LOOKING FOR JAPAN IN CONTEMPORARY ITALY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Searching for Japan in Contemporary Italy

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This dissertation examines cross-cultural representation between Japan and Italy as a means to question national identities. I consider texts of Italian and Japanese writers who visited the “Land of the Rising Sun” and the Bel Paese throughout the Twentieth century. My reason for choosing to compare these two countries has to do with the fact that contemporary Japan and Italy are engaged in a network of relations in which their own identities are at once strikingly similar and in stark contrast. From the Italian unification (1861) and the Meiji restoration (1868), these two geographically distant nations have shared a common pact of fast growth fostered by the goal to achieve international prestige equal to that of the Western superpowers. I utilize this corpus of writings according to two different approaches, concerning, on the one hand, the viewer reflecting on his/her social identity and, on the other hand, the various representations of the Other. I contend that through this cross-cultural framework it is possible to single out distinctive elements of Italian national identity. Moreover, I argue that by positioning the self—the subject who sees—
through ethnic and gender borders, the stereotypical images of the Other are substantially challenged.

The first chapter investigates Italian representations of Japan in the Fascist era (1923-1943). The watershed of this time periods was the Axis Alliance of 1940. Concurrent with the rise of the Fascist party in Italy, a strong nationalistic element began to surface in the accounts of writers who traveled in Japan. The Japanese were perceived as both inferior and irrational, compared to the allegedly superior Italian civilization. And yet, as fellow members of the Axis alliance, Japan became the subject of Fascist propaganda oriented toward conveying the image of a partner on the world stage with whom Italy shared significant political and military goals. Thus Japan became ever closer in the Italians’ perception.

In the second chapter I deal with the perceived image of Japan as a country that arose from the ashes of the Second World War, in which the traditional structure of the society was preserved despite the fast pace of Japanese modernization. Italian writers depicted this image having in mind the contrasting representation of the new Italian Republic, which was itself in the process of searching for a new identity and a new set of national traditions and values.

In the third chapter I consider the same theoretical framework of continuity/change with a focus on the Japanese perspective as I analyze the writings of three Japanese living in post-war Italy. I argue that these writers’ representations of Italian monuments and civilizations of the past (especially Venice) are filled with a sense of anxiety caused by Japanese post-War urban planning which had aimed at rebuilding the country without restoring its
historical buildings. I also point out the fact that Japanese observers confirm from a different perspective Italians’ own disappointment in the new Italian Republic, as I demonstrate in the previous chapter.

In chapter four I look at the writings of four women writers living in Japan: Angela Fratta, Antonietta Pastore, Angela Terzani and Marcella Croce. I am interested in the way they look at the Japanese woman and how they review the male-invented stereotypes to describe her submissive role in society. I focus also on the assumptions that Italian women have about themselves when they compare their own model of what it is to be a woman with the one embodied by their Asian counterparts.
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Introduction

Viaggiare non serve molto a capire... ma serve a riattivare per un momento l’uso degli occhi, la lettura visiva del mondo.
(Italo Calvino)

1. The Self Within the Other

It was my first time, and I was not prepared. When I first set foot in America few years ago, I soon realized that I was living not only in a different country but also in a context in which people were speaking from different cultural backgrounds and asserting different values and traditions. Heightening this impression was the fact that I shared my apartment with roommates from Nepal, Korea, and Greece and my neighborhood was predominantly Latino. While my feelings vacillated between displacement and relentless wonder, I slowly came to realize that for the first time in my life I found myself caught in a network of interracial relations in which I was the object and at times the subject of the same look. I was living in what has been described as a social scenario where “identities were more openly imagined now [in the decade after 9/11]: more fluid and multiple, less tightly packaged by gender and social-role theory, less quickly read as the expression of social norms and structures. … Racism had hardly disappeared, but
race was less confining a conceptual cage that it had been three decades ago” (Rodgers 270). Indeed, I started to question my own national identity as I increasingly realized that my subjectivity (as well as my neighbor’s subjectivity) is determined not only by nature but is also the result of cultural and social construction. I cannot find a better description of this state of being than in Homi Bhabha’s notion of “unhomeliness,” which is not the state of being homeless (or what Bob Dylan beautifully described as the feeling of being “like a rolling stone”), but is rather “the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (13). It is a condition of disorientation and confusion, equivalent to the experience of having your proper “domestic space,” the boundaries of your own subjectivity, invaded. I also came to understand that the confusion and uneasiness produced by this experience paved the way for a profound journey of self-awareness, and triggered the process (always an approximate process) of recognition of the Other.

Ann Kaplan observes that “paradoxically, while travel may destabilize a fixed notion of culture, it heightens a sense of national belonging. People’s identities when they are traveling are often self-consciously national than when they stay home. In addition, travel provokes conscious attention to gender and racial difference” (5-6). While this observation helps explain how my interest in national identity has become, more specifically, an interest in Italians living abroad (or traveling abroad for an extensive time), something must also be said about why I chose Japan as the stage for such cross-cultural inquiry. Much of the answer to this question lies in the fact that I do not know any other country where unexpected similarities with Italy tend to lie, deeply and provocatively, below the surface of obvious anthropological, cultural and historical differences.
I cannot resist offering an example of these surprising commonalities. In the enduring masterpiece film *Ikiro (To Live, 1952)*, the well-known Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998) paints a fresco of the postwar Japanese era. The main character is Watanabe Kanji, a meticulous bureaucrat who lives an unemotional, tedious life. Thirty years of continuous and mechanical work as chief of the Citizen’s Section in the municipal office has turned his daily life into a hopeless, mundane routine. His uneventful existence is shaken when Watanabe is diagnosed with stomach cancer and given only about six months to a year to live. Teetering on the brink of death, the modest government employee decides that he should spend his little remaining time by releasing his deepest instincts of pleasure and joy that he had always repressed. Embracing the decadent *Kasutori* culture (lowpulp culture, developed in the 1950s) “that made the faint hearted bold and the strong hearted wild” (Dower 148), Watanabe begins to explore the sensory pleasures of listening to music, dancing, drinking alcohol, prostitution, and striptease. However, his feelings are a mix of lustful liberation and a deep melancholy. In fact, one night at a cabaret he requests a song familiar to him, “The Gondolier’s Song.” As soon as he begins to sing with the piano’s accompaniment his eyes fill with tears:

*I nochi mijikaschi* Life is brief,
*Koi seyo otome* So fall in love, young maiden—
*Akaki kuchiburu* Before your red lips
*Asenu ma ni* Lose their color,
*Atsuki chishio wo* And your passion
*Hienu ma ni* Cools.
*Asu no tsukihi* Tomorrow
*Nai mono wo* Does not exist
*I nochi mijikaschi* Life is brief,
*Koi seyo otome* So fall in love, young maiden—
*Kurokami no iro* Before your black hair
As I watched this scene I was deeply struck with how Watanabe’s utopian pursuits—his decision to free himself from norms, prohibitions, and authority—resonated with Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of Carnival as a time “of change and renewal, with the sense of gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities” (Bakhtin 11). Watanabe embodies the logic of the “inside-out,” the “turnabout” typical of Carnival, as he renounces his official role as clerk and chooses instead to “perceive the world in its laughing aspect” (Bakhtin 13). This song played by a Venetian gondolier, with the melancholic notion that life is short and quickly passes followed by the joyful call to live in the here and now, recalls the spirit of carnival in the Italian Renaissance as it was expressed by Lorenzo de’ Medici in his well-known Canzona di Bacco: “Quant’è bella giovinezza, / che si fugge tuttavia! / Chi vuol essere lieto sia: / di doman non c’è certezza” (Medici Lorenzo de’ 176). I am not assuming that Kurosawa intentionally alluded to the Canzona, but it is plausible to recognize a reference to the Italian Renaissance culture in a context that would simultaneously appear to be completely alien to contemporary Italian society of the 1950s. Indeed, the Western spectator’s perception of Otherness, of a cross-cultural gulf experienced while watching Kurosawa’s Ikiro, is suddenly reduced by means of “The Gondolier’s Song.”

Let me give one more example. In Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalism, the anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney examines the diaries of Japanese tokkōtai (or kamikaze) pilots who sacrificed their lives for the sake of
their homeland near the end of World War II: “The pilots were the intellectual crème de la crème. They were students from top universities whom the government graduated early in order to draft. Their prodigious readings and extensive diaries served as a means for soliloquy” (Ohnuki-Tierney 3). In the several hundreds of pages that constitute each of these diaries there is an astonishing number of references to readings from countries in both the West and the East, providing ample evidence of the intellectual caliber and open-mindedness of these bright student-soldiers:

With their voracious appetite for pursuits, these young pilots read both Japanese and Western intellectual and literary giants intensively and extensively. One pilot read some six hundred books and another five hundred, for example. Their reading ranged from Greco-Roman figures such as Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, and Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, to major nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary and philosophical figures in Japan and the West. They read authors such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Goethe, Schiller, Marx, and Thomas Mann (Germany), Rousseau, Martin du Gard, Gide, and Romain Rolland (France), and Lenin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Berdyaev (Russia), often in their original languages. (Ohnuki-Tierney 4)

The historical relations between Japan and countries like Germany, France, England, and Russia plausibly account for why works from these countries were the most often cited. Far more surprising, however, is the fact that in the four diaries of tokkōtai student-pilots that Ohnuki-Tierney analyzes, Italian literature holds a solid position, occupying seventh place in number of references with fourteen titles below France (187), Germany (170), England (83), Russia (70), Classics (42), and slightly outnumbered by the United States (15). The authors represented are of course some of the most well-known names: Benedetto Croce, Gabriele D’Annunzio, Dante, Edmondo De Amicis, Galileo Galilei, Giovanni
Gentile, Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Benito Mussolini, the philosopher and economist Vilfredo Pareto, and the international tenor Enrico Caruso. With this selection of readings one sees that the pilots were not passive adherents to the intellectual currents of the time: although they did pay homage to the mainstream nationalist thought in Japan by reading Mussolini, Gentile, and Vilfredo Pareto, whose economic theories inspired il Duce at the beginning of his political climb, they were also introduced to Benedetto Croce's anti-fascist opposition through the translation from Italian into Japanese by the Marxist historian Hani Gorō (1901-1983), whose radical political views cost him many years in prison and the banning of several of his publications.¹

Because of their willingness to die for the sake of the emperor, the tokkōtai student-soldiers are perceived by Westerners as the symbol of an incomprehensible Japan: they represent the radical, inscrutable Otherness of Japanese society. Yet just when the distance from Italian culture seems immeasurable, unexpected ties between the two identities intervene to reduce this distance. Who could imagine that De Amicis's Cuore could be included in the

¹ In 1928 Hani Gorō published the translation of Filosofia come scienza dello spirit. IV. Teoria e storia della storiografia. In 1939 he published a book on Benedetto Croce. He was also in contact by letter with the Italian philosopher, who remembered the anti-fascist profile of his Japanese acquaintance: “La lettera [Croce is referring to Hani Goro’s letter to him] era scritta, come si vede, in corretto italiano, non son se con l’aiuto di qualche conoscitore italiano in Tokio o tutta di proprio fondo, e accuratamente dattilografata su foglietti di cui ciascuno portava graziose e artistiche figure. L’accompagnavano le fotografie fatte dal Kubo in Napoli, il fascicolo di una rivista (Chisei, 8-8-1939), nella quale egli narrava la sua visita a me con un corredo di ritratti e vedute, e altre fotografie del Goro e della sua stanza da studio, appoggiato a uno scaffale di libri, dove era sospeso il ritratto mio con quello dell’ultima della mie figliuole e, guardando i dorsi dei libri, se ne vedevano degli italiani, e tra essi il romanzo Fontamara del Silone. Era come un lembo di antifascismo che mi si scopriva in Tokio” (Benedetto Croce, “Ricordi e lettere di amici giapponesi,” Quaderni della “Critica” diretti da B. Croce 6 (August 1946): 103).
reading list of a *kamikaze* pilot during the last weeks before his final mission? Who would think that D'Annunzio and his rhetorical revision of the *uberman* could be inspirational reading for a young man in a moment of agony? These questions led me to single out the example of Japan as particularly apt for a research that aims to discover elements of Italian national identities through cross-cultural space. The duality of the relation between the two countries, being at once Other and similar to each other, is what drove my interest and the investigation that follows. However, the fact that the theoretical framework of my work is situated within the areas of interest of orientalism (Edward Said), postcolonialism (Homi Bhabha), and Italian and Japanese studies raises questions about the legitimate use of such theoretical patterns for the analysis of countries that are not colonial superpowers in Asia and, as a consequence, whose reciprocal views are not influenced by their colonial interests.

2. **The Western Mind**

When in *Orientalism* Edward Said narrows the focus of his research on the Orient within Western culture to France, England, and later America, one may ask whether it is legitimate to limit orientalist discourse only to those superpowers responsible for military occupation, or to colonized territories. Especially now that we live in an era best described as a capitalist “global village,” the presence of alternative forms of exploitation, such as the capitalist global market of production and consumption, where international corporations produce and sell their products according to a logic of economic exploitation, is even more evident. One wonders with Paul Fry “whether social, economic and political
crises in the third world are always necessarily to be understood in terms of
coloniality” (Fry 286). To be fair, Said himself was aware of the fact that other
European cultures play an influential role in shaping the idea of the Orient, even
though they are not colonizer powers:

Britain and France dominated the Eastern Mediterranean from about the end of the seventeenth century on. Yet my discussion of that domination and systematic interest does not do justice to (a) the important contributions to Orientalism of Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, and Portugal. .... In the first place, I had to focus rigorously upon the British-French and later the American material because it seemed inescapably true not only that Britain and France were the pioneer nations in the Orient and in Oriental studies, but that these vanguard positions were held by virtue of the two greatest colonial networks in pre-twentieth-century history. The American Oriental position since World War II has fit—I think quite self-consciously— in the places excavated by the two earlier European powers. Then too, I believe that the sheer quality, consistency, and mass of British, French, and American writing on the Orient lifts it above the doubtless crucial work done in Germany, Italy, Russia, and elsewhere. (Said 17)

Here Said is mainly concerned with the case of nineteenth-century German orientalism, which shares striking similarities with French colonialism, notwithstanding the fact that Germany, unlike France, had no colonial interests whatsoever in the Asian territories. It is possible to make the same case for nineteenth-century Italian orientalism, although on a lesser scale.2 On the one hand, I argue that an orientalist discourse that focuses on a body of Italian texts

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2 As De Nonno points out: “Italian post-unification orientalism, although still primarily influenced by German orientalism, witnessed a general change of views as it became informed by positivist philosophy. The Italians also revisited the relationship established by German orientalism between India and classical antiquity, on the one hand, and Northern and Southern Europe, on the other. Although the Germans included ancient Greece together with India when reconstructing the route to modernity of the Germanic race, all the genealogical links with the Latin and Semitic cultures and peoples were treated with ambivalence if not cut off completely” (De Nonno 10-11).
is possible insofar as Italy is part of a Eurocentric horizon. According to this archetypal perspective Europe is the area of the world with the highest level of rationality ever achieved in history by any civilization. In consequence, the European continent (or, as it was considered in the nineteenth century, Western civilization as a whole) is seen as the ideal site for modernity (Dussel 3). In other words, Italy has its fair share of records on the library shelves, including countless numbers of publications about the East written by Western authors. However, I chose to not take this approach in order to preserve Italian texts from the risk of merging their views into an undistinguishable and altogether too general discourse on “Western tradition.”

Since I do not consider the relationship between the author and the Other as a relationship between the colonizer and the colonized or subaltern, I depart from Said’s theoretical paradigm. At the same time, I refer to Said’s work in that I do address the relationship between the Western self and the Oriental Other using the same structuralist premises. According to this approach, the discourse on the Westernized view of the East (or Middle East) is based on a fundamental dialectical binary opposition of self and Other; in particular, I am interested in the construction of the Other as one of the possible way of constructing the self-identity, which in my case corresponds to the Italian identity\(^3\). What is at stake is not a truthful and reliable account of the subject matter; instead, though Said points out a distinction between truth and representation and his primary concern is not how to provide a natural, truthful image of the Orient, he is mostly

\(^3\) I must also note that Roberto Dainotto’s *Europe in Theory* and its way of understanding the discourse of Europe by contrast with its interior Other, that is, Southern Europe, has had a major impact on my theoretical premises (Dainotto 19).
devoted to exploring the inauthentic, artificial image and its ideological
collection: “My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis on
the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations, as
representations, not as ‘natural’ depictions of the Orient” (Said 21). This reading
of Said has influenced my research in that, while engaged in this binary
opposition of the self and the Other, he focuses his attention on the viewer and
his/her ideologically construction of the Other, unlike Homi Bhabha, who is more
concerned with the subaltern and the ambivalence of the relationship between
colonizer/colonized.4 While Said refers to Michael Foucault’s concept of
power/knowledge to analyze how the vast body of information that falls under
the label of orientalism is inspired by a logic of dominion, I take up the same
dialectical view in order to reflect on the viewer’s assumptions about his/her
own identity. In this sense I consider the image of the self —the Italian looking at
the Japanese Other — not as such, but rather as a non-Other, that is, as a negation
of the Other and as a recognition of a difference that is the basic structure of its
own identity.

To give one example among many, I draw on a passage from Fosco
Maraini’s Ore giapponesi, which is particularly poignant insofar as Maraini
represents probably the most radical attempt by an Italian author living in Japan
to position him/herself outside the Western identity in order to embrace the
mores of the Japanese other. During a conversation with his friend Somi on the
secret beauty of Japan, Maraini brings up some of the major differences between

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4 Bhabha refers to a “Derridian” argument to question the binary opposition of
self/Other: “It is the effect of ambivalence produced within the rules of
recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural
difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial
power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth” (Bhabha 158).
his homeland and the visited country. Here is what Maraini reports of the conversation with his friend:

Somi, cosa pensi che sia il segreto di questo paese? Perché incanta in maniera così sottile chi l’ha capito una volta? Cos’è questa dolcezza, questa pace, questo senso d’armonia fra l’uomo, gli alberi, il cielo, la vita, la morte, tutto?

— Caro mio, per me son tre cose: una che non hanno mai sentito parlare di peccato originale, due ch’è un modo di vivere del Sud, permeato di sole, tre ch’è una civiltà del legno...

— Già, noi invece siamo oppressi dal peccato originale, da un modo di vita nordico, da una civiltà del metallo. Vedi, abbiamo sbagliato direzioni! Dal Sud dovevamo prendere la luce, il nudo, il mare, la gioia, invece abbiamo scelto questa disperata dottrina deserta piena di oscuri terori; dal Nord dovevamo prendere la coscienza morale, l’entusiasmo serio per la vita, ed abbiamo accettato soltanto i calzoni, le cinghie, le bistecche, le muraglie, il vestito cucito, anziché drappeggiato, le finestre piccole ed un mucchio di altre cose che i romani ed i greci avrebbero considerato stranezze da poveri barbari...

— Quello del peccato originale — riprende Somi — è la dottrina più incomprensibile di tutti alle menti di qui. Per secoli le generazioni si sono nutrita d’un sillabario che comincia con questa frase: “L’uomo è fondamentalmente buono”; vai ad insegnare adesso, come cercano di fare i missionari, ch’egli è fondamentalmente cattivo, se non redento da Cristo. Impossibile, ti dico impossibile! Che bisogno c’è di farlo diventare cattivo per poi faticosamente redimerlo? È un’obiezione elementare, giustissima. Voi, ci dicono, pensate di essere cattivi e vi occorre la redenzione; noi pensiamo che l’uomo è buono, perciò la redenzione è un inutile di più. (Maraini 131)

In this loose face-to-face interaction between civilizations one can learn a great deal about Maraini’s sense of uneasiness regarding the culture and society in which he was born — especially for its contrast between Christian values and immorality — and his desire to resolve such oppressive feelings by living in a world defined by a different set of rules and values. In Ore giapponesi Maraini ends up replicating again and again the binary opposition of self/Other, resulting
in a reflection about the shortcomings of his own culture. As Ann Kaplan puts it, “Western theorists travel to other cultures when seeking ways out of dilemmas at home.” The goal is to “refresh” a “tired European market and feed increasingly exotic desires” (Kaplan 141).

Nevertheless, even if by now it is clear that my interests lean toward the viewer’s position in the dialectic with the Other, I still wish to advocate the epistemological value of Japanese representations. By wondering whether it is possible to provide an alternative, natural, and true (or even approximately true) representation of the Other, Said admits that this problem remains unchallenged in his book:

> Perhaps the most important task of all would be to ... ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, per-spective [sic]. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power. These are all tasks left embarrassingly incomplete in this study. (24)

To what extent can we consider any representation of Japanese society to be “true” and “natural?” In his essay “Interrogating Identity” Bhabha writes:

> As a principle of identification, the Other bestows a degree of objectivity, but its representation .... is always ambivalent, disclosing a lack. For instance, the common, conversational distinction between the letter and the spirit of the Law displays the otherness of the law itself; the ambiguous grey area between justice and judicial procedure is, quite literally, a conflict of judgment. In the language of psychoanalysis, the Law

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5 “In Occidente noi viviamo in una specie di assurdo millenario compiacimento. Siamo persuasi di essere non solo i più bravi, i più belli, i più buoni, i più tutto, ma anche i prescelti degli dèi, i possessori delle chiavi del mondo. Pensiamo che il cristianesimo sia talmente superiore a qualsiasi altra forma di vita spirituale che, al suo mero apparire sull’orizzonte, tutti debbano abbracciare gli insegnamenti con entusiasmo. Questo atteggiamento costerà nel futuro non solo gigantesche delusioni, ma anche sangue e miseria senza fine” (Maraini 283).
of the father or the paternal metaphor cannot be taken as its word. It is a process of substitution and exchange that inscribes a normative, normalizing place for the subject; ... Identification, as it is spoken in the desire of the Other, is always a question of interpretation, for it is the elusive assignation of myself with a one-self, the elision of person and place. (74)

In this passage Bhabha explains how any representation of the Other is always an approximation to an objective representation, as the identification between the object and its representation is always imperfect and dependent on the interpretation given by the subject. However, whereas Said does not provide an answer to the problem of the truth in the representation, Bhabha manages to undermine the notion of identity as process determined by the interpretation of the subject by introducing the concept of “hybridity” in which the identification of the subaltern with the image (the “mask”) imposed by the state apparatus is only partial. The subaltern still retains the power to stage a “strategy of subversion,” which Bhabha describes as a “mode of negation that seeks not to unveil the fullness of Man but to manipulate his representation” (89). It is ultimately a process of “mockery” of the imposed representation; in this double conscienteness dwells the idea of “hybridity” in which the colonizer performs a sort of identification with the mask and a will to subvert it.

Ann Kaplan also attempts to move beyond the postmodern claim about the impossibility of knowing the Other by adopting the notion of “speaking nearby,” which entails at once the desire to represent the Other and awareness of the impossibility of closing the gap that separates the subject from the subject of the representation: “The phrase [“speaking nearby”] conveys an idea of closeness but with a necessary distance because of difference; a concept of ‘approaching’ rather than knowing an Other” (Kaplan 201). Although I have not
been able to find a better answer to this question, I have been incessantly haunted by it throughout my research, specifically the question about what the Italian perspective adds to the sum of knowledge about Japan produced by the Western world. In some cases I have been disappointed by the way prominent Italian intellectuals translate into Italian stereotypes clearly “made in the USA,” (such as Alberto Moravia and his cliché about Japanese society). These stereotypes usually take the form of feminization and eroticization of the Japanese body. I came close to agreeing with what Alessia Ricciardi writes about the intellectual weakness of post-World War II Italian society and its failure to develop a “critical insight and vocabulary to resist the forces of mass mediation and commodification.” In fact, while noticing how stereotypes such as the Japanese woman as faithful servant or the irrationality of Japanese society were substantially left unchallenged in writings on Japan, I also believed that “whatever aspects of modernity in fact have been incorporated by the culture never acquired a truly Italian character, as they typically were direct appropriations of American lifestyles” (Ricciardi 5).

However, the flatness of the images of Japan I came across in Italian writings was the starting point for organizing my analysis. I suggest that a viable way of challenging the sameness of images on Japan is to position the self — the subject who sees — through ethnic and gender borders. This explains why in the following chapters I alternate male views (chapters 1 and 2) with female views (partially chapter 3 and chapter 4). I also maintain that a cross-cultural analysis is not a one-sided discourse. Since I emphasize aspects of Italian national identities through the eyes of Italians observing Japanese society, I also dedicate a chapter to Italians viewed by Japanese living in Italy and their unvoiced
assumptions about their own Nippon identity. The result of these multiple or alternative views are discussed in the conclusion, but I can only hope that images like the Japanese woman or the irrational Japanese mind will be thoroughly revised as the result of this research strategy. Therefore the division of the work into four chapters reflects a criterion for distribution of the subject matter that is other than chronological. However, the sequence of the four chapters does take into account a chronological scale that begins with the Fascist Ventennio and culminates in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. Few words are necessary to explain the reason why I consider this arc of years as the most prominent for my research.

3. Catching up with Superpowers

Reading Richard J. Samuels’ *Machiavelli’s Children, Leaders and their Legacies in Italy & Japan* (2003) drew me into attempting an audacious historical framework for Japan and Italy, regardless of their loose historical ties. Samuels convincingly argues for the existence of a common path of growth between the states since their inception, that is, from the Italian unification (1861) and the Meiji restoration (1868). The underlying motive supporting his narration is that both Italy and Japan were committed to pursuing their own national identities and shared a similar set of problems. Massimo D’Azeglio’s well-worn aphorism after the mission of unifying the country was accomplished—“L’Italia è fatta, ora bisogna fare gli italiani”—is echoed in the 1875 words of the Meiji intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi: “Japan has never been a single country. ... In Japan there is government but not nation” (qtd. in Samuels 34). Samuels goes on to comment,
"Like the Italians, the Japanese also had to be made; like the Japanese, the Italians also found deep reservoirs of common past and future purpose" (Samuels 32). The domestic problems related to a fluid definition of common identity paired with a similar foreign agenda that aimed to catch up to imperialist nations: "As in the Italian case, much of this challenge was animated by Japanese's pursuit of parity with the Western powers" (34).

As the two countries struggled to achieve international prestige, their relationship became ever thicker as a result of an increasing mutual exchange of artists and intellectuals traveling between East Asia and Europe. In the process of westernization of Japanese society, the young Meiji state chose Italy as the country most suitable for providing introduction to the established fields of the fine arts. Artists such as the painter Antonio Fontanesi (1818-1882), the sculptor Vincenzo Ragusa (1841-1927), and the interior architect Vincenzo Cappelletti (1843-1905) were appointed to Tokyo University of the Arts (Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku) to introduce Japanese students to Western art. It was Edoardo Chiossone (1833-1898), an Italian engraver living in Tokyo, who received the highest honor of being commissioned to create a portrait of the emperor.

On the other hand, the penetration of Japanese culture into Italy was also proceeding at a fast pace. At first the reception of Japan was objectified in the international aesthetic movement called Japonisme. Very few Japanese crossed the Alps, but a wave of objects and images began to proliferate in private collections and drawing rooms of distinguished and affluent Italians, not directly from Japan but primarily through the cultural mediation of France and England. In fact, Italian intellectuals and artists were—once again—trying to catch the wave of a movement conceived in the northern provinces of Europe. The first
exhibition of Japanese art was at the Universal Exposition of London (1862), while Japanese painters walked through the *Bel Paese* only much later, at the *Venice Biennale* in 1897. Similarly, Vittorio Pica’s *L’arte dell’estremo Oriente* (1894) was hugely indebted to Edmond de Gournay’s *Outamaro, Le Peintre des Maisons Vertes* (1891), while the plot of Giacomo Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904) relied heavily on the novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) by Pierre Loti.

At the turn of the century news about Japanese imperialist ambitions were welcomed in the Italian nationalistic discourse and used to spur the foreign policy of the young liberal Italy. Nippon militaristic enterprises with China (1894-95) and Russia (1904-05) were admired and considered ideal examples for possible Italian imitation. An unusually belligerent Giovanni Pascoli called on Italy to follow the example of Japan, where day laborers became “little soldiers” (*soldatini formidabili*), defeated Russia, and conquered territory for her settlers. A Futurist and nationalist intellectual such as Marinetti celebrated the efficiency and the state-of-the-art equipment of the invincible Japanese army in a poem asserting the aesthetic beauty of the machine (“Automobile ebbrrra di spazio, / che scalpiti e frrremi d’angoscia / rodendo il morso con striduli denti… / formidabile mostro giapponese”).

Therefore, during the *fin de siècle* and the first two decades of the twentieth century, Japan penetrated the intellectual debate in the peninsula either as an exotic signifier referring to an aesthetic movement popular in

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6 For this aspect see Ishi Motoaki, “*Vittorio Pica e la critica dell’arte giapponese in Italia,*” *Annali dell’Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”: Rivista del Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici e del Dipartimento di Studi e Ricerche su Africa e Paesi Arabi* 58/3-4 (1998): 495-518.
Europe or as a remote imperial enterprise made innocuous by distance, providing a convenient example of a young, imperialistic, nation to inspire a nationalistic ideology. I maintain that for a cross-cultural representation between Italy and Japan these first fifty years of cultural exchanges represent a sort of prehistory when only a limited number of abstract Japanese images were circulating throughout Europe. A major turning point in the story occurred with the onset of the fascist era in Italy because of the policies implemented by the regime. From the beginning, Mussolini gained mass consensus by promising to recast the image of Italy in order to overcome the current economic crises and to improve the country’s international prestige. For the first time in the modern era, Italians viewed themselves within a broader, potentially worldwide context. The implementation of this political strategy relied on a vast investment in technologies of information: while documentaries on Japan were made available by the newborn Instituto Luce (the first videos on Japan date from 1928\(^7\)), a large group of journalists and writers were sent to Asia to bring back fresh news and images of foreign nations. Ruth Ben-Ghiat has convincingly argued that the desire of the fascist regime to reach out to other cultures and civilizations was aimed at fostering the national identities through a process of assimilation and borrowing from foreign cultures, as is well expressed in this quote by a young militant Giulio Santangelo in her introduction:

> Do you want to make this empire? Then we must leave our beautiful little towns and go out into the world to get to know those whom we intend to dominate. We need to rid ourselves of all that suits us alone and highlight the things we possess that are suitable for others as well. We must

\(^7\) Videos on Japan from the archive of the Istituto Luce are available on YouTube; they present a stimulating as well as unexplored field of research.
ruthlessly take the good wherever we find it and make it ours, Italian, and serve ourselves of it for our own ends. (Ben-Ghiat 12)

In the first chapter I argue that in the case of Japan the process of selection and assimilation takes over after a first period of racist views of the Mikado’s empire. However, this vast archive of images and writings on Japan molded and appropriated by the Fascist regime first gave the impression to Italians that Japan was similar to their own country. Since I consider this moment of Italian history as the inception of a process of cross-cultural views, in the following chapters I track the evolution of this story beyond the end of the political alliance of the Axis pact and throughout the new patterns of modernization and continuity with the past that established the postwar dialogue between the two countries.

