. He managed to destroy The Golden Temple by setting it on fire. He had come to terms with reality and decided to live, even if he ended up getting arrested. Yōzō also faced legal issues after his suicide attempt with Tsuneko, but he ended up getting released due to him being regarded as an individual with mental health issues. After this, he ended up under the supervision of an old family friend, Flatfish. Moreover, Yōzō attended Communist Party meetings frequently, which would get one into legal trouble especially during those times. Although his views did not

[117] Dazai, *No Longer Human*, 85.
[118] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 85.
[119] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 260.
[120] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 260.
[121] "Mishima Yukio," *Britannica*, January 10, 2026, accessed February 10, 2026, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yukio-Mishima.

align with the members of the Communist Party, he merely attended the meetings because he enjoyed them, or rather, he enjoyed deceiving his "comrades": "I came to be so popular that I was considered indispensable at the meetings. These simple people perhaps fancied that I was just as simple as they—an optimistic, laughter-loving comrade—but if such was their view, I was deceiving them completely,"[122] "I was not their comrade. […] I did it because I liked to, because those people pleased me—and not necessarily because we were linked by any common affection derived from Marx."[123] Besides attending the meetings, he also ran errands for the Communist Party, the members of the "Reading Society" seeing him as their equal and trusting him to do dangerous jobs for them: "I was therefore considered a promising comrade and entrusted with various jobs fraught with a ludicrous degree of secrecy."[124]

A sign of Antisocial Personality Disorder that is present in Yōzō, but not so visible in Mizoguchi is his *Deceitfulness*: often mistaken for his "charisma." Without masking a likeable, humorous personality, fitting in with his colleagues would have been a hard task. Despite him mentioning not understanding how humans function, he found ways to adapt some personality traits into his own; behind the funny boy that made his classmates laugh, there was a deceitful and manipulative one who was acting like that on purpose, for his own benefit. Mizoguchi, on the other hand, is often presented as an outcast, as he is unable to perform in front of his peers and fit in. He had been targeted by his classmates for his speech impediment and for his quiet nature. A senior who was popular among his middle school colleagues laid his eyes on him after noticing Mizoguchi was not interested in listening to his stories, and started mocking him: "What, you're a stutterer, are you? Why don't you enter the Naval Engineering School? They'll flog that stuttering out of you in a single day!"[125]

Both protagonists ended up worsening their situations, their mental stability reaching such a low point that both of them gave into their pessimistic thoughts, trying to reach their "goals"—Yōzō's desire to die,

[122] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 66.
[123] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 67.
[124] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 69.
[125] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion,* 7.

resulting in constant suicide attempts, and Mizoguchi's desire to burn the Golden Temple, which he wanted to destroy due to his obsession with its "beauty," resulting in the burning of the temple. These goals are not necessarily something they wanted or had planned from the very beginning, but since they had no other purpose, hope was not something either of them could see coming at any time in their lives. Both of them turned to illicit activities that had resulted in their dehumanization. Yōzō was aware that his behavior was unusual, and aware of how the consequences caused by his actions are affecting him and others around him, saying he "had now ceased utterly to be a human being."[126] Mizoguchi shared similar thoughts, knowing the immoral aspect of his actions only leads to destruction and self-destruction: "Let the darkness of my heart, in which that evil is enclosed, equal the darkness of the night, which encloses those countless lights!"[127]

Environmental Factors Contributing To The Protagonists' Antisocial Traits

Risk and prognostic factors contribute vastly to the development of ASPD in individuals, the traits mentioned above present in Yōzō and Mizoguchi are likely caused by environmental factors, which increase the likelihood of developing Antisocial Personality Disorder.

Signs of *abuse during childhood* are present in Yōzō's case, as he was sexually abused by a male servant and a female servant during his childhood, however he did not speak up as he thought it would be pointless: "I believe that the reason why I did not tell anyone about that loathsome crime perpetrated on me by the servants was not because of distrust for human beings [...] but because the human beings around me had rigorously sealed me off from the world of trust or distrust."[128] The fact that he thought that telling any family member about the abuse caused by the servants was unnecessary is also a sign of *emotional neglect*, as it is hinted that the issue will go unnoticed by his family, and a solution is unlikely to be proposed by anyone.

[126] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 167.
[127] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion,* 149.
[128] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 38.

More signs of *emotional neglect* are present in both characters' childhoods, Yōzō had a large family and he was the youngest child, but despite seemingly having his basic needs met, like hunger, he was not emotionally aware of them: "I have had not the remotest idea of the nature of the sensation of "hunger." It sounds peculiar to say it, but I have never been aware that my stomach was empty."[129] Due to the lack of an emotional connection with his family, he was incapable of developing a healthy emotional awareness, and had trouble connecting to everyone around him: "As a child I had absolutely no notion of what others, even members of my own family, might be suffering or what they were thinking."[130] Mizoguchi was forced to live at his uncle's house at an early age, and was unable to form a connection with his parents. His father's profession also contributed to this matter, as he wished that his son would follow in his footsteps and become a Buddhist priest. Following his death, Mizoguchi had no say in the matter, and respecting his father's wishes, he went to Kyoto to become an acolyte at the Golden Temple.

Inconsistent parental discipline is another contributing factor to the characters' psychological evolution. Both protagonists had fathers that were respected by other people, Yōzō's father used to be an influential political figure, and Mizoguchi's father used to be a Buddhist priest. Both fathers valued education and discipline, they both used stricter methods to raise their children, and the protagonists were perhaps triggered by this strictness, eventually trying to rebel against their fathers who were polar opposites of them. Despite attempting to raise the two with discipline, the fathers were unable to connect with their sons and reach them, being unaware of their struggles due to the lack of an emotional bond. The absence of emotional attachment and the physical absence, in Mizoguchi's case, created a path to inconsistency in their parental authority, but also in their relationship with their sons. Yōzō's father disowned him after Yōzō attempted suicide with Tsuneko, the two cutting off every tie with each other. Yōzō, however, found out about his father's death through his older sibling who was still in touch with him, the news of this leaving him feeling empty: "The news of my father's death eviscerated me. He was dead, that familiar, frightening

[129] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 22.
[130] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 27.

presence who had never left my heart for a split second. I felt as though the vessel of my suffering had become empty, as if nothing could interest me now. I had lost even the ability to suffer."[131] Mizoguchi's father died while Mizoguchi was still a child, but Mizoguchi didn't seem to have been affected by it so much at the beginning: "I felt not the slightest sorrow over Father's death."[132] Later on, however, as his mental stability worsened, memories started coming back to him, making him aware of the impact his father had upon him while he was still alive: "As I recalled Uiko and my father and Tsurukawa, an ineffable tenderness arose within me, and I wondered whether the only human beings whom I was capable of loving were not, in fact, dead people."[133] Yōzō and Mizoguchi were constantly reminded of who their fathers used to be, and how disappointed they would've both been if they could have witnessed their "evolution." The thoughts of their fathers awakened fear and insecurity inside them, and their past interactions kept coming back to haunt them.

Besides their connections with their fathers, other relationships and interactions also contributed to them developing traits similar to ASPD symptoms, including their relationship with themselves. Yōzō never had a positive self-image, his self-esteem being low to the extreme. He kept talking down to himself on every occasion: "And now I had become a madman. Even if released, I would be forever branded on the forehead with the word "madman," or perhaps, "reject." Disqualified as a human being."[134] Mizoguchi was a stutterer, so his classmates would always make a mockery out of him knowing his introverted and quiet nature would not let him fight back: "Why don't you answer me something? Are you dumb?"[135] This resulted in him forming a similarly negative opinion about himself, lowering his self-esteem. As a result, he often compares himself to the ones around him: "The only points of difference were that I was a stutterer and that I was a trifle uglier than the others."[136] Having low self-esteem and a pessimistic view on everything including society and

[131] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 168.
[132] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion,* 31.
[133] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 183.
[134] Dazai, *No Longer Human,* 167.
[135] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 7.
[136] Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 35.

oneself may also be a symptom of depression which falls under the mood disorders category.[137] Individuals who suffer from ASPD may develop symptoms of depressive disorders as well, considering they share traits. This does not mean depressed individuals are automatically antisocial or vice versa - symptoms that are caused by other mental disorders are excluded when diagnosing an individual with ASPD, as their causes and effects are different.[138]

Mental Health in Postwar Japan

Through protagonists like Mizoguchi and Yōzō, readers can get a better idea of how the mind of an antisocial individual functions. Both novels, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* by Yukio Mishima and *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai, present a modern Japanese society through the eyes of troubled protagonists who feel disconnected from everything around them, with many factors contributing to them becoming characters whose maladaptive traits lead to a pattern that is recognizable in individuals who develop severe cases of Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD).

In Japan, long-term institutionalization has been used as the primary form of treatment for patients with mental health issues since the 1920s, and although the government encouraged the integration of individuals with mental health issues in communities that help the development of rehabilitation programs since the Mental Health Law of 1988 was enacted, progress in the implementation of such programs has been slow.[139] At the time both novels were written mental health resources were most likely harder to access, but looking at the symptoms of ASPD and the protagonists' behavior throughout the novels, it is safe to assume the traits they are displaying are signs of Antisocial Personality Disorder. Although the traits, behaviors and struggles depicted in the protagonists are accurate portrayals of those visible in an individual diagnosed with ASPD, the authors solely

[137] William Coryell, "Depressive Disorders," *MSD Manual Professional Edition*, January 23, 2026, https://www.msdmanuals.com/professional/psychiatric-disorders/mood-disorders/depressive-disorders.

[138] Zimmerman, "Overview of Personality Disorders."

[139] Kiyoka Koizumi and Paul Harris, "Mental Health Care in Japan," *Psychiatric Services* 43, no. 11 (November 1, 1992): 1100–1103, https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.43.11.1100.

presented the contradictory nature of the brain of individuals unable to adapt to society in that time, without intending to label the phenomenon their protagonists lived through.

By the time Yōzō had been hospitalized in a mental hospital, his condition was too severe to be improved. Mizoguchi's situation was not any better. Both characters represent outcasts who give up hope in humanity and in themselves, ruining not only their lives, but also the lives of those who interact and engage with them. The representation of these two characters, although unintentionally similar to a representation of an individual affected by Antisocial Personality Disorder, is a representation of individuals struggling to adapt to the ever-changing modern Japanese society. The issues these individuals are facing go unnoticed by the same society that builds their mindset towards the future, and this ignorance is a critical point to their pessimism, which later evolves into psychological dysfunction. Society's expectations from them are therefore unmet due to the isolation of these individuals caused by societal pressure, miscommunication, and an unwillingness to understand their struggles. Mental health is still a taboo topic in today's Japanese society, but also in many other parts of the world. This research attempted to highlight the struggles these individuals were facing in the postwar Japanese society, and how postwar Japanese literature portrays these individuals, through a psychoanalytic approach focusing on Antisocial Personality Disorder, supported by the analysis of Dazai's protagonist, Yōzō, and Mishima's protagonist, Mizoguchi.

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WOMEN'S CONDITION IN *THE HOUSEKEEPER AND THE PROFESSOR* AND *NORWEGIAN WOOD*

Alexandra-Chris Stănescu

Abstract: This paper explores the socio-cultural positioning and constraints of women in contemporary Japanese society through a comparative study of Yōko Ogawa's *The Housekeeper and the Professor* and Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*. By placing these literary works within a historical framework—tracing the evolution from the Meiji-era *ryōsai kenbo* ("good wife, wise mother") ideal to the contemporary "M-curve" employment phenomenon—the study considers how female agency is negotiated against rigid social demands.

In *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, the protagonist embodies the contemporary version of the *shufu* (housewife), where domestic labor is a necessity dictated by constrained educational opportunities and the pressures of single motherhood rather than a romanticized cultural aspiration. Ogawa emphasizes the resilience of care and domesticity, showing how women construct meaning within economic and social constraints.

By contrast, *Norwegian Wood* presents a spectrum of female responses to social conditioning through the characters of Naoko, Midori, and Reiko. While Naoko represents the tragic psychological cost of failing to conform to social norms, Midori serves as a symbol of emancipation and nonconformity, and Reiko shows the potential for reclaiming agency following social marginalization.

Ultimately, this analysis argues that both novels portray women who, whether through acceptance or resistance, must constantly navigate traditional pressures and emerging global opportunities to assert their individual identities.

Keywords: female agency, gender roles, Japanese literature, social, women.

Introduction: The Novels

Hakase no aishita sūshiki (The Housekeeper and the Professor), published in 2003[140] by Yōko Ogawa, is narrated by its protagonist, a woman employed as a housekeeper for a mathematics professor who suffers from memory loss following a car accident. Since the accident, the professor's memory has remained fixed in 1975, allowing him to retain new information for only eighty minutes before it disappears.[141] To cope with this limitation, he pins notes with essential information to his suit. Among these notes is one about the housekeeper, who has just entered his life. She is a single mother raising her young son, having been unable to complete her education and therefore deprived of access to better employment opportunities. When her son begins visiting the professor's home after school, while she is at work, a delicate yet meaningful bond develops among the three. The professor affectionately nicknames the boy "Root," remarking that "the flat top of his head reminded him of the square root symbol." Over time, their relationship evolves into a familial one in which all three find comfort. The housekeeper, in particular, is grateful that the professor—despite his advanced age—assumes a paternal role for Root.[142] The novel was later adapted into a film by director Takashi Koizumi in 2006.

Noruwei no Mori (Norwegian Wood), written by Haruki Murakami in 1987,[143] follows the story of Watanabe Tōru, a university student who struggles with the suicide of his best friend, Kizuki. Kizuki's girlfriend, Naoko, is equally devastated, and his death awakens in both of them emotions that had long remained unacknowledged. After some time, Naoko withdraws to a secluded sanatorium for individuals with psychological struggles seeking distance from society. In contrast, Tōru encounters a fellow student, Kobayashi Midori, an energetic and

[140] Ogawa, Yōko, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, trans. Stephen Snyder (Picador, 2009).
[141] Ogawa, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, 14.
[142] Grace En-Yi Ting, "Ogawa Yōko and the Horrific Femininities of Daily Life," *Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese* 54, no. 2 (2020): 551–52, https://doi.org/10.5195/jll.2020.97.
[143] Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, trans. Jay Rubin (Vintage International, 2012).

unconventional young woman whose character starkly opposes Naoko's fragile and restrained disposition. At the sanatorium, Naoko befriends Reiko, an older woman who, after years of residence, teaches piano to patients. Murakami's novel was also adapted for the screen in 2010 by Vietnamese director Tran Anh Hung.

Themes

Norwegian Wood engages primarily with the themes of love and death, its characters orbiting around the omnipresence of mortality. All are profoundly marked by trauma and loss, yet Naoko is particularly unable to withstand the psychological weight of societal pressures. By contrast, Midori—although herself scarred by her mother's death and her father's subsequent illness and passing—manages to navigate these difficulties with greater resilience. She transforms her trauma into a source of strength. Reflecting on a moment of hardship, she recalls: "For three months, I had to live with only one bra. [...] I would wash it at night, desperately trying to dry it, and then wear it the next day."[144] This confession illustrates Midori's perseverance: regardless of the challenges posed by family or society, she never abandoned her determination to pursue her goals. While each character processes trauma in distinct ways and at different stages of life, what remains essential is that they succeed in constructing personal values and principles that sustain their development throughout the narrative.

In contrast, *The Housekeeper and the Professor* is structured around the themes of memory and love. Unlike Murakami's exploration of romantic passion intertwined with loss, Ogawa portrays a more intimate, domestic form of love, almost familial in nature. The professor's unexpected presence profoundly reshapes the lives of the housekeeper and her son. Though constrained by difficult social and economic circumstances, the housekeeper discovers a form of fulfillment in the relationships she builds with the professor and her child. Among the two central themes, this analysis will focus particularly on love, in order to set it in contrast with the representation of love in *Norwegian Wood*.

[144] Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, 84.

The Construction of the Female Characters

The housekeeper in *The Housekeeper and the Professor* is portrayed as a modest woman whose life circumstances have curtailed her personal development. She became pregnant at a young age by an irresponsible student who refused to acknowledge his role, leaving her to face motherhood alone.[145] Her mother, too, had endured a similar fate after being abandoned by the father of her child, and she often reproached her daughter for repeating this trajectory. Such emotional burdens left deep scars.

At first, the housekeeper appears resourceful and pragmatic, a woman who "knows her way around the world." Yet as the narrative unfolds, the reader gradually perceives the hardships she endured in order to acquire this resilience. She recalls: "When I was only two years old and still not ready for the potty, I would wash my own underwear if I had an accident; and before I turned seven, in elementary school, I was already using knives in the kitchen, chopping ingredients to make fried rice."[146] This testimony reveals how she prematurely assumed domestic responsibilities, effectively becoming a "housewife" long before adulthood. As a result, her identity formation and personal aspirations were stunted, confined within the boundaries of domesticity.

By contrast, *Norwegian Wood* presents two sharply opposed female figures: Naoko and Midori. Naoko embodies psychological and emotional fragility, continually battling trauma and loss. She experiences life as an overwhelming burden shaped by both social expectations and her inner struggles. Her relationship with the protagonist, Tōru, is characterized by intimacy but also by her incapacity to heal. The narrative emphasizes her enduring attachment to Kizuki and the absence of romantic love for Tōru, leaving him confined to the pursuit of a love she cannot reciprocate.[147]

Midori, on the other hand, represents a radically different model: she is independent, spirited, and modern, openly embracing life with courage and

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[145] Ogawa, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, 44.
[146] Ogawa, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, 43.
[147] Giselle Carter, "Being the Other Woman: Watanabe's Unrequited Love for Naoko in Norwegian Wood," *Mary Wollstonecraft Writing Award* (Augustana College, 2017), 5, https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=wollstonecraftaward.

candor. Her presence introduces vitality and contrast into the novel. Reiko, an older woman Naoko befriends in the sanatorium, adds another layer to Murakami's exploration of female identity. Her complex and tragic past exemplifies how social prejudice and rigid norms can devastate lives and futures. Together, Naoko, Midori, and Reiko form a spectrum of female experience, ranging from fragility and confinement to independence and resilience.

THE CONDITIONING OF THE FEMALE CHARACTERS

From a young age, the housekeeper was compelled to manage life independently. Raised in a single-parent household, with a mother often absent due to work, she quickly learned to take responsibility for herself and the home. Consequently, the occupation of "housekeeper" appeared to her as both a natural and inevitable choice, the only profession accessible given her limited education.[148] Forced to abandon her studies due to pregnancy, and leaving home while still expecting her child, she never completed even her secondary education. With no qualifications beyond domestic skills, she turned to Akebono Housekeeping Agency for employment shortly after giving birth. Thus, her professional trajectory was dictated less by choice than by circumstance, reinforcing the traditionally assigned role of women as domestic caretakers.

Here, Ogawa diverges from the prevailing ideals of modern Japanese society, where the archetype of the "perfect family" positioned men as breadwinners and women as homemakers.[149] Japanese women were often socialized to aspire to the status of housewives; yet, in the housekeeper's case, this role was not the product of cultural aspiration but of necessity. Her lack of education and the responsibilities of single motherhood forced her into a domestic occupation, underscoring the structural limitations imposed upon her life.

In Murakami's novel, three women—Naoko, Midori, and Reiko—are each shaped, though in different ways, by the demands of society. Naoko

[148] Ogawa, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, 45.

[149] Ella Cuskelly, "Yōko Ogawa's Subversion of the 'Normal Life' in The Housekeeper and the Professor," *The Albatross* 13 (2023): 39.

suffers from depression and anxiety, exacerbated by her inability to meet societal expectations. Seeking refuge, she isolates herself in a sanatorium, which symbolizes the marginalization of those unable to conform. Her eventual suicide constitutes the tragic culmination of her struggle, making her a poignant emblem of the human cost of Japan's rigid social norms.

