MEDIATISED IMAGES OF JAPAN IN EUROPE: THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

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MEDIATISED IMAGES OF JAPAN IN EUROPE:
THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

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MARCO PELLITTERI & CHRISTOPHER J. HAYES
Mutual Images

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Section editorial: Mediatised images of Japan in Europe
Christopher J. HAYES | Cardiff University, UK

As shortly explained in the general Editorial of this issue, in this second part we host four of the papers that were presented at the Mutual Images international workshop at Cardiff University, last year: ‘Mediatised Images of Japan in Europe: Through the Media Kaleidoscope’. Below, we include the original workshop schedule, to give you a taste of the diverse range of research that was united under this theme of the ‘media kaleidoscope’.

**Panel 1: English-Language Journalism on Japan**
- Kenn Nakata Steffensen (University College Dublin), Bullshit journalism and Japan: English-language news media, Japanese higher education policy, and Frankfurt's theory of ‘bullshit’
- Christopher J. Hayes (Cardiff University), Mediating Conflicting Discourses of Japan in the Press: An Enviable Vision of the Future or an Eccentric, Technofetishist Nation?

**Keynote speaker 1: Marco Pellitteri, Kobe University, Japan. When a Minor Imaginary gets Nazionale-Popolare: The Case of Japanese Animation in Italy, a 40-year Long Mainstream Presence that Reframed Japan in the Italian Media and Public Opinion**

**Panel 2: European Images of Japan, Japanese Images of Europe**
- Alessandro Tripepi (University of Milan, Italy), Japan in the Gonzaga Communication Network: The First Japanese Embassy in Italy in 1585
- Michael Tangeman (Denison University), Avebury, Arsenic, and Thistle: Matsumoto Seichō's Celtic Travel Diary

**Panel 3: Japan as Seen Through Popular Culture**
- Matteo Fabbretti (Cardiff University), The interplay of structure and agency in the translation of Manga

**Panel 4: Images of Meiji Japan**
- Andreas Eichleter (Heidelberg University), The Treaty Port Press: Japan’s Image in the Eyes of the Foreign Language Press in East Asia in the 1870s
- Ene Selart (Tartu University), The Image of Japanese in the Estonian Soldiers’ Letters from the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)

**Keynote speaker 2: Rayna Denison, University of East Anglia. Adapting Europe into Anime: The Exoticisation and Elision of Europe in Hayao Miyazaki’s Animated Films**

**Panel 5: Displaying Japan Through Objects**
- Sarah Walsh (University of California), Postmodern Paradise, or Glorified “Trade Show”? The Reception of 1980's Japan Style Exhibition (by video link)
As you can see from the schedule, the broad range of topics covered in the workshop highlights the salience of representation and depiction in studies of Japan. Papers ranged from historical depictions of Japan influenced by war to the reception of Japanese popular culture in Europe, but all had in common these same issues. At the end of the workshop, during the roundtable discussion, participants pondered representations of Japan abroad today, concluding that it continues to be misrepresented, in spite of the closeness that one might presume modern technology like the Internet and services like Twitter bring. This themed issue is thus our contribution to the ongoing endeavour of researchers and scholars to educate and promote understanding of Japan.

Increasingly, Japan is present in a variety of public venues and forms disseminated on multiple distribution platforms: print, television, and online media. Indeed, much of modern life is consumed and mediated through these technological means. As Lundby (2009a, 1) notes, ‘the day-to-day activities of individuals, families, networks, organizations, companies, and institutions in high modern settings involve a repertoire of technical media’. Our lives are saturated by it. With all of these different media constantly surrounding us, we have more access to knowledge than ever before, even when the country is geographically distant. Inevitably, with so many different sources of information available, we are provided with polyvalent images of Japan as traditional and modern, familiar and alien. Surrounded by these various images, it is here that we can place and make use of the notion of the ‘media kaleidoscope’, as explained in the general Editorial.