In the end, it is clear that the reason I focus on a period of time roughly from the 1920s to the 1990s is because the volume of cultural exchanges, as well as the increasing opportunity to travel offered by mass tourism, are the main factors for the continuing reshaping of cross-cultural relations. The swift historical and political transitions undertaken by both countries over the years carry the consequences of a continuing process of renegotiation of national identities, and a complex and dynamic pattern of representation of the self as the mirror of the other.

4. Meetings Between Italy and Japan

This study considers a wide array of sources: travelogues, novels, diaries, journalistic reports, propaganda pamphlets, and essays on architecture and
photography. Strangely enough, cinema is not a feasible field of research since Cinecittà seems to ignore depictions of the Far East and its diasporas in Hollywood cinema, unlike other Asian destinations such as China, India, or the Middle East. The texts that I discuss in the following pages are in dialogue with one another around questions of cross-cultural representations. To me, the juxtaposition of different genres is not a limit but rather an asset because it is intended to preserve and shed light on the writings’ presentations of the multiple dynamics between the self and the Other. Through this strategy one can better comprehend that regardless of the genre of the book—either fiction or nonfiction—and the writer’s intentions, an element of foreignness is inevitably inscribed within it. In selecting these texts from the numerous others mentioned in the bibliography, I was driven not by criteria of adequate representation of any Japanese reality but by the mark that such images leave on the observer. In other words, these texts are not interesting for what they describe, but rather for the way the identity of the observer reacts and negotiates its own status in regard to Otherness. In most cases the authors share the same nationalities as their readers, and for this reason the authors often end up presenting commonplaces about Japan—or Italy, in the case of Shiono Nanami—and reflecting on them through the lens of their readers’ national identities. This mutual understanding and complicity between author and reader guarantees the force and credibility of such commonplaces on the one hand, and the opportunity to bring attention to issues related to the author’s national identity.

By superimposing a case study of national identity on one of orientalism, I argue that national borders still matter in the view of the Other because the metaphysical construction of a supposedly Western gaze on the Orient, which is
basically the result of American, English, and French perspectives, does not take the articulation of images of the Other into national discourse. It must be noted that Italians visiting Japan normally do so with a background of Western transnational best-seller books on Japan including those by Lafcadio Hearn, Ruth Benedict, and Roland Barthes, and they lean on tired Western stereotypes. Notwithstanding the porosity of the concept of national culture, I venture an attempt to challenge the monolithic binary opposition of East and West by stressing the fact that depictions of Japan in Italian accounts arise in conjunction with historical and political conditions. The four case studies I present not only show how images of Japan are refashioned through time, but also assert and at the same time complicate the notion of commonplaces as fetishistic images that express the Western subject’s ambivalent attitude of aggression and curiosity toward the Other. The following chapters examine images of Japan that oscillate between fascination and abjection. Fascist propaganda until the mid-1930s is certainly driven by an impulse of abjection of the Japanese Other as a strategy of emphasizing the existence of a homogeneous and superior national body in the face of racial difference. The later phase of Fascist propaganda is instead characterized by the opposite process of assimilation and absorption of difference. Finally, the postwar years emphasize the fascination with the Japanese Other.

In chapter 1 I look at the Fascist representation of Japan through the lens of Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and Said’s elaboration of it:

Culture —according to the author of Orientalism— of course is to be found operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, of institutions and of other persons works not through domination but by
what Gramsci calls consent. In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony.* (7)

In my case study I have relied on this notion of hegemony for the fundamental distinction between a notion of hegemony as coercive power dictated by an authority and the more sophisticated concept of totalitarian power, which consists in the way hegemonic opinions construct the image of Japan and, at the same time, serve the purposes of the Fascist political agenda. As mentioned above, I clearly single out two different moments in the production of Japanese representations in Italy. An aggressive and racist language aimed at belittling the Japanese empire and thereby gaining support for Fascist plans of international dominion characterizes the first decade of Mussolini’s dictatorship. Similarities and common goals are stressed when the moment comes for justifying the ideological bases of the Axis alliance and introducing the notion of brotherhood with their Far East partner. To further investigate the effects of Fascist propaganda I consider the paradoxical cases of Giovanni Comisso’s *Donne gentili* (1958) and Ercole Patti’s *Ragazze di Tokyo* (1934). The two authors were not aligned with the ideas of the regime, and their fictional stories are inspired by their journalistic production in Japan. Comisso published his novel for the first time in 1949 under the title *Amori d’Oriente* in order to elude the Fascist censors. Despite all the evidence regarding their nonaffiliation with the dictatorship and the use of fiction as a way to evading the propaganda authorities, I emphasize how images of Japan circulating during the *Ventennio* had a deep impact on their writings.
Chapter 2 moves forward to the postwar years and the years of reconstruction featuring rapid economic growth in both Italy and Japan. I look at the writings of Fosco Maraini, Goffredo Parise, and Alberto Moravia through the ideological framework of continuity and change that was widely debated in Japan at the time of its rapid modernization. I analyze the reflection of Italian identities through the Japanese mirror by referring to the thesis of Emilio Gentile in his essay “La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century.” At the dawn of the new Republican government, leading Italian intellectuals suffered from an inferiority complex despite the fact that the democratic process was leading the country toward an unexpected economic miracle. The origin of this disillusionment lies at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century when a nationalistic movement tried to introduce a “religion of the nation,” a lay form of religiosity that “did not look back to the past as being perfect; to be preserved to counteract the changes brought by modernization, it launched itself toward the future tragically optimistic that the nation would become so great as to satisfy its desire for power” (Gentile 87). This vision of greatness that reached its apex during Fascism had now turned into a sense of disillusionment, which I believe is a key element to understanding the cross-cultural representations between Italy and Japan during the three decades following World War II. I also refer to the Japanese anthropologist Nakane Kie and her international best seller Japanese Society (1970) to deconstruct Fosco Maraini’s representation of Japan as a modern nation on the verge of becoming a world power leader as opposed to a decaying Western society.

In chapter 3 I utilize the same conceptual framework of continuity/change to offer a look from the opposite side and analyze writing
excerpts of Japanese living in Italy during the same period. Since Italian
cityscapes and history were an influential element in the debate about
modernization in Japan, I turn my attention to the writings of a Japanese
architect (Jinnai Hidenobu), a photographer (Ikko Narahara) and an historian
and author of historical novels (Nanami Shiono). I make the case for an
asymmetric relation between Western and Eastern observers as I prove that
Japanese’s images of Italy are clearly rooted in a Western cultural background
that includes authors like Burckhardt, Goethe, and Thomas Mann. My main focus
is on the way Japanese visiting Italy project their anxiety regarding the
dismantling of the old traditional Japan, a consequence of the fast pace of
modernization and the effort to win the technology competition with America.
My analysis hints at the fact that Italy was not taken seriously as a state and
rising modern power since each of the writings I analyze delves into the past and
considers Italy as a museum nation, a place where “time vanished.”

Chapter 4 raises the issue of gender in the cross-cultural analysis as I
consider accounts of Italian women writers in Japan. The few samples of female
writings mainly fall in a period that spans the 1980s and 1990s, evidence of the
fact that this period was characterized by an ongoing growing awareness of
women’s rights and opportunities. By focusing on the golden years of the
feminist movement in Italy (1968-1980), I show how Italian women offered a
revised representation of the traditional image of the Japanese geisha while male
writers failed to avoid the typical stereotypes. Through this close-up look at the
Oriental Other I emphasize how Italian women reflect on their own status and
become more aware of the fact that the alleged superiority of the Western
woman is challenged by supposedly less-evolved models of gender relations.
All the Italian authors I considered in my dissertation eventually decided to return to their own country. Even after a long sojourn in The Land of the Rising Sun, the perception of Japan as the Other inevitably remains, and includes a sense of alienation together with a sharper awareness of national differences. In the words of Antonietta Pastore: “Dopo quattordici anni che abito in Giappone, proprio quando potrei vivere serena in questo paese, comincio ad avvertire una certa irrequietezza. Il fatto è che sento in maniera sempre più acuta la mancanza della mia famiglia d’origine e provo una nostalgia crescente del mio paese, dei suoi paesaggi, della bellezza delle sue città, di certe sue atmosfere.” (Pastore 2010, 152)
CHAPTER I

Mussolini in Japan: Nippon
Representations in the Age of Fascism
Ma la loro massima forza [the Japanese’s strength] è morale. È nella compattezza delle loro volontà, nella sublimazione del sacrificio per la Patria, per cui chi muore in guerra diviene una specie di nume tutelare. Gli eroi sono eterni. Il loro spirito entra nell’anima del combattente e li infiamma. (Luigi Barzini)

**Introduction**

When Benito Mussolini proudly announced Italian access to the Nippon-German Anti-Comintern Pact on November 6, 1937, Italians realized for the first time that Japan was no longer a legendary land nor a brutal, belligerent nation, but was likely going to become a friendly ally. From the outset Italy, Germany, and Japan attempted to define cultural and political boundaries to strengthen the military alliance against the front composed of Britain, the United States, and the U.S.S.R. The historical and cultural distance among these three nations had to at least be reduced, and it became a necessity to define a nationalistic common identity beyond any particularism. The thread of communism and the supposed hegemony of Western positivism and materialism made a case for a right-wing coalition aimed at defending the vision of a postliberal society in opposition to the evils represented by both liberalism and socialism (Griffin 1-23).
Nevertheless, even this common conceptual framework did not easily apply to the three nations at stake. For instance, unlike Japan, Italy and Germany could find ideological affinities in the Idealistic creed of the spirit as an active force in history. Hegelian doctrine shaped the ideology of German fascism and also influenced the vision of the totalitarian state in Italy through the neo-Hegelian philosopher Giovanni Gentile, who eventually became the philosophic father of Fascist Italy. “Fascists appeal to collective, spiritual vitalism as a means to overcome trivial materialism and the class conflict and social disruption it caused” (Sottile 27). On the other hand, a comparative study of Italian, German, and Japanese fascism leaves Italian particularism in a subordinate position in many respects. Both countries apply racist policies; they are both pursuing ambitious expansionist campaigns deploying invincible army troops with an advanced technology, not to mention that Japan borrowed its own constitution from Germany. Given the absence of consistent diplomatic relations between

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8 In a comparative framework the word “fascism” (in lower case) has a generic definition, whereby the Italian case does not necessarily stand out in respect to other fascist nations. As Roger Griffin points out: “The word fascism here, however, is the Anglicized form of the Italian proper name fascism (henceforth to be referred to as ‘Fascism’). To apply it to phenomena outside Italy is to change the status of the word: it becomes a generic term.” The use of “fascism” in this sense (for which we always use the lower case) is documented by the Oxford English Dictionary as having been established in English as early as 1923. At this time the Contemporary Review commented on the political situation in the Weimar Republic, which, given Hitler’s accession to power a decade later, is laden with tragic irony: “Fascism in Germany will never be more than one of several factors.” As the interwar period unfolded, the term was soon subject to a process that one historian has described as inflation (Huizinga 296-7), which, as we all know, inevitably leads to devaluation.” (Griffin 1)

9 In his 1938 book Inside Asia, journalist John Gunther suggested that Germany and Japan had stronger reason to join in a coalition compared to Italy: “Japan and Germany at least have strong community of interest. Both countries believe in race and Japan has begun to flirt with anti-Semitism: not a semicolon in original quotation? both are expansionist states, which were once put in the Have-Not category; both fear and dislike the U.S.S.R. on nationalist grounds. Japan
Italy and Japan, it is certainly harder to outline the similarities between Nippon and Italian fascism.

However, it is not my intention to linger over whether it is appropriate to compare Western forms of fascism with Asian models; rather, I am interested in analyzing the rhetorical devices employed by the Italian regime to support the partnership with its Asian ally. From the outset, the practice of a perceptual strategy aimed at representing Japan as a “close” and “familiar” country in the eyes of Italians is present in Benito Mussolini’s writings, such as in the letter to the Japanese prime minister Fuminaro Konoe on March 22, 1938.

Italia e Giappone, che le affinità delle aspirazioni, il culto comune per un glorioso passato e la comune fede in un più grande avvenire già univano in un saldo e mai smentito vincolo di reciproca amicizia, sono ora ancor più strettamente legate dal Patto che impegna i due Governi ed i due popoli alla difesa della civilità umana contro le ideologie dissolvitrici che insidiano il più sacro patrimonio dell’umanità. (410)

This public letter published in the newspaper *Il Popolo d’Italia* permitted the author to share his own perceptions of Japan with the multitude of readers. This work of propaganda sets out to stress Italian-Japanese coincidences in the glorious past (“il culto comune per un glorioso passato”), present ambitions (“le affinità della aspirazioni”), and the promising future (“la comune fede in un più grande avvenire”). Some of the ultranationalistic key concepts that are central in the Fascist discourse were employed. The supremacy of the Italian civilization resting on questionable descent from the Roman empire (“il culto comune per un

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glorioso passato”) is put side by side with the *kokutai* spirit (national essence or entity), whose concept lies at the core of the justification of the emperor’s authority through divine origin and his image as benevolent patriarch of the nation. It is worth observing that both these historical narrations of a glorious descent were meant to play a symbolic role in the legitimizing of an aggressive imperialist agenda and the implementation of a nationalistic policy. If the myth of Roman inheritance was part of the Fascist manipulation of aesthetics and its propagandistic use of the power of the image, the Japanese Imperial Household was a product of the Meiji restoration, which intervened to end two and a half centuries of shogunate authority.

My primary interest is to focus on this narration of Japan as a country that shares with Italy the same vision of a prestigious and glorious future, the same deification of its leader, the same collective belief in patriotic faith, and the same ethical values. Above all, I focus on the cultural apparatus organized by the government to support its military agenda. The sources I use are related to the area of literary/journalistic production, with specific attention to travel literature. In general, travel literature involves not only an encounter with what is considered ‘diverse,’ but it also implies a reflection on the assumptions by which the traveler represents the “Other” through his/her own culture. The individual representation of the place visited is somehow part of a vast archive of preexisting images, judgments and beliefs present in a collective identity, in which the subjectivity of the writer is imbued. When the collective identity is under the influence of a regime and the traveler is a journalist working to serve the purposes of political propaganda, travelogues become a useful source for
discovering the apparatus of enforced images and ideas. As Charles Burdett puts it:

The question that travel writing provides a medium to explore, whether they concern the limits of personal autonomy, the coercive power of collective versions of identity or the problems that attain to representing other cultures and people, all assume an undeniable importance in the context of a regime that attempted to enlist large swathes of the population in its drive to transform the whole of society, and which pursued an increasingly aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. (9)

During the so-called Ventennio travel literature was connected to journalism, whose main role was to mold public opinion in order to meet the goals of an aggressive foreign policy. Most of the writers I consider in the following pages were sent to Japan as correspondents for national newspapers: Giovanni Comisso worked for Corriere della Sera, Arnaldo Cipolla was hired by La Stampa, while Luigi Barzini and Mario Appelius published their articles in Il Popolo d'Italia, the national daily paper founded by Mussolini. After these first appearances in national dailies, these reports from Japan were collected and published in book form by well-known publishing houses like Mondadori, Bompiani, or Treves. Since the authors of the reports were also freelance writers, the transition of the travelogues from newspapers to book sometimes involved the creation of a plot and consequently the transformation of written accounts of journeys into travel literature novels. For example, this was the case with Ercole Patti’s Un lungo viaggio lontano (1975) and Giovanni Comisso’s Amori d’Oriente (1949).

As I analyze the work of each author through the lens of Fascist propaganda, I refer to the critical perspective that Edward Said outlined in
Orientalism (1978). By considering each representation of Japan within the larger discursive framework of the Fascist cultural apparatus, I rely on Said’s idea that every representation of another place is itself enmeshed in the network of preexisting and predefined sets of ideas and images that have become predominant in the imagination and the representation of a place:

The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions and political ambience of the representer. … We must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is eo ipso implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things beside the "truth" which is itself a representation. (273-73)

In Said's view the main function of every representation is controlling and manipulating the other for political, moral, or epistemological purposes. As a consequence, in the context of the Ventennio Italians were prevented from understanding Japan as the Other. The structure of power, that is, the Fascist cultural apparatus, is what prevented Italians from reaching out to its Far East ally.

1. Un popolo di formiche. Images of Japan 1922-1935

Before delving into the analysis of this typology of travel writings I consider travelogues written during the Ventennio but before 1935, which marked the beginning of the Ethiopian war and the first step toward an alliance with Japan and Germany. In contrast with these years preceding World War II, the travel writings about Japan written during the first period show a redundant nationalistic element in their accounts. In Angelo Pellegrino's words:

In regard to Japan, we have to limit this nationalistic element to the period between the rise of Mussolini to power and the campaign in Ethiopia. The first two authors I consider, Giovanni Comisso from Veneto and Ercole Patti from Sicily, were both fiction writers working as special correspondents in Asia for the national papers Gazzetta del Popolo and Corriere della Sera. They both revisited their articles in order to republish them as books, whose titles stress the sexist image of Japan as an erotic Disneyland: Ercole Patti’s Ragazze di Tokyo (1934) and Giovanni Comisso’s Donne gentili (1958). The reduction of Japan to a country worthy only of sexual exploitation is a clear metaphor for a nationalistic ideology intent on looking at the “country observed” from a perspective of dominion and superiority. 10 Beyond the sexual metaphors, Comisso and Patti deploy other

10 The perspective of the Western observer whose point of view emphasizes the superiority of his civilization over the observed eastern civilization is a cornerstone of Said’s Orientalist theory. Giuliana Benvenuti observes this phenomenon in the accounts of Italian travelogues in Orient: “Nel resoconto novecentesco possono alterarsi, ovvero convivere, diverse modalità di descrizione, se di una estetica dell’eccentrico e dell’ignoto sarà erede Gozzano, con la sua ripresa dell’esotismo ottocentesco, con ‘l’enfasi sullo ‘stridore’ dell’India, di un atteggiamento illuminista sarà erede Moravia, ma in ogni caso, la ‘struttura di atteggiamento e di riferimento’ di questi autori è ancora di larga misura quella che Said considera propria dell’imperialismo, poiché l’osservatore, qualunque estetica privilegi, si sente superiore in termini di conoscenza rispetto agli osservati, anche quando percepisca questa superiorità
rhetorical devices to diminish the Land of the Rising Sun in the eyes of the Italian reader.

2. A Disneyland for Sexual Escapades

Between 1931 and 1932 the young Sicilian novelist Ercole Patti (1903-1976) was employed as reporter in Asia by the daily newspaper Gazzetta del Popolo. The itinerary of his tour included countries whose political and military turmoil drew the attention of the international community—India, under the effect of Ganghi’s nonviolent resistance movement, but also China and Japan, whose diplomatic relations had broken down when Japanese army forces clashed with Chinese troops in Manchuria in September 1931. These articles were later collected in a travelogue titled Ragazze di Tokyo: viaggio da Tokio a Bombay (1934), which was republished in a new edition titled Un lungo viaggio lontano in 1975.

From the point of disembarking in Yokohama, Patti immediately seems unsympathetic to the people observed along his journey, as well as uneasy about the places he visited. He describes the predominant trait of local inhabitants as a deeply aggressive feeling expressed with a seamless smile: “È il Giappone che ride sempre e in certi momenti il sorriso, a furia di resistere sulle labbra per tanto tempo, assume un’aria feroce e ossessionante” (Patti 13). The perception of

being in a place that stands apart from common humanity is elaborated in the following passage, in which the Japanese are described as a sort of machine:

I giapponesi escono di casa calmi, rassettati, col cappello duro e il tight ben spolverati, le scarpe lucide, la pace nel cuore, formidabili, freddi, imbattibili e vanno a fabbricare le potenti corazzate, i grattacieli, le grandi motonavi, organizzano l’esercito, invadono lentamente la Cina, con una precisione sconcertante e sulle labbra un sorriso che fa venire i brividi. I loro cervelli, non geniali, ma sicuri e garantiti, funzionano come cronometri. (38)

The Japanese individual is portrayed as a person lacking in human emotions, whose efficiency is compared to that of a ruthless robot.

In Patti’s view, even the behavior of Japanese youth stands outside the definition of “typical, commonly accepted behavior.” This is his conclusion after a night spent in a Tokyo bar:

I giovanotti giapponesi hanno una maniera di divertirsi che contrasta singolarmente con quella dei giovanotti di tutte le razze. Essi siedono lunghe ore al “café”, in atteggiamenti di abbandono, tranquillo e domestico, chiacchierando del più e del meno, masticando bruscolini e sorseggando birra. Non ce n’è uno che allunga la mano per carezzare una ragazza. Parlano e ridono continuamente. Non ho mai capito che cosa abbiano tanto da ridere. La loro serata trascorre lieta e uguale fra luci variopinte, canzoni cavernose di grammofoni, insipide sigarette col Fusijama sulla scatola, risatine.

Soggiogato da quell’inesorabile crepitare di sorrisi pullulanti in tutta la sala, ad un certo punto, trascinato pei capelli, fui costretto a mettermi a ridere anch’io. Non c’era altro da fare. Guardandomi nello specchio che avevo accanto mi sorpresi con un sorrisetto dolciastro sul labbro. Il Giappone è terribile: ti piega ai suoi voleri e ti impone le sue usanze senza che tu te ne accorga. (45)

What is more typical than a group of young teenagers talking, smiling, and drinking beer in a bar at night? But for Ercole Patti a standard norm of behavior must include things like man’s sexual body language: “Non ce n’è uno che
allunghi la mano per carezzare una ragazza." Moreover, without any regard for the fact that he is not fluent in the language, Patti feels entitled to judge the smiling faces as frivolous. His sense of exclusion is well represented by his unmotivated smile reflected on a mirror, in an attempt to convince the reader that the other smiles are as meaningless as his own.

The process of alienation from Japanese society is completed when Patti uses puppet metaphors to describe the persons he meets. The allegedly cruel gaze of a bystander is compared to a grim-faced teddy bear: “Un uomo basso e tozzo mi guardò a lungo di sotto le falde del cappello duro, con due occhi neri, fermi e crudeli da orsacchiottio di stoppa col fischietto sulla pancia” (47). Other bystanders’ smiles are compared to those of imaginary tigers: “Partimmo sotto lo sguardo di due giovanotti che si erano fermati a guardare con taciti sorrisi da tigre” (47). Finally, Patti attains his goal of meeting a prostitute, whose movements are compared first to a cat and then to a sturgeon: “Sotsouko sorride serena e familiare osservando con curiosità e stupore le mie valigie. Va su e giù nella minuscola stanza a passi lenti e molli, come un piccolo gatto. All'improvviso si lancia a capofitto nel letto, con un guizzo, come uno storione” (48). In general, in Un viaggio lontano the point of view of the observer carries a sense of nationalist superiority over the object of his observation. The chauvinistic tones of this representation are expressed through a complex of metaphors and images, like the persistent image of the “smile,” that successfully present a degraded vision of the Land of the Rising Sun.

Giovanni Comisso (1895-1969) was already an accomplished novelist when, between 1929 and 1930, he completed his journalistic reports in Asia for the national daily paper Corriere della Sera. A selection of his articles was
published in the book *Cina-Giappone* (1932), which was later republished under the new title *Donne gentili* (1958). While editing the articles for *Cina-Giappone*, Comisso began to write a fictional and autobiographical story based on his Oriental tour. The result was *Amori d’Oriente*, that would be unpublished until 1949. Lorenzo, the alter ego of the author, is the protagonist of a search for sexual pleasure in the Middle and Far East. The protagonist’s intentions are explicit from the outset in the same fashion as we have already seen in Patti’s book: “Gli avevano parlato del Giappone come di una terra dove l’abbondanza di donne rende piacevoli tutte le ore del giorno, attendeva il sopraggiungere della notte per avere la possibilità dei primi incontri” (Comisso 1031). However, Lorenzo must cope with the fact that his sexual appetite cannot be satisfied in a land where women do not live up his expectations:

Il servo dell’albergo aveva presentato a Lorenzo una delle tanto attese bellezze della città, ma sebbene assai bella di volto, aveva rivelato un corpo patito la cui pelle era cosparsa di cicatrici. L’aveva fatta uscire subito, il suo amico gli aveva spiegato che erano punture fatte con aghi infuocati per guarirla da qualche malattia, come usano in Cina, ma non aveva voluto sapere di altre. (1029)

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11 It is interesting to note that immediately after the publication Comisso wrote an article on “La Fiera Letteraria” to mark the distance from the content of the book, saying that it belonged to a previous and outdated period of his career: “*Amori d’Oriente* è semplicemente un mio libro scritto quindici anni or sono e solo ora ha trovato la possibilità di essere pubblicato. È un libro mio, ma scritto da un altro me stesso che oggi considero staccato da me. Non rinnego questo libro, perché allora avrei dovuto distruggerlo. Ma siccome rappresenta il limite massimo della mia possibilità narrativa nella trama degli istinti, ho desiderato venisse pubblicato per avere, io compreso, la misura completa della mia maniera di scrivere. Purtroppo, *Amori d’Oriente* piace: e questo mi riconferma l’errore nella narrativa d’istinti” (Giovanni Comisso, “Il libro di un altro me stesso,” quoted in Giovanni Comisso, *Opere*, ed. Rolando Damiani; Nico Naldini [Milan: Mondadori, 2002], 1724). In 1954 an English translation of *Loves of the Orient* was published in New York by the publishing house Bridgehead Books, but American censorship intervened to stop the distribution.
Lorenzo is disappointed by the body types he encounters and does not hesitate to express his distaste for the appearance of Japanese women as well as men: “Subito [Lorenzo] si accorse che contrastava con queste [donne] l’aspetto aspro, orrido e a volte malsano degli uomini, vestiti con chimono grigio, scalzi o con zoccoli e cappello all’europea: terrei e occhialuti” (1031). Even his meeting with a prostitute generates frustration in Lorenzo, who ends up blaming the two women protagonists because of their irreconciliable diversity:

La porta si aperse, una vecchia occhialuta e con i denti d’oro gli fece un grande inchino, pregandolo di togliersi le scarpe, salì una scaletta di legno e si trovò in una stanza dove si sentiva un fastiosissimo fonografo con voci nasali e continue. La vecchia gli offerse alcuni cuscini e gli mise accanto l’occorrente per fumare, facendogli segni di avere pazienza. Pertanto il fonografo non smetteva diventando sempre più irritante. ... la portà si aperse ed entrò una ragazza vestita e pettinata all’europea, che lo salutò in inglese, e tra sorrisi artefatti e altre parole in giapponese lo indusse a sedersi sui cuscini. Anche questa ragazza non aveva nulla di notevole, Lorenzo era ormai deciso di adattarsi, ma il fonografo, dopo un attimo di tregua, aveva subito ripreso pettigolo e insistente. Fece segno di fare tacere questa musica, la ragazza gli rispose che non si poteva, perché il fonografo non era in quella casa, ma in una di fronte. La musica non finiva più, Lorenzo volle sapere dove fosse la stanza per fare l’amore, si sentì rispondere che era quella. Il fonografo non accennava a smettere. La ragazza non accennava a spogliarsi. La vecchia voleva pagasse prima... Lorenzo ne ebbe abbastanza. Le donne dovettero accorgersi che era in grande furore, perché al suo cenno di aprire la porta, si affrettarono umili senza dire una parola. (1032-1033)

Here Lorenzo’s distaste for the unappealing body of the prostitute comes with a deeper frustration due to a lack of communication and a deep awareness of an unbearable diversity. The image of the gramophone and its obnoxious sound vividly expresses this distance that cannot be bridged. The cacophonic sound stands for how Lorenzo perceives the Japanese other. The location of the gramophone in another room — that is, an inaccessible and unknown space—
represents the impossibility of reaching out to the source of the music, that is, the core of the Japanese soul.

The conclusion of the journey in the Land of the Rising Sun features another rejection of Japanese customs and culture. After debunking the myth of the “sexy and gracious Jap girl,” Lorenzo questions the benefits of the well-known Nippon tradition of a warm bath at dusk. What is generally considered a sublime way to relax turns out to be another tragicomic experience for Lorenzo.

The gap between the elements (room temperature too cold, water too hot), the distance in morality (Lorenzo’s embarrassment about standing naked in front of women), the lack of grace in the girls’ mannerisms (“Nessuna grazia raggiava dai loro volti, ma un’indifferenza ostinata”) are all conducive to the instinctive reaction of the protagonist, who ends his adventure in Japan with an explosion of rage and a final cry—which is, once again, misinterpreted and taken to be a violent declaration of love! It is clear that Comisso plays with the natural instincts of his character, whose demeanor shows no attempt at understanding and reaching out beyond the differences he encounters. The instinctual reactions underline a sense of dominion and implicitly point out the weakness and
“feminine soul” of Japanese society in contrast to the allegedly more virile Italian identity. In the example cited here, the local inhabitants are women willing to serve the newcomer. The brutality of his reaction after being disappointed shows the cowardice and frivolity of the East Asian people and their naïvete.\(^{12}\)

In conclusion, *Amori d’oriente* was by no means written to endorse a Fascist ideology, as a matter of fact Comisso decided to publish it only many years after the end of the *Ventennio*. Some critics have regarded this book as rather anti-fascist for its “anti-militarism” and its “fairly explicit sexual content” (Duncan 2002, 56). However, a close reading of the text tells a different story. It is hard to deny the presence of a strong virile element in Lorenzo, as opposed to the femininity of the people who are the object of the observation. As Barbara Spackman points out, “virility” is linked to “Fascism” according to different interpretations, including “sexual potency”: “Virility is not simply one of many fascist qualities, but rather than the cults of youth, of duty, of sacrifice, of heroic virtues, of strength and stamina, of obedience and authority, and of physical strength and sexual potency” (Spackman xii). All these qualities “that characterize fascism are all inflections of that master term, virility” (Spackman xii). While I do not question Comisso’s silent opposition to the regime, I believe that in this case the subjective identity of the narrator reflects assumptions and images that belong to the collectivity of Italians living under the effect of a nationalistic propaganda.

\(^{12}\) For this naïvete see, for instance, this example in which the Japanese security system is met with ridicule: “Lorenzo aveva sentito parlare del grande sospetto che i giapponesi hanno verso gli stranieri e si divertiva a eludere tutte le domande mescendogli una birra che finì per fargli reclinare il capo sulla tavola e se ne uscì lasciandolo nel sonno” (1036).
3. Mussolini’s kimono

When referring to Ercole Patti and Giovanni Comisso’s images of Japan we cannot consider their works as products of an explicit nationalist propaganda, oriented to exorcising the dread of the invincible Japanese army. It must be pointed out that Japan’s defeat of China (1894) and Russia (1904) resulted in a perceived anxiety about the so-called “yellow peril” in Europe and America; in the 1920s Italy was part of this phenomenon. However, Ruth Ben-Ghiat focused attention on culture’s role in Fascist policy as a useful device for consensus building and promoting its foreign policy: “Culture was also assigned a key role in the regime’s projects for international expansion. Italy's formidable cultural patrimony made fascists acutely aware of the role aesthetic prestige could play in the arrogation of international influence. A regenerated Italian culture would advertise national creative genius throughout the world, much as it had during the Renaissance” (Ben-Ghiat 6). A comparison with the Italian Renaissance is particularly appropriate in expressing the Fascist agenda of diffusing a collective ideal of Italian supremacy in civilization, culture, spiritual life, and ethical values. In this respect Japan, with its growing power, was a potential opponent to be feared.