Midori, by contrast, embodies resistance to these constraints. She openly rejects conventional expectations of how a woman should behave, instead forging an authentic life path of her own. Yet even in her independence, she remains vulnerable: her strained family relationships and desire for affection reveal that no one is entirely free from societal influence. Still, her determination to claim autonomy and happiness positions her as a figure of female emancipation.

Reiko's story illustrates another dimension of social conditioning. Once a respected teacher, she experienced a mental breakdown after being falsely accused of inappropriate behavior toward a student. The rumors, amplified by her past struggles with depression, led to her ostracization. Social rejection forced her into the sanatorium, where she eventually found a degree of peace but also embodied the collective fate of those marginalized by prejudice.[150] By offering emotional support to others, particularly Naoko, she assumed the role of a moral anchor within the institution. Her eventual decision to leave the sanatorium and re-enter society represents an act of courage and a tentative reclamation of agency.

Ultimately, Midori and Reiko share common ground with the housekeeper: all are portrayed as strong, independent women who refuse to allow societal norms to dictate the entirety of their lives. Naoko, in contrast, resembles the housekeeper in her submission to social pressures; however, whereas Naoko is crushed both emotionally and socially, the housekeeper's conditioning is limited primarily to the professional sphere, allowing her greater resilience and strength in comparison.

Shufu

The concept of the "housewife," which later evolved into that of the "housekeeper," derives from the Japanese notion of *shufu*, literally "house mistress." This historical construct emerged during the Industrial

[150] Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, 191-194.

Revolution at the end of the nineteenth century and became widespread following the 1917 publication of *Shufu no Tomo* (The Housewife's Companion), the first women's magazine in Japan. The magazine sought to assist women with household management (*uchi*), budgeting, and even methods of contraception.

The Japanese gender ideal of the time was encapsulated in the phrase *otoko wa soto, onna wa uchi* ("men outside, women inside"), which clearly articulated a restrictive domestic ideology. According to this model, a woman's individuality and freedom were subordinated to her role of caring for the home and children. Although the postwar period formally granted women the right to work, many continued to be socialized into aspiring to the ideal of the housewife, viewing it as the ultimate fulfillment of female identity.

Another related concept is *shokuba no hana* ("office lady," literally "flower of the workplace"). This designation referred to young women who entered the workforce only temporarily—typically until marriage—after which they were expected to resign and assume domestic responsibilities. These women often envisioned their lives as a brief interlude of employment before transitioning to the "comfort" of married life, complete with a husband, a home, and children.[151]

In *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, the protagonist is forced into precisely this domestic existence, though not as an aspirational ideal but as an unavoidable reality shaped by circumstance. Unlike the romanticized dream of becoming a *shufu*, her condition reflects the harsher social and economic constraints that compel women into domestic labor when other opportunities are denied to them.

The History of Women's Condition in Modern and Contemporary Japan

The condition of women in Japan has long been shaped by a tension between modernity and tradition, emancipation and social restriction. Over the past two centuries, Japanese society has undergone profound

[151] Kaori Shoji, "The Thorny Topic of 'Office Flowers'," *The Japan Times*, December 16, 2002, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2002/12/16/language/the-thorny-topic-of-office-flowers/.

transformations—ranging from Meiji modernization and Shōwa militarism to postwar democratization and contemporary globalization. Women experienced these historical shifts in deeply ambivalent ways, as their roles were continually redefined by state ideology, social norms, and feminist contestation. This chapter outlines the historical trajectory of women's condition in modern Japan, situating the literary analysis of Ogawa and Murakami within a broader socio-historical framework.

Meiji: Women's Education and the Ideal of the "Modern Woman"

With the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan embarked on an ambitious project of modernization and Westernization. Women were incorporated into this national project primarily as symbols of domestic order and moral stability.

The dominant ideology was *ryōsai kenbo* ("good wife, wise mother"), which emerged in the late nineteenth century and was propagated through both the education system and political discourse.[152] According to this ideal, women were entrusted with ensuring the moral integrity of the household by caring for their husbands and raising their children, thereby contributing indirectly to the strength of the nation.

The 1899 *Kōtō Jogakkō Rei* (Girls' High School Law) extended access to secondary education for girls, but the curriculum emphasized domestic skills, morality, and hygiene rather than academic or professional advancement.[153] As a result, modernization produced a form of "double marginalization": women were granted formal access to education, yet the content of that education reinforced their confinement to domestic roles.

Taishō: The Emergence of Japanese Feminism

The Taishō period, associated with the so-called "Taishō democracy," opened space for liberal and democratic ideas. Within this atmosphere

[152] Shizuko Koyama, "Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' in Modern Japan," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 11 (1991): 31–52.

[153] Kathleen S. Uno, "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (University of California Press, 1993), 17–40.

emerged Japan's first feminist movement, epitomized by the *Seitō* (Bluestocking) literary journal (1911–1916), founded by Hiratsuka Raichō and a group of women intellectuals. *Seitō* explored themes of female individuality, sexuality, and freedom of choice.[154] Its manifesto famously declared: "In the beginning, woman was the sun. Now she is the moon, reflecting the light of others." This statement powerfully expressed the feminist aspiration to reclaim autonomy and selfhood.[155]

Despite its cultural significance, the movement was marginalized and criticized by the conservative press. Women still lacked political rights, and their participation in public gatherings was restricted under the Public Peace Police Law of 1900.[156] Nevertheless, the Taishō period marked the first substantial articulation of feminist thought in Japan, laying the foundation for future activism.

Early Shōwa: Militarism and Regression

The rise of militarism in the 1930s dramatically altered the discourse on gender. Women were increasingly defined through the lens of nationalism and imperial expansion.

Motherhood was transformed into a patriotic duty, encapsulated by the slogan *umeyo fuyaseyo* ("bear children and increase the population"). In 1941, the government established *Dai Nippon Fujinkai* (the Greater Japan Women's Association), a national body that mobilized women for the war effort—ranging from industrial labor to the patriotic education of children.[157]

Any expression of feminist dissent or alternative gender roles was suppressed. Women were effectively reconstituted as "mothers of the nation," expected to sacrifice individuality and freedom in service of the state.

[154] Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford University Press, 1983), 89–110.

[155] Raichō Hiratsuka, "In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun," Seitō 1 (1911), quoted in Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford University Press, 1983), 98.

[156] Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45–50.

[157] Barbara Molony, "From 'Mothers of Humanity' to 'Assisting the Emperor': Gendered Belonging in the Greater Japan Women's Association," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 42, no. 1 (2016): 1–26.

Postwar Japan: Democratization and Contradictions

Following Japan's defeat in 1945, the American Occupation introduced a new constitution (1947) that legally enshrined gender equality, granting women the right to vote, access to education, and formal entry into the labor force. Yet these legal reforms were undermined by persistent social expectations.[158]

The *ryōsai kenbo* ideal reappeared in transformed guise, now embodied in the postwar nuclear family: the salaryman husband and the housewife wife. During the 1950s and 1960s, the figure of the *Office Lady* (OL) became emblematic of this paradox. Young women would work in clerical or administrative roles only until marriage,[159] at which point they were expected to withdraw from the workforce.

Thus, despite constitutional equality, structural discrimination and entrenched gender norms continued to limit women's opportunities, creating the context for later feminist critique.

Japanese Feminism in the 1970s–1990s

The 1970s witnessed the rise of Japan's second-wave feminist movement, known as *ūman ribu* (Women's Lib). This radical current rejected the *ryōsai kenbo* ideology and challenged the patriarchal family system. Feminists organized demonstrations for reproductive rights, workplace equality, and the redefinition of female sexuality.[160]

A milestone was the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985, which formally prohibited gender discrimination in hiring and promotion.[161] However, many companies circumvented the law by establishing "dual-track" career systems, channeling women into clerical posts while reserving managerial trajectories for men.[162]

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[158] Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 72–78.

[159] Mary C. Brinton, *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan* (University of California Press, 1993), 55–70.

[160] Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 123–140.

[161] Mari Osawa, "The Hidden Side of the Japanese Economy: The Institutional Mechanism of Unequal Employment," *Annals of the Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo* 34 (1993): 119–143.

[162] Osawa, "The Hidden Side of the Japanese Economy: The Institutional Mechanism of Unequal Employment," 130.

CONTEMPORARY JAPAN: DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS AND THE CAREER-FAMILY TENSION

In the twenty-first century, Japan has confronted an acute demographic crisis, marked by declining birth rates and an aging population. In response, women's participation in the labor force has become a central focus of public policy.

The *Womenomics* initiative, championed under Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, sought to boost economic growth by integrating more women into the workforce.[163] Policies expanded childcare facilities and offered greater support for working mothers.

Nevertheless, the so-called "M-curve" phenomenon persists: women's employment rate drops sharply after marriage or childbirth and only recovers later, typically in lower-status positions.[164] Women continue to face intense social pressures to choose between professional careers and family life.

New social patterns have also emerged, such as women opting to remain single ("parasite singles"), rejecting motherhood, or prioritizing career advancement. At the same time, contemporary feminist movements—often using digital platforms—have amplified campaigns such as #MeToo, calling attention to harassment, inequality, and structural discrimination.[165]

The history of women in modern Japan illustrates a continual oscillation between emancipation and constraint. In the Meiji era, *ryōsai kenbo* defined modernization through domesticity; the Taishō period witnessed the birth of feminism; the militarist Shōwa years repressed female agency; the postwar constitution proclaimed equality yet reinforced the housewife ideal; second-wave feminism in the 1970s–1990s contested these structures; and contemporary Japan faces new dilemmas surrounding the balance between career and family.

Today, Japanese women navigate a complex landscape in which global opportunities coexist with traditional pressures. Their history demonstrates

[163] Ayako Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates: A Century of Contention on Sex, Love, and Labor* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 155–190.
[164] Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Duke University Press, 2019), 89–95.
[165] Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates*, 180–190.

that emancipation is not a linear progression but an ongoing negotiation between state policies, social norms, and individual agency.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to examine the condition of women in *The Housekeeper and the Professor* and *Norwegian Wood* because in both novels women are depicted as constrained by Japanese society, which denies them autonomy and equality. Through the figure of the housekeeper, Ogawa explores themes of care, devotion, and the social expectation that women should assume roles of service within the household. These roles reflect cultural norms that prioritize the needs of others over a woman's own aspirations. Yet, through her relationship with both the professor and her son, the housekeeper discovers a measure of fulfillment. Despite the social limitations that confine her, she succeeds in forging meaningful and profound human connections. Ogawa's novel thus highlights themes of personal sacrifice, selflessness, and the ways in which women construct meaning within roles imposed by socio-economic constraints.

Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, by contrast, presents a more complex exploration of women's condition. The three central female figures—Naoko, Midori, and Reiko—represent different responses to the constraints of society. Naoko emerges as a tragic victim of both external pressures and her own inner struggles, unable to reconcile her vulnerabilities with societal demands. Midori, on the other hand, embodies freedom and nonconformity, rejecting social norms and striving to create an authentic life, thereby becoming a symbol of female emancipation. Reiko, though marked by prejudice and social rejection, manages to find a path toward partial healing and reintegration into society, embodying resilience and hope.

These two novels highlight the diverse trajectories of women negotiating the weight of cultural expectations. Whether through acceptance, resistance, or eventual reconciliation, each character reflects the broader struggle of Japanese women to assert their identity and agency within a society that has historically sought to restrict them.

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BODY ODDITIES: ALIENATION AND REBELLION IN THE NOVELS *HANCHIBAKKU* BY ICHIKAWA SAŌ AND *CHIKYU SEIJIN* BY MURATA SAYAKA

MICHELLE STAN

Abstract: This paper aims to explore the theme of alienation reflected by the protagonists of the novels *Chikyu seijin*[166] (Earthlings, 2018) by Murata Sayaka and *Hanchibakku*[167] (Hunchback, 2023) by Ichikawa Saō. Using a comparative approach of the two novels, the paper focuses on the way that nonconformity and social rejection affect the characters of the two novels. In the context of contemporary Japan, still strongly influenced by traditionalism and a conservative mind, the main characters of the novels embody the condition of an outsider, stemming from their so-called abnormality of their bodies and identities. Both novels bring critiques of the concept of the body as a site of societal control, using themes such as bodily difference, trauma, and isolation to serve as acts of resistance against the normative politics of the body, gender, and reproduction.

As its theoretical framework, this paper grounds its analysis on queer theory and feminist studies. Both protagonists challenge the performative aspect of gender and sexuality, refusing to conform to societal norms and rethinking what it means to be female, challenging the concept of reproduction and other types of stereotyped thinking. By examining *Hunchback* and *Earthlings* through the perspective of queer theory and disability studies, this paper highlights how both novels reimagine alienation as a form of resistance. Both novels confront the social norms that deem certain bodies, such as the disabled or asexual, as unacceptable or hideous. Through their protagonists'

[166] Murata Sayaka, *Earthlings*, trans. Ginny Tapley Takemori (Grove Press, 2020).
[167] Ichikawa Saō, *Hunchback,* trans. Polly Barton (Hogarth, 2025).

refusal to conform to generally accepted ideals of embodiment and desire, the texts can be considered critical perspectives on the violent enforcement of normativity and propose radically different ways of inhabiting the body.

Keywords: alienation, bodily autonomy, compulsory conformity, reproductive norms.

Introduction

The concept of nonconformity becomes a powerful weapon in the battle against long-standing, deeply ingrained customs and beliefs in the East Asian cultural sphere. First records of the concept show it being used as early as the seventeenth century, in the context of clergy refusing to follow certain religious practices pertaining to the Church of England. Thus, the groundwork was laid for a broader conceptualization of the term, identifying those who were resistant to established norms, while over time the meaning of the term extended beyond religious meaning. In queer theory, this concept is centered on the rejection of the normative framework that surrounds gender, sexuality, and identity. Although attempting to trace the origin of the term in the context of queer theory can be difficult, it can be attributed to various scholars and activists who built their theories around the idea of resistance to norms, such as Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble.*[168] The evolution of queerness has been shaped by the early 1990s' frequent acts of discriminatory violence against LGBT people, leading to the *Queers Read This*[169] anonymously published essay, which directly links queerness with nonconformity. In East Asian societies, traditional norms and societal pressures stemming from traditional mentalities govern the society. In the literary space, nonconformity takes on various forms, encouraging readers to challenge accepted wisdom and explore alternative accounts of identity and emancipation. In order to understand their role in society, characters who defy social constraints and conventions must overcome many obstacles—both physical and psychological—which

[168] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

[169] *Queers Read This* (anonymous pamphlet distributed by Queer Nation, New York Pride March, June 1990).

are explored in this paper, shedding light on the transformative power of nonconformity. Precisely, the characters trying to break free from the confines of traditional society are female leads who challenge the assigned role of a woman in the Japanese contemporary society.

Abdul Saleem defines the concept of alienation as "a natural consequence of the existential predicament,"[170] a defining feature of the modern human experience. This condition emerges when the individual experiences a rupture between their own identity and the surrounding world, which can manifest as isolation and loss of said identity. In modern literature, alienation reflects a deeper socio-cultural disconnection for many characters. They live in a reality that no longer mirrors their values, desires, or embodied experience in the norms of society. This concept particularly resonates with Judith Butler's theory of normative intelligibility, which maintains that a "person" must conform to established norms of gender, sexuality, and embodiment in order to be recognized as such. When one's desires, body, or ways of living fall outside the matrix defined by Butler as "the cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible,"[171] they become unintelligible – outsiders, socially alienated. In both novels, the protagonists' alienation stems from their inability to conform to the aforementioned social norms. In *Hunchback*, Shaka's physical disability and refusal to accept her own condition by pursuing normalcy in a nonconformist way place her at odds with generally accepted norms. Likewise, in *Earthlings,* Natsuki's rejection of her human identity pushes her beyond the limit of what is socially deemed as normal, leading to a complete loss of her human nature.

When the Body Speaks: Disability and Perception

Early 20th-century Japanese authors, such as Masaoka Shiki, Nakae Chomin, and Natsume Soseki, depicted illness and suffering as material, lived realities, rather than metaphors. They cultivated a form of what

[170] Abdul Saleem and Hussam Bani-ata, "Theme of Alienation in Modern Literature," in *The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2013: Official Conference Proceedings* (IAFOR, 2013), 282.

[171] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23.

scholars have called "humoral" writing by rejecting sentimentality and aestheticized portrayals of pain, this style giving readers the possibility to understand the world in a new way, through the lived experience of a sick or dying body. Their works were often shaped in structure by the authors' own physical constraints and illnesses, treating the ailing body as grounds for exploring philosophical questions – the meaning of life, mortality, identity, freedom – as well as social issues. Ichikawa upholds this discourse through a distinctly authentic perspective, in which disability is presented not as a limitation, but as a place where new realizations emerge, accepted norms and values are questioned, and put under scrutiny, as well as a symbolic form of pushing back against authority. The protagonist of *Hunchback*, Shaka, narrates from within the boundaries of a confined, medically dependent body, similarly to Masaoka Shiki. However, in Shaka's case, the character remains ambitious in her thinking, rather than feeling completely limited by her medical condition, and refuses to treat established conventions with unquestioning respect. She challenges the norms, sometimes playfully, often critically, and even mockingly:

> Japan, on the other hand, works on the understanding that disabled people don't exist within society, so there are no such proactive considerations made. Able-bodied Japanese people have likely never even imagined a hunchbacked monster struggling to read a physical book. Here was I, feeling my spine being crushed a little more with every book that I read, while all those e-book-hating, able-bodied people who went on and on about how they loved the smell of physical books, or the feel of the turning pages beneath their fingers, persisted in their state of happy oblivion.[172]

The manner in which Ichikawa tells the story argues strongly that someone who relies on others physically does not lack autonomy or authority over their own life. Instead, said authority may be expressed differently, through other ways of communication. The narrative voice of *Hunchback* is fundamentally shaped by the dependence of the main character, Shaka, on her caregivers, as a consequence of her physical disability. The reader experiences her world through the perspective of the character's confined existence in a single building, where she eats, goes to school, and sleeps. From this point of view, the author exposes the realities

[172] Ichikawa, *Hunchback*, 37.

of institutional neglect, gendered desexualization, and the ongoing debate over the meaning of independence, who is capable of it, and how autonomy is socially recognized and managed for disabled individuals.

Emmanuel Lozerand proposes in his 2015 work "Body, Illness, and Writing by Three Japanese Authors at the Start of the 20th Century: Nakae Chômin, Masaoka Shiki, and Natsume Sôseki"[173] that suffering is an extension of illness. Masaoka Shiki describes it carefully, bringing to light its different forms and manifestations. Suffering is thus split into physical, emotional, and moral or ethical struggle. In his belief, suffering should not be covered up with false comfort; instead, it can be eased momentarily with several distractions and small comforts. Shaka's disability, as presented by Ichikawa, is not only a literary device used to represent abstract ideas such as suffering and mortality, but it is also real and important in its own right. The body itself is political because, as a tangible entity, it engages with society, norms, and power structures. It is a clear description of how society marginalizes the character because of her illness, and showcases how the disabled individual is not passive or silent, but actively participates in the world and resists oppression. The suffering of Shaka is clearly visible when her central life purpose, or what she desperately clings to in order to keep going, is threatened by her declining health and dismissed by society. Her comforts are only momentary because she finds herself in a progressive decline:

> Being able to see; being able to hold a book; being able to turn its page; being able to maintain a reading posture; being able to go to a bookshop to buy a book - I loathed the exclusionary machismo of book culture that demanded that its participants meet these five criteria of able-bodiedness. I loathed, too, the ignorant arrogance of all those self-professed book-lovers so oblivious to their privilege.[174]

The way in which she is able to reclaim that comfort and purpose is by writing – her creative, erotic, and intellectual pursuits prevent her from collapsing into a complete and unstoppable degradation.

