

**Introduction to *Three Asias: Japan
Invisible Asias, Other Japans***

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In the last decade of the twentieth century, the rise of post-cold war globalism encouraged us to ignore boundaries between nations. However, the 9/11 terrorist attacks inevitably made us conscious of diverse nationalisms. Whenever we feel compelled to believe in the myth of globalism, nations are rendered invisible; however, when this myth gets jeopardized by war, terror, or any form of panic, not only nations but also discourses of nationalism come into view. In this context, let me start by focusing on the double image of Asia as proposed by the North American master of metafiction, Thomas Pynchon, in his sixth novel, *Against the Day* (2006). Introducing the Sfinciuno Itinerary edited in the Middle Ages, “the fabled Sfinciuno Itinerary, a map or chart of post-Polo routes into Asia, believed by many to lead to the hidden city of Shambhala itself” (248), Professor Svegli of the University of Pisa explains: “Now, as in Sfinciuno’s time, there are two distinct versions of ‘Asia’ out there, one an object of political struggle among the Powers of the Earth—the other a timeless faith by whose terms all such earthly struggle is illusion. Those whose enduring object is power in this world are only too happy to use without remorse the others, whose aim is of course to transcend all question of power. Each regards the other as a pack of deluded fools” (249). It is remarkable that the “two distinct versions of ‘Asia’” conceived in Pynchon’s imaginary medieval book coincide with Indian-American post-colonialist critic Gayatri Spivak’s vision as spelled out in her 2008 work, *Other Asias*: “I was beginning to understand that ‘other’ is not simply a matter of imaginative geography but also of discontinuous epistemes” (8). This double image makes more sense when we take into account Pynchon’s poetics centering around the preterite imagination as well as Spivak’s theory fueled by the subaltern imagination. Despite the racial, religious, and political differences between them, Pynchon and Spivak consistently unveil the invisible nations hidden deep within the visible ones we feel we safely inhabit, by paying attention not so much to the dominant class of intellectuals as to the otherwise neglected classes of racial, religious, political and even sexual minorities.

So, is it necessary now to illuminate not only other Asias but other Japans as well? Japan has been a clearly visible country since the rise of the discourse of “Cool Japan,” another name for the victory of Japan’s soft power in the new century inspired by “Cool Britannia” in the 1990s. Nonetheless, we should not forget that while Japan’s postmodern visibility has helped create another globalist myth, this decade in the wake of 9/11 terrorist attacks ironically ends up privileging the catachresis of “ground zero” and erasing not only the memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the hypocenters of Atomic Bombs but also the history of Japan as a literally invisible country back in the mid-nineteenth century, when it was regarded not only as “half-barbarian” as Commodore Mathew Perry pointed out from the western perspective, but also “double-bolted” as Herman Melville called it in *Moby-Dick* (1851), that is to say, blockaded domestically and diplomatically in its withdrawal from the rest of the world. Antebellum America considered Japan important and forced it open in 1853, exclusively to create a geopolitically convenient base for transpacific whaling with the Japan Ground as the most prolific area. Thus, Commodore Perry and his gang advanced their negotiations with Japan by presenting products of American soft power, including telegraph wires, a Francis lifeboat, and a quarter-scale locomotive—not to mention a concept of democracy.

Even in the fin de siècle work by Oscar Wilde, “The Decay of Lying” (1889), Wilde’s heroine Vivian states,

In fact, the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people.... The Japanese people are ... simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art. And so, if you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio. On the contrary, you will stay at home, and steep yourself in the work of certain Japanese artists, and then, when you have absorbed the spirit of their style, and caught their imaginative manner of vision, you will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see an absolutely Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere.

Here Wilde is so deeply conscious of the rise of Japonisme that he dismisses Japan as “a mode of style,” anticipating both the modern Hegelian Alexander Kojeve’s postwar redefinition of Japan as a country of post-history with snobbish style, and the postmodern Japanophilic writer William Gibson’s view of Japan as a country of the future. The Orientalist discourse of fin de siècle Japonisme is undoubtedly the

ancestor of Cool Japan, whose advent was predicted and prepared by transpacific negotiations throughout the 1980s and 1990s between Gibson's cyberpunk fiction and its Far East counterparts.