An example of this cultural campaign against the “wicked Japs” is Clemente Ferraris’s *Al di là del Paese di Butterfly* (1927). As the title suggests, Ferraris’s journey to Japan aimed to debunk widespread opinion about Japanese heroic virtues and gracious beauty:
[Ho deciso di] fare un viaggio in quel Giappone dove gli uomini (specie dopo la loro vittoria sulla Russia) ci vengono dipinti come tanti eroi, anzi come tanti mezzì quintali di virtù fatta carne, e le donne come tante geishe che nel famoso e festoso yoshivara prodigano le loro grazie tra languori e suoni di chamisen nelle loro mille gabbie lucenti di lacca. (3)

With this passage at the beginning of the book Ferraris sets the parodic tone of his description. On one hand he maliciously observes that the well-known Japanese “virtue” is carried out by men who weigh roughly one hundred pounds (“mezzi quintali di virtù fatta carne”); on the other hand, he shows no respect whatsoever for the artistic image of the geisha, who is compared to a prostitute living in a cage. As we continue reading, Ferraris’s intentions become more and more explicit: “Questo preambolo per dire che io non sono troppo entusiasta di questo popolo giapponese, che in Europa, ci viene dipinto come l’incarnazione della virtù, con le sue relative uggiose conseguenze” (66). These ironic praises of Japan’s modern view in regard to divorce rights channel the attention to Japanese women and their dubious customs upon marriage:

Ma verrà anche per noi uomini europei il giorno del riscatto! E allora noi poveri maschi, calpestati, parafrasando il grido di Ferdinando Lassalle: “lavoratori! Sembrate piccini perché state in ginocchio, alzatevi!” inizieremo il nostro glorioso riscatto contro i soprusi del così detto sesso debole! E nostri condottieri in questo nostro risorgimento saranno allora questi giapponesi, che tra le infinite loro virtù, hanno quella di poter divorziare, (cioè restituire al padre suo la non più diletta consorte) quando la loro dolce metà, come ho già detto, si dimostri un po’ bisbetica, gelosa e persino se si lamenta che il marito vada con le geishe al Ioschewara, senza pensare, la sciagurata! Che la causa di queste scappatelle è lei stessa, che nel passare a nozze si è rasa le sopracciglie, e si è tinta i denti in nero, non calcolando l’infelice che, così facendo, essa non avrebbe benissimo indotto in tentazione gli altri uomini, ma non avrebbe però potuto in tal guisa tenere a sé avvinto nemmeno il proprio. (69)
Whereas one could expect sympathy for the subordinate role of the Japanese woman in a fascist writer, we find only mockery and scorn. Finally, the last revised image is the urban space of modern Japan: “Ed invero l’Europeo immagina qui in Giappone città fastose, monumentali, opulente, e grandiose, quali si addirebbe ad un popolo che è alla testa della civiltà” (104). Instead of the rise of new great cities endowed with solid buildings and innovative architecture, contemporary Japan — in Ferraris’ view — is far from reaching the level of European metropolises: “E questa delusione dataci dal vedere questo ammasso di catapecchie che costituisce le città giapponesi, è molto più viva, in quanto chè a tutti noto che il giapponese ha nel suo sangue stesso il sentimento dell’arte” (104). Even in this last passage it is evident that Ferraris’s attempt to free the nation’s perceived subaltern status with respect to Japan is not based on a blatant message of demonization. A sharp irony and superficial appraisal are rhetorical devices frequently used to soften the corrosive effects of his criticism. This moderation of the propaganda discourse stems from a historical situation in which Italy’s aggressive foreign agenda was still unsettled. Especially after 1935 when Mussolini began to foster his nationalistic campaign, a more disruptive irony would no longer be applied to Japan but rather to the so-called plutocratic nations, such as Great Britain and United States.

Another influential fascist voice in Japan was that of the journalist and novelist Arnaldo Cipolla (1877-1938), whose popular writings (journals, novels, and reports) contributed to molding the representation of faraway lands, including colonial territories in Africa, for many Italian readers. As a journalist he worked as a reporter for some of the most important national dailies, such as Corriere della Sera, La Stampa, Il Messaggero, and Il popolo d’Italia. In 1931, as
the Manchurian incident brought worldwide attention to Japan’s expansionism in Asia, Cipolla published his account of his Asian journey in *Nel Giappone dei grattacieli, viaggio da Tokio a Dehli*. From the outset Cipolla’s intention was to set a parallel between Japan and China, envisioning them as two peer nations on the road toward military empire building:

La Mancuria è oggi la provincia più ricca della Cina. Mukden è completamente giapponesizzata, vale a dire ha imitato Seul e Dairen nello sviluppo moderno e tutto quello che vi si acquista è giapponese. È probabile che l’esperimento mancese inclini il Giappone a rinunciare definitivamente a ogni idea di conquista territoriale in Cina preferendo invece la penetrazione economica. Ma c’è lo spirito d’espansione militare che volere o no è ancora acuto in Giappone, il quale unito alle difficoltà del sovrappopolamento nelle isole che potrebbe sommergere le tendenze pacifiste dei governi responsabili. In altre parole esiste da queste parti e nei riguardi del Giappone un problema del tutto analogo a quello italiano ed è anche per questo che la sua volgarizzazione ci interessa. (10)

By looking at Japan from the Italian standpoint Cipolla manages to accomplish a double goal. First, while keeping the focus on the Asian empire he ends up legitimating Italy’s imperialistic ambitions stemming from the problem of population growth. Also, the parallel with Japanese expansionism in Asia implicitly exalts the Italian army in regard to its potential possibility of achieving the outstanding victories of its Asian peers.

The following pages foster the idea that the political and cultural presence of Italy is intended to play a major role in this account, sometimes at the cost of placing Japan in the background. The portion dedicated to the institutional presence of Italian ambassadors and consuls in the territory is meant to point to Italy’s political prestige and an acknowledgement of international authority from one of the most frightful nations in the world: “Il Console Gasco è talmente
conosciuto, apprezzato ed amato in Estremo Oriente e in Italia che non gli farò il torto di tentare di tesserne l’ennesimo elogio” (Cipolla 1931, 30). A long interview with Alfonso Gasco, the Italian consul in Kyoto at the time, is the framework for celebrating Italian achievement in Japan. During the interview Cipolla praises the Italian theater: “l’Italia è oggi di grande attualità al Giappone. Fra l’altro vi sono tre Compagnie drammatiche giapponesi che non fanno che rappresentare soggetti italiani di creazione puramente nipponica” (30). On the other hand, the consul responds by stressing the importance of the Italian language:

Il corso di lingua e lettere italiane che tengo a Kioto è diventato dall’ultimo agosto obbligatorio ed è frequentato da una folla di studenti che, dico il vero, mi seguono con appassionante interesse. Abbiamo anche il prof. Arundel Del Re, laureato ad Oxford, che insegna italiano e inglese a Formosa e all’Accademia delle Lingue a Tokio il Prof. Pastorelli occupa, seguitissimo e da molti anni, la cattedra di d’italiano. Possiamo dire che la nostra lingua è conosciuta in Giappone come il francese ed è da notarsi che i francesi fanno qui una attivissima propaganda alle cose loro. Però come influenza culturale e straniera, primeggia sovrana l’America, che ha conquistato il popolo soprattutto con il cinematografo. (31)

Not only can the Italian language live up to the competition with more influential languages like French (because of France’s colonial presence in Indochina), but Italian literature is also very popular: “Per quel che ci riguarda, gli autori italiani meglio conosciuti in Giappone sono D’Annunzio, Croce, Gentile e Papini. Per parlare dei vivi. Si sono fatte in questi ultimi tempi ottime traduzioni in giapponese dei ‘Sepolcri’ di Foscolo e Dante è più che mai in onore” (31). It is not surprising to find the popular philosopher Benedetto Croce’s works on the list of Italian best sellers, and this observation can be extended to Dante Alighieri as well. It is less easy to find the best Fascist literature in Japan together with Ugo Foscolo. Of course, Japanese right? wing-nationalist beliefs in the 1930s and its
patriotic ideals exerted a strong influence and can help to explain the reason behind this selection. Foscolo's patriotic sonnet “A Zacinto,” mourning for the unreachable homeland, can be manipulated and adapted into nationalist discourse. The mythological origin of Foscolo's homeland Zante in particular can be compared to the myth of the divine origins of the imperial family, which became popular during the Meiji restoration.

After glorifying Italian's cultural success and prestige in the Far East, the interview finally reaches the crucial point—the political impact of Benito Mussolini on Japanese public opinion:

— Bisogna ricordare l'enorme interesse giapponese per la nostra “battaglia del grano” applicata al riso, lo studio profondo che qui si è fatto della nostra riforma dei Codici, con l'intendimento di applicarli a l'impero e soprattutto lo spontaneo culto che il Giappone nutre per la personalità del Duce.

— Veramente?

— Qui non si tratta di far piaggerie o di alterare la portata del sorprendente fenomeno. La semplice verità è che Benito Mussolini gode in Giappone di una popularità che nessun grande uomo occidentale si è mai sognato di avere. E la popularità è di quelle che non seguono il capriccio della moda o sono limitate ad una categoria più o meno larga di persone, ma va dalla Casa Imperiale ai poveri contadini che rimestano il fango delle risaie. Il Giappone vede in Mussolini non solo l'uomo d'eccezione che ha portato l'Italia all'altezza di Nazione paragonabile in potenza e prestigio al Giappone, ma l'eroe, segnato dalla divinità, simile agli eroi che hanno personificato i periodi salienti della sua storia favolosa. In altre parole il Duce d'Italia corrisponde perfettamente alla concezione immutabile del “buscido” dello spirito, per il quale le Nazioni progrediscono e si affermano soltanto attraverso determinate personalità di essenza sovrumana. Ecco perché i biografi più notevoli del Duce hanno trovato in Giappone i lettori più numerosi ed appassionati. Oggi il Giappone vede in ogni Italiano un allievo di Mussolini e come tale lo stima e lo onora. (p. 31)

The point that Cipolla is making goes far beyond the political goal of assuring the popularity of the Italian dictator abroad, or making the case for Italy as an international super power equal to Japan. The rhetoric of the discourse applies a
secondary connotation to the image of the Duce. Another image is superimposed on the traditional image of Mussolini as a “totalitarian” leader that stands as a symbol of “unity” for the nation (Spackman 155): which is the image of the member of the Imperial Family. The persona of Mussolini is “exported” to Japan and molded to fit the image of a Nippon royal family member; as a consequence, his figure is raised to the level of a potential leader even for the Japanese. In the eyes of his Asian estimators, Mussolini is a hero chosen by a goddess (“l’eroe, segnato dalla divinità, simile agli eroi che hanno personificato i periodi salienti della sua [Japanese] storia favolosa”). He also embodies the spirit of an authentic samurai whose code of honor is expressed by the word buscido (the way of the warrior): “Il Duce d’Italia corrisponde perfettamente alla concezione immutabile del ‘buscido’ dello spirito.”

Cipolla describes Mussolini’s persona in a kimono style, as a charismatic Japanese figure who inspires the opposition front against the Soviet “red peril”:

Il Governo imperiale trascinato dal corso medesimo dei negoziati con gli agenti del Soviet e sotto la spinta d’un opinione russofila ardente riconosce il Governo di Mosca. E il riconoscimento rimette in agitazione i gruppi socialisti, comunisti e libertari, mentre la gioventù intellettuale impressionata, esaltata dalla vittoria del Fascismo italiano, s’agita per unificare il pensiero nazionale ed opporsi al socialismo rivoluzionario. Il primo maggio del 1923 è celebrato frammesso manifestazioni d’una violenza ignorata sino allora al Giappone. I fascisti giapponesi marciono per le vie di Tokio portando il ritratto di Mussolini in testa dei loro battaglieri cortei e proclamano che i malanni vengono dall’accoglienza cordiale fatta negli ambienti governativi ai rappresentanti dei Soviet e che tutto sarebbe rientrato nell’ordine se essi avessero lasciato per sempre il territorio nipponico. Da parte loro i sovversivi hanno già stabilito un “Comitato centrale rivoluzionario” con un giornale, “Bandiera rossa”, in relazione con Mosca. (123)
May 1, 1923, is a symbolic date, recalling the demonstrations in London’s Hyde Park in support of withdrawing Japanese troops from the island of Sakhalin, whose territory was divided between Japanese and Russian administrations. Nationalist manifestations in Japan exploited the portrait of the Duce (“il ritratto di Mussolini”) to the purpose of anti-Soviet propaganda. Cipolla succeeds in presenting Mussolini as symbol of the traditional Japanese spirit to the extent of describing young intellectuals using his portrait to remind the elected Japanese government of those values.

In *Nel Giappone dei grattacieli* (1931) Cipolla perpetuates an Orientalist representation of Japan, using the vantage point of the observer as a means to overshadow the people who are the object of his observation. Unlike Patti, Comisso, and Ferraris, he does not portray the Japanese in a negative fashion, emphasizing their subhuman aspects or their weaknesses; rather, he prefers to stress similarities between the two nations, envisioning a future military alliance. In this sense Cipolla set the tone for the pro-Japan propaganda that followed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, which is the main topic of the rest of this chapter.

4. **Brother in arms**

Nel giorno in cui l’antica amicizia dei nostri due paesi trova definitiva consacrazione sui campi di battaglia, il mio pensiero si rivolge all’eroico popolo giapponese in armi. L’alba dell’ordine è già spuntata su tutti i continenti e il popolo italiano è, con lo spirito e con le armi, vicino ai camerati nipponici nell’incrollabile volontà di vittoria che unisce l’Italia, la Germania e il Giappone. (Mussolini 250)
A few days after the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), Benito Mussolini wrote this telegram to Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, guaranteeing that Italy would respect the Axis Pact with Germany and Japan (1940) and stating his decision to join the war. Suddenly the Japanese were being addressed in the same way as any Italian Fascist, as “camerati” (comrades). Also, the absolute lack of political relations between the two countries was covered by a generic long-standing history of friendship (“l’antica amicizia dei nostri due paesi”).

In the previous sections we observed how Italian writers in the 1920s (even those not affiliated with the regime), from various perspectives and in different fashions, adopted a nationalistic view to belittle and disparage the rise of the Japanese empire, portraying its inhabitants as inferiors. We noted that this diffused ideology was fueled by Mussolini’s belief in the rise of Italy as an international power, compared to which no other nation could be superior or even equal. It was not necessary for a writer to follow Il Duce’s teaching word for word in order to be affected by this racist view, so strong was the influence of the collective perspective of Italian society in the 1920s on the subjectivity of the intellectual mind. After Mussolini’s decision to align with Japan a different narration was needed in order to explain to the Italian people the alleged Fascist foundations of Nippon society and the reason for this atypical brotherhood. This is the reason behind Mario Appelius’s urgency to travel to Japan and write about his impressions:

Il volume m’era dettato dal desiderio di contribuire a far conoscere al popolo italiano un elemento così importante del mondo moderno come è il Giappone. Il Fascismo ha buttato l’Italia nell’aringo delle grandi lotte internazionali prima che l’opinione pubblica si fosse preparata a guardare il mondo con un occhio da conquistatore. Il Duce non poteva aspettare. Il
mondo andava in fretta e l’Italia aveva camminato troppo piano durante il Risorgimento. Lo studio della geografia mondiale, della storia mondiale, dell’economia mondiale, della politica mondiale è ancora appannaggio, in Italia di troppo poche persone. Bisogna che la nazione intera entri in questo vasto ordine di idee. (15)

Unlike what Appelius writes here, Italians were obviously acquainted with Japan, at least since earlier in the twentieth century. It was part of the Fascist strategy to present Japan as an “old brother” that for some reason we had never had the chance to meet when he was young. In order to introduce Japan as the brother so similar to us, it was necessary to reset all the data accumulated in our memory as Italians about this anomalous land full of ladies of easy virtue and effeminate or irrational men. The date of this book’s printing was October 1941, a turning point for the representation of Japan. An extensive collection of propaganda began to be released from this moment on, designed for soldiers on the front line and civilians as well. We begin our research on the new, “unknown” Japan by analyzing this rare material.

5. **Inside the propaganda**

The uneasy task of the regime’s propaganda during the 1940s was to prove Mussolini’s above-quoted statements about the long-standing historical relationship between Italy and Japan, as well as the many similarities between the two nations. The difficulty of this task resulted in the publication of a long series of brief documents—booklets and articles—that we briefly outline here. It is not out of mere curiosity that we approach these documents; they are part of the rhetorical strategy through which the Italian regime tried to get mass society
involved in its plan for a new geopolitical order, dominated by the members of the Axis Pact. These documents speak for a body of collective ideas about Japan that circulated in Italy during World War II.

In a booklet titled *Vincere* Mario Appelius used all the sources of his imagination to explain the reason for the historical distance between Italy and Japan resulting from a strategic Anglo-Saxon plan:

> V'erano molti ostacoli di lontananza, di diversità razziale, di vecchi modi di pensare che separavano Roma e Berlino da Tokio. L’influenza anglo-nordamericana aveva creato un barriera artificiale tra l’Occidente e l’Oriente. Il genio del Duce intuì che bisognava scavalcare risolutamente quegli ingombri artificiali ed avvicinare decisamente le due capitali europee alla lontana capitale asiatica ove pulsava il forte cuore di un popolo giovane, valoroso e capace il quale come l’italiano e come il germanico cercava il suo posto al sole e ne era impedito dall’egoismo aglosassone. (12)

In the same year the anonymous writer of a booklet titled *Il Giappone e le sue forze armate* tried to outline an inconsistent historical framework in an attempt to justify Mussolini’s far-fetched connections between Japan and Italy:

> Le molte analogie che si riscontrano tra l’Italia e il Giappone, non solo per la configurazione geografica dei territori e per la somiglianza del clima, ma anche per lo spirito e per molti caratteri comuni ai due popoli, hanno favorito rapporti di comprensione, di simpatia e di amicizia, che si sono sempre rafforzati, nonostante la lontananza geografica tra i due Paesi. Già nel 1585, tre Principi Giapponesi, sotto gli auspici del Missionario Padre Alessandro Valignano, di Chieti, vennero a Roma e visitarono il Papa Gregorio XIII. Una successiva ambasciata nipponica visitò nel 1615 il Papa Paolo V. (2)

This author fails to mention that a few years after the Japanese visit in Rome, the shogun Tokugawa leyasu first implemented a severe campaign of persecution,
followed by his successor Tokugawa Iemitsu, aimed at eradicating the Christian faith from the shogunate.

In his attempt to drastically overturn the image of Japan in Italian public opinion, Mussolini tried to involve influential and reliable writers. In the 1940s Luigi Barzini (1874-1947), one of the most famous Italian reporters in the Far East (and father of the even more famous Luigi Barzini Jr., the author of bestselling books like *Italians*), was one of those writers. He made his career as a journalist for the national paper *Corriere della Sera*, covering the Boxer rebellion in 1900 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, until the final Japanese conquest of Manchuria. He became famous in 1908 for accompanying Prince Scipione Borgese on a motor race from Peking to Paris. After a two-month journey across China and Siberia, he published a memoir of this experience that became an international best seller. Although he never owned a Fascist party card (*la tessera fascista*), he was one of the subscribers of the *Manifesto degli intellettuali fascisti* (1925) and for the Fascist newspaper *Il popolo d’Italia*, covering the news from the Russian revolution (1934) and the Spanish Civil War (1936).\(^\text{13}\) In 1942 he wrote a booklet in support of Fascist propaganda titled *Perché il Giappone vince*. His portrait of the Asian ally is extremely positive:

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\(^{13}\) According to Ludina Barzini, Luigi Barzini’s granddaughter and author of a recent biography of the Barzini’s family, Luigi Barzini collaborated with the Fascist regime only for the sake of his children: “Il nonno non è iscritto al Partito fascista e vive appartato fino al dicembre 1943. Si ritira in campagna, a Orvieto dove passa gran parte del tempo. Effettua brevi visite a Roma dove nell’agosto 1943, al Senato, pochi giorni dopo il crollo del fascismo, firma con altri senatori un indirizzo al re. Le preoccupazioni del nonno per i figli sono costanti ma come sempre Senior non si perde d’animo e cerca in tutti i modi di aiutare chi è in difficoltà. Spesso le sue scelte professionali sono dettate dalla necessità di aiutare l’uno o l’altro dei suoi figli, che si trovano in guai seri con il regime fascista” (Ludina Barzini, *I Barzini. Tre generazioni di giornalisti, una storia del Novecento*)
La scomparsa del sistema feudale, invece di far sparire i nobili, ha nobilitato l’intera Nazione. Ogni giapponese che va sotto le armi si sente elevato, si considera un samurai, e si comporta come un samurai. L’educazione rigida e severa della nobiltà è divenuta educazione di popolo. La lealtà, il coraggio, l’impassibilità, il senso dell’onore, lo spirito di sacrificio, sono le doti di ogni uomo. (6)

Only a few years earlier these same characteristics of obedience, willingness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the emperor, and a rigorous education were valid elements in making the case for Japan as an inhuman nation and for comparing the Japanese people to a multitude of “monkeys” or “ants.” In Fascist Italy those characteristics became positive qualities. Barzini’s attempts to rehabilitate the Japanese image also include the effort to eradicate the well-known opinion about the silliness of the Japanese smile and facial expression, as noted in Ercole Patti’s

_Un lungo viaggio lontano:_

E il Giappone è perciò un paese di volti sorridenti e inespressivi, dall’aria un po’ atona e stupita, e di cuori eroici. Chi non ha vissuto a lungo in mezzo a questa gente scambia facilmente l’impassibilità per incomprensione. La parola prudente e reticente, che trattiene il pensiero invece di rivelarlo, è presa per un segno di tardezza mentale. La cortesia rituale, deferente, con i suoi sorrisi insignificanti e i suoi inchini, è ritenuta indice di umiltà e sottomissione. Perciò i giapponesi non hanno mai goduto, in genere, nel mondo bianco, una reputazione adeguata alla realtà. (6)

Barzini was also determined to prove the adopted Western idea about the lack of glamour in Japanese men to be evil and slanderous:

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Vi è poi l’aggravante della piccola statura e di una fisionomia asiatica che non corrisponde sempre al concetto europeo della bellezza; e il comune uomo caucaso che, ritenendosi al gradino più alto della scala umana, è propenso a ritenere inferiori tutti i popoli che non gli somigliano, è tentato di mettere i giapponesi al posto di quelli che gli somigliano meno. Gli è più simpatico il cinese, perché più alto. Nel comune linguaggio americano la parola “monkey” (scimmia) si accoppia spesso alla parola “Jap” (giapponese in dispregiativo). (6)

In this atypical use of “Orientalist” arguments by a Fascist author in defense of his Asian ally, it is remarkable how the racial theories of the Manifesto della razza (1938) were entirely overlooked. As nondescendants of the Aryan race, Japanese men and women should have been deemed inferior as the Jews were. In contrast, racist allegations against the Japanese were attributed only to Anglo-American propaganda, despite the fact that perceptions of the Japanese as subhuman or evolutionarily inferior in the Italian travel literature of the 1920s.

Finally, another example of pro-Japanese propaganda is a flyer printed and distributed in Italy at the end of 1944, titled Sogno delle Hawaii (photo). This document contains an accurate list of Anglo-American losses of ships and airplanes during the Pacific War since the battle of Pearl Harbor.14 The cover illustration shows a person relaxing on an exotic beach in the foreground. In the background a huge sunrise emerges from the sea and a paper with musical notes is superimposed over the image.

14 “Ora sappiamo perché gli angloamericani tentano di passare sotto silenzio le perdite subite sui fronti dell’Asia Orientale. Le cifre, che precedono, parlano un linguaggio oltremodo eloquente e fanno apparire in una luce ben strana le smargiassate di Churchill e di Roosevelt, che vaneggiavano di ‘debellare le scimmie con un’offensiva di proporzioni mai viste.’ Il crudele risveglio che attende questi signori dai loro rosei ‘sogni dei mari del sud’, è dimostrato dal risultato delle battaglie navali del 12 ottobre 1944” (Il sogno delle Hawaii, 1944, 4).
The propaganda in this image is based on a dual interpretation of a system of signifiers. At first reading they express an idea of “exoticism”: the palm tree, the island, the sun, the bather, the phrase “the dream of Hawaii.” But, as Roland Barthes states: “None of this information is innocent: the image is crammed with demonstrative significations” (Barthes 30). A political signification is disseminated in the way that these signifiers are assembled. In this sense the sun on the horizon stands as a metaphor of the upcoming victory of the Empire of the Rising Sun in the Pacific War. The information of the name of the island, “Hawaii,” reminds the reader of the Japanese victory at Pearl Harbor. The “dream of Hawaii” therefore stands for the dream of a colonial empire that Italy, as a member of the Axis Pact, is on the verge of being a part of. The successful effect of the message relies on signifiers employed by mass tourism agencies to advertise their exotic journeys: information about military operations overlaps the message of Hawaii as a paradise for a relaxing vacation. The use of these exotic signifiers to convey a political message has the advantage of locating the content of the message in an indefinite distance: the distance that separates any exotic location from the civil world of tourist consumers. At a time in which Italians were coping with the idea that the war was irreversibly lost, exoticism was a useful source for delivering false information by locating it in a space and a time completely apart from the present.

6. The megaphone of the regime
I focus here on the work of an author that ranks among the most popular voices of the regime, especially for his accounts of travel around the world and for a famous radio show. Mario Appelius (1892-1946) was not a Fascist hierarch, but he was well known within the Fascist establishment, especially toward the end of World War II. At that time his voice was present in many Italian homes, bringing popular support to Mussolini’s decision to bring Italy into the war (Sposito ix). Appelius made his journalist career writing about his many journeys around the world. He traveled from one end of Africa to the other, then went to India in the interwar years during Gandhi’s challenge to the British Empire. He was sent to Mexico by the Fascist regime in 1928, and worked as a journalist in Buenos Aires. Other locations where he traveled and about which he wrote include Cuba, Chile, Indochina, and Shanghai.

Among his many publications I consider in particular his travelogue of Japan titled *Cannoni e ciliegi in fiore* (1941). Although published after the Axis Pact (1940) and the subsequent beginning of “Jap” propaganda, most of the book was conceived during the thirties. For this reason it is not surprising to sometimes find a nationalistic tone together with the typical praise for the Asian ally.\(^\text{15}\) In fact, as with other Fascist journalists of this period, Appelius’s appraisal of the Japanese ally emphasizes characteristics that fit the image of the perfect

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\(^\text{15}\) “Appelius aveva cominciato il saggio in tutt’altra maniera parecchi anni prima. Pensava addirittura di scrivere due volumi, uno sul costume e uno sulla incredibile crescita economica di un Paese uscito dall’isolamento da soli ottant’anni. Poi lo aveva rimaneggiato trasformandolo in un libro a tesi, il cui titolo lascia già intuire il contenuto: *Cannoni e ciliegi in fiore*. Descrisse un Paese che conservava, e conserva ancora, antiche tradizioni e allo stesso tempo era diventato una potenza economica e bellica. Una nazione che stava in bilico tra Oriente e Occidente” (Sposito 268-69).
Italian Fascist; for this reason he brings the Japanese as close to Italians as possible:

Le qualità fondamentali del popolo giapponese sono la vitalità demografica, la frugalità, la laboriosità, la disciplina, l'altissimo amor di patria, l'orgoglio della propria nazionalità, la tenacia, la pazienza, la saggezza, lo spirito di sacrificio, le tradizionali virtù guerriere, il senso d'arte, l'attitudine commerciale, la capacità industriale, la fede in se stesso e nell'avvenire. (28)

The same qualities required to be considered an ideal Fascist are attributed to the Japanese: demographic growth rate, sense of discipline, nationalism, strong patriotic feelings, willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the nation, and an optimistic view of the future. Also, in Appelius’s view the Japanese were endowed with a mystic sense of the state: “Un popolo che vive misticamente la vita medesima dello Stato” (28). This identification of the individual life with the life of the state brings the reader close to Giovanni Gentile’s idea of the state as the ultimate authority, located above the rights of the individual.