[173] Emmanuel Lozerand, "Corps, maladie, écriture chez trois auteurs japonais du début du xxe siècle: Nakae Chômin, Masaoka Shiki, Natsume Sôseki," *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident*, 39 (2015): 21–46.

[174] Ichikawa, *Hunchback*, 29.

As mentioned above, Japanese literature uses the body as a tool for mirroring inner pain, and that reflects the effects of societal pressures. Murata contributes to this discourse by making the physical and emotional suffering of the body a central element in her novel. The author portrays suffering in a less conventional sense, instead bringing into focus her character's psychological wounds, feelings of alienation, and posthuman transformation. Similarly to the modernist authors discussed by Lozerand, but also other Japanese authors such as Yukio Mishima with *Kinkaku-ji*[175] (Temple of the Golden Pavilion, 1956) or YŌko Ogawa with *Hakase no Aishita Sūshiki*[176] (The Housekeeper and the Professor, 2003), Murata portrays the body as a real, wounded place that endures violence. The body of the main character, Natsuki, is repeatedly abused, and she is pushed mentally and emotionally to a point beyond what we consider "human" in both disturbing and fantastical ways. Her refusal to follow the path expected of women in Japan – marrying at an age considered "proper" and becoming a mother – places her outside of the framework of the Factory metaphor: the compulsory participation of the people in abiding by rules that dictate how individuals should live. Refusing to follow the same script as everyone else places the character outside of the rigid social system that thrives in Japan.

Feasting for Survival: Healing from Trauma

In *Earthlings* by Murata Sayaka, the act of cannibalism serves as both a form of healing from trauma – although it ends up inducing other forms of trauma – and a form of defiance against a rigidly conformist, capitalist society that values only a standardized ideal and overlooks individuals who deviate from it or suffer trauma as a result of societal pressures centered on reproduction. Although the novel discusses collective trauma in a broader sense as it addresses issues rooted in the traditional Japanese mentality, this part of the research will focus on both the collective trauma of the protagonist and her closest people and the personal trauma suffered by the main character, Natsuki. Moving forward, the traumatic events suffered by

[175] Yukio Mishima, *Kinkaku-ji* (Shinchosha, 1956).
[176] Yōko Ogawa, *Hakase no Aishita Sūshiki* (Shinchosha, 2003).

other characters of the novel will be briefly mentioned, as they all ultimately lead to a most unusual way of dealing with it: cannibalism. In this instance, cannibalism is more of a vehicle for recovery and rebirth, while at the same time defying societal norms and rejecting what is generally accepted as normality.

In order to better understand this analysis, a summary of *Earthlings* is necessary to better set the scene: *Earthlings* follows Natsuki as she experiences life from the age of 11 to adulthood. During her childhood, Natsuki and her cousin, Yuu, began a sort of romantic relationship and bonded over their belief that they are both aliens at their grandparents' house in Akishina. Due to increasingly escalating sexual assault instances perpetrated by her teacher, Natsuki convinces Yuu to have sex with her before she loses ownership of her body completely, to her aggressor. They are caught by the entire family as they have intercourse beside their grandfather's still-fresh grave, and they are separated for roughly 15 years, though it was initially meant to be a permanent separation. Later, in an out-of-body experience tinged with what could be deemed as hallucinations used as a tool for coping, Natsuki murders her aggressor, but she does not remember the event at all. What she remembers is killing "the wicked witch" that lived in the teacher's house, encouraged by her speaking toy Piyyut, who granted her "magical powers." Her childhood experiences follow her through adulthood, as she remains unable to taste food or hear anything out of one ear following the sexual abuse she suffered. Fifteen years later, Natsuki marries an asexual man she met online in order to avoid scrutiny from society, but especially from her overbearing family. Their marriage is essentially an agreement and they decide not to have sex or kids. After hearing about her childhood memories at Akishina, her depressed husband Tomoya wants to visit to escape the social pressures that fuel his depressive episodes, and Natsuki agrees as she is scared he will take his own life. In order to stay there, Natsuki and Tomoya must share the house with Yuu, her ex-boyfriend and cousin. In Akishina, Natsuki, and Tomoya compel Yuu to reject "The Factory" and live as an alien. They proclaim themselves as aliens, ultimately resorting to cannibalism in an act of self-defense. Following her consumption of meat, Natsuki regains her ability to taste and hear, the

effects of her trauma coming full circle as she restores "moral" balance based on the "eye for an eye" principle.[177]

A great part of Murata Sayaka's literary works touch on subjects such as conformity, nonconformity, people who do not fit in, outcasts, sexuality, and reproduction. These thematic concerns are all set against the broader context of daily life in contemporary Japan or in dystopian versions of Japan. Particularly noteworthy is her inclusion of asexual and celibate characters, who frequently feature prominently in her writing. The inclusion of asexual characters in her novel represents one of the ways her characters challenge gender roles and social norms. The entire work itself is an obvious critique aimed at the traditional Japanese mentality. Murata's characters fundamentally refuse to adhere to Japanese societal "norms". Murata's texts boldly present a radical separatism by envisioning an idealized queer utopia, one that is liberated from the restrictive notions of heteronormative sexuality prevalent in Japanese society.[178] In a similar fashion to Murata's *Earthlings*, *Hunchback* gives the world a protagonist who uses writing and escapism as a way to navigate the feelings of isolation and dysphoria—specifically, the journey of finding the purpose to exist as a disabled person in a reproduction-focused, capitalist society. Despite her limitations, Shaka still acts on her desires, erotic writing becoming the medium where her imagination, wit, and sexuality can flourish. By producing erotic texts, she deliberately confronts the prejudice that disabled people cannot be sexual beings: "Disabled people were not sexual beings – I had assented to the definition that society had created."[179] The moment she propositions her caregiver, Tanaka, to engage in sexual intercourse, she defies the framework that deemed her passive or lacking desire, instead becoming someone who can be intimate on her own terms. By channeling her sexuality, she challenges and reverses the power dynamic usually associated with hospice care.

[177] Nicholas Colecio, *Compulsory Conformity in Modern Japanese Culture: An Exploration of Asexuality in the Works of Murata Sayaka, Kawakami Mieko, and Kamatani Yuki* (master's thesis, University of Central Florida, 2022), 32–33.

[178] Kazue Harada, "Chapter Four: Cannibalistic Space and Reproduction in Japanese Speculative Fiction," in *Into the Fantastical Spaces of Contemporary Japanese Literature*, ed. Mina Qiao (Lexington Books, 2022), 80.

[179] Ichikawa, *Hunchback*, 54.

The Japanese Traditional Mentality: Causes and Effects

From the tone of the narration to the writing style of the author, both *Hunchback* by Ichikawa Saō and *Earthlings* by Murata Sayaka provide stunning storylines that dive deep into the themes of trauma and social nonconformity in the East Asian cultural space. Both novels offer profound reflections on the challenges of breaking free from societal constraints. When discussing the East Asian cultural space, in this context, it is relevant to touch on Kim Taeyon's concept of the subjectless body of women from a Neo-Confucian perspective. This Neo-Confucian ideal of selflessness had radically different meanings for men and women: men were expected to transcend the body, while women were confined within it, as they were valued mostly for their reproductive ability and the labor they provided. As Kim explains, women were treated as what is called "subjectless bodies": useful for their designated roles, something to be controlled, and yet socially invisible.[180] Particularly in Korean society, women's role in producing heirs was reinforced through rituals, showcasing how their physical bodies were valued, but not to be heard. It can be said that the same concept extends to contemporary Japanese contexts. Both of the novels discussed reveal the ongoing influence of this belief in the regulation and erasure of women's bodily autonomy.

When it comes to discussing the sociocultural background that influenced Murata and Ichikawa's works, it is impossible to avoid the concepts of conformity, nonconformity, and alienation in Japan. In his widely cited study of conformity and anticonformity in Japan, Robert Frager challenges the belief that Japanese citizens "tend to devote themselves completely to one group, and relate their behavior and sense of identity to that group." Frager highlights that critics often presume individuality is less common in Japan compared to some Western or other Asian countries. He illustrates this by describing how, in "the traditional form of Japanese group decision making … all decisions were made 'unanimously.' Individual members would never vote on an issue but would acquiesce to the 'will of the group'

[180] Taeyon Kim, "Neo-Confucian Body Techniques: Women's Bodies in Korean Consumer Society," *Body & Society* 9, no. 2–3 (2003): 101, citing Deuchler, 1992.

even if they privately disagreed.[181] In such instances, individual will is seen as suppressed. However, his study reveals that "Japanese conformity may be a response to strong social pressures," and that "the more old-fashioned subjects are the most conformist."[182] His findings indicate that while older generations tend to embrace collectivism, younger generations show a preference for social independence. Conformist culture persists in Japan largely because the older generations, who occupy influential positions, shape and enforce societal norms. This conformist culture is particularly suffocating for some women in Japan. Although women are joining the workforce in unprecedented numbers, they are still expected to bear children, given society's reliance on them for this role. As a result, they face growing pressure to manage both a career and a family. Ultimately, Japanese society positions women in a way that makes it impossible to meet all expectations. As Ayako Kano claims in *Japanese Feminist Debates: A Century of Contention on Sex, Love, and Labor* (2018), "the basis of social policy in modern Japan is the assumption that all women are potential wives and mothers (and that all men are potential breadwinners and heads of household)."[183] However, record numbers of women join the workforce and are expected to lead a career as well as take care of raising children. It is thus implied that having children is a main goal for both men and women.[184] This unequal treatment fosters compulsory conformity, wherein individuals feel compelled to adhere to societal expectations. Failure to conform may result in being ostracized and alienated.

Conclusion

The two novels portray distinct methods of resisting compulsory normativity. Ichikawa's protagonist, Shaka, showcases resistance as something coming from within, asserting her position in society as a visible, sexual being, while Murata's protagonist, Natsuki, does the opposite in a

[181] Robert Frager, "Conformity and Anticonformity in Japan," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 15, no. 3 (1970): 203–210.
[182] Frager, "Conformity and Anticonformity in Japan," 208.
[183] Ayako Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates: A Century of Contention on Sex, Love, and Labor* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 8.
[184] Colecio, "Compulsory Conformity," 11-16.

way that nearly places her in a fantastical realm. By contrast, her form of resistance consists of breaking away entirely from the constraints of society, thus showcasing how literature can destabilize and reimagine the boundaries of what it means to be a normal human, or simply human. In short, the novels *Hunchback* and *Earthlings* suggest that the concept of alienation does not need to be limited to its connection with suffering, but it can be viewed as a catalyst for resilience. While alienation wounds and isolates, it also forces people to find new ways to survive. Even if the reader may perceive Natsuki or Shaka's choices as grotesque or degrading, their rebellion is a testament to resilience that draws the reader into unexpected sympathy.

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Part II:
Non-Textual Excursions

DIFFERING ASPECTS, SAME PURPOSE: DIVINE TRIAD IN JAPANESE AND EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY

Konstantin Kostić

Abstract: Egyptian and Japanese mythology differ greatly, despite the fact that they are both polytheistic. While Egypt features a large number of different divine cults depending on the ruling dynasty and its capital, Japan shows a certain consistency in its veneration of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. Throughout history, she has been the supreme deity, even though the capital has changed. In Egypt, the sun god Ra was not always the supreme deity due to frequent changes of dynasties, which in turn had caused the creation of new divine connections in order to demonstrate the divine right of the pharaoh and his family. These circumstances led to the ascension of certain local gods of the new capital to a much higher position than that which they had held previously. Creation of divine triads became a common occurrence in Ancient Egypt, which is not noticeable in Japanese mythology. However, it is important to note that the Sun Goddess Amaterasu herself was part of a divine triad, and that it was not the only divine triad in Japanese mythology. Her descendants have successfully waged war against the descendants of other members of the divine triad thus making her the supreme deity. What these two mythologies have in common is the connection of the royal, imperial lineage to divine origin. In this way, the political power of the ruling family was justified as divine will.

Keywords: divine triad, Egyptian mythology, fake triad, Japanese mythology, *Kojiki*.

Introduction

Comparison of the Japanese and Egyptian mythologies reveals that despite having been established in very different conditions and rather

different civilizations, they possess certain similarities. For example, in both, the supreme deity is the Goddess or God of the Sun (even though in Egypt that changed during certain periods of history, for the most part, the supreme deity was sun god Ra). The focal points of this paper consist of the formation and characteristics of divine triads in these two mythologies, therefore it is important to mention that they differ in both the way they were formed and their traits. Comparative analysis shows that despite their numerous differences, these two mythologies share a vital resemblance.

One of, if not the most important, written historical sources for studying Japanese mythology is *Kojiki*. Not only does it describe the origin of Japan and Japanese people, it also illustrates a great myriad of Japanese gods, and, what is most significant, it sheds light on the profound connection between the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and the imperial family. *Kojiki* traces its origins back to the year 712, and the one who gave the order for its creation was the emperor Tenmu, as he had been concerned that genealogies from those times were plagued with a "great many untruths."[185] He was concerned that someone would dispute the imperial right of his family to the extent of issuing political reforms aimed at strengthening the authority of the imperial family. Although both *Kojiki* and *Nihon-shoki* were compiled to legitimize the divine origin and political authority of the imperial family, their intended audiences differed. While the first was primarily directed toward the emerging Yamato state (as Japan was called at the time) and other clans contending for its imperial throne, the latter was modeled after Chinese dynastic histories and was not intended only for a domestic audience but also aimed to present Japan's origins and its developing society to China and the broader East Asian world. For this reason, *Kojiki* has been selected as the primary source for this paper, drawing on both Gustav Heldt's English translation for its enchanting and direct rendering of deities' names, and the Serbian translation for its more descriptive approach to Japanese mythology and the genealogy of the imperial family.

The necessity to change state gods, and even the supreme deity, proves that in Egypt, as in Japan, it was rather important to show evidence that the

[185] Ō no Yasumaro, *Kođiki – Zapisi o drevnim događajima*, trans. Hiroši Jamasaki Vukelić, Danijela Vasić, Dalibor Kličković and Divna Glumac. (Tanesi, 2016), 13.

imperial family could trace its lineage back to the gods themselves. Unlike Japan, in Egypt, the change of dynasties was a rather common occurrence and depending on the cult of the new imperial family, what ensued was the change of state gods. Another difference was that in the Egyptian ruling family, besides the pharaoh himself, his wife and his son (the next pharaoh) also played vital roles. In that regard, oftentimes new connections were established between the supreme deity of the cult and other (minor) gods. The wife and son took on those godlike functions.

Comparison of the Divine Triad in Japanese and Egyptian Mythologies

Divine triad refers to a grouping of three gods usually connected by importance or similarity of their roles in a religious or political context. A divine triad is not an uncommon occurrence in polytheistic religions. Reasons for its formation may vary greatly. It can occur due to the time or place of formation, human beliefs and associations, or it can be a creation with the specific purpose to please and justify the social or political criteria of a certain community. In most cases, it is only when many of these reasons converge that a new deity is created, and by extension, the divine triad.

In the past, when the first states came into being, it was customary for one person, a descendant of gods, to hold both sacral and secular power. Their divine origin would give the imperial or royal family the right to rule those states, arguing that this was the will of the gods. In most cases, they would trace their origin to one specific god, however, certain geographical and historical events influenced the formation of divine triads. They can form as "lone gods,"[186] as is the case with the Japanese gods Ame no Minakanushi, Takami Musuhi and Kamu Musuhi, or they can form as a divine family of father-mother-son, which is the case for the Egyptian gods Osiris-Isis-Horus, the divine triad of Abydos. Furthermore, in some special cases, what is formed is a fake divine triad, and perfect examples for this are Memphis' divine triad Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertem[187] and Karnak's

[186] Ō no Yasumaro, *Kođiki – Zapisi o drevnim događajima*, 17.

[187] Eberhard Otto, "Bogovi i hramovi," in *Egipat: Arhitektura, plastika, slikarstvo tokom tri milenija*, eds. K. Lange and M. Hirmer (Jugoslavija, 1973), 28.

divine triad, Amon-Mut-Khonsu, formed when the capital was transferred from Memphis to Thebes (Ptah was supreme local god/deity of Memphis before Memphis became capital, and Amon was supreme local god/deity of Thebes before it became capital).[188] The adjective fake is not used in a literal sense, but as a means to differentiate the Abydos' father-mother-son triad as the original established during the First Dynasty (c. 3100 – c. 2900 BC) from other father-mother-son divine triads created in other capital cities as capital changed with shift in political power. Therefore, fake triads were modeled after the original Abydos pattern. Local gods were cast as state gods in order to justify the political situation of the times.

Egyptian mythology shows us many ways in which the divine triads were formed as well as the purpose of their creation. Otto explains the formation of the original father-mother-son divine triad:

> Long, long ago, during the time of the Old Kingdom, Osiris, the god of the underworld and fertility was specifically connected to gods from the circle of god-kings. The key for understanding this connection is the king himself, as after his death he would become Osiris and for that reason, his heir, the living king, Horus, would have to be the son of a god. At first it was the dual deity Osiris-Horus, father and son. Next, the goddesses Isis and Nephtis would fuse (into one) mourning the death of god. At the same time Isis, the mother-queen, would become the widow of Osiris and the mother of Horus. Thus, a triad is formed: father-mother-son.[189]

This serves to show the twofold role the pharaoh played in Egyptian society, as a human and as a god. During his life, the king of Egypt was the embodiment of the hawk-god Horus which granted him secular rule. The formation of a triad may therefore be based on a supreme local deity and its connections to other gods in order to justify the right of the ruling family to govern based on their origin and their social function.

The Memphis triad was also formed to satisfy the needs of the ruling family. Memphis was the capital of the Old Kingdom (2686 – 2181 BC).[190] According to Otto, Egyptians did not hesitate to form new triads, be it

[188] Otto, "Bogovi i hramovi," 30.
[189] Otto, "Bogovi i hramovi," 29.
[190] Ian Shaw, *Ancient Egypt, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 183.

father-mother-son or one god and two goddesses or something similar.[191] For that reason, besides the Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertem triad which consisted of very different gods replicating father-mother-son pattern, there was another triad in Memphis which consisted of gods that formed a unity - Ptah-Sokar-Osiris. Sokar is the chthonic god of fertility and is often connected to work in the fields, especially the harvest. However, the city god Ptah took over much of Sokar's domain which is attested by the merging of their names, Ptah-Sokar. Sokar was also tied to Osiris, the seed that rests deep in the earth. These bonds led to the formation of the Ptah-Sokar-Osiris triad. What is intriguing is that the three can appear as standalone gods as well as a unified divine triad. Quite similarly to Memphis' Ptah-Sekhmet-Nefertem, Karnak's Amon-Mut-Khonsu divine triad brought together gods with no prior connection in order to legitimize the rule of the new pharaoh and his family.