Those who study Japan have long been aware of the issues of the representation of Japan and the misunderstandings around it. These are not new problems, and have existed since Portuguese missionaries first returned from Asia having encountered the Japanese people. It is difficult to mention representation and depictions of an Asian country without discussing Orientalism, and articles within this issue do, but Japan represents a particular case: a non-Western country that rapidly industrialised and established an empire, a country that was seen as civilised but without being a Western civilisation. Certainly,
European perceptions of Japan, World War 2 withstanding, have been motivated by curiosity, admiration, and, arguably, voyeurism.

Not all papers presented at the two-day workshop were submitted to the journal for publication, and those that were differ from the presentations as originally given as a result of the transition from oral presentation to a peer-reviewed article. In ‘Bullshit journalism and Japan: English-language news media, Japanese higher education policy, and Frankfurt’s theory of “bullshit”’, Kenn Nakata Steffensen appeals to Harry Frankfurt’s notion of ‘bullshit’ in journalism in order to account for high degrees of inaccuracy. Steffensen shows the media propensity to exaggerate and to ‘blag’, dispelling the myth of the death of Humanities in Japanese universities. The ease with which he does so demonstrates the lack of research that can go into an article, and the danger of when one article becomes the source of countless others. As Robert E. Park might say, the news becomes fact by its very repetition.

In present times, communication is near-instant and we are more connected than ever before, but Andreas Eichleter reminds us that before the advent of the World Wide Web or even any kind of telecommunications, discourse and understandings of other cultures were also mediatised. ‘The Outside Perspective – The Treaty Port Press, the Meiji Restoration and the Image of a Modern Japan’ examines the characterisation of Japan and the Japanese in Japan-based foreign news publications, the eponymous ‘treaty port press’. Eichleter’s research is fascinating because the treaty port press occupies a very particular position – non-Japanese language newspapers written in Japan for those non-Japanese who were confined to settlements within ports. This is a very different situation to other foreign language publications for expatriates, the kind that still exist around the world today, such as The Japan Times in Japan. Eichleter’s analysis challenges ideas about images of Japan, which are often universalised and presented as a case of foreigners Orientalising a Japan they know nothing about (or to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, a Japan that does not even exist), by looking at these communities who, while on the periphery, were nonetheless in Japan.

Similarly, Ene Selart approaches the historic representation of Japan, but this time from the perspective of soldiers in ‘The image of Japanese in the Estonian soldiers’ letters’. Selart’s research demonstrates the complexity of media representation: soldiers’ letters were reprinted in Estonian newspapers allowing for a real sense of closeness to the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, but at the same time, these letters would have been subject to censorship, not only by the military but also by the press. Selart examines and deconstructs these layers of obfuscation, and shows how Estonian soldiers’ depictions of the Japanese
even managed to run against official narrative. Selart’s article reminds us that representation is a complex issue, affected by ideologies, discourses and personal experiences. Japan was the enemy of Russia, but elsewhere the war was watched with curiosity as a new power emerged in Asia.

Finally, in ‘Utopia or Uprising? Orientalist Discourses of Japanese Robotics in the British Press’, I examine press representations of Japan from a British perspective, using the reporting on robots in Japan as an example of contemporary British press coverage of Japan. My purpose was to link the present to the past, showing continuity in the way that Japan has been presented through the Orientalist lens. Surprisingly, despite being modern technologies, robotics has been given a historical ‘lineage’, lending authority to claims of Japan’s technological supremacy. Like Steffensen, I myself was concerned with misreporting and the exaggerations that are rife within foreign news reporting of Japan. In the article, I posit that such depictions adhere to Orientalist preconceptions and understandings of Japan, but I also emphasise that these do not necessarily originate outside of Japan. Indeed, the matter of foreign representation of Japan discussed in this issue is complicated by compounding it with the issue that depictions of Japan are also influenced by official Japanese discourses. As scholars of Japan, it makes us think: how many times have we accepted depictions of Japan’s uniqueness because it is the Japan that we are encouraged to see? Even when one has lived in Japan for an extended period of time, settled down into a career and started a family, how much is one allowed to see inside Japan, when one is considered gaijin?

Christopher J. HAYES, Member of the Editorial Board

REFERENCES