However, it is also true that the more visible Japan gets culturally in the age of late capitalist postmodernism, the more vulnerable it becomes geo-politically in the transpacific network. While Japan used to serve the United States as the base for whaling, now Japan functions as the base for controlling not only the Far East but also for re-appropriating the Middle Eastern oil-producing region. The United States appears to have succeeded in erasing the memory of its whaling history, while Japan apparently continues to serve the United States as whatever kind of base it needs. Thus, whenever Japan is at stake geo-politically, the repressed memory of its function as a U.S. base returns.

At this point, let us reopen that major "whaling" novel, *Moby-Dick*. Take a glance at the second paragraph of Chapter 109, "Ahab and Starbuck in the Cabin," and you immediately find a reference to Japan: "And so Starbuck found Ahab with a general chart of the oriental archipelagoes spread before him; and another separate one representing the long eastern coasts of the Japanese islands—Nippon, *Matsmai*, and Shikoke" (361, italics mine). In the context of the rise of Manifest Destiny, which drove Antebellum America to secure a Far East base for whaling, here Melville refers to a couple of key places, all of which belong to different categories: First, "Nippon" is the transliteration of the name of the country "Japan" (日本); second, "Shikoke" should have been spelled as "Shikoku" (四国), a southwestern island of Japan from which a number of fishermen and whalers such as John Man (Nakahama Manjiro) found their way to the coast of the United States, where they were to be educated; third, "Matsmai" should be "Matsumae" (松前), a city located in the southern part of Hokkaido, which used to be well-known for its major whale markets. How did Melville select these place-names? Quite simply, the author learned of them from a reliable source, a book written by his contemporary.

Uncovering this source allows us to revive one of the most repressed memories of Japan before the opening of Japan, that is, the story of an antebellum biracial Native American as the first teacher of English in Japan. His name was Ranald MacDonald, the author of a Japanese captivity narrative, who taught English in Japan before the arrival of the naval officer and diplomat Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853. Born to a Scottish father and Native American mother in Astoria, Oregon in 1824, the historical Ranald MacDonald believed that the ancestors of Native Americans came from Japan. Oppressed by racism and dying for the freedom he dreamed existed in the Far East, he shipped out on

December 2, 1845 from Sag Harbor on the ship *Plymouth* which had embarked on a whaling voyage. “Being off the island of Japan, I left the ship at my own desire, agreeably to a previous understanding with the captain. He was to furnish me with a boat, etc., and drop me off the coast of Japan, under favorable circumstances for reaching the shore” (MacDonald’s report, April 30, 1849 [Senate Executive Document 32nd congress 1st session V9, Doc 59], Kawasumi 126). Near Rishiri Island, on July 2, 1849, he saw smoke on the island and purposely capsized the boat to simulate a state of distress. He was rescued by Ainu and turned over to the Japanese on Hokkaido. He was forced to stay in Matsumae close to Hakodate for a while, and then he moved to Nagasaki in Kyushu. In the end, MacDonald pioneered English education and trained a number of translators, such as Moriyama Einosuke, who negotiated many foreign affairs policies in Meiji Japan. In writing his mega-novel, Melville apparently referred to an article on the life of Ranald MacDonald, “A Sailor’s Attempt to Penetrate Japan,” published in the December 1, 1848, issue of *The Friend*, a Hawaiian newspaper useful for whaling, which reports the way MacDonald was accepted by the Japanese: “After being on shore eight days he was taken under the charge of four *Matsmai* officers. At Matsmai he was imprisoned from the 6th of September until about the first of October” (Kawasumi 123&125). What is more, MacDonald starts his own narrative, *Japan: Story of Adventures of Ranald MacDonald, First Teacher of English in Japan A.D. 1848-1849*, with the following sentence: “About noon of the fifteenth day of our voyage (September 7th) we entered the port of *Matsmai*” (Kawasumi 130, italics mine).