Another strategy for identifying the Italian and Japanese under the same banner was stressing the common reference to the myth of the Roman Empire. Simonetta Falaschi-Zamponi’s research on the Fascist system of myths aimed at promoting its political agenda include, among other rhetorical images, the “myth of Rome”: “For Mussolini, the glorious tradition of Rome represented a model of action, an inspiration for fascism’s ideals of renewal. Thus, references to Rome did not imply static admiration, or nostalgia. Instead, Rome constituted the foundation on which to build a bright fascist tomorrow” (92). Appelius employs the same mythical reference to describe Japanese pride and their plans for military expansion:
Sotto vari aspetti i giapponesi fanno pensare un po’ ai romani: ai romani del tempo delle guerre contro Atene e Sparta e poi delle grandi guerre puniche. Romani dell’Asia, i giapponesi sono sulla soglia delle guerre puniche. Meno sviluppato dei romani hanno forse il senso giuridico, ma dei romani hanno lo spirito militare, il senso civico, l’orgoglio nazionale, la volontà d’imperio, la capacità di assimilare e di ordinare. (28)

However, in spite of these similarities, Appelius is still affected by the language of the nationalist propaganda of the 1930s; behind the bright image of Japan a shadow is cast. We have already noted Comisso’s debunking of the myth of the enticing Japanese woman, full of grace and unique virtues. Similar disavowals can be found in Arnaldo Cipolla’s writings on Japan.¹⁶ Not so different on this matter is the position of Appelius when facing racial differences:

È bella la donna giapponese? Per i giapponesi certamente sì. Per noi occidentali, in fondo no. La sua carnagione è troppo scura per il nostro gusto, d’una tinta saura che dà sul nerastro, senza possedere né il bel colore di terracotta di Signa che hanno le malesi né il giallo-bruno delle donne di Cina che fa pensare ad una strana lega d’ambrà e di ghisa…. Se il torso e il seno sono quasi sempre belli, le gambe sono quasi sempre brutte, un po’ storte, divaricate e corte. Il bacino troppo grasso rende la loro nudità poco estetica. Sgraziato è in genere il taglio del naso e bruttissimi sono i denti. (50)

¹⁶ “Non sarei sincero se dicesi che la donna giapponese mi ha lasciato nell’animo un’impressione apprezzabile. Per le gheise non ho mai saputo vincere la vaga ripugnanza delle loro monumentali capellature trattate all’olio, sia pure di mandorla, per quelle che vestono all’europea ho sempre trovato difficile armonizzare le grosse e corte gambe con la faccia larga, anche se illuminata da occhietti pieni di malizia, per le migliaia di operaie che vedo uscire dagli stabilimenti industriali di Kobe e di Osaka con l’ombrello sotto il braccio non potevo impedirmi di pensare che fossero ammalate di pellagra a cagione dell’ingrato colore dominante dei loro visi e per madame Crisantème che ogni europeo ha l’occasione di conoscere non riuscivo a separare i loro indiscussi meriti nello sposare gli interessi anche infimi del loro compagno e nel dimostrarsi delle ménagères accorte, economi e gentili, dall’immancabile gesto ch’esse, come Crisantème precisamente, avrebbero compiuto, un minuto dopo la separazione, contando il denaro ricevuto in premio della loro fedeltà e del loro eterno sorriso” (Cipolla, 1931, 96).
Unlike Comisso and Cipolla, here the distaste for the Butterfly’s beauty is explained by advancing anthropological principles and relativistic views. The fact is that in a regime of political alliance similarities must overcome differences; when Italian reporters deal with the racist feelings hovering in Fascist Italy (as well as the effect of strong “anti-Jap” Anglo-American propaganda) they must downplay their judgments, avoiding the impression of considering the Japanese to be inferior. Appelius does not avoid the racist views of American culture, like the description of the Japanese as “a subhuman society,” but he makes the effort to turn them into a positive quality. Of course, Appelius does not compare the Italian ally to a “monkey ape”, but he refers to the brutality of Japanese society, their animal instinct for aggression and violence, as a guarantee of a successful military partnership:

Il Giappone è un popolo guerriero. La sua casa, semplice e nuda, è una tenda. L'uomo giapponese è in sostanza un brutale benché in apparenza si presenti con una vernice di cerimoniosità cortese. La donna giapponese ama la brutalità del suo uomo-padrone. I ragazzi giapponesi che ieri sognavano spade di samurai e pugnali di karakiri, sognano oggi aeroplani, cannoni e sottomarini. I costumi giapponesi sono semplici e duri, proprii degli uomini d'armi. L'alimentazione giapponese non ha quasi cucina. È l'alimentazione di un esercito in bivacco. Le canzoni popolari non cantano l'amore ma le battaglie. Il teatro è epico. Il cinematografo è pieno di sciabole, di zuffe, di cadaveri. La letteratura tende sempre verso l'epopea. (108)

Leaving aside the positive aspects of Japanese culture such as its high standards of achievement in aesthetics or the deep philosophic traditions of Shintoism and Buddhism, the image of the Japanese in this passage is not very different from the animallike picture conceived by American propaganda. Despite Appelius's
effort to emphasize the common Fascist background between Italy and Japan, racial biases are evident in the text. Since Appelius is aware of the ethnic problems that imply a new order of the world based on a pact among Fascist nations, it is necessary for him to find a compromise between these two opposite tendencies that interacts in his writing. For this reason his attempt to find a solution to this Gordian knot goes in the direction of reconfiguring the Axis Pact merely as a political alliance without any inclusion of cultural and ethnic statements:

Come paese spiritualmente nazional-socialista il Giappone può essere considerato uno Stato fascista e lo è di fatti dal punto di vista filosofico. Nella struttura invece dello Stato e nell’organizzazione sociale il Giappone conserva tutto un complesso di elementi locali e tradizionali ai quali non può rinunciare senza compromettere il suo carattere asiatico. Il trapianto integrale del Fascismo in Asia, in tutta l’Asia, è un fenomeno impossibile. Il Fascismo, come regime statale e politico, è un prodotto tipicamente occidentale, generatosi nella razza bianca in un momento di sua crisi profonda. I principii filosofici e gli elementi politici del Fascismo sono invece universali, applicabili a tutti i continenti e a tutte le razze. Il Giappone è e resterà per lunghissimo tempo un paese spiritualmente fascista, organizzato però materialmente all’asiatica. ... Uno dei grandi compiti storici del Giappone sarà appunto quello di elaborare una forma sui generis di Fascismo asiatico, capace di stabilire un rapporto di armonia fra l’evoluzione generale in senso fascista del mondo moderno e le particolari esigenze economico-sociali dei popoli dell’Asia Orientale, i quali sotto certi aspetti sono ancora in un periodo medioevale. (142)

For Appelius the political phenomenon of fascism is tied to the historical period in which it was born (the crisis of bourgeois liberal societies in Germany and Italy) and to an ethnic influence (both Germany and Italy as societies of Aryan descent). The attempt to not degrade or belittle the Japanese political system by claiming the universal values of the fascist spirit is only partially successful. The style of the passage contradicts the general statement. In fact, in a
hypothetical fascist world order the East Asian nations would play a secondary role, given that the philosophical ideas driving fascist societies would come from nations where fascism is also an advanced form of government, that is, Italy and Germany. Since the socioeconomic models of East Asia were considered backwards ("medieval"), as a consequence they would always have an ancillary role in the fascist world scenario.

When comparing the territorial landscape of the two countries, Japan is overshadowed by the bright ‘garden of Europe’:

Tutto sommato, quindi, pur rendendo omaggio all’immensa bellezza naturale del Giappone, è impossibile non riconoscere all’Italia il primato. Al Giappone spetta, incontestabilmente, il secondo posto. La superiorità italiana è dovuta in gran parte alla straordinaria armonia esistente fra il cielo d’Italia, la luce del suo sole, i colori della sua atmosfera, le tinte dei suoi mari, la opulenza delle sue campagne, l’irradiazione festosa dei suoi giardini e la ricchezza decorativa dei suoi abitati, delle sue chiese, dei suoi campanili, dei suoi paesetti, delle sue case che partecipano in pieno al paesaggio e si fondono nella sua essenza. In fondo il Giappone è un boschetto collinoso, circondato da un vezzo barocco di isole civettuole. L’Italia è un sontuoso giardino nel quale le opere della Natura e le opere degli uomini formano una unica sinfonia. Quando creò il Giappone, Dio sorrideva. Poi, soddisfatto, volle dimostrare a se stesso di poter fare anche meglio. E creò l’Italia. I due paesi cantano la gloria dell’Onnipotente. (232)

Once again the general statement is in striking contradiction to the style of the phrases. It is hard to believe that Japan is ranked second in the world for territorial beauty, since the short description of its land seems so understated:

“In fondo il Giappone è un boschetto collinoso, circondato da un vezzo barocco di isole civettuole.”

In Appelius’s *Cannoni e ciliegi in fiore* all the limits of the Italian pro-Japanese propaganda of the 1940s emerge with their contradictions. The racial theories circulating at the time, the substantial political differences, the lack of a
history of diplomatic relations, cannot all simply be dismissed by an ambitious strategic alliance aiming to show the unity of the three allied nations. In his effort to celebrate the superiority of Italian civilization, Appelius failed to realize the ideological biases of his Japanese portrait.

**Conclusion: The Monkey and the Brother**

In this chapter we have seen a twofold story starring the same protagonist. During the 1920s, until a few years before World War II, the representation of Japan in Italy had to cope with a nationalistic ideology aiming to debunk the concept of the invincible Nippon army and Japan’s aggressive foreign policy. The perception of the Japanese as aliens, subhuman beings, or weak and effeminate people was predominant in the accounts of these years. I hold that this perception was a trademark of Mussolini’s communication strategy in the years following the creation of the Fascist dictatorship. Italians were not used to such a racist view of the Japanese; a quick look at the accounts prior to the 1920s confirms such a hypothesis. I think in particular of Luigi Barzini’s portrait of the Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese war (1904) as heroic and humane, to the extent of showing mercy for their opponents.\(^ {17} \) I also recall

\(^ {17} \)“In mezzo ad essi [Japanese soldiers] la parte terribile della Guerra si dimentica. Si dimentica la guerra Mi pare che fra quei soldai io marcerrei fino all’assalto. Mi pare di seguire delle truppe in una grande manovra. Non una nube di tristezza o di preoccupazione nei loro occhi, non un segno d’emozione sui loro visi, e neppure un’espressione ardita d’entusiasmo o d’eccitazione. No, sono come li vedo a Tokio passare per le vie, sereni e tranquilli. Guardano con sorpresa e compiacenza questo straniero che marcia nelle loro file, e sorridono tirandosi in disparte per lasciarlo passare. Gli ufficiali rispondono al mio saluto
other nationalist writers who did not travel to Japan yet shared an admiration for the Japanese heroic spirit, like Enrico Corradini in his article *Susume*,\textsuperscript{18} Mario Morasso,\textsuperscript{19} and Giuseppe Antonio Borgese.\textsuperscript{20} Approximately in the mid-1930s the redefinition of geopolitical relations and the emergence of the Axis Pact forced the National Fascist propaganda to offer a new narration of the Land of the Rising Sun. For the first time in the history of these two nations a political and ideological contact was established. Japan was no longer the distant and unapproachable superpower admired by Italian nationalists at the dawn of the twentieth century, but in the Italian collective representation this land became much closer and more familiar. It was a mutual attraction: Mussolini was depicted as the leader who could embody the Japanese national spirit, and the Japanese were depicted as *camerata*, having in common with Italians the same

con gentilezza e, se parlano inglese, mormorano un ‘Good bye’ cerimonioso. … Mi pare che fra quei soldati io marcerò fino all’assalto. Vi è nella loro indifferenza una forza che si comunica. Comprendo l’eroismo delle masse” (Barzini, 1959: p. 268). The following passage describes Japanese feelings of piety and respect for the Russian soldiers upon their decision to surrender: “I soldati non sorridono più; un sentimento di pietà adolcisce tutti gli sguardi. I più vicini tendono le mani per aiutare il nemico ferito ad uscir fuori. Egli si muove lentamente, a fatica, tutto scosso da un tremito febbrile. Si avvicina ai due che lo hanno preceduto, e rimane immobile girando intorno lo sguardo istupidito del suo unico occhio, il sinistro” (283).


\textsuperscript{19} “Ammetto io per primo che nel caso della guerra russo-giapponese sia sempre la spinta del sentimento e non la meditata consapevolezza dell’interesse che ha suscitato la simpatia italiana per il Giappone” (Mario Morasso, *L’imperialismo nel secolo XX. La conquista del mondo* [Milan: Treves, 1905] 185).

sense of discipline, obedience to authority, order, and military ambition. But such unlikely similarities were only the result of the historical period. In the next chapter we will see how the distance—the contrast—between the two countries would again be perceived among Italian intellectuals from the 1950s to the 1980s.
Chapter II

Little Italy, Big Japan:

Patterns of Continuity and Displacement among Italian Writers in Japan
Introduction: Tradition and Modernity

Even today Western interpreters discourage any serious attempt at locating Japan within a comparative spectrum. They tend to emphasize Japanese uniqueness and exceptionality, despite the fact that twentieth-century Japanese history is by no means unrelated to the rest of the world. In this chapter I consider one of the most evident aspects of the comparative spectrum between Italy and Japan, the combination of “tradition” and “modernity.” During the three decades after World War II, Western intellectuals noted a remarkable aspect of Japanese reconstruction: the nation with the highest economic growth rate was also a society in which traditional values of the medieval age (e.g., respect for the divinity of the emperor, the structure of personal relations, the anxiety about gossip and criticism, and so on) were still alive. The paradox of structural change and continuity with the past is of particular interest to Italian observers because their society embraced a similar set of problems at the dawn of the foundation of the Italian Republic. During the fifties and sixties, twentieth-century Italy experienced a similar economic development followed by an intense phenomenon of migration from the south to the cities driving the “economic miracle” in the north. The consequence of this rapid growth was unprecedented
social and cultural transformations that engendered a perceived discontinuity with the past and change in the national identity. For Italians who traveled in Japan during these years and tried to interpret its rapid modernization, comparing the Nippon example with the historical circumstances that Italy was experiencing was inevitable.

It is not my intention to deny the authenticity of these accounts of Japan, but I believe that the original point of view of this representation —what distinguishes the Italian perspective from the rest of Western discourse on the Orient —can be detected in the reflected image of Italy through the lens of the Japanese world.

1. Three encounters with Japan

When approaching the relations between two different cultures and civilizations, one must consider not only diversity in terms of national identity but also in terms of more subjective elements related to the personal experience of the observer. The degree of comprehension of a different society depends on several variable factors, such as the amount of time spent in the country visited, general awareness of its history and culture, and finally, knowledge of the language. These aspects have played a determinant role in selecting specific Italian authors for this chapter’s focus: Fosco Maraini (1912-2004), Alberto Moravia (1907-1990) and Goffredo Parise (1929-1986). These authors visited Japan between the 1950s and 1980s, during which time Japan captured the attention of the entire world for its extremely fast modernization and economic
growth. These writers also deal with the theme of modernity in relation to tradition, and all arrive at a similar conclusion: that the rapid changes in Japanese society have not overthrown the traditional structure of the society, relations among individuals, or its set of rules. What is most relevant to the purpose of this chapter is the different levels of experience and knowledge of Japanese society among the authors. I present these authors’ work in an order that corresponds to their different degrees of knowledge of the Nippon world and their inclination to compare it with Italy. In general, the less observers know about Japan (the least time spent within its territory and among its peoples), the higher the probability that they will to be engaged in a comparison with their own country. Encountering a new culture has the immediate effect of enhancing and intensifying awareness of the observer’s national identity and of stimulating his reaction by emphasizing the differences.

For each author, the encounter with Japan results in an experience of infatuation somewhat greater than the typical reaction of a knowledgeable European writer in an exotic land. Behind their wondering gaze a shadow is cast, the shadow of the Italian republic and its uncertain path toward the acquisition of a clear, new identity.

2. *The defense of Otherness: Fosco Maraini and Japan*

The first of the three authors is Fosco Maraini—writer, photographer, mountaineer, traveler, and ethnologist. Maraini is definitely an Italian intellectual whose acquaintance with the Nippon world was deep. His book that I discuss is *Japan. Patterns of Continuity*, published in 1971.
Maraini first traveled to Japan in 1938, at the age of twenty-four, to study the Ainu people on the island of Hokkaido. In 1943, after Italy signed an armistice with the Allies on September 8, Maraini and his wife, Topazia, were imprisoned in a Japanese concentration camp with their three children because he refused to support Mussolini’s Fascist Republic of Salò. As a vehement protest against the officials’ inhuman treatment of inmates, Maraini lopped off his finger with a hatchet. The family was finally released in 1945 when the American troops took control. He returned to Japan from 1953 to 1956, during which time he collected the sources for his book about Japan, Ore Giapponesi (1957, the English translation was published in 1960 with the title Meeting with Japan). He visited Japan again from 1963 to 1972, and in 1970 he married his second wife, the Japanese Mieko Namiki.

*Japan, Patterns of Continuity* was published by the international publishing house Kodansha International, and immediately became a best-seller, with thousands of copies sold and named “book of the month” in the United States. Besides the superb quality of the photographs, the book’s success must also be attributed to the popularity of the subject, the relation between continuity and change in Japanese society. The rapid pace of modernization undertaken by Japan after the humiliation it suffered during the Second World War drove it to become one of the strongest economic powers in the world. Nevertheless, this is the “only complex society with a Bronze Age monarchy, where the emperor until recently was believed to be the lineal descendent of the sun goddess and, in some sense, himself divine” (Bellah: 184). The paradox of Japanese modernization that drew the attention of the international community of anthropologists and sociologists is not concerned with its intense postwar
recovery. Instead, it regards the nature of this change: that is, the fact that structural change was effective despite major features of Japanese society remaining unaffected. How can one explain the coexistence of unchanging structural features of Japanese society and the process of change?

Maraini has his own hypothesis, other than theorizing a dichotomy between continuity and change, as he makes clear at the very beginning: "Similar views [the dichotomist views], usually less explicitly stated, can be found in most writings on Japan, from the papers of economists to the articles of foreign correspondents or the books of missionaries.

The author feels inclined towards different conclusions. Thirty years of loving acquaintance with Japan, its people, its language and culture, have been a progressive discovery of unity and continuity underlying all superficial conclusion and change." (8)

While the typical visitor to Japan is impressed by the contrast of ancient elements existing side by side with all the accoutrements of a modern industrial superpower, Maraini points out that there is a unity and continuity beneath this apparent contradiction.

In the fourth and last chapter, “The Future of the Past,” Maraini goes further and explains the details of his main stance that can be summed up in two points:

A. A distinction between Westernization and Modernization. Maraini first denies the idea that Japan's success in modern world is due to its full acceptance of Western (mainly American) ideology, political thought, and ethics. In Japan
change has the distinction of adopting Western technology (modernization) rather than its way of thinking or lifestyle (Westernization). As a consequence, “Japan’s success must be explained in human terms and, one must add, predominantly in Japanese terms” (Maraini, 1971: 183). The core of Maraini’s view is that through the centuries Japanese civilization has developed a series of elements that facilitated its path toward success in the modern world. First, “in the case of Japan [compared to Europe], a series of historical circumstances and some extremely lucky coincidences place its civilization in a most favorable position as regards the scientific mutation” (185). These elements are summarized below.

According to Maraini, Japanese history is characterized by the absence of negative forces that could retard the rise of modern progress. In particular, he refers to the Christian bias toward the scientific revolution in medieval and early modern Europe as compared to the alleged religious tolerance of the Japanese: “Japan, therefore, appeared on the modern scene with a mental outlook particularly adapted to accept in full the essence of the Western scientific cultural mutation and of its dependent technological revolution, leaving behind all the antagonistic and retarding elements that were, and still are, so deep a part of Western civilization” (187).

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21 In 2001 a new edition of Le ore giapponesi (Meeting with Japan) was released. Maraini added a new introduction in which he confirms the same view illustrated in Pattern: “Venendo adesso al Giappone, potremo affermare ch’esso è altamente, splendidamente modernizzato, assai più modernizzato di noi per molti aspetti, ma poco, pochissimo, occidentalizzato. Numerosi e continui malintesi tra stranieri e giapponesi hanno luogo proprio perché, visitando l’arcipelago e notando tanti segni di somiglianza con l’Occidente nel vestire, nella casa, nel mangiare, nel lavoro, nei giochi, nelle abitudini più comuni della giornata e della notte, il viaggiatore conclude: ma allora sono come noi! Niente affatto, sono diversissimi: in molte cose meglio di noi, in altre peggio, però sempre diversissimi. Regola basilare dunque: non si scambi modernizzazione per occidentalizzazione” (Le ore Giapponesi, 2001: 19).
Another aspect of the Japanese attitude toward modernization is the love of nature, which is mostly considered divine. Adoration of nature facilitates a scientific approach to nature:

In this attitude toward nature and to life, I think one can appreciate an extraordinarily favorable background to the acceptance and understanding not merely of the methods and application of science but of its very spirit. Men and women who for thousands of years have approached nature in trepidation and wonder and who have been inspired by it to extraordinary heights of artistic and poetic feeling are now admirably prepared to face this same nature in a framework of pure rationality. (…) Such ideas may seem obvious today. It should be noted, however, that this attitude, achieved in the West by bitter victories over stake and proscription, springs in Japan from the most ancient frontiers of the collective mind, from myth, proverb, and folksong. (Maraini, 1971: 189)

This love of nature carries another similarity between Japanese traditional values and the essence of modern times: “Transcendence and contemplation are out; immanent values and actions are in” (189). As a consequence, Maraini considers Japanese society to be more pragmatic and achievement oriented. A successful career is well rewarded on all sides; there is no contradiction between the spiritual sphere of life and the more interior needs of the soul.

Even the lack of individualism in Japanese society and the need for the individual to be embedded in a social network seem to meet the demands of modern life. As Maraini points out: “The modern age stresses communal life: ours are times of groups, crowds, collaboration, and social integration” (191).

In Japan ethical values are not based entirely on religious beliefs. Thus the process of secularization that is underway in the West does not affect Japanese society: “The development of Japanese ethics has taken place predominantly under the auspices of secular philosophy, especially of Confucianism, and only to a limited extent under religion” (192).
Finally, Maraini reviews the common idea of Japan as a man's world and emphasizes that the role of the woman is in a direction consonant with the recent tendencies of the contemporary world: “One may say, however, that modern Japanese women (...) have seized with spiritual eagerness most of the opportunities offered to them. There are few countries in the world where the average husband hands over the entire monthly paypacket to his wife. The wife then takes care of household expenses, perhaps saves some, and doles out small sums for her husband’s personal pleasures”. (194).

The overall picture presents an image of Japan as an ideal country for modern society and against the Western world that still faces negative influences, mostly due to religious values, from its past.

By showing the source of this particular cultural representation of Japan that Fosco Maraini provides, we can better understand what is omitted from the representation and, above all, we can compare the basic source with the discourse that Maraini builds on the source. The author wants to hide his subjective cultural representation by claiming the status of a neutral observer when he says, “We are not expressing judgments; we are merely observing a cultural scene that has certain definite characteristics — the modern world” (191). Instead, what we are looking for are exactly the judgments that are implicit in his vision, that is, his relativistic view.

The idea of continuity between traditional and modern Japan was introduced by Japanese anthropologist Nakane Kie (1926-) in her book Japanese Society (1970), published in English one year before Patterns of Continuity. At that time a Japanese self-interpretation was quite rare, and Nakane’s book became one of the most well-known examples of nihonjinron (discourse about
the Japanese), with more than one million copies sold in her country and about thirty different translations published. The core of Maraini's stance is the same as that in Nakane's book, as is evident in the following quotation:

Some of the distinguishing aspects of Japanese society that I treat in this book are not exactly new to Japanese and Western observers and may be familiar from discussions in previous writings on Japan. However, my interpretations are different and the way in which I synthesize these aspects is new. Most of the sociological studies of contemporary Japan have been concerned primarily with its changing aspects, pointing to the "traditional" and "modern" elements as representing different or opposing qualities. ... The proponents of such views are interested either in uprooting feudal elements or in discovering and noting modern elements that are comparable to those of the West. The fabric of Japanese society has thus been made to appear to be torn into pieces of two kinds. But in fact it remains as one aspect (not element) of the same social body that also has "modern" features. (Nakane, 1970: viii-ix, my italics)

For the first time Nakane elaborates on the idea of a pattern of continuity between traditional and modern Japan in a way that will be restated by Maraini. While Nakane's work attempts to show positive and negative aspects of modern Japanese society, Maraini is rather oblivious to the shortcomings of the Nippon economic revolution. By reading Nakanes's book we learn what is hiding behind Maraini's praise for Japan's achievements in "high-level education, in ambition, organization, group solidarity, in a pragmatic approach to problems both large and small" (Maraini, 1971: 212). According to Nakane, the key to understanding Japanese society is the principle of vertical human relations—the ie-type society. The typical Japanese group model is formed by an inverted "V." The superior member, located at the apex, establishes a link with two subordinated groups, located in the two branches. The only possible human relation is vertical and,

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22 Nakane Chie is also famous for being one of the few women of her generation to become a professor at a major university, the University of Tokyo.
ideally, each subordinate branch is not aware of the other's existence. Any horizontal collaboration among lower ranks is prevented by superior hegemony. The result is that each individual is identified with a group (usually a group of co-workers) to the extent that individual identity overlaps with the group's identity. According to the vertical principle, individual freedom is undermined because what counts is the tie of the individual to one group (Nakane, 1970: 57). Maraini joins Nakane in celebrating the modernity and efficiency of a society based on group affiliation but, unlike his Japanese counterpart, he neglects to admit the cost in terms of individual freedom that this model implies: “It is interesting to observe that the traditional system, manifested in a group organization, has generated both the major driving force toward a high degree of industrialization and the negative brake that hinders the development of individual autonomy” (Nakane, 1970: 120). When Maraini emphasizes Japanese group solidarity he refers to the traditional household system and the great solidarity among members, but he disregards the realm of hostility and ruthless competition among the heterogeneous groups within the society. As Nakane observes, “the entire society is a sort of aggregation of numerous and independent competing groups that by themselves can make no links with each other: they lack a sociological framework on which to build up a completed and integrated society” (102). Another potential shortcoming that Nakane detects is the absence of mobility for workers among different companies: “The prohibition on mobility in the Japanese system promotes inefficiency” (107).

Even though Maraini does not deny the subjugation of the Japanese woman in contemporary society, he believes that the rising modern women’s rights movement is consistent with the Japanese story in which women often
occupy a privileged position in the social ranking. Maraini, who quotes Nakane in this regard, does not deal with the different pattern that Nakane lays out: instead of rising independence of Japanese women, Nakane observes that “Japanese wives adopt the role of mother rather than wife to their husbands; this is the traditional pattern, little affected by post-war change” (128). Excluded from any social activities, neglected by their husband who is more concerned with his work, Japanese wives direct their attention to their children; even the husband-wife relationship becomes a parent-child relationship.

In conclusion, Maraini’s idealized portrait of Japan is partly due to his historical context: the 1970s was the beginning of Japan’s economic boom with its clear effects on society. Japan’s manufacturing production index reached 8,143 in 1965, while in the United States it was 1,227. The enthusiastic prediction that the twenty-first century will be the “Japanese century”23 is manifested throughout this book. Nakane’s book on the same subject leads to a different conclusion. As a native-born Japanese woman, Chie Nakane presents an optimistic vision of her country but does not spare it from criticism. Maraini’s case is just the opposite: Japan is his chosen country and through his lack of criticism he intends to advocate his choice. What is missing here is a point of reference for this interpretation: Maraini depicts a bright image of Japan in contrast to a generic “Western society” left behind on the path of modernization. I suspect that the accusation of backwardness and decadence has much more to do with Italy than with a generic “Western society.” Behind this label one recognizes the dissatisfaction of an Italian intellectual toward his country and

23 In this regard see Herman Kahn, *The Emerging Japanese Superstate* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1970).
the path that Italy undertook after World War II. At the end of the war Italy and Japan were both defeated and victimized countries. While Japan was able to achieve unexpected growth, Italy’s economic growth and social transformation failed to rebuild it into a leading country of the world, as the Fascist government had promised.

The core of Maraini’s criticism seems to be the influence of the Catholic Church in Italian society. According to him, the split between Catholicism and science in terms of moral values condemned Italy to fall behind the pace of other nations. The way that Maraini depicts his Japanese “dreamland” shows an implicit disappointment in the lack of significant change in Italian society. This bitter and implicit side of Maraini’s conclusion, this perception of decline of the sense of the nation, was common among Italian intellectuals during the period considered, as the journalist Domenico Bartoli sharply observes: “We are not capable of being the kind of state or nation that we are, or were, as civilization or culture. This incapacity exasperates particularly the intellectuals, active minorities and those who should be the ruling class, and turns everybody toward extreme pessimism or evasion, which almost always ends up in cynical indifference as soon as the first moments of fury passed” (Gentile, 2009: 354).

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24 For a detailed reconstruction of the role played by the Christian Democrat party in shaping the image of Italy see Gentile, 2009: “The way the Christian Democrats officiated at the ‘Italy ’61’ celebrations [Italians’ celebrations of the centennial of its unification] seemed to consecrate, with the pope’s blessing, both the Catholic leadership of the national state and the reappropriation of the nation by the Catholics, who returned it to the Church’s folds. The governing party was leading the country toward modernity under the emblem of Christ, moderating conservatism and progress, conciliating modernization and Christian tradition. At the same time, the Jubilee celebrations allowed the Christian Democrats to claim they were the legitimate winners of the competition with the communist party for the monopoly of the national myth” (Gentile, 2009: 344).
This national climate of disillusionment among Italian intellectuals deeply affects Maraini’s representation of Japan; it explains his diminished representation of the Western world compared to his wondrous view of Japan.

3. **Moravia and the Japanese crowd**

Moravia went to Japan three times as a reporter for the Italian magazine *L’espresso* and the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, as well as an intellectual invited by Japanese cultural institutes. In 1957 Moravia accepted an invitation to participate in the Pen Club congress in Tokyo, together with Stephen Spender (1909-1995) and Angus Wilson (1945-2005). Ten years later he came back to Japan with his new wife Dacia Maraini (1936-), and together they traveled through China and Korea as well. In 1982 Moravia was sent by *L’espresso* to Hiroshima, where he wrote articles on the atomic bomb. As Moravia said in an interview, “The first time, the encounter with Japan, not always pleasant, was totally new for me. The second time, I met many writers and intellectuals, including Yukio Mishima, and I had the opportunity to understand Japanese life more profoundly; on the other hand, the Japanese experience became mixed with those of China and Korea. Finally, the third time I visited also visited the Japanese provinces. I went as far as the island of Hokkaido, and in particular, after visiting Hiroshima, I decided to devote myself to the antiatomic campaign” (Moravia-Elkan, 2000: 282).

Between the first and the second journey, Moravia observed the rise of the Japanese economic miracle, and along with Fosco Maraini he drew attention to the particular phenomenon of the coexistence of tradition and modernity in
Japan. Unlike Maraini, who underlines the continuity between past and present in the Land of the Rising Sun, Moravia considers these two elements as independent and juxtaposed. The European Industrial Revolution is considered as an achievement of humanistic culture, and technical change is immersed in European thought. On the other hand, Moravia considers the Japanese Industrial Revolution as a consequence of opening the country to the rest of the world; it is a revolution based on imitation of European technical progress without absorbing the philosophical culture that nourished such progress. In the end, postwar Japan reveals a unique overlapping of the feudal structure of society and modern technology.

In this way Moravia denies the existence of a “Japanese way of modernization” because in his view the persistence of the traditional elements in its history is due to the conservative character of its society; instead, technological innovation is due to the Japanese meeting a challenge to keep up with Western countries and delete the stigma of an inferior civilization. Moravia considers the ongoing changing process in Japan to be the result of a Westernization of this country and
as an intrusion of a new-capitalistic politic into the body of an old and perishing culture. Moravia’s ultimate goal is to include the representation of Japan in his critical discourse against the alienating effects of neo-capitalism in society.