Unlike Egyptian mythology, in Japanese mythology a divine triad is not that common and it is not formed with a special purpose or specific reasoning. After the already mentioned lone gods, Ame no Minakanushi, Takami Musuhi and Kamu Musuhi, follows the main divine triad of Japanese mythology with Izanagi as its origin. After his flight from Yomi no kuni, he had to purify his body as he had been in "scolding and unclean land."[192] Three of the most important gods were created when he washed his face:

> Now he washed his mighty left eye, and the spirit named the great and mighty spirit Heaven Shining (Amaterasu) came into being.
> Next he washed his mighty right eye, and the spirit named the mighty one Moon Counting (Tsukuyomi) came into being.
> Next he washed his mighty nose, and the spirit named the mighty one Reckless Rushing Raging Man (Susanoo) came into being.[193]

The three resulting gods were given special tasks: Amaterasu Ōmikami was to rule over Takamanohara (Plain of High Heaven), Tsukuyomi-no-Mikoto was to rule over Yoru no Osukuni (Land of Night), and Susanoo-no-Mikoto was to rule over the sea. The fact that they were given governance

[191] Otto, "Bogovi i hramovi," 28.
[192] Ō no Yasumaro, *Kođiki – Zapisi o drevnim događajima*, 32.
[193] Ō no Yasumaro, *The Kojiki – An Account of Ancient Matters*, trans. Gustav Heldt (Columbia University Press, 2014), 18.

is precisely what makes them a divine triad in Japanese mythology. Another characteristic element of the Japanese divine triad is that one god gets excluded from any further narrative. In this case it is Tsukuyomi. After he was given governance over the Land of Night he is not mentioned anywhere else in *Kojiki*. Ame no Minakanushi of the first triad also doesn't play any part in the narrative since the first time it was mentioned. It can be assumed that the excluded gods belonged to triads as a means to be part of a whole. They will therefore be referred to as a "non-acting middle."[194]

As has already been implied, in Japanese mythology it is noticeable that the origin of the imperial family is connected to Amaterasu Ōmikami. Not only does it justify their right to rule, but it is also presented as her divine will. After the failed attempts of heavenly messengers Ame no Hohi and Ame no Wakahiko to convince Ōkuninushi to relinquish his sovereignty of *Ashihara no Nakatsukuni* (Central Land of Reed Fields), the celestial gods send the god Take Mikazuchi who finally succeeds where others have failed. When at last Ashihara no Nakatsukuni has been conquered, the grandson of *Amaterasu Ōmikami*, Ho no Ninigi, is sent to rule over that country in her stead. Ōkuninushi, descendant of Susanoo, relinquishes his right to rule to Ho no Ninigi, the descendant of Amaterasu Ōmikami, symbolically recognising her position in the triad and in the Japanese mythology itself. *Tsukuyomi* and his descendants aren't part of this chain of events.

Ho no Ninigi marries the goddess Konohana no Sakuyabime. Three children are born to them: "The name of the child born when the fire raged wildly was the god Hoderi. (This is the ancestor of Ata no Kimi of the Hayato people.) The name of the child born next was Hosuseri. The name of the child born next was the god Hoori, also known as the god Amatsuhiko Hiko Hodemi."[195] These three gods represent the divine triad, and yet only the gods Hoderi and Hoori have a role in the further narrative plan. God Hosuseri appears as the "non-acting middle" of this triad. Considering that the descendant of Hoori is the god Kamuyamato Iwarebiko, that is, the first emperor of Japan later known as Jinmu, the origin of the first emperor can be traced back to the goddess Amaterasu. The story of the subjugation of the god Hoderi by the god Hoori is used by

[194] Ō no Yasumaro, *Kođiki – Zapisi o drevnim događajima*, 307.
[195] Ō no Yasumaro, *Kođiki – Zapisi o drevnim događajima*, 35.

some historians as proof of the theory that a tribe from the north of the island of Kyushu subjugated a tribe that lived in the south of the same island.[196] That story unequivocally depicts the submission of one god of the divine triad to another, which is identical to the submission of the descendants of Susanoo to the descendants of Amaterasu. It can be noted that the god whose descendants are associated with the origin of the imperial family takes a more prominent role in the triad, which indicates the political coloring that the mythology took on. This god is obeyed by the second god of the triad, while the god characterized by the "non-acting middle" is not mentioned, perhaps precisely because he and his descendants, who are also not mentioned, do not participate in any dispute over the authority of the land. It is possible that this is why nothing more than their name was recorded. Since they had no influence at the time of *Kojiki*'s origin, no clan can trace their descent from these gods. It is recorded which clans descend from Hoderi and from Susanoo and his descendants, but there is no record of the descendants of Hosuseri and Tsukuyomi.

Another notable difference is that in Egyptian mythology, gods can be part of several different triads simultaneously and can play different roles in each of them. Cases like the god Ptah in Memphis are not rare. A change of dynasty is often followed by a change of capital, and a change of capital by a change of state gods. Local gods became the most revered, their roles expanded. A true example of this is the tomb from Abydos, composed of seven long chapels:

> The three chapels, lying on the right, belong to the main gods of the Osiris circle: Horus, Isis and Osiris. Only from the chapel of Osiris can one reach the wing where the rooms for the ceremonies of reviving and resurrecting the dead god and the chambers for the deification of the deceased endowment builder Seti I as Osiris were located. On the left are chapels for another trinity, namely for Amun from Thebes, Horus-on-the-horizon from Heliopolis and Ptah from Memphis, which form a deliberate trinity in which the main gods of the earth are united, and thus its comprehensiveness of divine powers. On the far left, as the last one, there is a chapel for the pharaoh, whose endowment, in fact, represents the entire complex of this temple.[197]

[196] Ljiljana Marković and Marina Jović Đalović, Stari Japan (Kokoro, 2018), 154.
[197] Otto, "Bogovi i hramovi," 29.

Several main local gods, who in the meantime have become state gods, are united in a new triad so as not to forget the past, but at the same time it is shown that the supreme god is Osiris with his triad, to whom the latter is now subordinated. The widespread opinion that the god Ra is the supreme god of Egyptian mythology stems from his independence. He does not join any divine triad. His name was associated with other gods over time in order to equalize their divine functions. These gods were identified with him because it was necessary to explain their position within mythology at a given time in Egyptian history.[198] None of these gods was a Sun god, as was the god Ra.

Japanese mythology shows a change in the place from which the emperor rules, that is, the place of the emperor's court, but this does not cause a change in their descent from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. There are no other gods, neither heavenly nor local earthly, who could rise to her position. No new triad is formed, because all the gods are already subordinated to her. One does not strive to create direct connections with the goddess Amaterasu because it is important to create a connection between the clan and the imperial family and thus indirectly create a connection with her as well.

Conclusion

Japanese mythology shows that, excluding the first triad of gods that arose themselves, a divine triad occurred only when it was necessary to establish the link between the imperial family and divine origin. In contrast, Egypt is characterized by an abundance of divine triads, both genuine and created for political purposes. Frequent changes of the capital caused the formation of new divine connections in order to demonstrate the divine function of the pharaoh and his family. The consequence of this is the creation of divine bonds in the form of a father-mother-son triad, the pharaoh, his wife and their son (the next pharaoh). One can also observe triads composed of three gods joined in union of meaning, and quite often a triad of gods who have the same role in different places is established, such as Ptah-Sokar-Osiris triad in Memphis. It is apparent that in Egypt each

[198] Otto, "Bogovi i hramovi," 29.

god of the triad has and performs a specific role that is the link between the members of the royal family and that triad. In different parts of Egyptian history, the pharaoh is presented differently, but the prevailing motif is that he is the son of the Sun god Ra, and thus he assumes the character of the king-father, which is why he lives with the king's mother. Throughout history, a large number of gods have taken on the role of the Sun god Ra, a phenomenon expressed by the amalgamation of names such as Ra-Haracte in Heliopolis. Thus the second god takes on the characteristics of the god Ra. Such an occurrence was unimaginable in Japanese history, where the goddess Amaterasu has always held primacy. There was no reason for the creation of new gods, let alone divine triads that would somehow take on her role or otherwise justify the power of the imperial family. Although in both Egypt and Japan, mythology was colored by politics very early on, the ways of its implementation are different. Japanese history and mythology are characterized by coherence and consistency compared to Egypt. The frequent turmoil in Egyptian history forged an ideal basis for the formation of a wide variety of relationships between the gods, consequently engendering new divine triads. Nevertheless, both states are characteristically linked by the divine trinity and the power of the royal or imperial line.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABAB TYPE *GITAIGO*: FROM THE TENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

Anđela Jovanović[199]

Abstract: Onomatopoeic words are known as one of many unique features of the Japanese language. They can be categorized into two types based on sound symbolism – *giongo* (onomatopoeia that mimic sounds of the outside world), and *gitaigo*. *Gitaigo* describe the state of things, emotions, textures, that mostly do not produce sounds. Today, they have various grammatical forms and uses, which are believed to be derived from their original use as adverbs accompanied with the particle *to*. In this paper, the changes that *gitaigo* went through are analyzed. As a preliminary step, ABAB type *gitaigo* were searched in three major dictionaries, and their appearances in literary works from the 10th century to the 2000s were studied using corpora made by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics. Focusing on their three main contemporary uses – adverbs, verbs, and noun modifiers, their development from the viewpoint of influences between the changes in their usage and meaning were studied. The results suggest that the weakening of the sound symbolism components allowed for abstract meaning derivations, that in turn resulted in the *to* particle becoming an optional addition, and the development of new grammatical uses, i.e. verbs and noun modifiers, with components such as the *suru* verb and *no* particle being necessary additions. Additionally, a possibility was observed that onomatopoeia with multiple meanings have different uses for each one; describing a state or condition was found in adverbs, whereas describing a characteristic was found in verbs and noun modifiers.

Keywords: ABAB-type *gitaigo*, Japanese onomatopoeia, sound symbolism.

[199] This study was conducted at Kyōto University under the guidance of Professor Ruchira Palihawadana. I am deeply indebted to Professor Ruchira and fellow mentors for their invaluable guidance and insightful feedback throughout the course of this research.

Introduction

Research Background

Onomatopoeic words in the Japanese language can be categorized into two types – *giongo*, onomatopoeia that mimic various sounds of the outside world, and *gitaigo*, used to symbolically express states and appearances of living things, inanimate objects, as well as states and changes of nature.[200]

Today, *gitaigo* have diverse uses and forms. Tamori and Schourup state that onomatopoeia function as adverbs, verbs, nouns, and adjectives.[201] In addition, Miyaji classifies *gitaigo* into four types based on their characteristics in terms of form: null form, *ni* form, *(to) suru* form, and *to* form.[202] However, according to Yamaguchi, the varied uses and forms of *gitaigo* in modern Japanese are derivations of adverbs accompanying the *to* particle.[203] Meanwhile, Amanuma points out that the particle *to* following present day *gitaigo* is not necessarily a component that comprises onomatopoeic words and cannot be removed from them; he treats it as something that is "garnished."[204] Thus, this paper analyzes the changes that *gitaigo* went through during the expansion from adverbs accompanying the *to* particle, to its addition becoming optional, as well as the appearance of completely new forms, uses and meanings.

Furthermore, Mikami[205] and Itō[206] argue that onomatopoeic words with multiple meanings are derived in meaning expansion. Kakehi, in explaining the change from "*giongo*" – concrete expressions that imitate sounds, to "*gitaigo*" – abstract expressions that express state, feelings etc., points out that the transition from concrete to abstract is possible, but never in the

[200] Amanuma Yasushi, *Giongo gitaigo jiten* (Tōkyōdōshuppan, 1982), 8.

[201] Tamori Ikuhiro and Schourup C. Lawrence, *Onomatope: keitai to imi* (Kuroshio shuppan, 2011), 47.

[202] Miyaji Yutaka, "Giongo gitaigo shōkō," *Kokugogaku* 115 (1978).

[203] Yamaguchi Nakami, *Onomatope no rekishi 1 – sono shujusō to shitekisuii; "obenchara" nado no goshi* (Kazama shobō, 2019).

[204] Amanuma, *Giongo gitaigo jiten*, 13.

[205] Mikami Kyōko, "Tagi onomatope no imi, yōhō no kijutsu to shidō no kokoromi," *Koidekinen nihongokyōikukenkyūkai ronbunshū ākaibu* 12 (2004).

[206] Itō Mami, "'Onomatope+suru' no goitekiimi to asupekutosei no kenkyū" (PhD diss., Kyūshū University, 2015), 10.

opposite direction.[207] Thus, it can be concluded that the uses and forms of *gitaigo* are influenced by their meaning. In the process of their meaning spreading from particular and concrete, they change according to their meaning expansion and abstraction, as well as the diversification of co-occurring words. In that sense, while considering the changes in function, this research will focus on the relationships between form and meaning, and discuss their influence on the development of *gitaigo*.

SUBJECT OF ANALYSIS

According to Yamaguchi[208] and Ono,[209] new types of onomatopoeia can be found in each period of history, but the only one that exists from the tenth century until today is the ABAB type. Additionally, Nasu points out that each of the different suffixes such as -*n* or -*ri* added to stems of onomatopoeic words carry their own special meaning, resulting in subtle differences in nuances.[210] For that reason, the subject of this research is the ABAB type *gitaigo*, free of additional meanings, and continually existing for more than a thousand years.

Ono notes that examples of onomatopoeia from before the tenth century whose semantic changes can be discussed are extremely rare, and that the limitation to periods after the tenth century cannot be avoided.[211] Therefore, this study focuses on the following periods: Heian period (794–1185), Early Middle Ages (Kamakura and Muromachi periods, 1185–1573), Middle Ages (Azuchi-Momoyama and Edo periods, 1574–1868), Early Modern period (before the Second World War), and Modern period (following the Second World War).

In order to select the *gitaigo* to be discussed in this study, a survey of corpora using dictionaries of contemporary onomatopoeic words was

[207] Kakehi Hisao, " 'Henshin' suru onomatope," *Gengo* 30, no. 9 (2001): 28–36.
[208] Yamaguchi, *Onomatope no rekishi 1*.
[209] Ono Masahiro, *Nihongo onomatope jiten* (Shōgakukan, 2007).
[210] Nasu Akio, "Onomatope gobi no bunpu to sōgo no kankei," *Tsukubanihongokenkyū* 12 (2007): 2.
[211] Ono Masahiro, *Kanjiru kotoba onomatope* (KADOKAWA, 2015), 16.

performed.[212,213,214] Focusing on the ABAB type *gitaigo* and using the Corpus of Historical Japanese for the search, the words with more than 4 appearances in the Heian period were selected. Presented in Table 1 below are 13 words that were extracted. Using the public database of the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, examples from the Corpus of Historical Japanese (CHJ) and the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ) were collected.

Subject	**Heian**	**EMiA**	**MA**	**EMoP**	**Modern**	**sum**
uraura	13	6	×	7	4	30
kirakira	8	3	1	46	317	375
sarasara	4	12	14	18	125	173
soyosoyo	6	2	1	25	1	35
tsukudzuku	60	38	68	44	278	488
tsuyatsuya	12	17	2	16	80	128
nayonayo	10	1	×	2	10	23
hatahata	5	2	3	2	4	16
harahara	11	72	37	17	137	274
honobono	27	20	8	18	47	120
horohoro	27	9	5	4	11	56
muramura	6	4	1	3	31	45
yurayura	4	4	1	26	127	162
Average	14,8	14,6	10,8	17,6	90,15	148,07

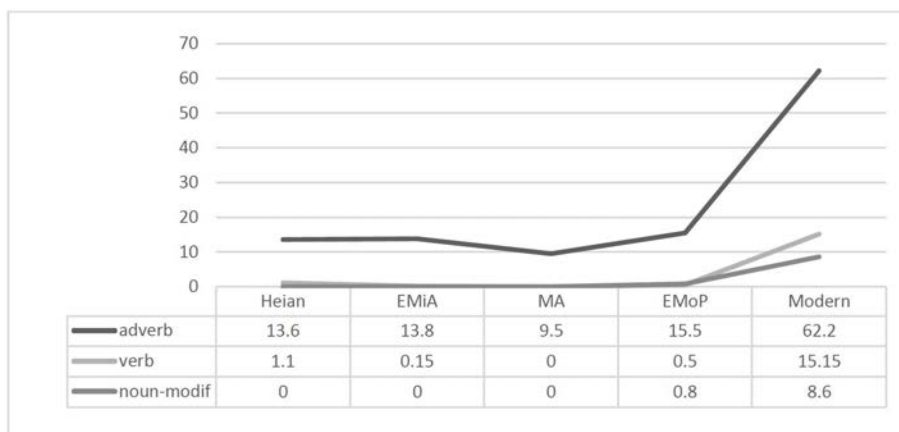
(Table 1) Overall appearances of the target *gitaigo*[215]

[212] Hida Yoshifumi and Asada Hideko, *Gendai giongo gitaigo yōhōjiten* (Tōkyōdōshuppan, 2002).
[213] Ono, *Nihongo onomatope jiten*.
[214] Yamaguchi Nakami, *Giongo-gitaigo jiten* (Kōdansha, 2015).
[215] All of the tables and figures presented in this paper were made by the author. The target *gitaigo* were looked up in each of the corpuses mentioned above, and an Excel database of found examples was made, which was further analyzed. The tables and figures were made based on the results of the analyses.

OVERALL CHANGE TRENDS

The most prominent changes were observed in adverbs, verbs and noun-modifiers. This study discusses these uses through the following chapters, focusing on their morphologic and semantic aspects.

The data from Figure 1 below shows that during the Early Middle Ages and Middle Ages, the overall number of *gitaigo* appearances and their varieties in function are scarce. The reason for this could be the fact that numerous new types of *gitaigo* emerged, such as A*n*B, A*n*, etc.[216] Below shall be discussed the following three phenomena observed during the corpus analysis: the strengthening of the adverbial nature of *gitaigo*, the progression of their uses as verbs, and as noun-modifiers.



	Heian	EMiA	MA	EMoP	Modern
adverb	13.6	13.8	9.5	15.5	62.2
verb	1.1	0.15	0	0.5	15.15
noun-modif	0	0	0	0.8	8.6

Figure 1. Average appearances of each use throughout the periods

GITAIGO AS ADVERBS

APPEARANCES THROUGHOUT HISTORY

This section concerns *gitaigo* appearing as adverbs – their most common grammatical use. While focusing on the presence or absence of the particle *to*, the reasons behind them will be discussed.

[216] Yamaguchi, *Onomatope no rekishi 1.*

Figure 2 below shows that in the Heian period there were 158 cases of *gitaigo* adverbs accompanied by the *to* particle (hereinafter "*to* form"), but only 21 cases of them used as adverbs without any additions (hereinafter "null form"). In contrast, during the Modern period, the number of *to* form cases was 330, while the null form rose to 546. Thus, during the Heian period, *to* form was dominant, only for null form to take hold as different periods passed.

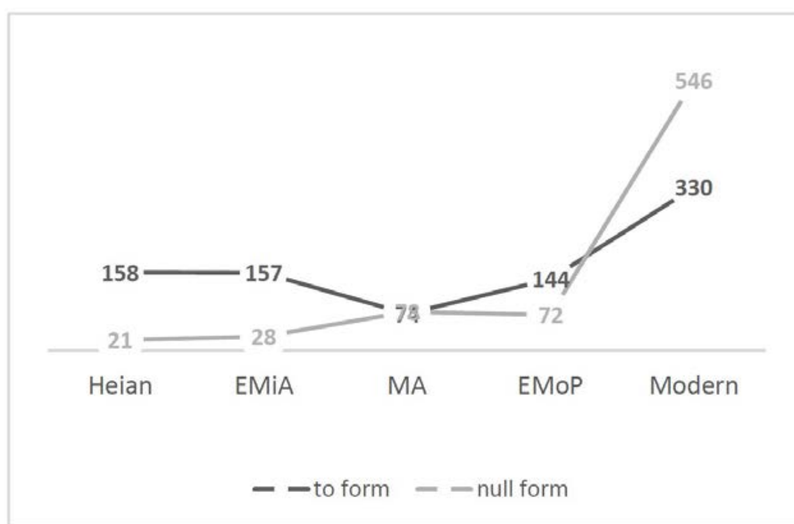


Figure 2. *Gitaigo* as adverbs throughout history

Co-occurrence with the Particle *to*

As shown in Table 2 below, examples of the null form such as (1) below already exist in the Heian period, but the *to* form cases such as (2) overwhelmingly outnumber them. Tamori and Schourup note that in the case of words that require *to*, it acts as a citation marker, and these words are incorporated in sentences through quotation.[217] On the other hand, in the case of ABAB type *gitaigo* used as adverbs of manner, which is a standard type of onomatopoeia, the addition of *to* is optional. The words observed in this study are used as adverbs of manner – they elaborate the meanings of verbs they modify.