What matters here is that while Ranald MacDonald himself adventured into Japan out of curiosity regarding the origin of his own tribes, through a series of accidents he survived, witnessed, and participated in the forced opening, and subsequent modernization of Japan in the world. Even before the exposure of Japan to western civilization, as symbolized by Commodore Perry’s black ships, Japan was influenced by the multicultural perspective of Ranald MacDonald, which helped arouse the Occidentalism will to power on the part of mid-nineteenth century Japanese intellectuals such as Yukichi Fukuzawa. It is at the critical point between MacDonald’s almost planetary mongoloid vision and Perry’s white supremacist strategy that made Japan visible as a transpacific nation. Japan has survived critical moments in the past two centuries: the clash between Eastern and Western soft power in the mid-nineteenth century, and the clash between Japanese and American hard power in the mid-twentieth century.

With this less visible agenda of pre-modern Japan in view, it is my pleasure to introduce this special “Three Asias” issue, which features several cutting-edge articles each of which help make visible other Japans.

Mary A. Knighton’s post-colonial intervention, “The Melancholy Melodrama of ‘Honorary Whiteness’: The Case of Yuasa Katsuei’s Colonial Fiction,” builds a provocative theory of “whiteness” discourse in the context of Asia. In a rereading of the novella *Kannani* (1934-1935), set in colonial Korea and written there by Japanese émigré and settler of thirty years, Yuasa Katsuei, Knighton argues that Yuasa narrativizes the construction of honorary whiteness in the early twentieth-century Far East. In the background here is Taguchi Ukichi’s critique of the discourse of the Yellow Peril and redefinition of the Japanese as the “Tenson race” [descendants of the gods], modified in the modern context as global Caucasian.

William O. Gardner’s new literary historical essay, “From Parody to Simulacrum: Japanese SF, Regionalism, and the Inauthentic in the early works of Komatsu Sakyo and Tsutsui Yasutaka,” retraces the idiosyncratic trajectory of Japan’s Postmodernism. He focuses especially on Sakyo Komatsu’s hardcore science fiction and Yasutaka Tsutsui’s black humorous metafiction, with special emphasis on the former’s vision of “postwar *zoku*, self-constituting, virally spreading minority tribes of outré tastes that may at any moment overtake conventional human society.”

Gayle Sato’s work is at the forefront of slipstream literature with “The Transpacific Gaze in *Tropic of Orange*,” the latest in her far-reaching, speculative series of research on the Asian American magic realist Karen Tei Yamashita. Sato’s critique is inspired by Yamashita’s reformulation of Gayatri Spivak’s concept of “planetaryity” from *Death of a Discipline* (2003), which emphasizes “the cultivation of a different kind of rootedness in the planet, one that is fluid and generous, giving priority to cultural tricksterism and multilateral cannibalism.”

Rebecca Suter’s fanthropological article, “Man/Woman: Gender and Identity Politics in Adrian Tomine and Yoshihiro Tatsumi,” skillfully investigates transpacific cultural negotiations between the graphic novels of Japanese American author Adrian Tomine, and the manga of Japanese comic book artist Yoshihiro Tatsumi, whom Tomine first introduced to the North American public. Suter’s essay pays close attention to the construction of the “Otaku” identity as well as to the cultural history of manga and anime fandom in the Pacific Rim.

I am convinced that all of these provocative and insightful essays, the topics of which range from modernist and postmodernist novels through manga, will initiate the reader into what is going on now in the field of transpacific, and even planetary, literary and cultural studies.

For further reading in this area, see the reviews section. We have Colleen Montgomery's review of *Mechademia 4: War/Time* and *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, Tadashi Nagasawa's review of Christopher Bolton's *Sublime Voices: The Fictional Science and Scientific Fiction of Abe Kobo*, Yutaka Ebihara's review of *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, and Deborah Shamoon's review of Ogawa Issui's novel *The Lord of the Sands of Time*.

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