Alienation, a concept that Moravia borrows from Marx, is a cornerstone idea through which it is possible to interpret many protagonists of Moravian novels (for example, Gli Indifferenti [Time of Indifference], 1929 and La noia [The Boredom], 1960. Moravia’s essay L’uomo come fine [Man as an End] (1963) goes deeper in explaining how such concepts as “neocapitalism,” “alienation,” and “antihumanism” are related in the present world:

Sarebbe interessante vedere perché, con apparente contraddizione, l’antiumanesimo oggi coincida con le vittorie del neocapitalismo. (…) Sarebbe difficile trovare nel mondo moderno la robusta fiducia, la sanguigna pienezza, il ricco temperamento che furono propri all’umanesimo ai suoi albori. L’uomo del neocapitalismo non riesce a dimenticare la propria natura dopo tutto umana. Il suo antiumanesimo per questo non riesce ad essere positivo. Sotto apparenze scintillanti e astratte, si celano, a ben guardare, la noia, il disgusto, l’impotenza e l’irrealtà. (Moravia, 1964: 6)

All these three key terms are suitable in Moravia’s view of Japan. The Japanese economic miracle is nothing more than an example of a new-capitalistic phenomenon with all its negative consequences in terms of alienation. According to Moravia, Japanese modernization is not a result of an alternative humanism or an Asian scientific revolution, but represents the avant-garde of an antihumanism spirit that lingers in Europe. This is evident in the way Moravia observes the Japanese path of modernization:
Finché durava nella cultura europea il retaggio dell’umanesimo cristiano e rinascimentale, il Giappone poteva veramente definirsi come il vaso di coccio tra i vasi di ferro. Ma la crisi, o meglio la liquidazione di questo retaggio negli anni recenti hanno fatto fare al Giappone un salto qualitativo che lo ha allineato alla pari con le grandi Nazioni occidentali in cui si è verificata la rivoluzione industriale con le note conseguenze dell’avvento delle masse e della produzione in serie. Il Giappone si trova perfettamente a suo agio, come le sue tradizioni, in un mondo in cui l’individuo scompare sommerso dalla massa, in cui il fatto economico appiattisce ogni rapporto e l’angoscia esistenziale nega la realtà. (Moravia, 1994: 796)

The discourse about the Western contemporary crisis and the dawn of European humanism is predominant in Moravia’s view, to the extent of including Japan in this scenario. Moravia’s attempt to describe contemporary Japan as part of this crisis implies the negative connotation of Japanese tradition and culture as unable to produce an alternative modern form of humanism. On the contrary, it seems that the only source of Japanese culture is to imitate its European counterpart: “L’assimilazione a dosi massicce, forzata e affrettata, della cultura occidentale che da un secolo circa ha luogo in Giappone, ha finito quasi per produrre in questo Paese uno stato d’animo schizofrenico, diviso tra l’ingorda e indiscriminata avidità di tutto ciò che è straniero e un conservatorismo e tradizionalismo altrettanto eccessivi”. (Moravia, 1994: 830)

At this point it is worth asking how Moravia justifies his idea of Japanese culture as an empty container suitable for every kind of Western intrusion without offering any resistance. It is interesting to investigate how Moravia explains this passive and conservative attitude of Japanese civilization. In one article Moravia uses the image of a paper page (“un foglio di carta”) to depict the allegedly one-dimensional Nippon culture:

“Se [Il Giappone] fosse un oggetto qualsiasi, che oggetto sarebbe?”
La risposta potrebbe anche essere questa: un foglio di carta, uno di quei pesanti fogli di carta che incorniciati di bambù verde o di acero bianco o di ciliegio rosso, ornati di qualche disegno impressionistico di paesaggio o di qualche ideogramma calligrafico, fungono da pareti nelle case giapponesi. In altri termini, l'impressione che si riporta al Giappone, non solo per quanto riguarda gli aspetti fisici ma anche quelli psicologici e culturali, è quella di un mondo che abbia le dimensioni del foglio di carta: lunghezza a larghezza ma non spessore e profondità o volume. (792)

The source of this sharp judgment on contemporary Japan society is *The Pillow-Book of Sei Shonagon* (1929), one of the first English translations of a diary of observations and remarks recorded by the court lady Sei Shonagon during the 990s in Heian Japan (794-1185). The translator of the book is Arthur Waley (1889-1966) an English Orientalist, a member of the Bloomsbury Group, and famous primarily for his English translation of the masterpiece of Japanese literature, *The Tale of Genji*. In his introduction Waley uses the precious sources gathered from the *Pillow-Book* as well as from *The Tale of Genji* to give a portrait of Japanese society and the spirit of the tenth century. The final result is an image of Japan during the Heian period as a refined civilization with a heightened sensibility for literature and aesthetic forms in general. Waley then attempts a bizarre (from a historical perspective) comparison between this ancient aesthetic world and twentieth-century England (or the Western world in general). He argues that what distinguishes “them from us” is a lack of historical awareness: unlike contemporary Western societies, tenth-century Japanese were completely oblivious of and indifferent to their country’s history. Their only concern was the present: “It is indeed our intense curiosity about the past that most sharply distinguishes us from the ancient Japanese. Here every educated person is interested in some form or another of history” (Waley-Shonagon, 1929: 10). After disqualifying the Sei Shonagon’s culture by stressing its “absence of
intellectual background” (12), Waley finally uses the image of the paper page that must have inspired Moravia: “It is this insecurity that gives to the Heian period that oddly evasive and, as it were, two-dimensional quality, its figures and appurtenances all sometimes seeming to us to be cut out of thin, transparent paper” (12). It must also be noted that although his translations were influential between the 1920s to the 1960s, Waley never set foot in Japan. His knowledge of Japan was based on his acquaintance with the “Oriental Prints and Manuscripts” in the British Museum, where he was appointed as assistant keeper. He always “maintained a profound textual attitude toward his subject” (De Gruchy, 2003: 165), and his image of the Japanese world “bought into and sanctioned the one-sided feminine or aesthetic view of Japan” (De Gruchy, 2003: 164), in line with Bloomsbury’s aesthetic sensibility and antagonism toward moral constituted authority.

Moravia’s representation of Japan as a one-sided and aesthetic society relies on such an Orientalist portrait of the visited country. Yet what really matters in his discourse is the attempt to ignore chronology and to overlap the Japanese civilization of the tenth century with that of the present time. Borrowing Waley’s characterization of Medieval Japan, Moravia is able to achieve his goal of deleting historical and cultural differences between Western and Eastern modernization. In this way he facilitates the task of the Italian reader of magazines, who can easily understand the new phenomenon of modern Japan by resorting to Marxist criticism of capitalism.

This is evident in Moravia’s article on the crowd in Japan (La folla in Giappone, November 10, 1957), in which all the passages that I have already cited are summoned up. At the very beginning Moravia highlights the conflict
between modernity and tradition in contemporary Japan through the contrasting images of Kyoto and Osaka: “Kioto è l’antica capitale, città bellissima ma addormentata nelle memorie dei suoi antichi monumenti; Osaka, invece, è la Manchester del Giappone: brutta, attiva, piena di traffici, con fabbriche, empori, sedi di società commerciali e industriali e via dicendo” (825). While Kyoto is a symbol of an embalmed cult of the past, Osaka embodies the spirit of the rootless Asian new capitalism, a counterpart to the analogue Western phenomenon. Once he has established the distance between past and present in Japan, Moravia underlines the similarity between Western and Eastern modernization. In doing so he chooses to set the narration of the Japanese crowd in the space of a train, which is a typical example of a “nonspace,” neither Western nor Eastern, the perfect setting in which all geographical and cultural differences are abolished: “Questi treni sono dunque luoghi molto adatti per osservare la folla giapponese” (825). The next step is to delete all differences in terms of social class, emphasizing the bourgeoisie character of the Japanese crowd: “Direi che la folla giapponese ha un aspetto piccolo-borghese anche quando è composta di operai” (827). After removing all geographical differences (Osaka as Manchester), spatial differences (train as neutral space), and social differences (the universal image of the bourgeoisie), Moravia can apply to the Japanese world the ideological message of the “moral crisis of the middle-class.” Like his other stories in which the protagonist is Italian middle-class, even the Japanese bourgeoisie are affected by boredom: “Infatti la noia è una delle malattie di questo paese” (829). The final step is a universal, metaphysical definition of boredom, within which all the anthropological distance between Europe and Asia is elided: “Ma si tratta probabilmente di una noia di tipo cosmico o esistenziale: originata, mi sembra,
dal divario bovaristico tra gli ideali che sono talvolta istericamente magnanimi (si pensi alla morale eroica del samurai per tanti decenni insegnata nelle scuole) e la modesta realtà. Ogni volta che l’ideale fallisce cozzando contro la realtà, il giapponese può ricadere in fondo alla noia, cioè ad una svaluazione massiccia della propria esistenza e di quella altrui” (830). Here we are no longer in Japan but in the realm of the the Moravian world. This definition of boredom is the same as that for Dino, the protagonist of the novel *La noia* [*The Boredom*], that Moravia published only a few years later (1960): “Per molti la noia è il contrario del divertimento; potrei dire, anzi, addirittura, che per certi aspetti essa rassomiglia al divertimento in quanto, appunto, provoca distrazione e dimenticanza, sia pure di un genere molto particolare. La noia, per me, è propriamente una specie di insufficienza o inadeguatezza o scarsità della realtà” (Moravia, 1960: 7). At this point the process of modern Japan’s assimilation into Western society is completed.

In conclusion, contemporary Japan, in its economic power and new materialistic tendencies, is perceived by Moravia as a leader of a postmodern society: “With the advent of postmodernity, American culture, with its economic and political influences across the shores, is bent on Americanizing the world, but at the same time is trying to internationalize it” (Hakutani, 2002: 14). This is evident in Moravia’s article *Il Giappone al posto dello “Zen” ha scelto la religione dei grattacieli* [*Instead of Zen Japan has chosen the skyscrapers’ religion*]. It relates the story of Moravia’s interview with a Buddhist bonze in Kamakura’s convent, one of the most important Zen shrines of the country. With surprise, Moravia vainly attempts to orient the conversation to topics related to Zen thought, but the bonze successfully keeps the conversation on a superficial level, talking
about his travels around the world. In Moravia’s view, the bonze’s pragmatic and
materialistic attitude is an unequivocal sign of the intrusion of the so-called
“American way of life” into the core of Zen tradition. At the same time Moravia
refers to an encounter with a young American student of Zen in the same
convent. The American student seems to have much more interest in Zen
practice than the Japanese bonze. This student represents the cultural
appropriation of Eastern traditions by Americans who are eager to find a valid
alternative to their consumer society. Moravia’s conclusion is that “Giappone e
Stati uniti sono come due vasi comunicanti: dal vaso giapponese è passato nel
vaso americano lo zen, l’arte, la decorazione, il gusto nipponico; dal vaso
americano in quello giapponese, in una misura addirittura eccessiva, molta
american way of life. Quale dei due paesi abbia guadagnato è difficile dire”
(Moravia, 1994: 1249). In the contemporary world Zen Buddhism is what makes
Japan an influential partner among capitalist societies and represents a critical
cultural element that complements the predominant American culture.

A negative portrait of postwar Italy springs from this perception of the
benefits that Japan provides in solving the spiritual crisis of the West. In this
regard Moravia finds an analogy between the authoritarian power wielded by
the United States in the Orient and the glorious image of Italy during the
medieval age: “Il rapporto con L’Oriente, durante il Medioevo, non fu per l’Italia
gran che diverso da quello che oggi gli Stati Uniti hanno con il Giappone e in
genere con l’Asia orientale: guerre, interventi, scambi culturali, commerci, viaggi,
eccetera. Il risultato di tutto questo si può vedere a Venezia, a Ravenna, in Sicilia,
a Siena, e un po’ dappertutto. Allora gli italiani sapevano appropriarsi idée e
The longing for the mythical image of Italy as a leading country in the Orient for its cultural, economic, and military enterprises is emphasized by the contrast with the disappointing portrait of Italy during the sixties:

Moravia’s resigned conclusion is an indictment against the political and cultural conservatism in Italy, despite the success achieved in rebuilding the country devastated by the war. Whereas Japan is perceived as a flexible society ready not only to absorb elements of American culture but also to promote a significant protest against its predominant way of life, Italy is perceived as an affluent but culturally stagnant society. One must also mention that at the origin of this negative judgment is the all-encompassing influence of the Roman Catholic Church in a country where the political success of the Christian Democrat party raised questions about the boundaries between the Vatican and the Parliament. According to Moravia, this conflict can be detected at the beginning of Italian unification: “L’unità d’Italia è, come dice Goldoni nella commedia Il bugiardo, una ‘spiritosa invenzione’. L’Italia dopo l’unità è rimasta disunita e quel che è peggio
con una capitale che non è una capitale, ma la città principale del Lazio. Semmai, ad ogni modo, la capitale della Chiesa” (Moravia-Elkann, 1990: 197). For Moravia the problem of Italy’s lack of criticism of society is rooted in the fundamental lack of national spirit, as result of a never fully accomplished political unification.

4. The utopia of Otherness

In his intense experience as a journalist around the world (the Unites States and Chile, as well as China, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos), Goffredo Parise came to Japan in his later years. The opportunity to visit this new country came with an official invitation by the Italian ambassador to Japan, Boris Banchieri, in 1980. L’eleganza è frigida is the fictional account of this journey through the eyes of Marco, an autobiographical character related by his name to the famous travel writer Marco Polo.25 As Parise himself explains, the title is borrowed from the Japanese poet Saitō Ryokuu (1868-1904). It refers to the absence of passion as the ethical norm that rules social life in Japan, in contrast to the sensual and passionate realm of Nippon art in which the hidden feelings of the Japanese are expressed.26 In the preface of the Italian edition of Kawabata’s House of the


*Sleeping Beauties*, Parise deploys the same idea by portraying Kawabata’s personality:

[Kawabata] doveva essere un uomo di estrema sensualità. Il segreto della sua fine di suicida, con il gas, si dice per amore sfortunato o comunque disperato per una servetta, sta appunto nella sensualità. Se si osserva il suo ritratto, il suo volto di diavolletto o di pipistrello, si direbbe l’opposto, si direbbe una persona gelida e secca come uno stecco di cedro. Ma è proprio quell’apparenza, in parte diabolica in parte animale a rivelarci la sua sensualità potente e tragica. (Parise, 1989: vol. 2, 1458)

Nevertheless, the title does not provide an all-encompassing picture of the book. This is not a novel for Italians who are seeking to become oblivious to their own country by plunging into a representation of an exotic land and unique people.

Italy is by all means present on every page of the novel, to such an extent that Parise succeeds in performing a representation of Italy while focusing on Japan.

The reason why Parise chooses Japan as a standpoint for looking at Italy can be detected within this framework: in the representational interplay between the two countries, Japan is the dreamland by which to emphasize the darkness of Italian society, which is constantly referred to in the narration as the country of the politic (“il paese della Politica”). By using the expression “dreamed land” I intend the fictional space that Japan takes in the narration, that is, a certain degree of unreality of the representation that the narrator makes explicit for the reader by using the narrative expedient of the dream. It is not by chance that the whole account of Japan begins and ends with the protagonist’s dream. After his arrival at Tokyo’s airport Marco enjoys a placid and restful night:

La notte parve estremamente silenziosa a Marco, che dormì di un sonno al tempo stesso felice e lontano, simile a quelli delle convalescenze o della salvezza. Questa era infatti la speranza di Marco nel lasciare il paese della Politica, sconvolto per millenni da furti, ricatti e assassini, e questo il nuovo stato d’animo che lo accompagnò per tutto il tempo del suo soggiorno in Giappone. (1060)

Here is the conclusion of the book:

Come trafitto da questi [three artists] nel profondo, Marco pencolante di sonno andò a letto e dormì per l’ultima notte in Giappone. Ancora in sogno gli apparve la signorina Momoko Tokugawa, quasi a riassumere quelle ultime emozioni e per la prima volta mostrò i bei denti in un sorriso di invito. (1178)

By diminishing his own country with such sarcastic comments (such as “il paese della Politica”), Parise marks an overwhelming distance in historical, ethical, and political terms between Italy and Japan.

It is necessary to explain the historical reasons of this opposition in Parise’s view. The 1980s were a fragile period in the making of the Italian democracy. In 1978 Prime Minister Aldo Moro was first kidnapped, then murdered by a militant communist group known as the Red Brigades (Brigate rosse). At the beginning of the 1980s the vice-director of the Marghera’s Petrolchimico was assassinated, and just few days later the director of an important chemical industry (ICMESA) was shot and killed in Monza. In February Vittorio Bachelet, the vice-president of the Superior Council of the Magistrates and former president of the Roman Catholic association Azione cattolica, was
killed in Rome. In August a bomb killed eighty-five people at the railway station in Bologna (Belpoliti, 2010: 278).

On the other hand, in the late seventies Japan achieved the status of the world’s second-largest economy. Several publications from U.S. scholars focused on giving Japan—America’s best ally in the Far East and a strategic partner during the cold war—a smooth interpretation of its success, avoiding mention of the price that Japanese had to pay in order to achieve their goals (social conflict and dissent, labor exploitation, political corruption, ecological battles, and so forth). The Japanese were depicted as close allies in the path to democracy, hardworking people who obeyed easily: “Harmony and consensus prevailed, and strife was a foreign thing, for the Japanese were a modest people given to compromise in all matters” (Smith, 1997: 19). A well-known example of this

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27 For a deeper understanding of the definition of Italy as the land of the Politic, it is worthy to note that in 1978 Parise published in Il Corriere della Sera a short story titled “Politica,” which focuses on the topics of Italian corruption and injustice in Italian society. As Marco Belpoliti observes: “Nell’ottobre del 1978 [Parise] pubblica sul ‘Corriere’ un nuovo racconto. S’Intitola Politica e non entrerà mai a far parte del Sillabario n. 2. La storia è quella di Giuseppe Fracasso, che nell’ottobre del 1945 ha un nuovo insegnante di italiano, latino, greco e storia. È il professor Tonolo, ‘un grosso e sporco uomo dell’Ottocento’ che conosce molto bene la sua materia, ma che ha una evidente ed eccessiva passione, il vino. Giuseppe capisce che quella è la strada giusta per conquistarsi le simpatie dell’insegnante: ogni settimana porta in classe un fiasco di vino da cui Tonolo comincia ad attingere. I pessimi risultati scolastici di Giuseppe migliorano. Nel contempo egli coltiva i suoi compagni di classe con piccoli regali, e non si dimentica neppure dei bidelli. Alla fine dell’anno ottiene la promozione. Un unico compagno di classe contesta il risultato ottenuto; è il primo della classe, un orfano. Gli altri ragazzi lo riprenderono: ‘Erano forse affari suoi? E poi, lui era stato promosso, con tutti otto e nove, che cosa gliene importava se Fracasso, così allegro, così simpatico, di cui tutti, nessuno escluso avevano mangiato i panini, anche lui era stato promosso?’ Il racconto riguarda ovviamente il tema della corruzione e allude alla situazione della società italiana a cui, due anni dopo, lo stesso Calvino dedicherà sul ‘Corriere’ L’apologo sull’onestà nel paese dei corrotti, che si conclude con l’immagine di una società rovesciata, in cui gli onesti sono una piccola minoranza, una contro società, rispetto alla società dei corrotti” (Belpoliti, 2010: 272).
idealization of Japan is Ezra Vogel’s *Japan as Number One*, published in 1979. Japan is praised as being a “modern democratic nation with a free enterprise system” (4). What is interesting is the fact that Japan is used as the standpoint from which to look at the shortcomings of the American economy, politics, and society. Vogel proposes that the United States can learn a lesson from Japan; for the first time an Eastern country represents an example of a modern, capitalistic society for Western countries. Japan can teach America how to gain a democratic consensus, organize a meritocratic system, and establish a flexible bureaucracy, an efficient educational process, and a superior economy based on planning, organization, and effort. In his effort to gather all the possible lessons that America can learn from the “Japanese miracle,” Vogel ends up creating an image of a modern society that can hardly be applied to the case in Japan. The contradictions that Vogel prefers to overlook are too numerous, the burden of success is too difficult in considering Japan as an example of society. The perception of Japan as a realm of social order, harmony, respect for hierarchy, and unity of purpose covers a reality of violence and exploitation, especially in the field of work: “There were tales of what Koiso called ‘coercive labor’, full of intimidating managers, corrupt union officials, executive suicides, *karoshi* incidents, ‘service overtime’ scams, vindictive personnel departments, and employees banished to various Siberias for being too independent of mind” (Smith, 1997: 131).

Parise’s image of Japan stems from the same set of cultural representations; it is affected by the Nippon success stories. Moreover, Parise applies a conceptual schema coherent with Vogel’s, in which Japan represents the cornerstone from which his own country is criticized. In fact, beyond the
rhetoric of the “lesson to learn,” Vogel’s *nihonjinron* (discourse on Japan) is rather a practice of self-criticism and disillusion.

Japan as mirror of Italy in Parise’s work has specific traits other than the typical juxtaposition of a society nourished by spiritual and aesthetical values versus Western materialism. Parise praises Japan for reasons that must be located in what he perceives as missing in the Italian society of the late seventies. First, there is the longing for a sense of patriotism, or for moral values based on patriotism:

Infine parve a Marco che il carattere fondamentale del popolo giapponese fosse l’orgoglio nazionale o la superbia individuale che per un giapponese è la stessa cosa anche se nel paese della Politica questo sembrerebbe un controsenso. Ma il paese della Politica è il paese della Politica e dell’affermazione individuale e non quello dell’orgoglio nazionale. Ma il paese della Politica, si sa, tanto è geniale, più di ogni altro geniale nella politica, cioè nella mediazione, la trattazione, lo scambio delle merci, tanto è ignorante e sordo nella Morale di cui però si riempie la bocca. Al contrario Marco ebbe l’impressione che la “questione morale” insieme a quella estetica fosse il patrimonio del Giappone più di molti altri paesi e continuamente vedeva intersecarsi, nel comportamento dei suoi abitanti, le due questioni, estetica e morale. (Parise, 1989, vol. 2: 1078)

The idea of patriotism has nothing to do with the dream of the Italian empire, the nationalistic idea of a superior civilization, by which Mussolini has built up his political consensus. What Parise is missing is a form of patriotism generated by the awareness of the treasures of art, the sense of an aesthetical civilization that should stir up among Italians a feeling of national solidarity oriented to preserving and extending the richness of their inherited tradition. In Japan this
aesthetic tradition had been kept alive by people who apply their aesthetical education in decorating their private houses, as well as in the urban space.\textsuperscript{28}

In contrast, in Italy a sense of obliviousness to the past predominates. Italians are like foreign citizens in their own country because they have no interest whatsoever in achieving an aesthetic education. This observation can only be inferred when reading \textit{L'eleganza è frigida}, but it becomes explicit when we read Parise's views in some of the articles he wrote as columnist of the \textit{Corriere della Sera}, from January 1974 to mid-1975. Here, for instance, is his opinion on the relation between the Italians and the nation in which they live:

\begin{quote}
Inoltre, questo è il concetto fondamentale della mia risposta, l'Italia non vuole più essere l'Italia. Gli Italiani (parlo della grandissima maggioranza) non vogliono più essere italiani. Se ne fregano dei monumenti, dei musei, di San Pietro, della Chiesa cattolica, dei Palazzi Pitti e Uffizi; ci mandano i loro figli con la scuola, ma se ne fregano e se ne fregheranno i loro figli quando sarà il momento. (Parise, 1998: 187)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, Marco’s remarks in front of a small theater? in Tokyo: “Poiché di quegli alberelli erano piene tutte le strade dell’immensa città di Tokyo pensò che certamente era necessario un esercito di giardinieri per fare quel lavoro. Cartesio agì immediatamente nella successione dei pensieri di Marco: altri informatori giunti da quel paese gli avevano detto che il Giappone era quasi interamente meccanizzato quando non robotizzato, la prova era l’enorme quantità di minuscoli calcolatori, televisori, radio e via dicendo che giungevano dal Giappone in tutto l’altro emisfero, quasi a rappresentarlo. Ma quello che aveva sotto gli occhi era un lavoro interamente fatto a mano. ... Eppure avrebbero potuto essere fatti a macchina. ... Era un lavoro che si era sempre fatto a mano, che per tradizione esigeva di essere fatto a mano. Ma perché? La sola risposta che Cartesio seppe suggerire a Marco fu questa: per ragioni estetiche. Ciòè per ragioni che dovevano rispettare al tempo stesso la tradizione, la materia dell’albero, che era vegetale, l’armonia tra materia e materia ... e l’apporto creativo dell’uomo. Era insomma quanto bastava per fare di quel lavoro di avvolgimento e di quell’asola un’opera d’arte. E infatti Marco provò di fronte a quella cordicella e a quell’asola la stessa emozione che si prova davanti a un’opera d’arte” (1094).
In answering a letter from a reader of the newspaper, Parise is even more explicit in emphasizing this sense of a dichotomy between Italy's present and the reality until thirty years ago, when a humanistic culture was still actively present in the society:

Del resto questa dissociazione, questa frattura così sentita dai ragazzi a scuola, è la frattura stessa dell'Italia. Da una parte le immagini e le testimonianze di un vecchissimo passato (l'Italia monumentale, storica e agricola), dall'altra una no man's land senza storia: l'Italia della speculazione edilizia, delle piccole e grandi industrie, delle autostrade alla Americana, dei motel, degli snack. Non siamo in America, dove non c'è cultura umanistica che affonda nel passato, e dove il paesaggio e la realtà giornaliera coincidono perfettamente con la cultura Americana. Questa frattura italiana è per il momento insanabile nonostante il velocissimo processo di integrazione in corso. Fino a quando la vecchia Italia, museificata, mumificata (o distrutta, che è lo stesso) avrà cessato di esistere come corpo vivo. Asettici e convenzionalmente italiani e mediterranei, i nuovi scolari del futuro potranno, ma solo allora e facoltativamente, come si fa nei tours, scegliere brevi 'diramazioni interessanti' in quella che lei, signora Morucci chiama, cultura umanistica. (97-98)

Here we again find the same perception of a discontinuity between the present and a certain way to be Italian that belongs to the past that we have already observed in Maraini’s and Moravia’s works. It is not by chance that Parise is fascinated by the continuity between new and old Japan, as Maraini was. See, for instance, the following passage:

[In Japan] luoghi e uomini si erano per così dire ‘adattati’ all’ordine centrale e la sostituzione del castello nella fabbrica, del palazzo imperiale o feudale nei capannoni produttivi non doveva aver procurato nessun danno nel loro animo praticamente uguale, cioè obbediente e gerarchico, nell’uno e nell’altro caso. (Parise, 1989, vol. 2: 1083)
The outstanding results of Japanese industrial machinery are nothing but the consequences of a strong work ethic and discipline rooted in the traditional structure of the society. According to Parise, such familiarity with modern mass production safeguards the Japanese worker from being affected by what Marx considers the typical condition of the worker in capitalistic societies, alienation. In fact, mass production in Japan is not the mechanical repetition of a process in which the worker as individual is an alienated part, but is rather the perpetuation of a procedure that is rooted in the Japanese craft tradition:

Marco fu colpito dal fatto che l'artista era giunto a scolpire sul legno anche un Budda al giorno, così gli dissero le guide e non poté fare a meno, una volta di più, di considerare che nulla in Giappone era cambiato dai tempi feudali dove non esisteva la produzione in serie: si vede che anche a quei tempi la spinta alla produzione in serie e in qualche modo all'esportazione era non soltanto in nuce ma de facto. (1087)

The final image of Japan as mirror of Italy is represented by the ideal of the equal society, in which the harmonic division of responsibilities among social classes is achieved despite — or rather because of — the absence of ideologies. The social justice discussed as a goal for the future in Italian political debate was already a reality in Japan:

Quei giapponesi, con i loro gradi morali, con i loro "inferiori-superiori" senza alcuna fede né ideologia erano già arrivati a quel dopo dove gli uomini non sono affatto tutti uguali ma ognuno ha il posto che gli spetta. Di questo e di niente altro era fatto "il dopo", quel dopo che nel linguaggio del suo paese viene chiamato "prossimo" e che egli sapeva invece ottenuto con il ricatto dell'invidia di classe, a quanto pareva inesistente nel paese dove si trovava. (1084)
This representation is nothing but the mirror image of the situation in Italy during the economic miracle (the so-called *boom economico*), as perceived by Parise in the novel *Il padrone* (1965). It describes the labor inside a factory in Milan. The protagonist and narrator is a twenty-year-old man who moves to Milan from a small town and begins work in a factory. His enthusiasm and expectations of a better life are soon crushed by the hideous exploitation and selfishness of his boss, whose inhuman behavior causes distress and the end of the protagonist’s dreams, who even agrees to marry a woman because his boss’s wife wants him to do so. The boss’s personality is characterized by individualism and by a language oriented to promoting his egotistic morality. Here is how he responds to his workers when they complain about his tyrannical behavior:

*Sono il padrone, il padrone, il padrone...! Sono stufo di essere il servo dei miei dipendenti, sono stufo di aver a che fare coi furbi, con le volpi, con i ricci, con le donnole della ditta. Non ne posso più, vi caccio via tutti... il vostro comportamento fa schifo, io vi pago ed esigo rispetto. Non è per i soldi, io me ne frego dei soldi, potrei benissimo farne a meno, è il fatto morale che conta. E tutto ciò è immorale, immorale, immorale, avete capito? Purtroppo Dio non c’è per fulminarvi, ma lo farò io se necessario, avete capito? Avete capito? Avete capito?* (Parise 1989, Vol. I, 877)

Unlike Japan, Italy at the end of the seventies is a country where ideologies are the source of terrorism rather than social equality. This is the inheritance of the so-called “Years of Lead,” the European period of sociopolitical turmoil marked by left- and right-wing terrorism, that lasted in Italy from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. The typical Italian attitude, according to Parise, is the way in which social violence, like that of the factory’s owner toward his workers in the novel *Il padrone*, is constantly balanced and legitimized in the name of morality (with an evident reference to Enrico Berlinguer’s famous speech “The moral question,” *La
questione morale, in November 1980). The hypocrisy of the Italian rhetorical appeal to morality, as it is dominant in public as well as private speech, is part of a broader problem related to the absence of patriotic morality: more than 100 years after political unification, Italy is still an individualistic society with no awareness of its glorious aesthetic civilization. Parise’s image of Japan as mirror of Italy derive from these perceptions of a rhetorical, individualistic, and nonpatriotic country.

Morality and aesthetical sensitivity in Japan are intertwined and kept alive by the awareness of an antique civilization. In contrast, Parise’s perception of immorality and patriotic indifference at home are the consequence of a historical gap in the making of Italy as nation. Parise detects in the rising of postwar Italy, the foundation of the Italian Republic, the moment of breakdown in a perceived image of a country radically different in every respect:


Before moving to the conclusion I would like to focus on the way Parise utilizes the concept of race in this book, as evidence of the fact that Fascist notions of

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29 Parise makes another interesting observation on Japanese patriotism by commenting on the heroic suicide of the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima: “Essendo nato e cresciuto nel paese della Politica Marco giudicava pazzo colui che si era suicidato in quel modo, e proprio entro il ministero della difesa, per protestare contro il governo, l’amico Chigusa gli disse invece che la sua memoria era molto rispettata in Giappone perché mostrava comunque un’azione di massimo onore nei confronti del proprio paese” (1070).

30 Parise’s article was published in Corriere della Sera, February 16, 1975.
race were still present in Italian society, despite of the post-war debate on the subject matter.

5. On Race and Culture: A dialogue between Parise and Calvino

*L'eleganza è frigida* is much more than an account of a journey to an imaginary country, a utopian land, by which Parise presents a stern judgment on the social, cultural, and political context of Italy. The boundaries between Japan and Italy include not only culture and religion, but must be extended also to the idea of race. Parise attempts to depict the Japanese race as radically alternative and marks the boundaries by assuming a link between biological differences and behavior. Marco explicitly notes those differences with the expression “A Marco parve di cogliere in quegli sguardi del resto molto belli, e solo per fulminei istanti, la coscienza di una profonda diversità non soltanto culturale ma razziale” (1064). Here is Parise’s outline of Japanese racial identity:

Abituato a generalizzare, perché riteneva che geografia, clima, razza, cultura di un Paese fossero culla e patrimonio comune ai suoi abitanti, Marco provò a definire il carattere base dei giapponesi: si trattava di persone innanzitutto timide e infantili, curiose, paurose, estremamente attente e molto più emotive di tutti gli altri abitanti del mondo.