[217] Tamori and Schourup, *Onomatope: keitai to imi*, 190.

	to form					null form				
	Heian	EMiA	MA	EMoP	Modern	Heian	EMiA	MA	EMoP	Modern
uraura	11	6	×	7	1	1	×	×	×	1
kirakira	6	3	1	30	107	×	×	×	11	166
sarasara	4	10	8	16	40	×	2	8	2	21
soyosoyo	4	2	1	19	×	1	×	×	6	1
tsukudzuku	59	34	33	16	34	1	4	35	28	243
tsuyatsuya	10	×	1	7	9	×	16	1	1	9
nayonayo	7	1	×	1	2	×	×	×	×	1
hatahata	3	2	2	1	2	×	×	1	1	×
harahara	10	72	18	11	31	×	×	19	2	11
honobono	15	17	4	16	15	12	1	3	1	8
horohoro	27	8	1	1	7	×	1	4	3	2
muramura	×	×	×	2	21	6	4	1	1	1
yurayura	2	2	1	10	59	×	×	×	13	51

Table 2. Appearances of each *gitaigo* in its *to* form and null form

(1) *Uchi miokosete,* ***tsukudzuku uchimamorite,*** (…).[218]
He looked over and **gazed intently** at me (…).[219]

(2) (…) *nado iishirasuruwo, geni to omousumo ito kanashikute,* ***tsukudzukuto nakitamau***. (Murasaki Shikibu. *Genji monogatari*, 1010)[220]
(…) Hearing those things, I believed them indeed true, but was overcome with sorrow and **wept deeply**.

In the case of null form, the *gitaigo* that has overwhelmingly numerous examples in modern Japanese is *tsukudzuku*. Analysis of corpora shows a tendency for onomatopoeia with multiple meanings such as *sarasara* and *harahara* to appear in the *to* form when they function as adverbs. In contrast, *gitaigo* such as *tsukudzuku* which have a strong connection to verbs, also have a domineering adverbial nature innate to them, resulting in null form being the more prominent one.

Furthermore, as shown below, there are numerous instances where while there is no apparent difference in semantic meaning or co-occurring words, in some cases the *gitaigo* are in *to* form, while in others they appear in null form. Examples (3) and (4) are of *sarasara*, (5) and (6) of *kirakira*. It can be concluded that addition of *to* becoming optional is not related to particular changes in meaning. Rather, this change stems from the overall strengthening of the adverbial nature within *gitaigo*. That is, in the beginning, these words needed *to* in order to function as adverbs, but with this use becoming their most typical form, the adverbial nature took root in the word itself. Thus, *to* is no longer necessary in order for it to appear in a sentence as an adverb.

(3) *Furusato no haru wa ichiban utsukushii kisetsu darou, (...),* ***sarasara nagareru*** *ogawa (...)* (Izawa Noriko. *Nihongokyōshi ga mita Chūgoku*. San'ichi Shobō, 1996)
The spring in my hometown has to be the most beautiful season, (…), streams **rippling** (…)

[218] Fujiwara Michitsuna No Haha, "Kagerō nikki," in *Shinpen Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshū 13 — Tosa Nikki / Kagerō Nikki*, edited by Kikuchi Yasuhiko, Kimura Masanori and Imuta Tsunehisa (Shōgakukan, 1995).

[219] All of the example sentences have been translated by the author.

[220] Murasaki Shikibu, "Genji Monogatari," in *Shinpen Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshū 21 — Genji Monogatari (2)*, edited by Abe Akio, Akiyama Ken, Imai Gen'e and Suzuki Hideo (Shōgakukan, 1994).

(4) *Fuyu to haru ni naru to kiyoi nagare ga* ***sarasarato nagareteiru***.[221]
When winter comes, the clean stream **ripples**.
(5) (…)*, nanika* ***kirakirato kagayaku*** *ishi kara horareta mono*.[222]
(…), something like a thing carved out of a **sparkling** stone.
(6) *Shikkoku no yami to* ***kirakira kagayaku*** *hoshiboshi ga hirogatteimasu*.[223]
The jet-black darkness and **sparkling** stars are spread out.

Katō and Sakaguchi point out that while the onomatopoeia with strong sound-symbolism such as *giongo* are mostly used in *to* form, when the sound-symbolism component is lost, and the word changes itself into an adverb, *to* is omitted[224]. As we have seen, rather than a specific change or expansion in *gitaigo*'s actual meaning resulting in a change in form, the addition of the *to* particle became optional because of the adverbial use taking root as a typical use of *gitaigo*.

In conclusion, the adverbial use of *gitaigo* is its most general use throughout all periods. In cases where they function as adverbs of manner, it can appear either in *to* form (i.e., accompanied by the particle *to*), or in null form (i.e., by itself). From the Heian period until Early Modern period, the overall trend of *to* form is observed, but as the Modern period approaches, and the occurrences where *gitaigo* are used as adverbs increase in number, the adverbial nature that was once dependent on the particle *to* becomes innate to the *gitaigo* itself, resulting in *to* no longer being necessary. In other words, the *gitaigo* can now appear in sentences as an adverb as is, without relying on additional components in order to function as an adverb of manner.

GITAIGO AS VERBS

Onomatopoeic words cannot be used as verbs in their zero form, so they take the form of "onomatopoeia + verbal suffix."[225] The forms that can turn

[221] Izawa Noriko, *Nihongokyōshi ga mita Chūgoku* (San'ichi Shobō, 1996).
[222] Jeter K. W., *Mantisu*, trans. Inomata Mieko (Hayakawa Shobō, 1990).
[223] Okazaki Hiroaki, *Tsuki no shizuku 100% jūsu* (Shinchōsha,1990).
[224] Katō Hisao and Sakaguchi Masako, "Kōsetsu seibun to onomatope no seishitsu nitsuite," *Nara kyōiku daigaku kiyō* 45, no. 1 (1996): 5.
[225] Tamori Ikuhiro, "Nihongo onomatope – tayōna oto to yōtai no hyōgen," *Nihononkyōgakkaishi* 54, no. 3 (1998): 218.

an onomatopoeic word into a verb can be categorized into two types.[226] With the first type, the creation of the verb is accomplished by adding suffixes such as *tsuku*, e.g. *iratsuku* "to get irritated," *mukatsuku* "to feel angry; to feel nauseous" deriving from *iraira* and *mukamuka*, or *meku*, e.g. *kirameku* "to glitter" deriving from *kirakira*. The second type are the ones that become verbs by connecting with the *suru* verb – this type is the most common one in modern Japanese. Itō argues that the most productive way of making onomatopoeic words into verbs is the second type.[227] For that reason, verbs accompanying the *suru* verb will be focused on. In the following sections, the appearance of verbal uses throughout the periods will be studied, followed by a discussion of their progression and conditions.

Appearances throughout History

As presented in Table 3 below, verbs already existed in the Heian period, but diminished in Early Middle Ages and Middle Ages, only to reappear from the Early Modern, and continue to increase in numbers during the Modern period. As mentioned earlier, the diminishing of verbs is suspected to be the result of various *gitaigo* types other than ABAB appearing and being frequently used during this time.

	Heian	**EMiA**	**MA**	**EMoP**	**Modern**	**Sum**
uraura	1	×	×	×	×	1
kirakira	2	×	×	3	32	37
sarasara	×	×	×	×	20	20
soyosoyo	×	×	×	×	×	×
tsukudzuku	1	×	×	×	×	1
tsuyatsuya	2	×	×	2	26	30
nayonayo	3	×	×	1	3	7
hatahata	2	×	×	×	×	2
harahara	1	×	×	1	82	84

[226] Kawase Suguru, "Shōchōshi wo dōshikasuru keishiki no Hensen," Gobunkenkyū 99 (2005): 42.
[227] Itō, "'Onomatope+suru' no goitekiimi to asupekutosei no kenkyū," 7.

honobono	×	×	×	×	1	1
horohoro	×	×	×	×	×	×
muramura	×	×	×	×	8	8
yurayura	2	2	×	2	10	16
Sum	14	2	×	9	182	207

Table 3. Appearances of verbs

The progression of forms of these verbs are as follows. First, during the Heian period and Early Middle Ages, most are accompanied by *to suru* – the combination of the particle *to* and verb *suru*, such as (7) below. During the Early Modern period, only *kirakira* appears with *to suru* – others all connect directly with *suru*. Regarding their meaning, most of the examples from the Early Modern period express attributes, such as (8) below, while only (9) shows derivation in meaning.

(7) *Kami wa ougi wo hirogetaru youni* ***yurayuratoshite***, (…).[228]
Hair **swaying** like a fan, (…).

(8) *Jūmin wa papuazoku de, iro wa kokutan no youni kurokute* ***tsuyatsuyashiteori***,(…).[229]
The population is of the Papua race, their color black and **glossy** like ebony (…).

(9) *Shōnen wa, chichi no chottoshita tameiki nimo (...), taezu* ***harahara shiteimashita***.[230]
The boy was constantly **in suspense**, (…), even from his father's slight sighs.

In the Modern period, the examples where *gitaigo* are joined directly with *suru* abruptly increase. Moreover, as a result of meaning expansion and verbal use becoming more established, in the Modern period the causative form also emerged. As seen below, there are instances of reflexive verbs, such as *kirakira* and *yurayura* in (10) and (11), as well as verbs that express emotions, e.g. *harahara* in (12).

[228] Murasaki Shikibu, "Genji Monogatari," in *Shinpen Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshū 20 — Genji Monogatari (1)*, edited by Akiyama Ken and Imai Gen'e (Shōgakukan, 1994).
[229] *Fifth period Shotōka Kokugo*, Vol. 7 (Monbushō, 1941).
[230] *Fifth period Shotōka Kokugo*, Vol. 7 (Monbushō, 1941).

(10) *Anna ga ōkina me wo* **kirakira sasete** *Anton wo mitsumeta.*[231]

Anna's eyes **lit up** as she gazed at Anton.

(11) *Darusouni kubi wo* ***yurayurasaseru***.[232]

Lazily **sways** her head.

(12) *Tsui, irairashitari,* ***haraharasaserare****tari suru nowa,* (…).[233]

Getting irritated and **anxious** is (…).

The Progression of *Gitaigo* as Verbs

Regarding the form of *gitaigo* used as verbs, Tamori points out that unlike when functioning as adverbs, they cannot appear in a sentence as is – they need to take the form of "onomatopoeia + verbal suffix."[234] The results of corpus analysis in this study support Tamori's observation, and further indicate that, under the influence of meaning expansion observed in *gitaigo*, i.e. their abstraction, it became possible to accompany the *suru* verb. At first, the *to* particle was used as an intermediary in order to bind *gitaigo* with *suru* and make verbs. However, as it distanced itself from its original meaning and became abstract, *to* became optional once again.

In order to transition from adverbs to verbs, *gitaigo* needed to acquire different, abstract meanings. Katō and Sakaguchi use *sarasara* to point out that when it is used as a phrasal verb, it depicts the state of being *'sarasara'* ('smooth, dry, silky'), whereas when providing a specific description of the movement of '*sarasara*' ('quickly and with ease, smoothly'), it is used as an adverb.[235] Thus, rather than providing specific descriptions about the way someone cries or laughs, the *gitaigo* now takes on the role of conveying that someone is sad or happy.

(13) (…) *tada, namida dake ga,* **harahara** *nagaretewa ochiteikunoda*.[236]

Only tears **trickle** and fall down.

[231] Sommer-Bodenburg Angela, *Chibikko kyuuketsuki no himitsu no shinsatsushitsu*, trans. Kawanishi Fusa (Kumon shuppan, 1994).

[232] Harada Munenori, *Yasashikutte sukoshi baka* (Shūeisha, 1986).

[233] Honno Bin, *ST Ao no chōsafairu* (Kōdansha, 2003).

[234] Tamori, "Nihongo onomatope – tayōna oto to yōtai no hyōgen," 218.

[235] Katō and Sakaguchi, "Kōsetsu seibun to onomatope no seishitsu nitsuite," 8.

[236] Murayama Yuka, *Kimi no tame ni dekiru koto* (Shūeisha, 1996).

(14) *Wagaiedemo,* (…)*, otto wa watashi no yarikata wo* ***harahara******shite*** *miteita youna kehai ga atta*.[237]

Even in our house, there was a feeling that, (…), my husband was **anxiously** watching my manner.

In the examples found from corpora, *harahara* showed particular differentiation in meaning between its verb and adverb functions. It originally portrayed the way small, light things spill over and fall as in (13) above. However, in the case of (14), it describes being worried because of a feeling of danger or uneasiness. None of the examples of *harahara* that describe the way things spill over and fall are used as verbs, nor are the ones that describe being worried used as adverbs. This *gitaigo* is part of a group of mimetic words that describe feelings, along with *iraira suru*, *wakuwaku suru* etc., which can without exception be combined with *suru.*[238] In this case, the original meaning had extended from a specific one, i.e. describing the concrete way in which something is being done, to a wider, more abstract one, depicting one's internal (emotional) experience. There are instances where *gitaigo* are used as reflexive verbs (e.g. *me wo kirakira saseru* – lit. 'to make one's eyes sparkle with excitement') as well as cases where they are used to describe attributes (e.g. *hada wa tsuyatsuya shiteiru* – lit. 'skin is glowing'). Thus, *gitaigo* can function as verbs in cases where it describes feelings, sensations, attributes, and movements of one's body.

Gitaigo as Noun-Modifiers

Noun-modifying cases first appear in the Early Modern, and rapidly increase during the Modern period. All of the observed *gitaigo* describe attributes of their objects. The words that do not appear as noun-modifiers at all are *soyosoyo* and *tsukudzuku*, which have an exceptionally strong bond with the verbs they modify. Sasamoto mentions *giongo* as onomatopoeia that cannot modify nouns.[239] It is likely that *gitaigo* like *harahara* and

[237] Minami Kazuko, *Teinengo, fūfu de tanoshiku ikiru kotsu* (Daiwashobō, 1997).

[238] Tamori and Schourup, *Onomatope: keitai to imi*, 56.

[239] Sasamoto Akiko, "Onomatope no meishishūshoku nitsuite," Nara kyōiku daigaku kokubungakkai 30 (2007): 64–52.

horohoro, which are derived from *giongo*, are used as adverbs in order to depict concrete actions described by verbs. She also describes ones that cannot function as noun-modifiers, instead occurring exclusively as adverbs – they exhibit a strong lexical and syntactic connection with specific verbs, which does not allow them to independently become verbs. *Soyosoyo* and *tsukudzuku* support Sasamoto's theory.

	Heian	**EMiA**	**MA**	**EMoP**	**Modern**	**Sum**
uraura	×	×	×	×	2	2
kirakira	×	×	×	2	24	26
sarasara	×	×	×	×	20	20
soyosoyo	×	×	×	×	×	×
tsukudzuku	×	×	×	×	×	×
tsuyatsuya	×	×	×	6	31	37
nayonayo	×	×	×	×	4	4
hatahata	×	×	×	×	2	2
harahara	×	×	×	×	2	2
honobono	×	×	×	1	21	22
horohoro	×	×	×	×	2	2
muramura	×	×	×	×	1	1
yurayura	×	×	×	1	3	4
Sum	×	×	×	10	112	122

Table 4. Appearances of noun-modifiers

Regarding their form, *(to) suru* is the most common. Among them, the past form *shita* as in (15) and (16) below is dominant. There is a small number of noun-modifiers accompanied by the *no* particle, with *sarasara* being the most common with 5 examples.

(15) ***Sarasarashita*** *kami wo yurashite,* (…).[240]

(16) *Sofī wa chotto tachidomatte, sono* **tsuyatsuyatoshita** *atama wo nihon no yubi de nadeta.*[241]

[240] Mitsuno Momo, *Watashi no sutairu wo sagashite* (Shinchōsha, 1998).

[241] Gaarder Jostein, *Sofī no sekai*, trans. Ikeda Kayoko (Nihonhōsōshuppankyōkai, 1996).

Sophie stopped for a second, and caressed that **shiny** head with two fingers.

The target *gitaigo* of this research already showed a small number of verbal uses in the Heian period. At that time, it can be argued that rather than being verbs themselves, they were simply one part of a predicative, and only in the Early Modern period did they start to function as noun-modifiers as well.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the development of ABAB type *gitaigo* was discussed, from the viewpoint of their function, form and meaning. In exploring their development, the three most prominent changes were focused on – the strengthening of their adverbial nature, the development of verbal use, and of the noun-modification use.

Most of the changes happened in the Early Modern and Modern Ages. In the case of adverbs, the strengthening of their adverbial nature and losing the sound-symbolic components led to the addition of the *to* particle becoming optional. This in turn resulted in the *suru* verb becoming compatible with *gitaigo* which now have derived abstract meanings, and other uses such as verbs and noun-modifiers emerged. However, in all of the functions except adverbs, additional components such as *suru* and *no* are required. Thus, all of the new functions of *gitaigo* are consequences of them losing their sound symbolism and gaining new, abstract meanings, and connecting with new components other than the particle *to*. The possibility of *gitaigo* with multiple meanings having specific uses for each one was also observed, however, not detailed in this study, paving the way for further research.

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CIS AND TRANS WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE THROUGH JAPANESE LANGUAGE

Milica Nikodijevic

Abstract: From the speech of court ladies (*nyōbō kotoba*) to women's speech (*josei kotoba*), there have been different forms of gender norms regarding the use of Japanese language since the Heian period, when *hiragana* was first introduced as women's characters (Endo and Abe 2022). The purpose of these norms was, and still is, to demonstrate one's social and domestic status and femininity, which is described as reserved, polite and soft (Nakamura 2022). While cisgender women are resisting being submitted to a certain set of speech norms, transgender women are trying to validate their gender identity by accepting the same or similar ones. This paper consists of three sections. The first section introduces the history of women's speech. The second section shows the real language used by cis women of different backgrounds based on previous studies. Finally, the third section introduces studies based on interviews with transgender women on their relationship to the Japanese language. In the conclusion section, a short comparison of cis and trans women's relationship to the Japanese language is provided. The goal of this study is to further understand trans and cis women's relationships to those gendered speech norms. This paper aims to expand the understanding of transgender identity through language and to inspire new research. This topic is extremely important as it helps alleviate the stigma and prejudice against gender and sexual minorities.

Keywords: cis women, gender norms, Japanese language, *josei kotoba*, transgender women.

History of Gendered Language in Japan

Women's speech has been an object of regulation and control in Japan since at least the twelfth century, when Confucian conduct books for

women were adopted from China. These conduct books taught women about various aspects of their lives, one of them being language, conveying andro-centric views derived from Buddhism and Confucianism. Eventually, high-class women started writing their own versions, giving rules on how women should behave and speak.

In the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, according to these books, women were openly prohibited from speaking, but eventually the concept of femininity was introduced, making not speaking "only a recommendation." Concretely, women were expected to speak ambiguously, not express emotions, not speak carelessly, to speak in a small voice, not speak roughly and avoid speaking with the mouth open during this time.

The Edo period brought new technologies making conduct books available to a wider audience. In addition to easier reproduction, the texts were simplified, making them more understandable and influential. The main focus of the Edo conduct books was the Confucian lesson of *shi kō* (four behaviours for women): *fu-toku* (female virtue), *fu-gen* (female language), *fu-yō* (female appearance) and *fu-kō* (female skills – calligraphy, Japanese songs and sewing), making language one of the key virtues of a woman, determining her value. Women were encouraged to use Japanese readings for Chinese words, which obstructed them from acquiring knowledge and showing their intelligence in their speech. With the spread of these books the emphasis was put on women's way of speaking instead of the contents of their speech.

