

Review >
Japan

Return to Japan

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

By Gérard Siary

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

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

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

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

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

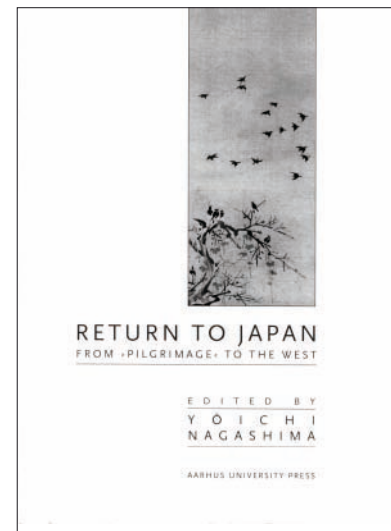
retraces how Mori Ōgai, a translator of Western works who, failing to adapt the Western novel to Japanese literature, shifted to a new type of historical writing, called *shiden*, that was not always devoid of Western devices.

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

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

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

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



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

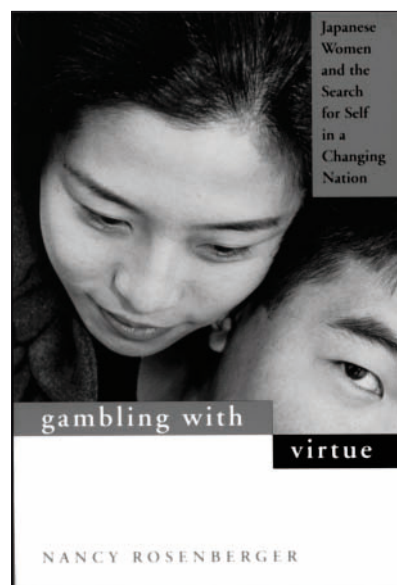
- Nagashima Yoichi, (ed.), *Return to Japan from 'Pilgrimage' to the West*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press (2001), 363 pp., ISBN 87 7288 837 7, ill. and index.

Dr Gérard Siary is a senior lecturer in comparative literature at the University Paul Valéry of Montpellier, France. He completed a PhD thesis on European travellers in Japan from 1853 to 1905, wrote several articles on the relationship of identity and national images in literary texts, and translated Ihara Saikaku's *Koshoku ichidai ōtoko* and *Nanshoku okagami* (2000-2001). gerard.siary@univ-montp3.fr

Gambling with Virtue

Review >
Japan

How has the notion of self changed in Japan over the last three decades of the twentieth century? Apart from this important question, Nancy Rosenberger examines the hybrid versions of personhood that three generations of Japanese women have created since the 1970s.



By Sabine Frühstück

There are many likeable aspects in *Gambling with Virtue* and, as any good book does, it opens up a number of avenues for future research. A particular strength of the book is the great variety among the women who speak from these pages. Rosenberger begins with a description of the lives of housewives and female teachers at a rural high school during the 1970s. In part 2 she visits urban and rural housewives, urban working class women and countrywomen, middle-class working women with a high level of education, women with full-time and part-time jobs, as well as

married and single women during the 1980s. In part 3 she returns primarily to housewives and young single women of the 1990s.

The immediacy of the lively descriptions of conversations about important life choices, self-perceptions, and perceptions of other women, who differ considerably in their geographic location as well as their class and age, make this book enjoyable to read and a welcome addition to a body of anthropological works about women in Japan. This body of literature has grown considerably since the publication of such ground-breaking books as *Women in Changing Japan* by Joyce Lebra, Joy Paulson, and Elizabeth Powers (1976) and *Japanese Women: Constraint and Fulfillment* by Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1984), which set out to show how far Japanese women have come in moving away from a traditional feminine ideal that expected them to be domestic, subservient, and self-sacrificing.

Out of public sight?

Each part of Rosenberger's book begins with an introduction to the main elements of 'public discourses' that serve as a background to the conversations and observations that she describes in the three sections of the book. This structure is rather ineffective, however, as it sets up an artificial gap between a mostly anonymous,

monolithic, and presumably male 'public discourse' and individual women's diverse decisions, achievements, frustrations, and views. Rosenberger argues in her introduction that people's ideas and practices are shaped throughout their lives by ideas and actions that 'come from families, schools, workplaces, media, state policies, national ideologies, and the global marketplace' (p. 4). But the women whose voices the reader gets to hear appear, if not as passive victims of 'public discourse', then at least as merely reacting to and somehow dealing with what has been created by someone else. The processes by which women contribute to these national discourses in important ways, as politicians, journalists, teachers, and other important roles remain out of sight.

If nothing else, the great number of books by women for women published in Japan – from semi-academic publications to advice books by (in some cases prominent) feminists and their opponents within and outside of the academy – testifies to the fact that women have become much more involved in (and ultimately also responsible for) the creation of the discourse on social expectations concerning women. I do not believe that the complexity of these processes should be sacrificed for the sake of simplicity and accessibility.

It is certainly safe to assume that women's lives in Japan have changed quite a bit between the 1970s and the 1990s, and the differences in attitudes among the different women that Rosenberger presents are quite striking. When she sets out to show these changes, however, I sometimes wondered whether individual differences were not mistaken for historical ones. For example, it remains unclear to me why the 1990s would have been any more significant than the 1980s or the 1970s in terms of the difference that women's personal choices were making. At least throughout the modern period anxieties about the danger that independent and individualist women may pose to social order and stability have evolved dramatically. This has been the case from the fight for suffrage since the early twentieth century to the legalization of the Pill in 1999, from the 'modern girl' of the 1920s to the independent career woman (or *tonderu onna*) of the 1980s and thereafter to the so-called 'parasite singles' (*parasaito shinguru*; single working women and men who are criticized for living with their parents instead of founding their own household) of today. Indeed this subject is worth pursuing as a broader research project.

By employing the somewhat worn concept of front stage and backstage spaces that Japanese women move in and switch back and forth between, a concept expressed in a kind of 'double consciousness', Rosenberger seems to suggest that elsewhere and

perhaps at an earlier time, lives were more consistent. The performance skill that Rosenberger claims Japanese women needed for social success, were unnecessary then. In this way, the book highlights the need for an in-depth comparative, intercultural, historically grounded (and hopefully demystifying) study of the self, individuality, and individualism. A study of that kind would have to integrate a critical analysis of the culturally and historically diverse procedures of homogenization, as well as its opposite, diversification.

As it stands, however, the book should appeal to a broad readership interested in post-war and present-day Japanese society as well as women's studies, anthropology, and sociology – in fact, all those who still need to be convinced that 'Japan is not homogeneous despite national efforts to make it so' (p. 3). ◀

- Rosenberger, Nancy, *Gambling with Virtue: Japanese Women and the Search for Self in a Changing Nation*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, (2001), 180 pp., ISBN 0-8248-2336-2

Dr Sabine Frühstück is assistant professor of Modern Japanese Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include analyses of sexuality and gender, as well as science in modern history. fruhstuc@earthlink.net