Con ogni persona che incontrava Marco stabiliva dei piccoli test per fare la prova e mai ne fu contraddetto; confuso qualche volta perché alcuni giapponesi avevano così fortemente assorbito abitudini e modi di pensare (e di parlare) occidentali che le caratteristiche fondamentali e indigene erano andate quasi perse, anche se mai fino in fondo; ma generalmente Marco fu confermato nella sua idea coltivata del resto già da molto tempo, che non soltanto esistono le razze ma esistono appunto geografie, climi e culture che ne conservano la purezza e l'autenticità. I giapponesi erano inoltre quelli che Marco era uso definire “razza pura” in vari sensi e direzioni: sia nella conservazione delle strutture fisiche
comuni, delle abitudini culturali e delle forme in cui esse si mostravano; e questo era dovuto innanzitutto all’assenza quasi totale di incroci con altre razze, come per esempio avveniva nella razza europea e mediterranea; inoltre erano puri perché la loro cultura, come aveva perfezionato e purificato la cultura cinese, così aveva purificato il proprio corpo e la propria mente tenendoli lontani dalle contaminazioni per molti secoli. (1077-1078)

Parise’s discourse on race and culture relies on nationalistic theories of “pure race” and “Japanese spirit” that emerged in the context of postrestoration Japan. In an attempt to lay the foundations for a national consciousness, the new Meiji state set up a propaganda campaign oriented toward spreading a sense of homogeneity and community throughout a heterogeneous population (Japan’s Minorities, 2009: 1). The Meiji restoration aimed to create the image of a nation as an extended family in which the emperor played the role of both the semidivine father to the national community and the head of state (Weiner, 1994: 19). This homogeneous community or family is forged by national characteristics that are the result of a shared genetic base: the definition of Yamato minzoku (Japanese race) regarded culture as embedded in the blood relationship of a group of people.

Parise’s concept of “pure race” is borrowed from this nationalist ideology that establishes a link between culture and genetic elements31 (“I giapponesi erano inoltre quelli che Marco era uso definire ‘razza pura’ in vari sensi e

31 “While acknowledging the diverse origins of the Japanese, later commentators maintained that the family state was itself a reflection of the inherited qualities and capabilities of its people. These inherent and immutable national characteristics, which were the product, though not exclusively, of a shared genetic base, were also the defining feature of the Yamato minzoku, or Japanese race. As distinct from a race defined exclusively in narrow biological terms, the concept of minzoku more closely resembled that of the German volk, which encompassed not only blood relationships, but broader cultural concerns, including the institutional arrangements, religion, language and history of a people” (Weiner, 1994: 19).
direzioni: sia nella conservazione delle strutture fisiche comuni, delle abitudini culturali e delle forme in cui esse si mostravano”). By adopting Meiji’s notion of “pure race”, Parise fails to consider the xenophobic tensions between insiders and outsiders that afflicted contemporary Japan. In fact, beneath the allegedly racial homogeneity, the difficult coexistence of a variety of ethnic groups generates racist behaviors and precludes true unity in the society. Parise does not acknowledge the presence of ethnic clashes in contemporary Japan among the barakumin (indigenous outcast community), island people like the Ainu in the north and Okinawans in the south. In addition, during the time of Parise’s visit Japan’s economic success brought a wave of Japanese from Brazil. Finally, the huge presence of Koreans, Chinese and Westerners must also be considered.

What is even more relevant in this discourse is the statement on the existence of the “Japanese race” itself. For an Italian intellectual in the 1970s, the concept of race was considered almost outdated and inappropriate, as a consequence of the fall of the Fascist government and its anti-Semitic Manifesto of Race (Manifesto della razza, 1938). In an effort to overcome the diffusion of racist theories, as occurred in Germany and Italy during 1930s, Unesco issued “The Race Question” in 1950 in which, among many other remarks, it was suggested that the term “race” be replaced with the more ideologically neutral expression “ethnic groups.” Among the protagonists of the debate, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), one of the founders of ethnology, introduced an innovative way to look at race from the perspective of the culture. In a public lecture delivered at the Unesco in 1971 (published under the title Race et culture in his book Le regard éloigne, 1983), Levi-Strauss considered the way culture influences the gene pool:
Tous les faits que je viens d’évoquer relèvent de la culture ; ils concernent la façon dont certains groupes humains se divisent et se reforment, les modalités que la coutume impose aux individus des deux sexes pour s’unir et se reproduire, la manière prescrite de refuser ou de donner le jour aux enfants et de les élever, le droit, la magie, la religion et la cosmologie. Or, nous avons vu que de façon directe ou indirecte ces facteurs modèlent la sélection naturelle et orientent son cours. Dès lors, les données du problème relatif au rapport entre les notions de races et de cultures se trouvent profondément bouleversées. Pendant tout le 19e siècle et la première moitié du 20e, on s’est demandé si la race influençait la culture et de quelles façons. Après avoir d’abord reconnu que le problème ainsi posé était insoluble, nous nous apercevons maintenant que les choses se passent dans l’autre sens : ce sont les formes de cultures qu’adoptent ici ou là les hommes, leurs façons de vivre telles qu’elles ont préévaluées dans le passé ou prévalent encore dans le présent, qui déterminent, dans une très large mesure, le rythme de leur évolution biologique et son orientation. Loin qu’il faille se demander si la culture est ou non fonction de la race, nous découvrons que la race—où ce que l’on entend généralement par ce terme—est une fonction parmi d’autres de la culture. (Levi-Strauss, 1983 : 35-36)

Rather than giving a definition of race, Levi-Strauss restated the link between race and culture in which the latter is in the foreground and has the power to determine biological evolution. The concept of race is diminished and replaced in its former role by the notion of culture. In turn, the French anthropologist establishes a relativistic idea of culture as a tool to divide and distinguish different groups:

La richesse d’une culture, ou du déroulement d’une de ses phases, n’existe pas à titre de propriété intrinsèque : elle est fonction de la situation où se trouve l’observateur par rapport à elle, du nombre et de la diversité des intérêts qu’il y investit. En empruntant une autre image, on pourrait dire que les cultures ressemblent à des trains qui circulent plus ou moins vite, chacun sur sa voie propre et dans une direction différente. Ceux qui roulent de conserve avec le nôtre nous sont présents de la façon la plus durable ; nous pouvons à loisir observer le type des wagons, la physionomie et la mimique des voyageurs à travers les vitres de nos compartiments respectifs. Mais que, sur une autre voie oblique ou parallèle, un train passe dans l’autre sens et nous n’en apercevons qu’une image confuse et vite disparue, à peine identifiable pour ce qu’elle est, réduite le plus souvent à un brouillage momentané de notre champ visuel, qui ne nous livre aucune information sur l’évènement lui-même et nous irrite seulement parce qu’il interrompt la contemplation placide du
paysage servant de toile de fond à notre rêverie. Or, tout membre d’une
culture en est aussi étroitement solidaire que ce voyageur idéal l’est de
son train. Dès la naissance et — je l’ai dit tout à l’heure — probablement
même avant, les êtres et les choses qui nous entourent montent en chacun
de nous un appareil de références complexes formant système: conduites,
motivations, jugements implicites que, par la suite. L’éducation vient
confirmer par la vue réflexive qu’elle nous propose du devenir historique
de notre civilisation. Nous nous déplaçons littéralement avec ce système
de référence, et les ensembles culturels qui se sont constitués en dehors
de lui ne nous sont perceptibles qu’à travers les déformations qu’il leur
imprime. Il peut même nous rendre incapables de les voir. (30)

By shifting the focus from race to culture, Levi-Strauss makes the reader aware
of the difficulties inherent in the process of meeting another civilization. In fact,
the differences among cultural groups are not merely defined in terms of
biological differences, but rather in terms of what he calls a “reference system”
(système de référence), which includes education, conduct, implicit judgments,
and historical development of a determined society. As with trains that move in
opposite directions, we all move along this reference system; we cannot begin to
properly judge another civilization unless we are aware of this structural
distance.

Parise’s meeting with Japan implies a meeting with the pure Japanese
race. A few years earlier Italo Calvino gave an account of his journey in the
Nippon world, using Levi-Strauss’s idea of culture as the theoretical background
of his representation. Between December 1976 and January 1977, Calvino
published in the newspaper Corriere della Sera a series of article about Palomar’s
adventures in Japan. Some of these articles would be included in the book

Collezioni di sabbia (1984) in the section La forma del tempo.32

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32 In editing these articles in preparation for the book Collezione di sabbia,
Calvino introduces some changes in the form, such as switching from the third
In the first article, titled *Due donne, due volti del Giappone* (*Corriere della Sera*, December 5, 1976), Calvino tells a story of his train trip from Tokyo to Kyoto. At the beginning Calvino expresses his awareness of the travel experience as an encounter between two different “reference systems” (that of the traveler and the other of the country visited), with the inevitable consequence of being exposed to a perception of a difference, a separation from his own culture, rather than experience a meeting with the other:

Calvino then takes his place on the train and describes what is happening in the car where he is seated: a young, cheerful woman is engaged in conversation with an old lady, whose reaction is quite indifferent as the harsh expressions on her face testify. Calvino tries to apply Western interpretative keys in an attempt to decode the meaning of the scene. Here the young lady embodies traditional Japan (“Non ha niente di occidentale, questa ragazza, è un’apparizione d’altri tempi,” 566), while the old woman is a typical expression of the new Japan:

“Nella vecchia signora, invece, quei pochi elementi occidentali, anzi americani —
The young girl seems to shows respect for and devotion to the older woman, such as helping her eat and trying to entertain her graciously even though the woman seems to be indifferent to her attention:

La giovane ora s’è seduta a fianco della signora, e parla e ride. La signora tace, arcigna, non risponde non si volta, guarda fisso davanti a sé. … E la vecchia? Zitta seria, dura. Non è detto che non ascolti: ma è come se stesse accanto alla radio, ricevendo una comunicazione che non implica risposta da parte sua. (570)

Calvino’s attempt to explain the irritating behavior of the old lady is based on another Western interpretative key, specifically the contrast between young and old generations and the subordinated relation of the former to the latter.

Insomma è un’antipatica spaventosa questa vecchia! È un’egoista presuntuosa! È un mostro! … Così in questo momento m’ininfurio dentro di me contro la vecchia dama che mi Pare incarni qualcosa di terribilmente ingiusto. Ma chi si crede d’essere? Ma come può pretendere di meritarsi tante attenzioni? Il mio risentimento per l’alterigia della signora cresce insieme all’ammirazione per la grazia e la letizia e la civiltà… che mi danno la sensazione di uno spreco imperdonabile. A guardare bene, è uno stato d’animo complesso e mescolato quello che mi travaglia in questo momento. C’è una spinta di ribellione mossa dalla solidarietà coi giovani contro l’autorità schiacciante degli anziani, coi sottoposti contro il privilegio dei signori. C’è tutto questo, certo. Ma forse c’è anche altro, un fondo d’invidia, una rabbia che viene dall’identificarmi in qualche modo, con la parte della vecchia signora, la voglia di dirle a denti stretti: “Ma non sai, scema, che da noi in Occidente mai più sarà possibile a nessuno essere servito come sei servita tu? Non sai che in Occidente nessun vecchio sarà mai più trattato con tanta devozione da una giovane?” Ecco che solo rappresentandomi il conflitto come qualcosa che avviene dentro me stesso, posso sperare di penetrarne il segreto, di decifrarlo. Ma sarà poi così? Cosa ne so della vita di questo paese? (570-571)
Through this apparently unimportant episode Calvino successfully conveys the distortions implied in a Western view of a culturally distant country. This short story promotes a metacritical reflection on the “Orientalism” (Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was published in 1978), unveiling the way Western observers implicitly mark their view of the East with an arrogant superiority.

In the view of the narrator the relations between the Eastern and Western world are regulated by patterns of center-periphery or vanguard-backwardness. This is evident when the narrator explains the reason why he is so irritated: he assumes that his own society stands as a vanguard compared to Japanese society. According to his logic, the woman-girl’s relation is an expression of backwardness, as the narrator assumes that future dress in Japan will be equivalent to those presently existing in the Western world. “Ma non sai, scema, che da noi in Occidente mai più sarà possibile a nessuno essere servito come sei servita tu? Non sai che in Occidente nessun vecchio sarà mai più trattato con tanta devozione da una giovane?” Japan, as a referent of Calvino’s discourse, is distanced and posed in a time other than the present. This “denial of coevalness” (Fabian, 1983: 31), that is, the split between the present time of the Western observer and the other time of those who are observed, implies a logic of power and dominion. According to this view, Japan (or the East in general) belongs to a lower stage of an evolutionistic conception of time.

Yet the final questions (“Ma sarà poi così? Cosa ne so della vita di questo paese?”) introduce a cultural gap, an empty space by which the character has the perception of a different dimension, in other words, the murky perception of the Other. These final questions correspond, in the Levi-Strauss image of the train, to
the standpoint of a passenger watching a train running in the opposite direction, who can perceive only a fleeting and barely identifiable image.

Calvino’s story is a narrative expression of Levi-Strauss’s view of culture as the main element of differentiation and identification among cultural groups: each group is part of a reference system, and other systems outside of it are perceived only through the distortions imprinted on them by our own system.33

Instead of culture, Parise still applies the category of race to depict the Nippon society. The genotypes of the Japanese are linked to their personality: their facial expressions, the particular quality of their eyes, are the best ways to explain their shy and curious personality:

La timidezza infantile che si esprimeva soprattutto nei movimenti degli occhi era deliziosa e così anche la curiosità. ... ma timidezza e curiosità avevano quasi sempre la meglio essendo due istinti vitali e primari anche se contrastanti: specialmente nelle donne e nei bambini questi due impulsi apparivano nello sguardo in modo inequivocabile che nessun formalismo avrebbe potuto trattenere. (Parise, 1989, Vol. I: 1079)

What is missing in Parise’s account of Japan is the awareness of the fear of the gab between the Self and the Other, the uncertainty of the cultural distance that, in contrast, conveys a sense of anguish in Calvino’s story. L’eleganza è frigida moves smoothly through the realm of the Japanese nature. The serenity of Parise’s narration is mainly due to his confidence in the accuracy of his

33 Calvino was an eager reader of Levi-Strauss’s books. He also wrote a review of Le regard éloigné in which he expressed his enthusiasm for Levi-Strauss’s theories: “Premesso che né la biologia né l’antropologia fisica riescono a decidere cos’è una razza, mentre l’etnologo può ben dire cos’è una cultura, L.-S. rovescia i termini della questione mettendo in primo piano gli aspetti in cui fatti culturali influiscono sul patrimonio genetico: i rapporti d’allontanamento e d’isolamento tra i villaggi d’una stessa tribù, poi le fusioni secondo complicate regole matrimoniali, permettono una selezione genetica — che si riflette soprattutto nell’immunità alle epidemie — in tempi molto più veloci che quando gli scambi genetici avvengono a caso” (Calvino, 1995, vol. 2: 2068-2069).
judgments, based on his allegedly objective characterizations of the people observed. Expressions like: “caratteristiche inconfondibili dei giapponesi” (1096) are scattered throughout the book. Emphasizing race more than culture allows Parise to avoid the thorny problem of bridging a gap between his own culture and that of the country visited. The interiority of the Japanese soul is appreciated through its external appearance, without posing any questions on the neutrality of the observer’s view.

**Conclusion: Italian self-abasement**

Both in Maraini and in Moravia, the historical comparison between Japan and Italy ended up producing a discourse about Italian shortcomings, since neither of them seems to be convinced that Italy has achieved the status of a modern powerful nation. In the case of Parise, the contrast between Italy and Japan is even sharper since Italy was experiencing weaknesses of its democratic system during the so-called Years of Lead. They all share the opinion that Italy stands in a backward position among Western societies, and this persuasion seems to be nourished by a general inferiority complex. One of the reasons of this lack of enthusiasm must be located in the reference to a mythical “great Italy,” compared to which the current image of the country cannot help but be diminished. This contrast is even more remarkable in times during which Italy completed its postwar transformation into one of the most economically and socially advanced countries of the world. The eventual decline of Fascism did not abolish, among the intellectuals, the political dream that Mussolini’s propaganda
was able to stir up, but now that dream has become the premise on which the perceived current image of “little Italy” is based.
Chapter III

La definizione di Goethe di Venezia come città dei castori laboriosi si riferisce ad un lontano passato di tre secoli fa. Nonostante fossero passati trecento anni, la fama dei Veneziani come lavoratori non era stata dimenticata dai Tedeschi dell’Europa settentrionale. Noi Giapponesi non abbiamo da vergognarci solo per il fatto di essere definiti da una ventina o trentina di anni api operaie. Fra due, trecento anni potrebbero infatti apparire delle persone che che rivaluteranno positivamente tale reputazione. (Nanami Shiono)

Introduction: A turn of perspective

The 2011 version of Italia in Giappone, sponsored by several Italian government institutions and local organizations, featured a series of cultural events in Japan. A variety of exhibits, concerts, film festivals, and conventions were aimed at refashioning the always-glamorous concept of “made in Italy” in the eyes (and wallets) of Nippon consumers and entrepreneurs. In flipping through the pages of the program, it is clear that the Italian location most represented in the entire event is Venice, through her history and art. An exhibit titled Ritratto di Venezia – Mille Anni di Storia offers an appealing tour through

34 “Italia in Giappone” is a biennial initiative by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan. The first meeting in 2001 was marked by a predominant presence of politicians and intellectuals with consistent political ties (Vittorio Sbarbi, for instance; see Le armi delle arti: parlano i protagonisti dell’anno italiano in Giappone, ed. Marino Marin, Milan: Angeli, 2003). Over the years this initiative gained more attention by virtue of playing the card of Italian uniqueness to attract Japanese investments.
the urban space of the city while focusing on her architecture, political institutions, and (dangerous) liaisons with the surrounding waters. The choice of the urban space of Venice over other possible alternatives (why not the splendor of Florence or Rome during the Renaissance, for example?) rests on an undeniable fact that had to have been well known to the organizers: the special place reserved for Venice in Japanese tours of Italy.

After having written extensively about Italians visiting the Far Eastern country, it is now time to turn our attention to Japanese living in Italy. I adopt the Japanese view at this point of the research as a strategy aimed to challenge the Italian stereotypes on the Japanese and Italian society, which they emerged in the previous chapter. By comparing the conclusion of these two chapters I expect to offer a more complex perspective of the relation between continuity and change in the way was perceived in the Italian and Japanese society as well. This new analysis focus on representations of Italy by Japanese who spent an extensive period of time in the peninsula. I am aware that this turn of perspective diverges from orientalism discourse to the more uncharted territory of Occidentalism, as discourse on the West carried on by Eastern observers (Buruma and Margalit). However, I wish to clarify that my change of perspective

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35 “On comprend alors le sérieux d’un jeu qui oppose à la constriction de la richesse capitaliste, à la parcmionie constipée des salaires, la débâcle voluptueuse des billes d’argent, qui, d’un coup, emplissent la main du joueur” (Barthes 43).
is not primarily inspired by a discourse about Western hegemony among Eastern intellectuals, that is, the fact that Asian writers looking at the West often take for granted an implicit superiority of Western civilization. As Georgette Wang puts it: “To the Europeans, knowing their Other also served to assert and ensure the superiority of the Self. But to the Orientals, the superiority of the Other was recognized before the need to know it was felt” (64).

This asymmetric relation of power is conducive to some preliminary observations about the texts I use for this topic. First, unlike the Italians I considered in the previous chapters, the authors I analyze here spent long periods of time in Italy, spoke the language, studied the history, and sometimes even used Italian as the language for their publications. The main writer I discuss here is Nanami Shiono (1937-), whose longstanding permanence in Italy began in 1972 and continues to this day. Therefore, unlike the Italians traveling in the Far East, the Japanese living in Italy are more embedded in the national territory to the extent of eventually becoming citizens. For this reason their Western discourse is enmeshed in a corpus of Western texts that generate a disproportion of power and worldviews between Eastern and Western observers. To give an example: when the Italian journalist and novelist Tiziano Terzani describes the Japanese passion for pachinko (a type of slot machine very popular in Japan), his discourse is clearly motivated by the same approach used by Roland Barthes in L’Empire des Signes, in which he explains the success of this game in terms of capitalist mentality. In addition to the implicit French reference, Terzani mentions the American Japanese scholar Donald Richie, whose friendship had an impact on his interpretation of Nippon society:

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C’è da chiedersi se il *pachinko* non abbia tanto successo perché il giapponese è più a suo agio con una macchina che in compagnia di un altro uomo. Lo scrittore americano Donald Richie, che vive a Tokyo da oltre quarant’anni, sostiene che “il giapponese vede nella macchina del *pachinko* il suo amico segreto” e che gomito a gomito con centinaia di altre persone, con le quali non ha bisogno di parlare, si sente in una sorta di “solitudine comunitaria.” (vol. 2, 775)

On the other hand, as we shall see shortly, Nanami Shiono’s rendering of the Italian Renaissance age is nourished by Jacob Burckhardt’s (1818-1897) *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860). Even though as an outsider Nanami is bestowed with the advantage of having an external critical point of view (as she herself sometimes acknowledges), the lack of non-Western references in her writings constitutes a striking difference when a comparison is made with Orientalist texts.

The other observation about the asymmetric relation between Japanese Occidentalist and Italian Orientalist is that while Italians visiting Japan can rely on a large number of accounts of Japanese society (especially from the Fascism

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37 “Non sorprende che sin dall’opera d’esordio, *Omnatachi*, venga evidenziato il riferimento diretto proprio a *La Civiltà del Rinascimento in Italia* (1860) dello svizzero Jacob Burckhardt (1818-97), l’opera che più di ogni altra ha contribuito a diffondere il termine stesso di ‘Rinascimento’ e a idealizzarlo come modello esemplare di civiltà, e di cui Shiono riprende, oltre che gran parte dei contenuti, la sua stessa *Weltanschauung*. Riprende soprattutto la propensione metodologica, all’epoca di Burckhardt innovativa e celebrata, di ricondurre la ricerca storiografica in contrasto con la tradizione annalistica, all’individuazione e all’isolamento degli elementi costitutivi di un periodo, in modo da metterne in luce il significato universale” (Miyake 149).

38 When she speaks about her new project of writing a history of ancient Rome in fifteen volumes, she mentions her advantage of being distant from Western society and its religious beliefs: “*Romajin no monogatari* dovrebbe diventare la prima storia di Roma scritta da una persona non cristiana. Voglio provare a scrivere da un punto di vista politeista una storia di Roma, scritta finora solo da credenti monoteisti cristiani o ebrei. In fin dei conti non è vero che il Giappone è un paese monoteista?” (Miyake 202).
age on) by Italian visitors, the same cannot be said about Japanese visitors, whose image of Italy was shaped by Western literature (especially the writings of Romantic-Gothic authors such as Horace Walpole and John Webster, the romantic novels of Bulwer-Lytton, or the plays of Shakespeare) and not by direct reports. I focus on the time span between the seventies and the eighties when Italy was slowly becoming an attractive destination for an increasingly wealthy Japanese society, and the number of Japanese living in and writing about Italy was becoming more significant. This period of time is specular to that considered in the previous chapter, which explains why I approach the new material of analysis (both visual and literary) using the same key concept, the relation between tradition and modernity from the Japanese standpoint. Given the fact that Italy and Japan are both growing economies undertaking rapid social, urban, and cultural change, I argue that this accelerated transition must also be a relevant issue from the side of Japanese looking at the peninsula. We shall see how the dialectic between past and present must be contextualized within the ongoing urban revolution in postwar Japan, and the major role that the image of Venice plays in this regard.

1. **The empty city**

During the summer of 1942, in the midst of the Pacific war, a meeting of Japanese scholars and intellectual took place in Tokyo to discuss the dilemma of “how to overcome the modern.” As Ian Buruma and Avishai Maralit have

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pointed out, the struggle against modern civilization, as opposed to ancient
traditional Japan, was directed against Americanism and specifically against the
urban expression of the modern age—the large metropolis:

They were thinking less about modernity in America or Europe than about the style of their own big cities, Tokyo and Osaka: Hollywood movies cafés, dance halls, satirical reviews, radios, newspapers, movie stars, short skirts and automobiles. They hated this new metropolitan civilization because they regarded it as shallow, materialistic, mediocre, rootless, and un-Japanese—that is, unlike the kind of profound, spiritual culture they wished to uphold. (29)

Their anti-Western view—insofar as “modernization” was perceived as a
Western attempt to culturally dominate Japan—was primarily translated into an
antiurban movement. The year 1942 was only the inception of the era of urban revolution:

Whereas before World War II the Japanese had been influenced chiefly by European architectural styles, after the war the main foreign influence was, probably unavoidably, American. ... The Japanese had always lived in small wooden homes, usually incapable of accommodating more than one or two families. Hence the construction of multistory concrete apartment buildings in the postwar period constituted a truly revolutionary development in style for many urban dwellers in Japan. (Varley 330-331)

As the urban space experienced rapid change, the traditional urban landscape was progressively fading away, creating a cultural shock in terms of the visual perception of the past. The contemporary writer Harumi Kimura provides an example of this perception of a discontinuity between past and present as urban discontinuity. When he was asked to write about the topic “We Japanese and the Past,” Kimura told the story of a father (“Mr. A”) who is wavering about the
decision to sell the house of his deceased parents because “it was his ancestral home and the repository of so many childhood memories” (160). He eventually decides to keep the house and offers it to his newly married son. Indeed, “what he intended to present to the couple was the value of continuity and keeping in touch with the past” (160). However, the young couple “had a different set of values” that did not include perpetuating the memories of the past; in the end, they decided to move out and live in a modern flat. This is what is happening in postwar Japan, where urban planning is fluctuating and unsettled and the mark of history is barely regarded as important. This is also one of the major differences with the conservative criteria that have inspired the reconstruction of Europe from the debris of the Second World War. In fact, after having lived extensively in England, Harumi comes to the following conclusion:

There is a great difference between Japan and the UK. In Japan, houses are often destroyed when a generation changes, and are sold for tax payment and for dividing up. As a result there remains only a plot with no buildings on it. In such cases we can hardly remember what buildings stood there yesterday. In Britain, on the other hand, houses, once built, generally stand as they are for hundreds of years. We can even visit a house where Shakespeare used to live. If it is haunted by a ghost, it has even more value. When the British move to a very old house, they give less priority to the value of living comfortably, more to experiencing the past which the house still retains within its walls, even if they may experience some inconvenience in living there. (161)

The desire of Japanese society since your beginning of the Meiji era to catch up with the West and have an American lifestyle is one of the major priorities that affects their decision in choosing their habitation. It is worth observing how this discontinuity with the past is limited to the perception of urban space. As with
Italians coming to Japan, Kimura also notes continuity between past and present in Japan in regard to the value of tradition and ancient rituals:

The Japanese sense of the past in their life is so different from that of the English. The difference concerns the depth of thought in their daily life. Japan is on its way to becoming a welfare state like the UK, but how to take in the sense of the past into daily life seems to be a problem as far as one’s state of mind is concerned. ... [Even] though houses in Japan are continuously being rebuilt, leaving nothing of the past, we Japanese are surrounded by many different aspects of an ancient invisible heritage in our everyday lives. Some people, for example, are interested in Zen, some in tea ceremony, some enjoy going to kabuki. (161-62)

The latter distinction between modernization of urban space and perpetuation of rooted costumes and rituals can be considered an interpretation of Sakuma Shozan’s (1811-1864) slogans “Eastern ethics and Western technology” (toyono dotoku, seiyonogakugei), or “Japanese spirit, Western civilization” (wakonyosai), popular by the middle of the nineteenth century, that expressed Japan’s intention to come to terms with Western imperialism while keeping their traditions as far as morals and art were concerned. In this sense, the massive postwar urban renovation in Japan is nothing but an exterior cosmetic operation to live up to the challenges of Western modernity without endangering the essential spirit of the society.

American urban development was not the only model at this time of modern transformation; Japanese architects looked at Western Europe as well. Under these circumstances, the architecture of Venice came to play a significant role in the reconstruction of Tokyo. As a city built on meandering rivers and canals, Tokyo shared with Venice the identity of a “city of water,” and
comparisons between the two cities were made.\(^{40}\) Thanks to the opportunities to travel abroad that came with the Meiji restoration, Japanese scholars traveled to Europe and Italy, paying special attention to the city of Venice and its urban space. One of these travelers was the architect Tatsuno Ningo (1854-1919), whose journey on the lagoon inspired the design for the private residence of the Japanese tycoon Shibusawa Eiichi in Tokyo:

Tatsuno Kingo si laureò nel Dipartimento di Architettura del Politecnico nel 12\(^{o}\) anno Meiji (1879) e, in seguito, studiò architettura a Londra per quattro anni, sino al 1883. Prima di tornare in Giappone, dal marzo 1882 viaggiò in Francia e in Italia per circa un anno, visitando diversi luoghi con capolavori architettonici che disegnò. Sappiamo che raggiunse l’Italia nel mese di dicembre e si sistemò a Venezia... Durante il suo soggiorno a Venezia di quasi venti giorni nel mese di dicembre del 1882, Tatsuno fu affascinato dall’architettura veneziana di cui osservò in dettaglio la struttura e gli ornamenti. Una esperienza, questa, che ebbe occasione di mettere a frutto quando tornò in Giappone, gli venne affidato l’incarico di progettare la residenza di Shibusawa. (Hidenobu 2008, 95)

Other details can be added to prove that “I giapponesi dell’era Meiji sognassero Venezia.” (Hidenobu 2008, 91); but the story of this fascination for the “capital water city” continued throughout the twentieth century. During the postwar reconstruction an entire quarter of the city was named after Venice and built with the intention of creating a Venetian-like area:

\(^{40}\) It is not my intention to trace the origin of the image of Venice in Tokyo since the time frame of my research is limited to the postwar period. However, I mention in passing some of the most interesting discoveries made by Jinna Hidenobu in his essay: “Nella seconda metà dell’era Meiji... fra i giovani intellettuali giapponesi andò diffondendosi un clima intellettuale tale da pensare a Tokyo come a una città d’acqua paragonabile a Venezia. L’architetto Nakamura Mamoru (1890-1933) laureatosi all’Università Waseda, nel primo anno dell’era Taisho (1912) scrisse un saggio intitolato ‘Venice in Tokyo,’ dove illustrava un ‘progetto di parco sull’acqua’ ed esprimeva la sua fantasiosa idea di creare una Venezia a Tokyo.”
During the 1980s Tokyo’s administration implemented a strategy to stress the image of Tokyo as a city of water. References to the “lagoon city” became even more frequent:

It is more interesting to analyze the reason why the capital of what was intended to become a highly modern technologic country included references to the old Republic of Venice as part of its own spatial identity. Given the fact that the Japanese postwar urban plan was informed by a substantial discontinuity with the past, it is necessary to explain this reference to the civilization of the Renaissance. In particular, the relevance of Venice in Tokyo’s architecture invites an investigation into the role played by this city in the context of the Japanese representation of Italy on the one hand, and in the Japanese national identity itself on the other.