The need to modernise and unite Japan during the Meiji period started the talks on the Japanese national language. Political leaders and intellectuals were searching for a dialect that would be the most suitable to become a base for the national language. Eventually, the choice was narrowed down to the Kyoto and Tokyo varieties. Ōtsuki Fumihiko, a linguist, argued that Kyoto speech was good for women, but a man would sound weak if he spoke it. He added that the Tokyo speech has strength and people from the provinces tend to imitate it. This was his argument for making Tokyo speech a base of the standard language. During this time, women were called legal incompetents (*hōteki munōryokusha*) in the Constitution, expected to stay at home, "regenerate male labour" and "produce excellent citizens." They were still expected to use women's

language, while men were mostly expected to use the standard version of Japanese. Nakamura argues that "as standard Japanese is implicitly masculinized, women's language is recognized as a female version of standard Japanese."[242] Even the education system segregated girls and boys by making different versions of textbooks and still incorporating the concept of *fu-gen* in the ones for girls, emphasising women's nature. For example, Shigeki Nishimura claimed that there "are naturally some norms only for girls"[243] and that "it is against the woman's way of life to use coarse language or to start speaking before others."[244]

Women's Actual Speech

As discussed above, women's speech has been an object of regulation for a long time with very similar norms and regulations being pushed onto women. However, practices do not always fully correspond to the rules, and the case of women's language is no exception. Women of different backgrounds all use different language that corresponds to their identity. In this section, a vast difference between rules of women's language and actual linguistic practices will be shown through some studies of actual women's speech.

Contemporary women's linguistic practices

As mentioned before, even though the norms and regulations on women's language have been quite strict for centuries, regular women from different regions in Japan, of different social class and various sexualities, have expressed extremely diverse language styles. In this part of the second section, two studies will be introduced which show how contemporary women do not always abide by the gender language norms, and the respective reasons for that. Both of these studies may be found in *Japanese Language, Gender and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real*

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[242] Momoko Nakamura, *Gender, Language and Ideology: A genealogy of Japanese women's language* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014).
[243] Nakamura, *Gender, Language and Ideology*, 97.
[244] Nakamura, *Gender, Language and Ideology*, 98.

people.[245] For the sake of better understanding the summaries of the studies, the contemporary indicators of women's speech in Japanese language shall be introduced prior to the studies themselves. The first study is of a group of farm women from Ibaraki and the second is of lesbians in Shinjuku, Tokyo. These studies were chosen as they show women of various identities, backgrounds and social status.

What is "women's language" in contemporary Japan?

Women's language is a term used for a speaking style expected of women. In the contemporary standard Japanese language, there are three main groups of indicators of femininity in the Japanese language.

First, the usage of first-person pronouns. The Japanese language has a vast variety of first-person pronouns and certain ones are deemed more feminine while others are considered more masculine. For example, the pronoun *watashi* is considered pretty neutral and can be used by anyone regardless of gender. Then, there are pronouns *boku, ore, washi* etc, that are considered very masculine and if used by a woman, might confuse the listener. Although the number of school girls using *boku* and *ore* is rising, it is still considered quite masculine and inappropriate. Finally, a feminine version of the first-person pronoun would be *atakushi* or *atashi*. It is considered quite soft and elegant, and sometimes even cute. Other than the usage of the first-person pronouns, there is a gender distinction in usage of second-person pronouns as well, although the usage of them is rare in Japanese. For example, most of the Japanese native speakers would consider it rude if a woman used the pronoun *omae*, as it is deemed a masculine way of saying "you." It is often expected of women to use the word *anata* when referring to a person they are talking to if they do not know their name.

Secondly, there is a large number of sentence-final expressions/ particles, sentence intonation and pitch that can indicate a person's gender. For instance, some of the "female" sentence-final particles in the standardized (Tokyo) language would be *wa*, *wayo*, *dawa* and "male" ones

[245] Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith, eds., *Japanese Language, Gender and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

would be *zo*, *ze*, *dayo*, *daze* etc. These sentence-final particles and their "femininity/masculinity" vary from region to region, so it wouldn't be a surprise to hear a man from Kansai use *wa* at the end of the sentence.

Finally, there is a difference in the politeness of male and female speech. Women are expected to use *teineigo* (respectable language) in situations where a man wouldn't be expected to. Furthermore, it is considered very feminine to use the *bikago* (beautiful words/word beautification) versions of words. This is achieved by adding the prefixes *o-* and *go-* to nouns. Some examples would be *hana* → *ohana* (flower) or *shujin* → *goshujin* (husband). Using/not using certain words would also fall under the category of politeness, with some words being unexpected or considered rude if used by a woman. To give an example, it would be acceptable in most cases if a man said: *Meshi wo kuitai* (I want to eat [a meal].), while a woman would be expected to say *Gohan wo tabetai*. Notice how *meshi* (meal) is replaced by *gohan* (same base meaning) and *kuitai* (I want to eat) is replaced by *tabetai* (same base meaning).

There are some researchers who claim that the gender roles have become too close together and that women are becoming more masculine and men are becoming more feminine.[246] This claim shows that there are still expectations thrown upon women even with the implementation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in the year 1986 which claimed to bring more equality in the workplace for women and men. Although women and men are equal in the employment field on paper, there are still vast differences in their treatment in reality. One example of that is regulating women's language in the work place. Sasaki[247] claims that women might gradually lose the habit of speaking the female language given that they are entering male-dominated spaces more and more. If women were "allowed" to enter into male-dominated spaces, then why would they still be pressured to act differently than men in the same position as them? It might be seen as a logical step to narrow down the differences between men and women by erasing dated regulations on language.

[246] Yoichi Shimemura, "No Womanly Women?: Blurring Gender Boundaries in Contemporary," *Nihongo to jendā* 10 (2010): 60, 61, https://gender.jp/journal/backnumber/no10_contents/.

[247] Mizue Sasaki, "Male and Female Speech in Japanese," *Nihongo to jendā* 12 (2012): 51, https://gender.jp/journal/backnumber/no12_contents/.

Farm Women's Professional Discourse in Ibaraki – Yukako Sunanoshi[248]

In her study, Sunanoshi followed four women working in agriculture in rural Ibaraki Prefecture in Japan. She analysed tape-recorded interactions of three female farmers and their Agricultural Extension adviser in Ibaraki from 1994. She then interviewed the Agricultural Extension adviser, Hayashi-san until 2002. She accompanied Hayashi-san in her visits to the three women and the conversations would last from thirty minutes to an hour. The participants in the conversations were mostly Hayashi-san and the three women, but their husbands were also present at times.

She first describes the attitudes towards the Ibaraki dialect and mentions surveys showing that it is one of the most negatively evaluated dialects in Japan, being called rough and not suitable for young women. However, the speakers of the Ibaraki dialect do not seem to be concerned about talking like people from Tokyo, although they do use standard features of the language in formal settings.[249]

Sunanoshi connected the dialect used by women with solidarity building and empowerment of farm women. She described that Hayashi-san's job was to empower women in agriculture and that she noticed two strategies of doing so. The first one is the usage of the dialect, which directly avoids the usage of women's language. Japanese women's language is sometimes considered a counterpart of the standard Japanese language, so by not using women's (standard) language, these women are freeing themselves of the regulation and gaining power to make and deliver their own ideas and decisions in a more direct way. This practice helps women to be taken more seriously and respected as equal to men. The second strategy was treating them "as representatives of their households who manage family business matters, rather than treating them as 'farmers' wives'." She also mentions that the advisors before Hayashi-san would only focus on technical matters, mostly communicating with men in the households. Two

[248] Yukako Sunanoshi, "Farm Women's Professional Discourse in Ibaraki," in *Japanese Language, Gender and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford University Press, 2004), 187-204.

[249] Sunanoshi, "Farm Women's Professional Discourse in Ibaraki," 191.

of the participants thought that only the husband should talk to the advisor before Hayashi-san came to them.

Sunanoshi then summarizes by mentioning the strategies that Hayashi-san used to establish solidarity between farm women. She mentions that most of the participants in the study used dialect-dominant speech and that their speech did not contain any "Japanese women's language" features. Instead, some dialectal features that are considered vulgar according to the rules of the gender norms were included. She continues to claim that farm women from Ibaraki do not have any similarities to traditional Yamanote housewives and that the use of women's language is itself a regional phenomenon. Sunanoshi earlier explains the Yamanote housewife phenomenon: "Yamanote is the western part of Tokyo, a middle- and upper-class residential area, whereas the eastern part, Shitamachi, is associated with lower-middle-class and blue-collar workers (Hibiya 1988). However, the Yamanote/Shitamachi designation has now become symbolic of class divisions rather than a strict geographic division (Lebra 1993), and a distinct speech style is associated with each."[250] "'Japanese women's language' is the ideal shared by women of a certain socioeconomic background who reside in Tokyo or aspire to Tokyo values, including language use."[251]

Lesbian Bar Talk in Shinjuku, Tōkyō: Hideko Abe[252]

This study is relevant to the present paper, as it shows females who identify with the gender role of women to a certain degree, but are in a position where their lives do not revolve around men. Therefore, it can be argued that lesbians have the least need to use women's speech given that they usually do not have to serve the heteronormative gender role of a woman like heterosexual women do, which makes "acting feminine" almost a free choice. To clarify, queer women are still undoubtedly influenced by the heteronormative standards of what a woman is, but to a smaller degree than heterosexual women who engage with heterosexual

[250] Sunanoshi, "Farm Women's Professional Discourse in Ibaraki," 189.
[251] Sunanoshi, "Farm Women's Professional Discourse in Ibaraki," 200.
[252] Hideko Abe, "Lesbian Bar Talk in Shinjuku, Tokyo," in *Japanese Language, Gender and Ideology: Cultural Models and Real People*, ed. Shigeko Okamoto and Janet S. Shibamoto Smith (Oxford University Press, 2004), 205-221.

men more frequently. For this reason, they may be seen as more creative in expressing their identity through language.

Abe visited a number of lesbian bars in Tokyo with a goal to see how linguistic practices of lesbians relate to the construction of their queer identities. For the sake of interviewees' privacy, Abe collected data by writing down interesting excerpts from the conversations she heard at the bars.

Abe discusses five linguistic features she found in interactions at lesbian bars: formal and informal styles, first-person pronouns, second-person pronouns, commands and requests and sentence-final particles. In this paper, the focus will be put on first- and second-person pronouns and sentence-final particles.

First, Abe noticed a link between the usage of first-person pronouns and the gender identity of people in the lesbian bars. First- and second-person pronouns are both important signifiers of gender identity of a speaker and hearer. Abe mentions Ide Sachiko's explanation[253] which describes the first-person pronouns *watakushi* and *watashi* as gender neutral (used by both sexes), the forms *boku*, *ore* (standard), *wagahai* and *washi* (nonstandard) as used by men exclusively, and the forms *atakushi*, *atashi* (standard), *atai* and *uchi* (nonstandard) as used by women only. Abe found that the usage of these pronouns correlated with the gender expressions of people at the lesbian bars. The people she observed in the bars are categorised into trans-sexuals (trans-masculine), *onabe*, who she describes as people who love women and choose them as partners, but their social and emotional identity is male, and lesbians who identify as women. The trans-sexuals would use *boku*, the *onabe* used *jibun* (a noun meaning "self" that is often used instead of first-person pronouns and although deemed neutral, mostly used by men) and the lesbians used *watashi* almost all of the time. Abe explains that this distinction is not strict and that the speakers often switch the usage of several pronouns depending on the context.[254]

As for the second-person pronouns, Abe found two pronouns used the most: *anta* and *omē*. However, she mentions that the frequency of second-person pronoun usage in general is not high, given that the speakers often referred to one another using nicknames and first names. She demonstrated

[253] Abe, "Lesbian Bar Talk in Shinjuku, Tokyo," 212.
[254] Hideko Abe, "Lesbian Bar Talk in Shinjuku, Tokyo," 208, 213.

that the pronoun *anta* is a more formal second-person pronoun and is seldom used. *Omē*, on the other hand, is considered very casual and more masculine and is often used between friends at bars, between employees and customers and between customers.

The sentence-final particles found in speech of people in lesbian bars were almost always masculine. Abe notices that the use of *da*, *dayo* and *zo* is quite frequent. *Da* is considered a moderately masculine particle, while *zo* is classified as strongly masculine.

Through these linguistic practices, it can be seen that queer people frequently attending lesbian bars (trans-sexuals, *onabe* and lesbians) often use different strategies of affirming their gender identity. We can also conclude that the word choice is quite fluid depending on the context the speaker is in.

Trans women's linguistic practices

This section introduces interviews and studies on transgender women's way of speaking, aiming to compare it to the women's language. The starting assumption is that transgender women would use more feminine styles of speaking given that it should be a part of their social transition. Changing one's gender is usually divided into two phases: social transition and medical transition. According to the UCSF Gender Affirming Health Program website,[255] social transition includes (1) presenting in public part- or full-time in your identified gender, (2) coming out to spouse, partner(s), children, friends, family, classmates, coworkers, community members and (3) changing your legal documents to reflect your chosen name, gender identity, and pronouns used. Medical transition refers to hormone therapy, hair removal, speech therapy etc. Presumably, for Japanese transgender women, feminine speech or women's language would be one of the tools of social transition. Therefore, this section will be analysing the use of standard Japanese language and women's language by transgender women.

[255] "Transition Roadmap," UCSF Transgender Care, accessed May 10, 2025, at https://transcare.ucsf.edu/transition-roadmap.

In a study published by Hideko Abe in 2023[256] it can be seen that transgender women pay significant attention to their way of speaking. When Abe asked MtF (male to female) interviewees about their speech, they gave a variety of very particular answers: (1) to not speak fast and not speak too much, (2) to make pauses between sentences to give the other person a chance to speak, (3) to use high intonation, (4) to be a good listener and use *aizuchi* (interjections during a conversation that indicate the listener is paying attention and/or understanding the speaker), (5) to not interrupt others when they are talking, (6) to smile, (7) to move hands (while speaking, gestures), (8) to use *yamato kotoba* and *wago* (Japanese words instead of Chinese words) and (9) to avoid using voiced sounds (e.g., instead of *daga*, use *shikashi*, both meaning "but"). Most of these linguistic (and paralinguistic) choices are quite similar, if not exactly the same as the regulations on women's language. Almost all of the (para)linguistic efforts here are the ones regarded by society as feminine, elegant and demure.

Other than these efforts, Abe found that the most used pronoun by transgender women is the "neutral" pronoun *watashi*. As for the second-person pronoun, she found that *anata*, *anta* and *kimi* were the most used.

Another very important thing to mention is the time and place of when and where transgender people can show their true identity. Here, language becomes a tool of keeping a person safe in situations when they are not certain if they would be accepted as a transgender person. An interviewee in Abe's study shared that it is easier for her to be herself when the other person does not know that she is transgender.[257] This woman probably went through a medical phase of her transition and is most certainly considered "passing," meaning that she is a person who is perceived as a cisgender person of their gender instead of the sex she was assigned at birth. That is why when someone who did not know her before her transition meets her, they probably do not question if she is a cis or a transgender woman. On the other hand, this interviewee feels awkward talking in a feminine manner to people who are aware of her transition.

[256] Hideko Abe, "Gengo kōdō to jendā saikōchiku – toransujendā no bāi" (Performative Linguistic Practices by Transgender Speakers), *The Japanese Journal of Language in Society* 26, no. 1 (2023): 29, https://doi.org/10.19024/jajls.26.1_21.

[257] Abe, "Gengo kōdō to jendā saikōchiku – toransujendā no bāi" (Performative Linguistic Practices by Transgender Speakers), 32.

The interviewee further explains that with people who are not aware of her transition, she tries to avoid finishing sentences (using definite stances, like *da*) and wordings that are deemed as masculine or "dirty" (such as swear words). In other words, she uses the "language aimed for women in today's society." On the contrary, she claims that she fears that people aware of her transition would comment negatively on her feminine language use by telling her that she is not a real woman and should not speak in that way. This is the reason for her not using as many of the feminine sentence-final particles like *yo* without a *da* preceding it. She also mentioned avoiding talking like she knows all about women (*Onna wa sōyo!* meaning "Women are all like that"). Instead, she puts in an effort not to use phrases deemed as womanly or cute. She emphasizes that balance is the most important when implementing women's speech as a transgender woman.

In a different study,[258] Abe mentions that in comparison to transgender men (FtM), transgender women put in much more effort into changing their language as a part of their transition. She mentions that they train their voice quality, communication strategy and they pay attention to grammar. During the process of Abe's data collection for this study, she even visited a voice training school for transgender women called *Otome Juku* and mentioned that it is quite popular. This shows that voice and language training is an integral part of the social transition of Japanese transgender women. It is important to stress that the initial goal of voice training is not "sounding like a woman," but rather "not sounding like a man."[259]

Seeing that these norms are of high significance to transgender women in their transition journey only shows how prevalent the norms still are in the current day. One interviewee stressed that she wanted to sound and be viewed as "natural" and "normal"[260] which further goes on to prove the degree of how much the "women's language" regulations

[258] Hideko Abe, "Performativity of Gender in Speech: Life Experiences of Japanese Trans Women / Gengo kōdō ni okeru jendā pāfōmatibitī: toransujendā no bāi," *U.S. – Japan Women's Journal* 58 (2020): 43, https://doi.org/10.1353/jwj.2020.0004.

[259] Abe, "Performativity of Gender in Speech: Life Experiences of Japanese Trans Women / Gengo kōdō ni okeru jendā pāfōmatibitī: toransujendā no bāi," 46.

[260] Abe, "Performativity of Gender in Speech: Life Experiences of Japanese Trans Women / Gengo kōdō ni okeru jendā pāfōmatibitī: toransujendā no bāi," 48.

were normalized and are now deemed as natural and normal, seen as an innate characteristic of women.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the differing relationships of cisgender women and transgender women with the norms of women's speech. First, a short history of norms and rules created to regulate the speech of women from the twelfth century to the modern day was introduced. Second, after a short explanation of current norms of women's language two studies following different kinds of women (by class, sexuality, gender expression, origin) and their linguistic practices were presented. Even though the gender norms prevailed through the centuries, this section showed that not all women follow them at all times. Finally, some studies that reflect the language use of transgender women were introduced. These studies showed that a large number of transgender women see importance in expressing their femininity through women's speech, although some different preferences are seen when it comes to the time and place of this practice.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the tool of control for some becomes a tool of self-soothing and finding one's real identity for others. Women's language is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, but rather a compilation of centuries of oppression of women's right to free speech in Japan. It has been promoted as a tool of showing femininity deceiving women (and men) of what a real woman should behave and talk like. It showed that real women are fragile, delicate and indirect. It is interesting to see transgender women use this tool in a totally different manner than it was "meant to be used." They decided to dive into the construct of femininity created by the patriarchy and feel comfortable in it, rather than being stranded by it. In Abe's study,[261] one transgender woman mentioned that she likes the term "returning" (*modoru*) to her true self. Women's language is a tool of liberation for some of those transgender women, who are in the process of social transition. On the other hand, we can see that some trans women feel a sense of discomfort if they use women's language in front of people who are aware of their transition.

[261] Abe, "Gengo kōdō to jendā saikōchiku – toransujenдā no bāi," 28.

Clearly, linguistic practices of any group of people cannot be put into lists or sets of rules, since every person's lived experience is different and influences linguistic behaviour in various ways. However, reporting on certain similar linguistic practices helps to see the socio-political problems of a larger group through language, and how individuals deal with them. The goals of the studies mentioned are not to "put people in a box," but rather to bring some of the marginalized people's experience closer to a wider audience. By broadening the minds of many people, a world with less stigma and prejudice, and more understanding and equality in society may be built. This research is very important, not only for understanding language use in transgender women, but also their lifestyles and general struggles.

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THE SHATTERED SELF: A FREUDIAN ANALYSIS OF SATOSHI KON'S *PAPRIKA* AND *PERFECT BLUE*

Arintina-Maria Bobiț

Abstract: The overt presence of elements from Freudian psychology can be noticed in most films directed by Kon Satoshi (1963-2010). Over the years, scholars have discussed in great detail the usage of dream and sexuality theory in such cases, neglecting other prevalent themes. The aim of this paper is to analyse the manner in which the Japanese director employs one of Freud's theories of the self, namely the Id, Ego and Super Ego delimitation of the human psyche, in two of his most influential films: *Perfect Blue* (1998) and *Paprika* (2006), in order to illustrate the fragmentation and reintegration of the self. Satoshi Kon's characters are physically doubled, yet psychologically and emotionally bound. Visual elements and story-telling techniques intertwine to showcase the complex mechanisms of the human psyche.