2. Venice calling
The author of the above-quoted passages about Venetian elements in Tokyo’s cityscapes is Hidenobu Jinnai (1947-), a professor of Engineering and Design at Hosei University in Tokyo. His infatuation with Italy began in 1973 when he came to Venice as a recipient of a fellowship sponsored by the Italian government. Because of his contribution to the image of Italy in Japan he received the honor of “Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana.” After studying the landscapes and waterfront spaces of the Italian cities, he set up a new research project on the historical developments of urban space in Tokyo upon his return at the end of the 1970s. Apparently the new project was at odds with the old one:

With my Venetian experience as background, I decided when I returned to Japan that the time had come to survey the vast, chaotic metropolis of Tokyo. The first problem I encountered arose from the difference between a European culture of stones and bricks and a Japanese culture of wood. Whereas most of the buildings in Venice dated back to medieval times, in Tokyo it was all I could do to find a house that was a century old. (1995, 9)

However, for Hidenobu the presence of Venice in Tokyo’s cityscape was an indisputable fact. Looking at the Tokyo’s bay where the seaport is located, Hidenobu was reminded of similarities with the lagoon: “It is all but forgotten today that Tokyo’s low city was once a city equal to Venice in its charms. The beauty of the water’s age was a favorite subject for woodblock print artists beginning with Hiroshige” (1995, 66). Hidenobu’s admiration for Italy must be placed in the context of a general enthusiasm in Japan for the Italian style of life and for the “made in Italy” industry. The 1970s and the ’80s were the decades of the “Italian Renaissance” in Japan, despite the effect of the economic crises and a dark political scenario deeply enmeshed in acts of terrorism and labor strikes.
Hidenobu reflects on the reasons for this success in the introduction of the English/Japanese edition of *Veneto. Italian Life Style Scenario* (1993): “There seems to be no let up in the amount of interest that people have in Italy. This is particularly true in Japan where people are especially interested in Italian design, fashion, and the food of this southern European nation” (6). Beyond the commercial success for products made in Italy, the Japanese, as Hidenobu points out, are interested in the country itself, looking at its style of life:

With the gradual weakening of an industrial society besotted with the pursuit of efficiency and rationalism, people everywhere have now begun to search for some real spiritual wealth and satisfaction in their lives. It seems quite natural therefore that they should once again turn to Italy for such inspiration, such lust for life. (6)

Jinnai believes that the origin of what Japanese consider the “Italian's appealing life” is its variety and multiplicity of its rich culture and tradition, as opposed to the sameness and monotony of the modern life that Japan was embracing during the 1970s. The complexity of the Italian cultural landscape offered an alternative to a society that was taking as its model the American way of life, based on mass production and mass consumption. The fragmentation and decentralization of urban space is for Hidenobu a key element in explaining Italian creativity: “We must not forget, however, that the cities and communities of Italy, enveloped in history and vested with individuality, are the breeding ground of this very particular kind of sensitivity that the people possess, and it is their sense of values that are leading the way” (6). Hidenobu sees a correlation between Japanese postwar urban developments and the fascination with Italy as a country that offers an alternative conception of city life based on human
exchange and interaction between the inhabitants and the historical buildings. Italians living in the city are made part of their past by simply making the historical area of the city a residential area and a center of attraction:

This even amounted to a bitter condemnation of postwar society in Japan, where the city had simply been considered as a place for production and economic activity, and people had only considered how the city could be made more efficient in the interests of high productivity. [On the other hand Italian cities are] theatrical stages on which the people take all the main parts in a continuous drama. The people talk while they walk through the stylish urban settings that seem to have been arranged simply for that purpose, being of such a human scale and surrounded by buildings pregnant with history built during the Middle Ages or during the Renaissance. Then at the heart of these historical settlements vested with such a wealth of genial variation, there are symbolic piazzas overflowing with a sense of freedom and spiritual release. (6-7)

While praising the Italian’s city planners Hidenobu is also thinking about his own country in which he perceives a striking discontinuity in terms of urban planning between the Tokugawa era and the postwar reconstruction: “But that is not to say that Italy is alone in having an urban consciousness. In Japan too, the almost three-hundred-year span of the Edo period was responsible for fostering a distinctive urban culture” (7). Despite the fact that modern Japan seems to have pushed aside the “wisdom and sensibility” of the Edo period “in favor of industry,” a new stream of Japanese city planners are looking at Italy as a model for implementing a continuity between the oldest layers of the city and the new.

While praising the Italian city planners for turning the hearts of their cities into areas of historical interest (the idea of centro storico), Hidenobu reflects that in Japan “there is a tendency for the heart of almost any big city to simply be a place of work, devoid of any homes” (9).
To sum up, what is peculiar to the Japanese interest in Italy during the 1970s (besides the rising interest worldwide for products made in Italy) was the urban space of their major cities at a moment in which Japan’s unrelenting construction agenda was raising legitimate questions about the quality of life in these new metropolitan areas and uncovering contradictions within its ambitious plan of being a modern nation while keeping one foot rooted in its past. However, there is nothing in the writings of Hidenobu to explain why Venice seems to be ranked first in appealing to the Japanese. The following pages will thus be devoted to the Venetian revival in postwar Japan.

3. A city of ghosts

The Japanese attraction for Venice as a visual space of historical buildings living in precarious existence is well represented by the photographic albums of Ikko Narahara. Born in 1931, Narahara discovered his vocation for photography only in 1954 when he began to photograph Gunkan Island in the East China Sea, offshore from Nagasaki. He then spent several years outside Japan traveling in Europe (1962-1965) and the United States (1970-1974), where he produced his most famous photography book *Where Time Has Vanished* (1975). Venice was the subject of three of Narahara’s books: *Arcade of Lights — Piazza San Marco* (1981), *Venice — Nightscapes* (1985), and *Venetian Lights* (1987). Among the many places visited, for Narahara Venice has always been a place to return to on a regular basis:
I did not return to Venice for fifteen years, until 1973. Since then, however, I have visited the city constantly, and I have even come to feel at home there. This mysterious city has become my own. Whenever I land in Venice now I always experience a deep sense of relief at what I feel to be my “return.” The scale of this somewhat surreal and elegant city must match the density of my own heart. (Narahara 1987, 102)

What makes Venice similar to his own homeland is a series of ideologically constructed frameworks aiming to align the two locations on the same footing. First, the idea of “femininity” as a specific signifier of Japanese society is reflected on Venice as well:

As I photographed Venice again, I began to realize a strange thing. Just when I thought Venice had shown me a melancholy look, the next moment it would show me a radiant smile. Venice was exactly like a beautiful woman. In fact, in Italian the city’s name, Venezia, is a feminine noun. Once called “Bride of the Adriatic,” it was the custom for each Doge to drop a ring into the ocean, thereby consummating a symbolic marriage with her. (Narahara 1987, 103)

Moreover, Venice shares with Japan the status of a secluded and separated island whose inhabitants had successfully developed longstanding civilizations, despite the limited available resources: “Both Venice and Japan are small, island nations with few resources that have managed, although at different times, to base their economies on trade” (103). The isolation and separateness from the external world, as Narahara points out, are the bases for the unmistakable Venetian and Japanese cultural and political identities, despite the fact that both civilizations have been influenced by foreign cultures for a series of historical periods (Chinese and Korean for one and Byzantine for the
other).\footnote{In this sense the photographs of Venice continue Narahara’s interest in isolated cultures, which is at the origin of his first photo book: “I am struck by the fact that my first photographic series, 
\textit{Man and His Land} (1956), also concerned an isolated, artificial island — this one in the East China Sea off Kyushu. Although there are obvious differences between an island coal mine and the city of Venice, both shared the important fact of being regions cut off from the rest of the world by water even while they depended on the outside world for their daily provisions. Both were intensively human-centered islands. Perhaps I was drawn to Venice precisely because of a hidden yet abiding interest in this type of situation” (Narahara 1985, 30).} Finally, there is the opposite perception of Japan and Venice as territorial frontiers, as gateways to and from the Orient: “As it was for Venice throughout its history, for me also ‘\textit{Venetian Light}’ is a gateway through which I hope to visit the Orient” (103).

As Japan’s resemblance to Venice is worked out in an array of contrasting or antinomic pairs of frameworks—the geographical contrast of water vs. land; the political and cultural contrast of West vs. East, and finally, the economic conflict of isolation vs. external dependence—Narahara focuses on another oppositional pair in which, he claims, the secret beauty of the city consists: the contrast between life and death. It would actually be more appropriate to define the relation between life and death in Venice as dialectical rather than contrastive insofar as the secret beauty of Venice, as Narahara puts it, consists precisely of the lively presence of the glorious past on the verge of its dissolution: “What strikes the modern visitor is the presence of a strange and mysterious yet easily approached beauty created by the city’s ultimate principle of existence. Venice reveals itself to be maintaining, within an eternal time, both the fossils of the time spent producing this beauty and the transience of the fiction of this beauty moments before its collapse” (Narahara 1985, 29). The “stones of Venice” reflect a light that speaks about the memory of the glorious
republic, but they are the repository of a dead memory, eternal insofar as it is
dead, like the life of a body in the otherworld:

Venice holds certain features in common with paradise. Paradise is
usually imagined to be a cohabitation of eternal life with eternal death;
and Venice, too, when viewed carefully from angles for which it has not
been rehearsed, reveals itself to contain not only the joy of living but also
the delicate sweetness of death. .... Secretly, within this shining darkness,
Venice came to take on a new life. Banishing its daylight human forms,
Venice returned after four hundred years and laid itself down in that
darkness held within it a strange yet vigorous luminance neither of
daylight nor of night. (Narahara 1985, 29-30)

Narahara views Venice as though through the lens of a camera, since what
is the eternal light of Venice if not a snapshot of the city torn from the stream of
time? Where Time has Stopped (1967) is the title of Narahara’s photography book
of Europe, but it is also a concise definition of his reflection on photography. In
the introduction of the above-mentioned book he explains the title with the
following words: “Are the dead those who have merely passed out of sight? If so,
aren’t photographs records of the moment that have gone? The dead, like
prophets, remind us of the pleasures of love and life” (2002, 206).42 As

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42 For the sake of clarity it is worth quoting the entire passage: “It was early
autumn when I visited Paris. In the Luxemburg Park lovers walked silently, arm
in arm, on the boulevard lined by chestnut trees, their heavy leaves turning
yellow; lovers in their twenties were followed by men and women in their
thirties who in turn were followed by couples in their fifties. The lovers, young
and old, walking arm in arm, appeared and then disappeared as if they were a
flow of similar geometric figures. I thought I was seeing the whole cycle of man’s
life within less than ten minutes. And I thought of the movement of death that
would come after they walked away. As the dead leaves fell to the ground, my
thoughts inevitably came to this: man fulfills his life by dying, and death is an
important element of life. ... At that moment I could believe that death was a
mere temporary form of existence. The lovers who appeared and disappeared in
silence seemed outside time. It was as if the figures of photographs had drawn
near me for a moment and then retreated into their own motionless eternity.
Such a great moment of revival I called ‘the moment when time has stopped.’ It
photographs are nothing but the record of past events, so Venice is also seen as the eternal memory of what it used to be rather than the present modern city.

It is not hard to recall the link between past and present already noted in Jinnai Hidenobu’s gaze on Italian urban space. Even if in a different way, Narahara is drawn by the same pattern of continuity between past and present. The main difference is a matter of point of view: in Hidenobu’s case the present reconstruction of the Italian cityscape guarantees this continuity; in Narahara’s case the continuity lies in the glorious past that eternally reverberates in the present, as in a photograph.

However, to conclude that Narahara’s gaze on Venice is peculiarly Japanese would perhaps be a little too naïve. In Narahara’s discourse on Venice one cannot help but detect some Western influence hovering behind his words. The association between Venice and death, for instance, directly brings to mind the well-known Thomas Mann’s novella Der Tod in Venedig (1912), in which Venice is no longer a noble republic but, after the Campoformio Treaty, the stage of a physical (the plague) and moral (Aschenbach’s obsession for a young boy) corruption. Moreover, the image of Venice as an instant photo eternally present insofar as it is crystalized in its past reminds of Roland Barthes’s theory of photography in La Chambre Claire (1980). As Venice, according to Narahara, is associated to death, so is photography. In this respect the Japanese photographer shares some reflections on the nature and the essence of photography with the French philosopher:

> was a moment pregnant with uncertain premonition; neither ‘sorrow’ nor ‘loneliness’ was the proper word to describe that moment” (Narahara 2002, 206).
Tous ces jeunes photographes qui s’agitent dans le monde, se vouant à la capture de l’actualité, ne savent pas qu’ils sont des agents de la Mort. C’est la façon dont notre temps assume la Mort : sous l’alibi dénégateur de l’éperdument vivant, dont le Photographe est en quelque sorte le professionnel. (Barthes 1980, 143)

What is at stake in Narahara’s photographic view of the “city of water” is what Barthes defines as “ce qui a été” (that-has-been) as the necessary object of photography.43 Narahara deals with the idea of photography as ratification of what has been and, as such, can no longer be modified. What is specifically “Japanese” to me is the fact that time’s immobilization, the absence of cars (“Just as the water once protected Venice from the invasions of alien armies, it now protects the city from the orders of automobiles that have conquered almost every other part of the globe,” Narahara 1985, 30), the stillness of the urban space are all aspects that draw Ikko Narahara to the “Bride of the Adriatic.” The way Venice has been, as an open-sky museum, drives Narahara’s camera, as a result of his attraction for an image of the past that is still preserved. Narahara belongs to the generation that experienced the atomic bomb:

On this day I looked up at the sky and saw not a single cloud of bombers, not even a small wisp. The war sky had vanished. In fact, there was nothing in the sky at all. It looked exactly like a vacuum. I had grown up knowing nothing but war, and I had never seen anything like it. The sky had a strange mysterious look to it. As it turned out, the vacuum-like sky was the starting point for the rest of my life. Like a black hole, the completely empty void of the sky began to pull me and everything around me toward it. Secretly hiding within itself an intensely hot flame. ... I began to use my own thoughts to fill in the complete void of the sky I saw

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43 “Le Photographie ne dit pas (forcément) ce qui n’est plus, mais seulement et à coup sûr, ce qui a été. Cette subtilité est décisive. Devant une photo, la conscience ne prend pas nécessairement la voie nostalgique du souvenir (combien de photographies sont hors du temps individuel), mais pour toute photo existant au monde, la voie de la certitude : l’essence de la Photographie est de ratifier ce qu’elle représente” (Barthes 1980, 133).
on the day the war was ended. At one such moment, as I gazed at the gutted ruins of a munitions factory, *I began to take photographs.*

(Narahara 2002, 211, my emphasis)

At the origin of Narahara’s experience as photographer there is a vacuum, the emptiness and debris of the nuclear bomb. This perceived historical and spiritual fracture between the past and the wreckage of the present is translated into Narahara’s wonder for the eternal light of Venice.

4. What Japan can learn from Machiavelli: Nanami Shiono and the Venetian Renaissance

So far we have considered the works of Japanese who spent a fair number of years in Italy, during which they developed solid bonds with the local culture. It is now time to introduce an exceptional, probably unique, case of a Japanese intellectual who decided to make Italy her new home country, but without giving up her identity as a Japanese writer. Nanami Shiono (1937-) moved to Italy in 1972, living first in Florence and then, since 1993, in Rome. Her first journey to the new country was in 1963 upon her graduation with a major in philosophy from the prestigious Gakushūin Daigaku University in Tokyo. In 1968 she published her first book in Japan on the Italian Renaissance: *Rumenansu no Omna-tachi (Women of the Renaissance)*, followed, two years later, by *Chezare Borujia arui wa yūganaru reikoku (Cesare Borgia, the Elegant Tyrant).*

The work that made Nanami a best-selling author and a popular national figure was the monumental enterprise of *Roma-jin no Monogatari (Stories of the Romans).* Between 1992 and 2006 Shiono published one volume of the Roman
saga each year, a total of fifteen volumes, carrying out her plan with an extraordinary sense of discipline and coherency. Without counting *Roma-jin no Monogatari*, Shiono sold over four million copies of her works in Japan (Vienna 243), but an accurate account of her sales should at least include Korea, where the translation of the *Roma-jin no Monogatari* was a huge editorial success. As a novelist and historian Nanami Shiono focused primarily on Italian history in the context of the Mediterranean and especially during the Renaissance. The latter work concentrates on the Roman Empire on one hand, but also on contemporary Japan and its international affairs, placing her in a new role as an intellectual engaged with the destiny of her native country. As a result of her commitment to introduce Italian history and culture to Japan, the Italian government awarded Nanami Shiono with the honor of “Grande ufficiale” in 2002. Even though her choice of writing exclusively in Japanese made Nanami Shiono an author mostly unknown among Italian readers, her name is well regarded among Italian artists and intellectuals, especially in Rome. An example of her discreet role in Italian culture was the recent 2011 *Italia in Giappone*, in which Nanami talked about her friendship with the deceased Italian director Mario Monicelli.

Nanami’s approach to the Renaissance can be classified according to two different perspectives: a biographical approach (the biographies of the most famous historical characters as expressions of the spirit of the age), and an urban approach (the history of a city or of a nation as an expression of the national

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44 “Per quindici anni Shiono ha pubblicato *Rōmajin no monogatari* al ritmo di un volume l’anno, impegno che ha rispettato con eccezionale disciplina e ripartendo le attività connesse con metodicità da maratoneta: da gennaio ad aprile si è dedicata alla ricerca e all’analisi delle fonti, da maggio ad agosto ha svolto una prima stesura del testo, da settembre a novembre ha studiato la realizzazione di tavole e appendici, mentre il mese di dicembre è stato dedicato alla revisione finale del manoscritto” (Vienna 244-45).
spirit. For the former perspective, Shiono wrote a series of biographies on selected characters that fit her view of the Renaissance as an age dominated by the contrasting elements of rationality and passion: Lucrezia Borgia, Catherine Sforza, Isabella d'Este, Catherine Cornaro in *Rumenansu no Omna-tachi* (Women of the Renaissance, 1968); the above-mentioned biography on Cesare Borgia Duke of Valentinois, 1970; and Nicolo Machiavelli in *Wagatomo Machiavelli* (My Friend Machiavelli, 1987). For the second perspective Nanami Shiono wrote a history of Venice, *Umi no miyako no monogatari* (Story of the City of the Sea, 1980-1981). Although we would expect a book on Florence to express the spirit of the Renaissance, Nanami Shiono chooses Venice for a specific reason:

Da circa cinque anni, da quando ho iniziato a raccogliere del materiale i maniera seria [su Venezia], mi capita spesso che dei conoscenti italiani mi chiedano:

“Perché scrivi una storia della Repubblica di Venezia, e non una su Firenze?”

Mi pongono questa domanda perché probabilmente anche fra gli stranieri è molto più conosciuta la Repubblica di Firenze, il fiore [*hana*] della civiltà rinascimentale che ha dato i natali a Dante, Leonardo o Michelangelo. A ciò, pur mormorando dentro di me che io scrivo piuttosto dell’essenza [*mi*] della civiltà rinascimentale, per essere sintetica ho sempre risposto:

“Perché non esiste una nazione [come Venezia] che è sopravvissuta per così tanto tempo, senza cambiare la propria essenza nazionale [*kokutai*].”

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45 In her book about Venetian history, Nanami points out that “la costruzione di una nazione è il riflesso della personalità del popolo di quella nazione” (Nanami Shiono, *Story of the City of the Sea*, qtd. in Miyake160).

46 “L’equilibrio del Rinascimento italiano, ovvero la convivenza esplicita, ma anche sentimentale e sensuale tra spirito e carne, tra bene e male. [...] In altre parole, l’essenza del Rinascimento italiano risiede nel freddo spirito razionale nell’anima audace e irriverente, non imprigionabili dentro il guscio angusto della spirito [cristiano]. // L’equilibrio sensuale e sensuale è fondato su questi due elementi. Se non si percepisce questo, risulta forse impossibile comprendere lo stato d’animo del Rinascimento italiano (Nanami Shiono, Women of the Renaissance, qtd. in Miyake 159).
Ascesa e declino sono il principio della storia. Fino ad oggi, è un principio della storia nei confronti del quale non vi è mai stata nemmeno un'eccezione.47 (Umi no miyako no monogatari, qtd. in Miyake 161)

Venice is her first choice because of singular individualities that better express the spirit of the time. For those characteristics Nanami looks elsewhere: the Medici Signoria in the case of Machiavelli, or the Rome of Cesare Borgia. As with Jinnai Hidenobu and Ikko Narahara, what draws Nanami Shiono to Venice is the city itself, its civilization, history, and urban space. Given these commonalities between Nanami Shiono and other Japanese who visited Italy I concentrate here on the representation of Venice in Shiono’s writing, paying special attention to the possible reflections of this narration on her Japanese national identity.

It is obvious that Hidenobu and Narahara were interested in the “body” of Venice, its visual image (since the former is an architect and the latter a photographer), but the fact that a historian like Nanami Shiono also adopts the urban space as a perspective for introducing Venice suggests some consideration of the role of the spatiality of the city of canals in the Japanese culture:

In questa sede, per quanto riguarda la costruzione di Venezia, vorrei porre l’attenzione sull’aspetto edilizio. Tra l’altro, è un aspetto a cui nei

47 We should not forget, as we have already seen in the case of Narahara, that images of Venice are often filtered by texts of Western authors, in particular Goethe and his *Italienische Reise* (1786-1788) in the case of Venice. In fact, Shiono herself does not hesitate to mention Goethe in more than one passage, especially when she explains the exceptionality of Venice in the context of Italian cities during the Renaissance: “[Goethe] ‘Tutto ciò che mi circonda è pieno di nobiltà. Si tratta di un’opera meritevole della più grande riverenza, nata dallo sforzo congiunto di tali persone. Questo splendido monumento commemorativo non è rivolto ad un unico sovrano. È il monumento commemorativo di un intero popolo.’ In effetti, Venezia è il frutto dello sforzo di tutto il popolo della repubblica. Non conosco altra nazione come la Repubblica di Venezia alla quale si addica un tale carattere anti-eroico. Should this be translated into English? (Nanami Shiono, *Umi no miyako no monogatari*, qtd. in Miyake 162).
testi scritti dagli storici viene accennato in modo molto sommario. Per quanto più importanti possano essere le spiegazioni dell’economia politica, della struttura sociale e delle guerre, non riesco a pensare che siano sufficienti. (Shiono, qtd. in Miyake 163)

Shiono successfully places Venice at the center of the book by turning herself into the extradiegetic narrator who walks the canals, bridges, squares, and narrow streets. The all-encompassing image of the city, inclusive of people and the cityscape, is what focuses her attention. The Republic of Venice is also a protagonist of the Mediterranean trilogy, Nanami’s three historical novels on three epic battles between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian European army. Focusing on the “Queen of the Adriatic” at the apex of her splendor emphasizes the nature of her perceived Venetian appeal.

5. The Mediterranean trilogy

During the 1980s Nanami Shiono authored three novels aimed at introducing Japanese readers to three key battles that contributed to shaping the geopolitical map of early modern Europe. The East Mediterranean trilogy is composed of *Kosutantinōpuru no hanraku* (The Fall of Costantinople, 1983); *Rōdosutōkōbōki* (The Siege of Rhodes, 1985); and *Lepanto no senki* (The Battle of Lepanto, 1987).

Between 2005 and 2007, probably in an attempt to catch the wave of Islamophobia subsequent to the 9/11 attack in New York, the trilogy about the battle between the Islam and Christendom was translated and introduced in America by the publisher Vertical. These three novels are the only publications by Nanami Shiono in a language other than Japanese to date. The events are narrated from the perspective of the Western troops, although the Muslim army
is not necessarily depicted as the “evil” to defeat. The overall trajectories of the three novels form a narration that begins with a traumatic defeat, the symbolic end of the Roman empire (The Fall of Constantinople), continue by showing the increasing threat represented by the Asian enemy (The Siege of Rhodes), and lead to the final victory of the European alliance (The Battle of Lepanto). By narrating stories of battles and clashes of civilizations, Nanami reveals a major interest in the political aspects of the Renaissance and the struggle for power over the production of liberal arts (Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia rather than Michelangelo or Leonardo). The narration also reveals her historiographical perspective, which includes the choice of paramount events and major protagonists to express the spirit of the age. The essence of the Renaissance is what led Nanami Shiono to study Machiavelli (rationality) and Cesare Borgia (passion and immorality), and to show how those contrasting forces of realism and irrationality are both influential elements in the determination of such historical events. In other words, Nanami Shiono borrows from Burckhardt the iconic image of the Renaissance leader as a ruthless, rational man, beyond any principle of good and evil:

L’equilibrio del Rinascimento italiano, ovvero la convivenza esplicita, ma anche sentimentale e sensuale tra spirito e carne, tra bene e male, [...] In altre parole, l’essenza del Rinascimento italiano risiede nel freddo spirito razionale e nell’anima audace e irriverente, non imprigionabili dentro il guscio angusto dello spiritualismo [cristiano].

L’equilibrio sentimentale e sensuale è fondato su questi due elementi. Se non si percepisce questo, risulta forse impossibile comprendere lo stato d’animo del Rinascimento italiano (Shiono, qtd. in Miyake 159)
The historical novels carry out the task of making those elements real by adopting a principle of mimesis in which abstract synthesis is made incarnate by concrete human beings who face real challenges. In this sense, throughout the three novels the Republic of Venice is portrayed as an example of Machiavellian rationality, based on political skill and capacity for employing the principles of the so-called arte della Guerra. These are the virtues that spark interest in the Renaissance age for Nanami, with particular regard for Venice as a city that best put these positive values to work during the golden period of her existence. Needless to say, this particular period of the Italian story is of special interest to her since it is an expression of a lay culture, no longer tied to religious influence, as she herself underlines in The Fall of Constantinople:

These visits to Italy, however, had brought about a fundamental change in his thinking. In Venice, in Ferrara, in the “City of Flowers,” Florence, Isidore [a Catholic Cardinal and Papal envoy] was able to sense, feel and have his eyes pried open by the new intellectual movement that would later come to be called the Renaissance. There was no trace in this in Byzantine civilization, where religion regulated every last aspect of life and therefore tended to stifle the unhindered expression of human vitality. Italians respected Byzantine civilization and vied with one another to emulate certain of its aspects, but only those they found agreeable — all else they ignored. Those scholars who had forsaken Greece in favor of Italy had done so because, in Italy, they were surrounded by people who took a genuine interest in their work; life there was far more energizing than in Constantinople. (Shiono 2005, 38)

Keeping in mind those elements that triggered Nanami Shiono’s passion for the Italian Renaissance—rationality, political wisdom, warfare ability, and godless humanism—let us see how they fit in the representation of Venice. Shiono

48 When I refer to a “godless humanism” I do not mean to speak in general about the Renaissance but to a specific stream of thought that is more materialistic, as an alternative to the more spiritual or platonic Renaissance that developed in
emphasizes that during the battle of Constantinople the diplomatic skills of the Venetian Republic were not inspired by the idealistic principle of fighting for the sake of the Catholic faith against the infidels, but they were rather stirred by the rational awareness of being in deep waters, which required the Republic to take cautious action in order to guarantee its survival:

Since the Venetians had no qualms about developing economic ties with followers of other religions they were often considered unscrupulous and materialistic. This criticism was somewhat justified since the Muslims had made quite clear their intention to invade Christian lands. ...During the siege of Constantinople in 1453, the Venetian settlement in that city had accepted the Byzantine Emperor's request to help defend against the Turkish assault. The Venetians had fought openly under the Venetian flag. Nevertheless, immediately after the fall of Constantinople and the consequent demolition of the Byzantine Empire, Venice sent a special envoy to the new Turkish ruler of the city in the hopes of reestablishing a Venetian settlement to renew commercial ties. ... The Republic of Venice fully exploited this fact in its dealings with the Pope and the rest of Christendom, while simultaneously making every effort to reestablish commercial ties with the infidel Turks. Had the Venetian settlement in Constantinople taken the same ambivalent attitude as that of the Genoese settlement, the republic never would have been able to walk this tightrope. Indeed, Venice reopened trade relations with the Turks long before Genoa. (Shiono 2006, 74-75)

As a Machiavellian prince, Venice is praised by Nanami Shiono for the rationality of her strategies, which included awareness of the limits of human actions against what Machiavelli calls Fortuna (which in this case meant the inevitable loss of Constantinople), regardless of the amorality and the political infidelity implied. In the novel The Battle of Lepanto, Nanami Shiono draws a clear dividing line between “the fanatical Pius V” (62) and the Catholic movement of the Florence at the Accademia Platonica. It is obvious that Nanami Shiono’s interest in the Renaissance does not include intellectuals like Marsilio Ficino and Agnolo Poliziano.
Counter-Reformation on one hand, and the Italian cultural environment, with particular reference to Venice, on the other:

Many people—particularly the Italians, who traditionally held reason in high regard—feared and distrusted Pius V. They worried that the Vatican might turn into an inquisition tribunal. So far, however, the Pope had been kept busy enough criticizing monarchs for insufficient fidelity to the Church. In Italy, where tolerance still reigned, issues were resolved without such inhuman atrocities as burnings at the stake. Such cruel tortures were typical during the Inquisition and had wreaked havoc in other European countries.

There was probably no one less sympathetic to the Venetian Republic, the most tolerant polity in Europe at the time in terms of freedom of religion and speech, than Pius V. The republic needed Christian allies, however. (Shiono 2007, 62)

Venice was not only the quintessential expression of Shiono’s interpretation of the Renaissance because of the presence of a liberal and lay society, but also for the high level of technical expertise in building construction: “Venice’s castle-building technology was considered the state of the art, and Germany, France and Spain were enthusiastically recruiting Venetian engineers” (2006, 89).

This introduction of Venice to the Japanese audience of the 1980s as the finest expression of a pragmatic, rational, and lay civilization is not devoid of an ideologically charged message to the author’s native country. The Republic of Venice represents an ideal example of the rising Japan in its effort to affirm its own pragmatic, rational, and polytheistic view against monotheistic, idealistic, and irrational Western societies. In the Roman cycle the references to contemporary Japan would be even more explicit than in the Renaissance cycle. However, here and there one can detect more or less explicit comparisons
between Venice and Japan as the two most advanced polities of their age in struggle with a potentially explosive international scenario.\textsuperscript{49}

For a portrait of Japan as the new rational civilization we need to look at a Shiono's article “Italia ga ikinagaraeru to shitara. Komunizumu ni shiro fascistumu ni shiro Italiaijin no kokoro wa irekaerarenai” (If Italy could survive: Neither with Communism nor with Fascism is it possible to change the soul of the Italians). The article was published in 1975 in Bungei Shunju, one of the most prestigious journals in Japan. The author introduces herself as one of the Japanese living in Italy, and offers to speak on their behalf. The “foreign-Japanese” are identified with the folk of “international rationality” who are helpless in trying to decode the illogical character of the Italian mind. This intimate connection between the Italian Renaissance and contemporary Japan can be read as an attempt to find a lesson to learn for the land of the Rising Sun, but also as a reduction of Italy’s status of a “museum nation,” that is, a country worth visiting exclusively for the glory of its own past, while the present is dismissed as picturesque and cheerfully chaotic at best. With the spirit of the Italian Renaissance extolled as a universal value to the extent of identifying the roots of Japanese society, Nanami Shiono looks down at the grotesque social landscape of Italy during the 1970s. Her paeans to the Republic of Venice cast a shadow on government institutions in postwar Italy.