Keywords: film studies, Freudian psychology, Kon Satoshi.

Introduction

Perfect Blue and *Paprika* have been subjected to exhaustive analyses through a Freudian theoretical lens with a focus on dream theory, sexuality and the subconscious. Dreams and the mind as a landscape lie as the foundation of Kon's storytelling in the two films: Mima and Chiba alike have access to an inner and outer world of similar complexities and, as the lines between real and virtual blur, their selves expand and contract violently in an attempt to stabilise. The self-induced metamorphosis represents the resolution of both stories as they use violence as a means of

rebirth. The only way the protagonists finally reach an ideal, balanced form of their self is through the psychological process called integration, which will be discussed and explored further in this paper.

Given that the psychological realm is of utmost importance to the development of the story in *Perfect Blue* and *Paprika* alike, scholars such as Hengrui Zhu have proposed an analysis based on Freud's theory of the Id, Ego and Super Ego and the way it interacts with Kon's storytelling. Similarly, in this paper, the scope of this proposition is expanded through a comparative analysis of the narratological and visual representations of psychological processes as they aid in the development of both the story and its characters.

Theoretical framework

Introduced in Sigmund Freud's 1923 study *Das Ich und das Es* (The Ego and the Id), the theory suggests a three-tiered structure of the self that ensures the functionality of the human psyche. All tiers constantly interact with each other, meaning the destabilisation of one results in the dysfunctionality of all. An imbalance between the Id, Ego and Super Ego may trigger socially or personally undesirable behaviours, hindering the person's relationship with themselves and others. Thus, the three tiers all fulfill different roles as follows: the Super Ego, also named the Ego-Ideal, encompasses societal expectations as well as parental-imposed traits, ensuring that the individual complies with the generally-accepted rules; regarding the Ego, Freud states in his study, "we have formed the idea that in each individual there is a coherent organization of mental processes; and we call this his ego"[262] while, in contrast, the Id, simply put, "contains the passions."[263] The metaphor proposed in Freud's paper describes the relationship between Ego and Id as the relationship between a rider and his horse.[264] The rider controls and directs the horse, harnessing its raw power and speed. Similarly, the Ego is in control of the Id's instinctual

[262] Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923–1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, (1923), 17.
[263] Freud, "The Ego and the Id," 25.
[264] Freud, "The Ego and the Id," 25.

and impulsive nature. The Super Ego acts as a sort of overseer to the Ego, ensuring that its actions comply with the rules imposed by authority, be it parental figures, teachers or society as a whole.

Visual representations of fragmentation

Although the three components described above cannot exist independently from each other, Kon chooses to visually illustrate their fragmentation in the psyche of his two protagonists Mima and Chiba by constructing body doubles: either full, standalone characters or clones. Mirrors, screens and reflections are used both in *Perfect Blue* and *Paprika* creating nearly parallel scenes in construction and overall meaning. Mima's idol self looking at her through the reflection on a train's window or Chiba "communicating" with her alter ego, Paprika, through the window of her laboratory building are scenes in which Satoshi Kon uses classic Freudian motifs to reinforce the idea of alienation from self. The broken reflections and the disjointed representations of his protagonists as they see themselves as separated from their professional personas highlight the underlying issue of rejection. Undesirability versus ultra-desirability prompts the two young women to artificially separate themselves from the parts of themselves that could hinder progress. The disjunction between the Id, Ego and Super Ego in his feminine characters is even more apparent due to the usage of body doubling as mentioned above. The components of the psyche as delimited by Freud are isolated and individually built as characters, interacting with each other on screen as seemingly entirely different people.

In *Perfect Blue*, for example, throughout the entire film it is established that there is the "real" Mima and the "Idol" Mima. Her idol persona is a figment of Mima's imagination that constantly crosses the border between reality and her mind. As Mima navigates her new life as retired idol and newly debuted actress, she constantly reminisces about her past and the person she used to be or, better said, the person she used to embody. Although the choice of separating from her idol life had not been imposed on her, she seems to constantly contemplate whether she should have ditched herself and fully adopted the personality she displayed as a pop star. It is apparent through the juxtaposition between scenes of her shows

or fan interactions and scenes of her domestic life that Idol Mima and Mima are wildly different. Still, as the name suggests, her idol persona is perceived as an ideal previously achieved that is looming over her new career prospects and relationships. In the context of the film, Mima's past idol self represents the Super Ego, all-knowing and all-powerful in her nature as an internal representation of Mima's suppression. Every time she makes an appearance, she can be seen in her most well-known idol costume, her demeanor playful, yet critical, especially in relation to Mima. She skips around, "appears" in the streets, in Mima's apartment, in the reflection of multiple surfaces, especially in moments in which Mima is regretful, afraid or vulnerable, and pushes her over the edge from a psychological standpoint. Idol Mima is the literal representation of the best version of herself: successful, loved and favored among her group members which makes her the representation of both societal standards and Mima's own standards for herself and her career. This embodiment of expectations generates constant tension throughout the film, amplifying Mima's turmoil and triggering an inner conflict that lasts all through the story.

Mima, the civilian, the regular person, or the "real" Mima as dubbed above represents the Ego. Her efforts to make her life and career align with her personality are conscious and constant. She doesn't hold grudges against her group members even though they seldom contact her after she ends her idol career. She does not harbor any hard feelings against people that denigrate her online or in real life, maintaining an altruistic, yet naïve approach to life. Although infantilized by her manager, boss and even her fandom, Mima is capable of taking care of herself and of making decisions. Without being under the action of her Super Ego manifested as Idol Mima or her Id, which will be touched upon later, Mima herself could be characterized as balanced. For the most part, she reigns with both of those forces, instinct and ideals, and fights to regain and maintain control until the very end.

The Id in *Perfect Blue* is not another version of Mima or, at least, not in the way the Ego and Super Ego are. As mentioned before, the Id is the instinctual and impulsive side of the mind, the primal area of the psyche that engages with passion and desire. Based on her behavior and motivations, the Id is the version of Mima as impersonated by Rumi,

Mima's manager. Her actions are reckless, violent and rooted in the selfish desire for fame and appreciation. Despite justifying her crimes by invoking the noble cause of protecting the young woman and ensuring her success in an industry that she knew and battled firsthand, Rumi ultimately seeks to fully overtake Mima's identity and assume it as hers. She is jealous of Mima who is far more talented, charming and beautiful than she used to be and it is exactly this jealousy that pushes Rumi into delusion. Her utmost desire is to be the idol she failed to be in the past due to her looks and, instead of processing her traumatic experiences under the action of a potential Ego and fulfilling her role as manager as her potential Super Ego would dictate, Rumi fully surrenders herself to her Id. Through mirroring Mima's way of dress, speech patterns and mannerisms she embodies a vengeful and egotistical Mima that ends up becoming violent with others and her own self. She attempts to eliminate the Ego and Super Ego, seeking to be the only Mima left.

The delimitation between these three components of the psyche is not as clear in *Paprika* as it is in *Perfect Blue.* While Mima has at least two other "characters" that physically resemble her, yet act in a manner that sets them apart from each other, doctor Chiba, *Paprika*'s protagonist, and the other representations of the constituents of her psyche are not as similar. One thing that has been agreed upon in previously published papers is that "Chiba's Id is embodied by Paprika."[265] Paprika is characterized by her signature hairstyle, colorful clothes and playfully erotic demeanor. In contrast to Rumi's representation of the Id, Paprika is not as reckless or impulsive, but is more so an illustration of desire and the fulfillment of said desire. While not overtly hedonistic, she does not deny herself satisfaction when something piques her interest and she does not abide by the strict code of conduct the dream device imposes on those who would use it for therapy. Moreover, she is acutely in tune with the desires of other characters such as Konakawa, the Chairman or even Chiba herself. Due to her virtual avatar nature, she is able to transform herself in order to trigger change or realization in said characters. Paprika is everything doctor Chiba

[265] Hengrui Zhu, "Paprika: Journey of Characters' Dissociative Psyches to Integration Through Freudian Analysis," *Communications in Humanities Research* 41, no. 1 (2024): 150. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/41/2024NE0023.

cannot be: free-spirited, painfully honest and sometimes selfish. She freely roams the imagination and mindscape of different people without much regard to the medical and moral implications of such an act, bouncing from person to person, memory to memory, dream to dream, all in the spirit of efficiency in treatment. She changes her appearance often, takes on mythic abilities and traits and, overall, does not concern herself with what reality or real people deem appropriate or plausible. Thus, the way Paprika and Chiba are constructed in the film highlights them as two extremes on the same spectrum. Based on this polarized illustration, it can be concluded that doctor Chiba represents the Super Ego, not the Ego as noted in Zhu's paper.[266]

From the beginning of the film, doctor Chiba is constructed to be starkly different from Paprika. Her appearance contrasts Paprika's casual outfit, doctor Chiba being constantly dressed professionally and devoid of any overt display of personality in matters of personal style. She is strict in following rules and orders and places great value in efficiency as well, but without moral or technological sacrifices from anyone but herself. There are multiple instances in the film in which Chiba's inability to maintain a friendly interaction with clients, bosses or colleagues is shown, underlining her repressed nature. Those suppressed desires, especially in relation to her colleague Tokita for whom she is nursing some kind of attachment, are obvious to Paprika. In one scene, she offers her counseling services as they are discussing through Chiba's reflection in a window, hinting at the character's internal conflict between duty and desire. Chiba turns her down rather curtly, temporarily sacrificing her own feelings for the sake of solving the overarching threat of the dream hijacker. In addition to the contrasting nature of their personalities, one more example to support the argument of doctor Chiba being the Super Ego in conflict with Paprika, the Id, is a scene in which doctor Chiba is running and, as the frames transition to her virtual alter ego, another version of Chiba, one with her hair down and dressed in a simple yet sleek shirt appears. That reinforces the idea that between Paprika and doctor Chiba, there is another "person," Atsuko, that can maintain the equilibrium between societal and professional pressure and personal desires. That is the Ego of *Paprika*'s protagonist, Atsuko

[266] Zhu, "Paprika," 150.

Chiba that, in the end of the film, enters a relationship with her coworker, Tokita, and changes her approach to helping those in need by retiring the rule-bending Paprika.

Violence as Integration

The process in which balance is restored to the psyche of Kon's protagonists is through integration, which is defined in Zhu's paper as "a psychotherapy approach that aims at reconciling fragmented aspects of the self."[267] Both Mima and Chiba are constrained to come to a resolution through violence. The destructive nature of such a narrative device is meant to force together the three aspects of each of their psyches. In *Perfect Blue*, Mima's fight is a physical, high-stake and high-risk one. Her life, both as a professional entertainer and simply as a person, is on the line as Rumi viciously attacks her. She does not receive any external help as the streets around her are empty and her screams for aid echo between seemingly uninhabited buildings. In order to win the fight she must grapple both physically and mentally with a version of her that no longer serves any purpose. By winning against her biggest enemy, herself, she manages to reach full personhood. Her suppressed, almost passive self is triggered by the life and death situation which makes her fight back, retort to violence in a final attempt to gain control over her own life and future. Eliminating the physical reminder of what she could have been as well as unleashing her own inner primal power in the context of survival mends the fragmented constituents of her mind. Retired, yet content, Mima manages to survive and live on while Rumi is hospitalized and seeking treatment for her still lingering psychological issues.

Chiba's fight is more metaphorical than Mima's. It indeed includes violence to a certain extent, but her transformation, literally represented by her growth from a baby to a toddler to a full adult is meant to signify her coming to terms with her feelings and growing into her full, own person. Only when she acknowledges her deep feelings of affection for Tokita, who she initially deems more immature than her and annoyingly child-like, can she tap into her own potential and fight against the Chairman. Not

[267] Zhu, "Paprika," 149.

only that, but the idea of defeating the villain through consuming him and overtaking him in sheer size, not power, underlines the benefits she reaps from weaponizing external forces instead of relying solely on her inner drive. In a classic display of light that defeats darkness, Kon reiterates the beneficial nature of traits that may initially seem negative or undesirable, such as Paprika's child-like wonder and charm. Ultimately, by saving her coworkers, her lover and the world, Atsuko discovers that she does not need to employ an alter ego in order to exhibit the extremes of her personality, instead she can just harness the power offered by her ethics, determination and intellect as well as her charisma and hunger for life to become the happiest version of herself. Continuing her research while being in a relationship with the love of her life, finding balance between duty and desire aid Atsuko in fulfilling her role as the Ego, the one in control.

Using physical fights as a means of psychological integration does not only heighten the tension in the most crucial moments of Kon's films. It also simplifies the meaning of the concept through visual representation, thus making it more accessible to a wider audience. The battles of the two protagonists reinforce the idea that healing and finding oneself is never a peaceful or linear journey, that it requires pain, mental stamina and the acceptance of destruction as a requirement for rebuilding something new from the rubble. Chiba and Mima forcefully reclaim their agency by eliminating the embodiment of their suppression. They destroy or fuse with their body doubles, thus coming to terms with who they are and what they truly want. Mending oneself, in Kon's perspective, means breaking self-imposed confinements and owning both the good and the bad traits of one's personality. In a similar manner to that of the Phoenix, Mima and Chiba burn what held them back or what they thought had been the best for them only to rise not better, but stable, whole.

Conclusion

Freud's theory of the Id, Ego and Super Ego is crucial to the type of story Satoshi Kon depicts in *Perfect Blue* and *Paprika.* While it is, indeed, interwoven with other Freudian theories mentioned in the beginning of

this paper, its role in the construction of the plot is undeniable. Albeit different in what their overarching plot is, both films rely heavily on a psychological conflict which is based on the fragmentation and, ultimately, the reconciliation of the self. The metaphorical and the concrete coagulate in these two pieces of Kon's work, creating a complex portrayal of one of the most volatile themes ever explored: the human mind.

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TECHNO-ORIENTALISM AS A NEW FORM OF "YELLOW PERIL"

Anna Arutyunyan

Abstract: The Eastern Other has always been perceived as a threat to Western civilization and its ideals. While the "exoticism" of the so-called East had no regional borders, however, the threat it represented took different forms depending on the region from which the "danger" emanated, be it the Middle East or East Asia. The racist metaphor of the "Yellow Peril" goes back to medieval fears of Pan-Mongolism, Genghis Khan and the Mongol conquests and represented the terror experienced by Europeans faced with foreign cultures, particularly Asian ones, as well as the fear that the West would be defeated and enveloped by the irresistible dark occult forces of the East. Although the manifestation of the "Yellow Peril" changed over time, reflecting changes in geopolitical dynamics, economic conditions and cultural relations, the nature of that fear remained unchanged - due to Asia's large population, fear of enslavement and the dominance of the Asian races over the West.

Keywords: East Asia, Eurocentric discourse, Techno-Orientalism, Yellow Peril.

The concept of "Yellow Peril" was introduced and spread in the Western political discourse at the turn of the 20th century, riding the wave of geopolitical anxiety. Western powers, especially the United States, looked with suspicion at Japan's successful industrialization and modernization, coupled with its military victories against the Russian Empire and China, in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, respectively. Japan's rapid rise after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and its subsequent successful foreign policy, contributed to the perception of East Asian expansionism as a threat to Western civilization.

German Emperor Wilhelm II (1859-1941), who added racial overtones to Japan's victory over the Russian Empire and portrayed Sino-Japanese relations as an alliance seeking to subjugate the West, popularized the ideology of the "Yellow Peril" as early as the 1880s. As stated in the book *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* by John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, "many credit German Kaiser Wilhelm II as having coined "die Gelbe Gefahr" or "the Yellow Peril." Wilhelm claimed to have had a prophetic dream of a seated Buddha riding a vicious dragon storm upon Europe. He commissioned Hermann Knackfuss in 1895 to illustrate his dream as gifts to leaders of Europe and America. The painting depicts the Archangel Michael (who leads the just against Satan during the final battle of Armageddon in Bible prophecy) cajoling the various European nations to fight together. An allegorical feminine figure represents each European nation. The painting is titled "Peoples of Europe. Defend Your Holiest Possessions."[268]

In the United States, the "Yellow Peril" theory first made its appearance with the first wave of Chinese immigration to America (1850s-1880s). For the European immigrants, the influx of cheap labor threatened to reduce their earning potential. The Chinese then became a real object of hatred during the Gold Rush in the 1880s, once again posing a threat to the white citizens.[269] In addition, the stereotype emerged that Asians, inextricably linked to their own culture, were incapable of assimilation and, accordingly, could not fully integrate into American society, which basically eliminated the possibility that Asian immigrants could move from the "out-group" to the "in-group."[270]

The "Yellow Peril" fueled discriminatory policies and practices against East Asian immigrants, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 in the United States and the White Australia Policy of the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act. Such laws restricted immigration from East

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[268] John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, eds., *Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (London: Verso, 2014), 12.

[269] Erika Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882–1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (2002): 36.

[270] D. G. Kim and Enze Han, "Yellow Peril or Model Minority? Measuring Janus-Faced Prejudice toward Asians in the United States," *Political Science Research and Methods* (2024): 4.

Asian countries and legitimized racism. Moreover, the concept contributed to the marginalization, stereotyping, and national imagery of East Asian countries. Thus, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 suggests that "the presence of 'Oriental' faces in the United States evoked among white Americans an alarm that the yellow race might overtake the white nation by outnumbering and out-powering the White race,"[271] an anxiety further intensified by perceptions of East Asia's vast populations and Japan's emergence as an imperial power.

During World War II, Japanese immigrants became the embodiment of the "Yellow Peril." Anti-Japanese propaganda in the Allied countries portrayed Japan as a ruthless aggressor and perpetuated stereotypes of the "mean" and "treacherous" Japanese enemy.[272] Japanese Americans and Canadians faced forced relocation and internment in camps; however, other East Asian communities were also discriminated against and surveilled, as East Asians were still considered "Orientals" in American society, so there was no need to differentiate. In the postwar period, the ideological confrontation shifted the focus from Japanese immigrants as the main threat to the Chinese population of the United States, as the Korean War and the rise of the CCP in China in 1949 made Chinese Americans prime suspects of treason and espionage. The rise of communism in Asia in the mid-20th century further fueled the "Yellow Peril" myth of a revolutionary communist East capable of taking over the globe and destroying Western capitalist hegemony.[273]

Orientalism is a well-known concept in academic discourse that was deconstructed within the framework of postcolonial studies by the American cultural theorist of Palestinian origin, Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism* published in 1978. In an attempt to liberate the East from its colonial past – particularly from its colonial scholarly heritage – Said, in *Orientalism*,

[271] Alan A. Lim, "Yellow Peril: A Legacy or a Forgotten Past? A Content Analysis of Chinese Representations in Today's U.S. News Media," *University of Washington Department of Communication*, 2014, 4.

[272] Gary Y. Okihiro and Julie Sly, "The Press, Japanese Americans, and the Concentration Camps," *Phylon* (1960-) 44, no. 1 (1983): 70–71.

[273] Yong Chen Yeh, "Transnational Celebrations in Changing Political Climates," in *Making an American Festival: Chinese New Year in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 21.

turns to the views of prominent Orientalists (A. Balfour, Lord Cromer, S. Oakley, etc.) and to Oriental studies as a discipline, analyzing its influence not only on political, economic, social, anthropological, and ideological processes, but also on cultural ones. The first chapter, in particular, focuses on demonstrating through concrete examples that the term "Orientalism" has deep historical roots and that its foundation lies in literary writings, pre-existing definitions, and concepts that laid the groundwork for Orientalist thought. Edward Said also interprets Orientalism as the idea of the East as a cultural, ideological, and civilizational antithesis to the West.[274]

Undoubtedly, in Said's work the emphasis is placed primarily on the construction of the image of the Middle East by Europe's colonial empires. However, Orientalism also provides the ideological framework within which the image of the East Asian region becomes distorted in American mass culture.

Thus, over time, particular modes of imagining the East by Europeans begin to take shape, producing an image of the East as exotic yet underdeveloped, mysterious, and therefore no less dangerous. At the same time, the danger emanating from the "various Easts" differs significantly: in the case of Asia (the "Yellow Peril"), the threat lies in its vast population and its perceived potential to, in some sense, bring the West under its control.

In the 1980s, the vector of the "Yellow Peril" shifted again to Japan, due to its rapid economic development, which gave rise to Techno-Orientalism. As Lin and Wang described it, "The concept of techno-orientalism originated in the 1980s when David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995) coined the phrase to refer to the emergence of anti-Japanese and anti-East Asian racist beliefs and speech during Japan's economic boom."[275] In addition, Lozano-Mendez defined techno-orientalism as "[...]Techno-Orientalism is an Orientalist discourse that the West has hegemonically established on a global scale as a structure of power and knowledge. This concept, in the form of Foucault's discursive analysis, derives from Orientalist knowledge

[274] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[275] Yirui Lin and Xiansheng Wang, "Media Portrayal of Techno-Orientalism," *Proceedings of the 2024 4th International Conference on Social Development and Media Communication*, 2024, 6.

related to Japan, as well as from Orientalist knowledge built around an 'imaginary geography' that is commonly called 'East Asia'."[276]

The framing of Asia and Asians within hyper-technological terms has transcended cultural representation and entered political discourse, where Techno-Orientalist imagery is saturated with technological and futuristic rhetoric. However, traditional Orientalism captures the East and Asia in traditional and often pre-modern images, while Techno-Orientalism represents a broader, dynamic and often contradictory range of images, created by both East and West, of an East undergoing rapid economic and cultural transformation.

The embodiment of American fear of the future, in which Asia occupies a leading place, came to be represented in popular culture of the United States. From William Gibson's 1984 sci-fi novel *Neuromancer* and the first cyberpunk film, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), which imitated the monolithic urban structure of Tokyo, to the *The Matrix trilogy* (1999-2003), or Alex Garland's 2014 *Ex Machina* – which to one degree or another featured characters or settings with features of technologically advanced Asian cultures could all be called manifestations of Techno-Orientalism in popular culture.

In films depicting a dystopian future with extremely advanced technologies, e.g. *Blade Runner* (1982), *Blade Runner* 2049 (2017), *Ex Machina* (2014), *Cloud Atlas* (2012), *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) – the "Asianness" of the scene is almost always exaggerated so much that in most cases the directors do not even bother to check the facts about the various cultures represented. The billboards feature a mix of Chinese characters, Japanese and Korean scripts, with East Asia simply coming together in a single image, illuminated by the glittering neon lights of an Asian dystopian future, where technology has become hostile.

The most typical cinematic image associated with techno-orientalism is the projected image of a geisha, as depicted in the *Blade Runner* movies, symbolizing both the aesthetically pleasing East and its purely exotic otherness to the West, which is revealed through the billboard's hazy hologram projection, further emphasizing the connection between

[276] Artur Lozano-Mendez, "Counterpoints: Edward Said's Legacy," in *Techno-Orientalism in East-Asian Contexts: Reiteration, Diversification, Adaptation*, 184, 2010.

technology, capitalism and hyper-reality, and "Asianness." East Asian cultures are often depicted as inherently futuristic or "otherworldly," with elements of traditional culture juxtaposed with high-tech environments. This juxtaposition often highlights the perceived strangeness or exoticism of East Asian societies, heightening the sense of cultural otherness.

In *Ex Machina* (2014), Alex Garland's portrayal of the character Kyoko embodies a distinctly racialized form of otherness that intersects with both gender and technology. As a silent, submissive Asian woman who is revealed to be an artificial being incapable of speaking English, Kyoko's characterization reflects a long-standing Orientalist trope of the voiceless, hypersexualized Asian female subject. Her lack of speech, explicitly framed within the film as a linguistic incapacity rather than mere narrative choice, symbolically reinforces her exclusion from the realm of human subjectivity and agency. Instead, her role is confined to that of servitude, functioning as both an object of male desire and a tool within the power dynamics between the film's male protagonists.

Looking a little deeper, an interesting blend of Techno-Orientalism and exploitation has been formed in the music industry and is represented by the experimental electronic music genre of vaporwave. Emerging in the early 2010s, this microgenre is framed by the post-irony of internet trends, imbued with a vibrant audiovisual aesthetic, and simultaneously serving as a youth response to a rapidly changing world. *Floral Shoppe* (2011) by Vektroid is one of the first albums in the vaporwave genre and "exhibits techno-orientalism in its appropriation of the Japanese language coupled with its futuristic sampling methods and an obvious emphasis on technology."[277] While the appropriation of Japanese writing may appear minor, its impact on the genre as a whole is substantial: it established a distinct visual and linguistic code that has come to define vaporwave aesthetics. This visual language helped cement the genre's identity, leading countless later artists to imitate the use of Chinese and Japanese characters to evoke an exoticized sense of modernity and alienation. After Floral Shoppe, Japanese and other Asian languages have become key identifiers within the vaporwave genre.

[277] Teagan Kim, "Accelerationism and Techno-Orientalism in Macintosh Plus's Floral Shoppe," *The Macksey Journal* 1, no. 209 (2020): 12.

Naturally, Techno-Orientalism extended beyond cultural representations, carrying profound economic and political implications. It was closely intertwined with the Japanese economic miracle and arose at a time when in an attempt to recover from the Vietnam War, the United States was undergoing a political, economic and social decline. The US economy was experiencing a recession, thus, the growing economic power of Japan and other "Asian tigers," as well as their rapid scientific and technological progress, threatened the position of the United States as the "first" power in the world.

"By the end of the eighties, after Sony acquired Columbia, and Mitsubishi – Rockefeller Center, in 1989, Techno-Orientalism in the United States bordered on hysteria. At that time, the statements of Techno-Orientalists reached a high level of anger. Japanese companies were perceived as buyers of American real estate, which was iconic in the public consciousness. The deals were presented as part of a strategy to colonize the country by absorbing economic and cultural values."[278] Japanese high-quality goods flooded the American market, and for Americans the dynamics of the present did not promise a bright future.

In particular, Techno-Orientalist portrayals of a future dominated by Asia have gained momentum, especially after the neoliberal trade policies that facilitated increased flows of information and capital between the East and West. The image of an Asia-driven technological future, marked by roboticism and a highly technological East, draws not only from the rise of Asian factory production and Chinese labor,[279] but also from contemporary global depictions of meticulously orchestrated K-pop stars,[280] the rigid work environments influenced by Confucian capitalism – a term used by Tu Wei-Ming (1991), which refers to an economic and cultural model in East Asia that fuses market-oriented growth with Confucian ideals of discipline, hierarchy, and collective harmony.[281] These seemingly disparate

[278] Lozano-Mendez, "Counterpoints," 188.

[279] Long T. Bui, "Asian Roboticism: Connecting Mechanized Labor to the Automation of Work," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 19, no. 1-2 (March 2020): 114-115.

[280] John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 48.

[281] Tu Wei-Ming, "A Confucian Perspective on the Rise of Industrial East Asia," in *Confucianism and the Modernization of China*, ed. Silke Kriger and Rolf Trauzettel (Mainz: Hase & Koehler Press, 1991), 31.

examples converge in a global imaginary that constructs Asia as a space of hyper-organization, collective discipline, and technological mastery – a striking contrast to the more individualized and deregulated free-market West, increasingly perceived as lagging behind in infrastructural and economic development.

For example, in postwar China, under Mao Zedong's leadership, technology was seen as a revolutionary tool to improve workers' lives, eliminate scarcity, reshape nature according to communist ideals, and defend the nation against imperialist forces. In the early years of Maoist China, technology was fundamentally viewed as a liberating instrument for the proletariat, aligning with the Chinese Communist Party's goal of abolishing feudalism and capitalism. However, this revolutionary technocentrism would eventually be modified under Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s.[282] Deng remained committed to a vision of Chinese technocentrism, but with the caveat that it supported China's integration into the global free market and fueled rapid economic growth within a capitalist framework.[283]

Before China began to open up in the 1990s, other East Asian countries prioritized domestic production and the active acquisition of technology under protectionist economic policies. They developed in parallel with industrial advances in the West, and while the East, according to Orientalist theories, was created by the West and had no opportunity to assert itself, East Asia, according to Techno-Orientalism, is shaped by the West, using those same technologies, as well as the levers of democratization. "This Orientalist narrative depicts a hyper-futuristic Japan that the West had a role in creating. In this vision, Japan has now ironically become more Western than the West, posing a danger to the 'fundamental' Eurocentric future."[284]

The idea of East Asia as a region integrating and producing modern technologies has contributed significantly to the modern Western

[282] Theresa MacPhail, "The 'Problem' of Science in China," *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 3, no. 1 (2009): 33-34.

[283] Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 68.

[284] Kaede Ashizawa, "Technologizing Asia: Uncovering Techno-Orientalism's Constructions of Asian Futurism," *New Explorations* 5, no. 1 (2025): 6.

understanding of the East as a more techno-centric civilization, according to which most of the East Asian population and their living infrastructure predominantly resemble something mechanized, something that has little human in it. The concept of a technologized East is directly based on neo-Orientalist ideas, in which the distinctions between human and machine characteristics seem blurred. Thus, the West, in particular the United States, for its own benefit, contributes to the technologization of the countries of the East Asian region with its investments and political narrative, thereby spreading its influence.

At the same time, an image of a machine-like and neon-bright Asia was created, in which artificial intelligence and robotization are developing at a rapid and dangerous pace. This perception, however, overlooks the sociocultural realities that shape technological adaptation in countries like Japan, which is often positioned at the center of such futuristic visions. While it is undeniable that Japan is making significant investments in robotics and integrating robots into society to perform tasks traditionally carried out by humans, the lingering influence of traditional conservatism, especially among Japan's highly skilled aging population, may prevent Japan from becoming the cyberpunk future it is often envisioned to be.[285]

While Japan's robots symbolize one facet of technological progress, the swift evolution of artificial intelligence has shifted global attention toward China, which Western media, policy, and public opinion frequently depict as the frontrunner in AI development. As a result, discussions and perceptions of AI in the West continue to be shaped by the belief that the Chinese are advancing in AI more quickly and efficiently. At the heart of techno-orientalist anxieties, fears, and dichotomies about a rising China lies a fundamental contradiction: no matter how the United States frames itself in opposition to China's growing technological dominance, it is inherently linked to the rise of a technologically advanced Chinese hegemony in the 21st century.

It is also noteworthy that the anxiety surrounding artificial intelligence originated from the very idea of its existence. The science fiction of the pulp era (1890s-1950s) serves as a clear and fundamental representation of this dread, embedding 3 key tropes into its narratives. The first is the fear of

[285] Bui, "Asian Roboticism," 112-113.

being overwhelmed by the superior numbers of a “horde” controlled by a central intelligence, commanding a generic and mindless mass of servants. The second is the emphasis on the inevitable conflict between opposing groups - whether White versus Asian or Human versus AI. The final trope is the portrayal of the Asian or AI as unfeeling, purely logical entities. While many of these tropes continue to shape both techno-orientalism and the AI imaginary today, the concurrent circulation of “Yellow Peril” and AI fiction during the pulp era, along with the striking similarities in world-building and plot development, offer a lens through which these correspondences can be more clearly understood.[286]

The Techno-Orientalist discourse evokes fear or anxiety about the perceived threat posed by East Asia’s technological sophistication. This anxiety is often linked to narratives of economic competition and colonization, or of technological espionage. The prevalence of Techno-Orientalist images can have consequences for both East Asian and Western identities. For East Asians, it can reinforce the sense that they are seen primarily through the prism of technology rather than as people with diverse cultural backgrounds, echoing the Orientalist construction of the “Oriental,” but replacing the core characteristic of under-development with a hyper-development that is dangerous to the West. For Westerners, this can shape the perception of East Asia as a monolithic, homogeneous entity that seeks to enslave them using modern technology. The opposition between East and West also takes on a new form. The West tends to present itself as either unrelated to the seemingly machine-like qualities of the East, or in most cases as something that will inevitably be swept up in the flow of Asian technology, reinforcing the sense of the West’s supposed decline.[287]

The Techno-Orientalism of the 21st century emerged from and is deeply rooted in the interplay between the West and East, which facilitates global neoliberal and state-capitalist systems of hierarchical power. While traditional Orientalism focuses on representing Asia in static, often pre-

[286] L. J. Fernandez, “Asiandroid: Techno-Orientalism and the AI Imaginary,” UC Riverside, 2023, 36-37.

[287] David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta Aiyu Niu, *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

modern ways to confine it, Techno-Orientalism offers a more complex and sometimes contradictory array of images. These are shaped by both Eastern and Western perspectives, depicting an Orient undergoing rapid economic and cultural change. Like traditional Orientalism, techno-orientalism centers around the idea of modernity, but extends beyond the West's historically dominant role in shaping representations of the East.

As China continues to rise in the 21st century, techno-orientalist perspectives increasingly portray Asia as both the engine of technological progress and a source of unease for the West. These narratives contrast the disciplined, technologically immersed Asian subject with the overwhelmed Western individual, suggesting a reversal of colonial dynamics through technological power. Culturally, such images circulate through global media and digital aesthetics, reducing Asian identities to symbols of efficiency and futurity while commodifying "Asian modernity" for Western audiences. Ultimately, Techno-Orientalism today operates as a global, bidirectional discourse shaped by the flow of trade, capital, and culture – one that serves the interests of elites across both East and West while reinforcing existing hierarchies of power and representation.

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APPENDIX

First East Asian Studies International Student Symposium (May 16-17, 2025)

Schedule

Friday, May 16, 2025

Panel 1: Religie şi spiritualitate (Religion and Spirituality) (In Romanian)		
8:30 – 8:50	Ștefan-Gabriel Ilie (online) *University of Bucharest*	Sectele budiste Shingon și Tendai
8:50 – 9:10	Ana Maria Busuioc *West University of Timisoara*	Apariția vocii feminine în poezia modernă japoneză: Yosano Akiko
9:10 – 9:30	Alexandra-Ioana Negrea *West University of Timisoara*	Consecinţele sociale ale bombardamentului nuclear în Japonia postbelică (Căsătoria)
9:30 – 9:50	Gabriela Tarsîna *West University of Timisoara*	În căutarea sufletului pierdut: *Decădere umană* de Dazai Osamu și *Portretul lui Dorian Gray* de Oscar Wilde
9:50-10:10	Alexandra Stănescu *West University of Timisoara*	Condiția femeii în romanele *The Housekeeper and the Professo*r și *Norwegian Wood*
10:10 – 10:30	Alexandra-Naomi Muraru *West University of Timisoara*	Doliul în *Brocart de toamnă* și *Dead-end Memories*

Break (15 minutes)

Panel 2: Culture and Society		
10:45 – 11:05	Iulia Elisa Gabor (online) *West University of Timisoara*	*Eta* burden in Shimazaki Tōson's *The Broken Commandment*
11:05 – 11:25	Andrei Ilban *West University of Timisoara*	On the purpose of literature in Japanese Modernity: Ars poetica in Edogawa Ranpo's *The Human Chair* and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's *The Hell Screen*
11:25 – 11:45	Diana Belehuz *West University of Timisoara*	Atomic Bomb Literature in Postwar Japan
11:45 – 12:00	Anna Arutyunyan (online) *Russian-Armenian University*	Techno-Orientalism as a New Form of the "Yellow Peril"

Panel 3: The Gothic in Japanese Literature		
12:00 – 12:20	Anamaria Cvașa *West University of Timisoara*	*The Human Chair* by Edogawa Ranpō As Body Horror: The Horror of Metamorphosis
12:20 – 12:40	Mia-Sofia Pencov *West University of Timisoara*	Izumi Kyōka's *The Surgery Room* from a Gothic Perspective
12:40 – 13:00	Andreea Rus *West University of Timisoara*	Metamorphosis in Edogawa Ranpō's Short Stories

Lunch Break (13:00-15:00): Lunch is provided for all participants

Panel 4: East Asian Cultural Paradigms		
15:00 – 15:20	Konstantin Kostic *University of Belgrade*	Differing Apects, Same Purpose: The Divine Triad in Japanese and Egyptian Mythology
15:20 – 15:40	Pavlina Mijatovic (online) *University of Belgrade*	Tanabata: A Transcultural and Literary Analysis of the Weaver and the Cowheard Love Story
15:40 – 16:00	Aleksa Stamenic *University of Belgrade*	The Grand Shrine of Ise (Ise Jingu) and its Social and Political Role Throughout History
16:00 – 16:20	Kristina Uskoković, Vasilija Tomašević *University of Belgrade*	Unearthing the Undead: A Comparative Study of Vampires in Serbian, Romanian and Chinese Cultures
16:20 – 16:40	Marija Bursac (online) *University of Belgrade*	The Terracotta Army: Legacy of China's First Emperor

Break (20 minutes)

Panel 5: Linguistics and Gender Studies		
17:00 – 17:20	Andela Jovancovic *University of Belgrade*	Development of ABAB Type Gitaigo: From the 10th Century to the Present
17:20 – 17:40	Milica Nikodijevic *University of Belgrade*	Cis and Trans Women's Experience through Japanese Language
17:40 – 18:00	Iulia Florișteanu *West University of Timisoara*	*No Longer Human*: An Analysis of Ōba Yōzō's Troubled Relationships with Women
18:00 – 18:20	Daria-Nicola Surugiu *West University of Timisoara*	Silenced Desires: Queerness and the Burden of Toxic Masculinity in Japanese Literature

Dinner (provided for all participants)

Saturday, May 17

Panel 6: Media and Social Media Representations in East Asia		
9:00 – 9:20	Marian Suciu *"December 1st 1918"* *University of Alba Iulia*	Through Korean Eyes: Victims and Oppressors in Media Representations of the Japanese Colonial Rule
9:20 – 9:40	Ana-Maria Viziteu *West University of Timisoara*	Postwar Japan in the Short Story *Grave of the Fireflies* by Nosaka Akiyuki
9:40 – 10:00	Oana-Andreea Tăune (online) *University of Bucharest*	Culture, conflict and Consequences: Analyzing Bullying in South Korea Using Korean Drama Tropes and Real-World Insights
10:00 – 10:20	Arintina-Maria Bobiț *West University of Timisoara*	The Shattered Self: a Freudian Analysis of Satoshi Kon' s „Perfect Blue" and „Paprika"

Break (20 minutes)

Panel 7: Japanese Literature in Comparative Approaches		
10:40 – 11:00	Miruna Demian *West University of Timisoara*	Duty, austerity, and self-sacrifice: Hiratsuka Raichō, *Seitō*, with a side of Beauvoir
11:00-11:20	Alexia Elena Faur *West University of Timisoara*	Struck by the Restoration: Female Social Outcasts in Higuchi Ichiyō's *The Thirteenth Night*
11:20-11:40	Andreea Teodora Tănase *West University of Timisoara*	Depending on the Vermin: A comparison of the relationship between caretaker and charge in Franz Kafka's *The metamorphosis* and Edogawa Ranpō's *The Caterpillar*

11:40 – 12:00	Daria-Adela Torok *West University of Timisoara*	Antisocial Personality Disorder Depicted Through Protagonists of Postwar Japanese Literature
12:00 – 12:20	Michelle Stan (online) *University of Bucharest*	Body Oddities: Alienation and Rebellion in the Novels *Hunchback* by Ichikawa Saou and *Earthlings* by Murata Sayaka

End of Symposium

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