\textsuperscript{49} In a review of Rōmajin the Japanese author Gotōda Masaharu notes the references to contemporary Japan in Shiono’s writings on Western history: “Un’altra grande fonte di fascino delle opere storiche di Shiono, è che nonostante si occupino di storia, introducono sempre il Giappone contemporaneo nel nostro campo visivo. Non ci sono molti riferimenti diretti sul piano testuale al Giappone contemporaneo, ma Shiono scrive in modo tale da far intendere al lettore di avere in testa la strada che deve prendere il nostro paese” (qtd. in Miyake 207).
6. Back to the present

As a foreigner determined to make Italy her new home, Nanami Shiono is also a thrilled and painstaking observer of her new country and does not miss any opportunity to share her impressions with her fellow Japanese left behind. Her articles on contemporary Italy were collected in the volume *Italia kara no tegami* (*Letters from Italy*), first published in 1972, a time when she was still a newcomer to Italy. When reading those pages it seems that Machiavelli has bequeathed his teachings to Japan, while he is considered an exotic foreigner in the land where he was born. Italians are described as irrational and chaotic, like the traffic on the streets and the hysterical debates in the Parliament. The efficiency and the technical skills of the celebrated Venetian engineer are now overshadowed by declining and moribund cityscapes. It appears that the Republic of Venice finally decided to move to the Far East, while the present city stands as a reminder of the decadent portrait of the lagoon by Thomas Mann:

Ho aperto le finestre che danno sulla veranda; volevo guardare le navi che arrivano dal Mediterraneo. Invece, ho visto solo una gondola posata sulla sabbia del fondo marino. Una gondola nera sopra la sabbia bianca. Sembrava proprio la tomba di qualcuno.

Vengo toccata da un vento freddo e apro gli occhi. È stato un sogno. Eppure ero tanto triste da essere vicina alle lacrime e ho aperto la finestra. Sotto ai miei occhi c’era il Canal Grande attraversato da una nave piena di gente e mi sono finalmente sentita sollevata. Alla finestra di un edificio sulla parte opposta del canale si vede la figura di una donna che versa l’acqua di un vaso nel canale.

Tuttavia anche in questo momento, Venezia sprofonda verso il fondo del mare. Anche se di poco, ma continua a sprofondare innegabilmente. Ormai non si può più abitare al piano terra. I gradini di pietra che una volta scendevano verso l’acqua, hanno la superficie sepolta
da muschio verde e per lo più sommersa. Le onde risciacquano senza tregua gli ingressi degli edifici.
Venezia, la città che sprofonda. Venezia, la città che muore.
(Shiono, qtd. in Miyake 170)

The image of Rome is similar to the international, vibrant city featured by Fellini in La dolce vita (1960); it is not the city of Via Veneto but is closer to its scruffy, premodern outskirts. In this image of Rome Fellini's Notti di Cabiria (1957) seems to play an active role, since the metaphor of Rome as an optimistic prostitute reminds us of the vitality of Giulietta Masina and her life in a decadent Roman sprawl:

Roma mi pare una prostituta indistruttibile. Una bella prostituta che non è resa schiava dall’uomo che la mantiene, ma che per conto proprio non sa produrre, facendo affidamento ai propri sforzi. Una donna ormai avanti negli anni, ma che, pensando al futuro, è indifferente al risparmio e a un programma di mantenimento. Una donna radicalmente ottimista, che non si preoccupa di morire in mezzo ai campi. Roma è una città che possiede il fascino di questo tipo di donne libere, in grado di ammaliare eternamente il cuore dell'uomo. (Shiono, qtd. in Miyake 170-71)

As the Italian trip heads toward the southern regions of the peninsula, emphasis is repeatedly placed on the irrationality of Italians, the lack of government leadership (especially in the paragraph on the Sicilian Mafia), and the absence of ideologies oriented to shaping the future, while the present is dominated by a day-to-day mentality. From the standpoint of a foreigner coming from an allegedly hyperrational country, a rising, state-of-the-art technological nation, the perceived odd Italians are the recipients of a benevolent and amused gaze, especially in the case of the representation of Naples. Here the reduction of the Italians to the image of entertaining actors in a comedy plays well with the ironic
admiration of the author for the Neapolitans’ jiggery-pokery skills (l’arte dell’imbroglio), or the lively cheerful atmosphere of the Mercato dei ladri:

Dalla stretta lastricata e in salita non si riusciva quasi più a scorgere il cielo, tanti erano i panni stesi ad asciugare sui fili attaccati da una finestra all’altra di entrambi i lati. Nonostante questo, il sole dell’Europa meridionale filtrava attraverso i panni e riversava i suoi raggi abbondanti. Delle donne grasse urlavano a tutta voce, chiacchierando con la dirimpettaia della finestra di fronte. Di sotto una folla di bambini che correvano, tanto numerosi da chiedersi come mai ce ne fossero così tanti. Dall’aspetto erano poveri, ma dei bambini così vivaci e appassionati. Non se ne vedono probabilmente in nessun altro luogo in Europa. I bambini di Napoli sono i più naturali, birichini e monelli di tutto il mondo. (Shiono, qtd. in Miyake 175)

As Japan is the setting of a complex integration between Eastern and Western ideologies, through Nanami Shiono’s eyes Naples becomes an exotic location where ideological clashes are suspended and Neapolitans are depicted as idle, carefree spirits with no intellectual ambitions whatsoever: “Al napoletano le ideologie al cospetto di un sole splendente e di un mare cobalto, oppure confrontate con un buon piatto di spaghetti, sembreranno sbiadite” (Shiono, qtd. in Miyake 175-76). The fast pace of Japanese society, the focus on the future, and the ensuing anxiety over time and efficiency are some of the reasons why she admires the Neapolitans for being so flexible about the issue of punctuality as well as oblivious to notions like productivity and work ethic.

Contemporary Italy is thus described at best as an entertaining society and the ideal place for a relaxing vacation; on the other hand, the Italian government is deprived of its place in the context of modern Western countries. In fact, as Toshio Miyake points out, when Nanami Shiono addresses her readers she uses the collective perspective of “we the foreigners” (wareware gaikokujin),
who are also identified with the alleged “international rationality” as opposed to the Italian “illogic mind” (Miyake 177-78). Since the word *gaikokujin* means not only “foreigner” but also “Western foreigner,” there is enough evidence to conclude that Nanami Shiono includes Japan in modern Western nations while dismissing Italy as the Other from the West. By excluding Italy from the driving forces of the Western world, Nanami Shiono reflects a theoretical view of Europe coined by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French philosophers like Montesquieu and Madame De Staël (Dainotto). Montesquieu’s climatology and Madame De Staël’s distinction of literature of the north from that of the south are milestone works in defining a “modern European identity.” In the words of Roberto Dainotto who outlined this story, “a modern European identity... begins when the non-Europe is internalized — when the south, indeed, becomes the sufficient and indispensable internal Other: Europe, but also the negative part of it” (4). By describing its backwardness and irrationality, Shiono includes Italy in what De Staël considered the negative south, living at the margin of a theoretical idea of Europe. At the same time, by hinting at Japan as the society that inherited the Italian spirit of the Renaissance, Shiono sets the Western foundation of Japan and claims a legitimate role for her country in the Euro-American pattern of civilization.

7. The past in the present

In the Japan of the economic miracle period (1970s-1980s), the discontinuity between the codependent ideas of “tradition” and “modernity” was mainly a matter of urban space. While Western visitors praised Japanese culture
for its capacity for being open to the West while keeping an Eastern foundation, the Japanese visiting Italy (and Europe) contemplated with nostalgia the ancient European architecture and lamented the Japanese lack of an urban plan inspired by historic preservation. Within this perception of Italy as a nation identified by its past, existing only as an open-sky museum of its ancient civilizations, a particular, specific interest for Venice stands out. The deep influence of German literature in Japan may help to explain the infatuation for the classic and pagan Venice (Goethe), even in its decadent garment (Thomas Mann). Of course, the similitudes with Japan’s history and civilization must also be taken into account: Japanese observers are fascinated by the lagoon as a physical border that separates Venice from the rest of the world, as well as the ocean that separated Japan from the Asian continent for many centuries. At the same time, Venice and Japan share the geographical position of being gateways between the East and West, from opposite directions; their cultures have been historically shaped by these antithetical civilizations. But deep down, in the writings of Nanami Shiono the Republic of Venice represents the paradigm of modern Japan insofar as it represents the ideal example of a rational culture that has been able to translate its humanistic knowledge into a military and economic dominion. By setting a parallel between the Republic of Venice and contemporary Japan, Shiono hints at a nationalistic plan for her country that includes the inheritance of Venetian culture and civilization as a necessary step to claiming a Western identity and a consequent right to compete as a peer with other world powers in the international contest for economic leadership.

In this process of narration of the past and remaking of national identities, the current Italian republic of the 1970s and 1980s is mostly ignored
in its quest to become a modern nation. The so-called Italian economic boom of the 1960s is irrelevant in Nanami Shiono’s accounts of her experiences in Italy. It may be logical to conclude that Shiono is orientalizing the Other Italian by deploying in her portrait the most trite commonplaces about Italy. But Said’s theory of Orientalism as a strategy to represent the Other by using premade Western ideas of the Orient does not apply in this case. While in the orientalist discourse the Other does not have the agency of the word and his/her point of view is not represented, we have already seen in the previous chapter how Italian intellectuals reflect on the image of the Italian republic and reach conclusions that are not too different from those we find in Nanami Shiono’s *Letters from Italy*. In one case Italy is seen as an exotic country, a backward society afflicted by corruption and inefficiency; in the other case the Italian republic has deeply disappointed those Italians who expected a new life for their country at the end of the fascist *Ventennio*. Predominant in both sides of the story is a debasement of Italy as state, as institutional power, for its inability to live up to its past and to gain international leadership. Rather than an orientalist image of the peninsula, *Letters from Italy* is a sign of a time in which folkloristic images of the country cast a light on the uncertainties and weaknesses of the Italian republic as perceived by Italians themselves.

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50 Toshio Miyake interpreted *Letters from Italy* as an orientalist text: “In altre parole, viene configurata una prospettiva dualistica tipica dell’Orientalismo, strutturata sull’identità dell’Occidente contrapposta all’alterità dell’Oriente; e in questo caso, con il Giappone razionale (occidentale) opposto all’Italia irrazionale (orientale)” (178).
Chapter IV

“Madama Butterfly” revised:

Italian women in Japan
La domanda che segue è: ma mia madre, la bella Topazia, figlia di un duca siciliano e di una selvaggia cantante cilena, era anche lei abitata dal demone del viaggio? O semplicemente seguiva mio padre, per amore? Pur non essendo una esploratrice come Fosco, la ragazza siciliana aveva nel sangue l’esperienza dell’altrove.
(Dacia Maraini)

1. Why women writers

Since the beginning of the Western appearance in Japan during the sixteenth century, the image of the Japanese woman has been a distinguishing feature of Nippon culture. The representation of Japan as a "female country" originates from the fact that femininity is deeply rooted in the Japanese culture itself, as attested in the Shinto mythology. This is particularly indicated by the myth of the sun goddess Amaterasu, who is considered to be directly linked in lineage to the Imperial Household of Japan and the emperor.\(^\text{51}\) However, in the eyes of Western

\(^{51}\) At least until 1946, when the proclamation of the constitution, drafted by the American government, renounced the idea of divinity associated with the emperor
visitors the combination of the nation with the image of woman plays a role on several different levels. At the political level the persona of the Japanese woman, her submission and her readiness to sacrifice herself, corresponds to the image of Japan as a subordinated civilization in comparison to the hard male world of the West. This aspect of Japanese representation is particularly evident in Italy during the Fascist "Ventennio," where the nationalistic claim of an allegedly superior Italian civilization (as descended from Roman civilization) was the implicit premise on which feminine images of Japan were justified. In his book *Nel Giappone dei grattacieli: viaggio da Tokio a Dehli*, the Italian travel writer and colonial novelist Arnaldo Cipolla (1877-1938) employs the metaphor of the woman to belittle the overall representation of the visited country:

In tutti i modi il Giappone è un paese femminile, voglio dire soffuso di quell’atmosfera che deriva dal predomino morale della donna in tutte le manifestazioni della vita nazionale. Meticolosità, gentilezza, riserva, semplicità, fanatismo tranquillo, ordine, assenza di atti esteriori violenti, spirito di sacrificio, resistenza al dolore; le qualità insomma della donna risultano nell’andamento dell’esistenza giapponese assai più che altrove. (Cipolla 97)

In this passage the metaphoric representation of Japan as a feminine country clearly serves the purpose of a nationalistic propaganda: Japan appears to be a fearful nation, whose violent instincts are kept repressed ("assenza di atti

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esteriori violenti”). It is a country meant to be dominated, by exploiting its will to sacrifice and to bear heavy burdens ("spirito di sacrificio, resistenza al dolore").

In addition to the political level, the metaphor of Japan as woman exists also at a semiotic level, in which the Japanese woman evokes the erotic fantasies of the Western traveler; she represents sexual paradise for the male who is attempting to move beyond the limits of the Jewish/Christian moral code. Giacomo Puccini’s opera Madama Butterfly created in the Western world the stereotype of the Japanese as the perfect wife whose loyalty, femininity, and readiness to obey exalts men’s feeling of dominion (Littlewood, 124). In this sense there is no difference between the Japanese woman and the artistically and sexually enticing geisha, whose demure and pleasant personality makes the journey to Japan special. We can locate the beginning of this stereotype in Italian literature in the works of Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938). In 1884 he published a short story titled Mandarina in the journal Capitan Fracassa. The story’s protagonist is the marquise Aurora Canale, whose nickname, “mandarina,” comes from her infatuation with Japanese art, fashion, and culture. She is a Roman noblewoman, but she longs to live a romance in perfect Japanese style. She thus falls in love with the secretary of the Nippon embassy, the chevalier Sakumi. Her attempt to qualify as an authentic geisha by acting in an artistically sophisticated manner ends up in a grotesque caricature when the chevalier makes his sexual desire clear:

Mandarina teneva li occhi socchiusi, come per trattenere fra le palpebre una visione fuggitiva; abbandonava il tenue fior delle membra sotto i gelsomini e i bambù della veste primaverile. E sospirò alfine, dopo un intervallo di silenzio:
— Sakumi!
As soon as the marquise puts herself in the shoes of an exotic geisha she cannot help but cause the chevalier’s sexual turmoil.

Both the semiotic and the political view of the Japanese woman are the result of a male gaze. By following this path the image of Butterfly can hardly be challenged, since we rarely find male writers attempting to revise Puccini’s myth of the Japanese woman as a commodity. This is one of the reasons why I decided to consider the point of view of Italian women writers who traveled to Japan during the twentieth century. While the East in general offers a source of attraction to the male traveler searching for sexual encounters, women travelers cannot but be disturbed by the subordination of the Japanese woman (Foster 147). The female point of view offers a valid alternative to the image of the faithful Butterfly, which is the result of man’s fantasy and desire for mastery.

Moreover, solidarity between women of different nationalities and ethnicities can be surprisingly deep in the case of Italian women in Japan because a network of social and cultural similarities enables a process of mutual identification. Italy and Japan are traditionally considered man-based societies in which women are entangled in a web of circumstances, obligations, and events that make their role subaltern to that of the man. Although the Western imagination created the eternal myth of the docile and manageable Butterfly, it also created a corresponding myth of the Italian woman that is incarnated by the persona of Sophia Loren. As the title of a recent book on the actress...
suggests—*Sophia Loren, the Quintessence of Being an Italian Woman*—the popular cinema star has become an international icon of Italian femininity. This stereotype features a woman who is sexually enticing but also chaste and family oriented, a maternal figure that, above all, never crosses certain lines imposed by her role of ideal housewife. In this sense, a comparison between the Italian and the Japanese woman’s lifestyle is intriguing (although there are of course differences between the two models, as, for instance, Sophia Loren does not share the submissive personality of the Butterfly).

Revising the myth of *Madama Butterfly* from a gender perspective is not the only reason that I have chosen to focus on Italian women writers. I am also interested in the way Italian women assert themselves and affirm their own identity by becoming aware of cultural and moral boundaries that separate them as the “other.” As Shirley Foster claims:

Attempts to understand the foreignness of Japan involved not only revaluation of the visitor’s own self-image but also of her values, assumptions and customs. Understandably, in approaching the unfamiliar, the travellers paid particular attention to matters of inherent interest to their own sex. Some of these, such as food, clothing, cultural activities and domestic arrangements, permitted an essentially objective response; others, including sexual mores, marriage customs and the position of women, demanded the potentially more disturbing application of moral and religious principles, both institutional and personal. As in earlier instances, we find here much ambivalence, reactions ranging from rejection of the alien to eagerness to embrace the new and different, as national and individual prejudices came into play. The degree of openness further illuminates the significance of the foreign experience for these women, faced with the choice of adjustment or resistance. (142-143)

For Italian women gender identity represents an opportunity to communicate with the “other” based on the common ground of same sex, in a way that is denied to the male counterpart. The core of this communication focuses on
“sexual mores, marriage customs and the position of women,” which are delicate points for those writers struggling to carry on the battle for affirmation of women’s rights. The status of women travelers and writers is in itself a result of the ongoing challenge to match male privileges, such as long-distance journeys and publication of travelogues. As Cinzia Sartini Blum points out:

Travel has been associated with men’s prerogative, and mobility — physical, spiritual, and cultural — has been an attribute of masculinity. Femininity has been confined instead to domesticity, at the margins of culture, and accordingly conflated with the cyclical patterns of nature or the static conditions of matter. (43)

In other words, the writers that I consider here are the vanguard of an ongoing process of the transformation of gender roles in Italy; for this reason they tend to be especially critical on the issue of women’s rights. By looking at the Japanese model of housewife, Italian women find validation of their own lifestyle or value system (Foster and Mills, eds. 14). They identify themselves as a positive alternative to the allegedly backward system of gender relations in Japan. The more they look at the Japanese model, the more they can emphasize their own identity as independent women. Solidarity and concern for members of their own sex conflict with foreign values: by wanting Japanese women to enjoy the same privileges as they do, they affirm the superiority of their own culture and regard what their country has accomplished in terms of human rights as a universal goal, to which every culture should aspire.

Even though these observers generally tend to place their Japanese counterparts in a seemingly disadvantaged position, they occasionally focus on
elements that do not fit the traditional picture of the passive Butterfly. My readings of the accounts of Italian women particularly emphasize these unconventional traits in order to not only question “Western conventions” but also to show how these unexpected elements “provoke recognition that other patterns of female behavior offer more freedom and opportunities than Western women enjoy” (Foster and Mills, eds. 14).

The few examples of Italian women writers in Japan are concentrated in the second half of the twentieth century, in particular during the 1980s. It is for this reason that I narrow my time frame to this decade and, in one case, to the most recent years. For Japan and Italy the ’80s also represent a decade of attaining prosperity and rapid modernization. The economic success implies rapid changes in a society in which traditional values and, above all, gender relations were reconsidered as the result of an ongoing process of improvement in education and unprecedented material wealth. In Italy the golden age for the emancipation of women is the period from 1968 (the year of the student movement) to 1980. These twelve years of political and cultural upheaval saw the rise of a widespread feminist movement that stirred up discussion about women’s rights and achieved some political victories, such as the law to legalize abortion in 1978 (Willson, 149).

My ultimate goal is to provide a gendered representation of the Japanese woman on the one hand, and on the other to discover how the Italian woman reflects on her identity by looking in the Japanese mirror. Although I focus on late twentieth-century travelogues, I cannot omit the exceptional case of the Baronessa di Villaurea, a Sicilian woman who independently decided to travel to Japan in 1914.
and to publish the account of her adventures after returning home. Since her case is unique in the context of Italian literature, I devote the following section to her.

2. **A leopard woman**

Women writers who journeyed the East were not a rarity at the turn of the twentieth century. Some were employed as teachers, governesses, or diplomats’ wives; others were simply pleasure-seekers or were interested in doing research in the field. This last category includes the journey of Marie Stopes (1880-1958), better known as a campaigner for women’s rights, who went to Japan in 1907 to study fossils and coal mines. The American writer Alice Mabel Bacon (1858-1918) was also in Japan from 1900 to 1902, having been invited by the Meiji government to establish the Tokyo’s Women’s Educational School. Bacon wrote extensively about her journey and eventually came to be known as a specialist in Japanese culture. In general, almost all women writers were British and “were white, middle or upper class, and with the means to travel” (Foster, vii).

Considering that most of these travelers were representatives of colonialist countries and their views marked by Victorian values, the case of Baronessa di Villaurea (Palermo, 1870-1963) is all the more interesting. There is little information available about her life, only the following short footnote: “Angelina Fatta, nata a Palermo il 2 marzo 1870; a 23 anni sposata a Francesco De Michele,

barone di Villaurea; morta a Palermo il 15 maggio 1963" (Rossi: 20). All we do know is that Angelina Fatta published the book *Al Giappone, impressioni di una viaggiatrice* (1914), presumably right after returning home, using “Baronessa di Villaurea” as her nom de plume. While research in archives will shed light on this unique case of a woman writer and traveler in Japan from that time period in Italy, we can assume that the reason for her journey to Japan is probably related to the exceptional presence in Palermo of the Japanese painter Otamà Kiyohara (1861-1939, also known as Kiyohara Otama or Eleonora Ragusa).

Otamà was a young painter apprentice whose life changed the day she met the Italian sculptor Vincenzo Ragusa (1841-1927). Ragusa moved to Japan for a few years (1876-1882), along with the painter Antonio Fontanesi and the architect Vincenzo Cappelletti, to open a school of Western art at the invitation of Emperor Mutsuhito. Upon his return to Palermo, Ragusa opened a *Scuola di Arti Orientali* (School of Oriental Art), employing Otamà’s relatives as instructors. Eventually the experiment of introducing Eastern art in Sicily failed, apparently because of lack of raw material, but Otamà remained in Sicily to marry Ragusa and spent the next fifty years in Palermo until she returned to Japan a few years before her death. Otamà was a well-known artist in Palermo and introduced many apprentices to the secrets of her art; many Palermitan families owned her

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55 A biography of Baronessa di Villaurea is forthcoming, to be published in a volume edited by Feaderica Frediani, Ricciarda Ricorda, and Luisa Rossi (publication expected by the end of the 2011).

56 Angelina Fatta’s second book *Sulla terra della redenzione: Palestina* (Palermo: Scuola Salesiana del Libro, 1933) is published under the name of “Angelina di Villaurea.”
artworks. It is very probable that Otamà sparked Fatta’s interest in the Japanese society and culture.

Nevertheless, was still uncommon for an Italian woman at the dawn of the twentieth century to not only venture on a journey to the Far East, but also to publish a book about it. Views on the inferiority of women in Italy were even stronger than in the British-American culture, and the southern mores were especially retrograde compared to the rest of the country. Even well-educated and upper-class women, as the baroness certainly was, were somehow bound within the role of housewife and housekeeper:

Richer women had considerably more leisure time but much of it was spent at home, doing things like sewing, reading, receiving guests and hosting family parties. The situation was, however, changing a little. Middle- and upper class women who, fifty years earlier, would rarely have set foot outside the house, because of the danger of their reputation, were increasingly beginning to go out. Admittedly, Italian women were less advanced in this respect than women in some other countries: American women living in Italy were seen as almost surreally emancipated in their disregard for ‘proper’ behavior. (Willson 14)

It is also true that at the time of Villaurea’s journey to Japan things were slowly starting to change. Feminist organizations such as *Unione femminile nazionale* (National Female Union) founded in 1905, or *Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne*

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*Italiane* (National Council of Italian Women) founded in 1908 gave women the opportunity to grow in gender awareness and social rights. Magazines specifically addressing female readers, such as *La donna* and *Vita femminile*, served the same purpose. At the time that Fatta traveled to Japan Italian feminist movements were engaged in a political battle to obtain the right to vote; though the 1912 electoral reform did not achieve this goal they were able to draw public attention by means of creating suffrage committees.

The example of Angelina Fatta highlights a combination of conservative and progressive elements. On the one hand, her independent travel in the Far East (apparently without a chaperone) qualifies her as a pioneer of female writers that adventure in exotic places. In Dacia Maraini’s words, the choice to travel to the Far East breaks with the convention of traveling with a male figure (Ulysses’ adventures versus Penelope patient craft at home), whose constraining authority limits women’s freedom of movement like a pair of tight shoes. On the other hand, Fatta’s choice of hiding her personal identity by adopting a pen name betrays her lack of confidence in the status of “woman writer” and her belief that only her nobility (*baronessa*) can grant her the right to be a writer.

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58 “How strange that after forty years one is still wearing the same shoes one was born with. How stupid that without one even being aware of it or concerned about it they’ve always been a size too narrow. Look at your own feet and you’ll see: they are covered with corns because of the way your shoes pinch you and restrict your circulation. Haven’t you ever noticed that walking has always been painful even when it seemed quick and easy. But then – take off your shoes and you’ll find you can’t walk because the way you walk has become part of your whole life-style and perception of the world. So we women live our lives in a world that has been created without us and acts against us. But we also have a sadistic love-hate attitude toward this culture as we always have towards those who tyrannise over us” (Dacia Maraini. *Letters to Marina*, quoted by Sartini-Blum: 155).
These conflicting elements of traditionalism and reformism, or respect toward the past and tension toward the future, play a major role in Villaurea’a account of Japan. Their importance lies in the overall image of Japan itself as a country engaged in a contrasting dynamism of traditional and progressive cultural streams:

Attività, pazienza, resistenza al lavoro, quante attitudini prodigiose manifesta questo popolo sempre ilare! Popolo eccezionale! Bisogna studiarlo e vederlo da presso, lento ed attivo ad un tempo; pare immobile come il sole della sua bandiera, e cammina invece intorno al progresso, alla civiltà, in una corsa misurata, flemmatica, continua, eppure forse appena percettibile. Simbolo della fede di una razza questo sole abbagliante, del quale i giapponesi si credono i figli, i protetti, i favoriti, i governati quasi che non fosse anche il nostro, quello immobile di Galileo. (Villaurea 62-63)

The combination of tradition and change is a trademark of the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912); in this sense Villaurea is giving a personal account of the rapid transformation that Japan was undertaking since Imperial rule was restored. On the one hand the necessity of endorsing the new political authority in the eyes of the people generated an ideological project of revitalizing old traditions and values, such as the divine ascendancy of the emperor. On the other hand, the main effort of the government was toward a westernization of the country in order to transform Japan into a modern power able to compete (if not surpass) other Western powers. This politic of westernization included economic, political, and administrative reforms, such as the opening of the trade market or the elimination of the samurai class, but it also involved the society as a whole: “Western dress became fashionable among progressives, and in 1872 became compulsory for government officials (including on ceremonial occasions)
and civil servants such as postmen. Western-style haircuts also became increasingly fashionable, and a popular symbol of modernity” (Henshal 79). The impact of Western style on tradition is central to the way Villaurea looks at the Japanese woman:

La giapponese di oggi va semplificando sempre più la sua capigliatura, sino ad accostarsi al moderno rigonfiamento del nostro stile. Guai a lei se la moda dovesse invaderla di più! Quanto del suo fascino non andrebbe perduto! Io temo tutto! Finché la donna conserverà un po’ di buon senso, è sperabile, non seguirà l’innovazione maschile, non si spoglierà del kimono! Infatti fuori di qualche deplorevole cattivo esempio a corte, di questo buon senso pare sinora con istintiva femminilità, guidata la graziosa giapponesina! Per confortarla assicuriamola, come noi signore di occidente saremmo ugualmente sgraziate e mal vestite nel loro kimono, se invece di ricorrere a quei falsi e compiacenti modelli messi in vendita espressamente, pensassimo di acquiringne uno autentico. (126-127)

In the way the Baronessa describes the Butterflies one can easily perceive a certain degree of irony, especially in her tone (“la graziosa giapponesina”) and in the hyperbolic style (“io temo tutto”). By adopting such ironic tone of understatement in describing the Japanese ladies, Villaurea does wink at her Italian readers and ends up debasing the Oriental Other. The hypothesis I employ to interpret the portrait of the Japanese woman created by this Sicilian observer has to do with this striking contrast between tradition and change. As we can infer from the passage quoted above, Villaurea certainly does not sympathize with the ongoing social transformation, but neither does she accept the traditional mores: in her view there is an ultimate hesitance in embracing the westernization of the Japanese woman versus her traditional customs, or vice versa. Through her way of describing the female role in the society, Villaurea
reveals a certain degree of compliance to the Western contemporary feminist movement, especially when she confronts the reality of married couples in Japan:

A conti fatti io credo che c'è da ringraziare la provvidenza quando non si nasce donna al Giappone. Decantata per la dolcezza, per la mansuetudine, la pieghevolezza del carattere, per le grazie, le moine, i sorrisi, lo credo bene, costituisca l'ideale fra tutte le mogli del mondo. Chi ne ha osservato o avuto anche una temporanea presso a poco come la Madame Crisanteme di Loti, ne dice l'entusiasmo con tutte le lodi. Vivere senza contrasti e senza esigenze, fra i sorrissi e le moine affettuose di una donnettina premurosa, ed osservarla, fragile come un giunco, spezzarsi in un inchino sino a terra, per offrire una tazza di thé od un paio di pantofole al marito, e sentire il proprio nome preceduto da un signor padrone, c'è di che portare al paradiso della beatitudine, il facile orgoglio maschile. Quando incontro a sciami o sole solette scalpitanti sulle ghete, queste figure sottili — col capo nero ombreggiato dall'ombrellino sempre aperto — trovo così facile la simpatia verso di loro che mi rammarico di non esser un uomo per sposarne almeno una. Ma! Senza dubbio, come Loti, l'avrei sposata, e spesso nonostante l'inutilità, mi diverto a scegliere fra quelle che incontro, quelle che avrei prescelta... E la donna giapponese — è un poco una bambola, perché in sostanza è una bambina. I chinesi hanno forzato il piede della donna a restare eternamente infantile — i giaponesi hanno costretto la psiche della donna, con lo stesso lavoro con il quale si riducono le piante, a conservarsi nana. E come per le bambine c'è il castigo, per queste c'è lo spauracchio e la minaccia nelle mani dell'uomo: il divorzio! Che può mettere la fragile creatura in pochi istanti in un mare di lacrime senza pietà e senza appello. Così è stata finora la condizione della donna... ma col nuovo Giappone?!..

(93-95)

Here the ironic tone stresses not only the inferiority of the Japanese woman, compared to her Western counterpart, but also her reduction to the stereotype diffused by Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanteme*. Dismissed as commodities or dolls in the hands of selfish men, Japanese girls are far from experiencing the freedom of their Western counterparts. At the same time, Villaurea seems to
predict a resurgence of female self-awareness in the immediate future. By ending the above quoted passage with an open question—“ma col nuovo Giappone?!”—the baroness alludes to a different scenario, a big leap toward a revolution in gender roles:

Povere bambole! Da mercato! Le più umili! Senza anima quelle, e tornavo a rivederle in mezzo alle altre, che corrono baldanzose alla conquista dell’avvenire, dalle cui fila cominciano ad uscire le prime timide femministe, quelle che un giorno ingrossate a legioni, vessillo spiegato, sapranno rivendicare per le loro sorelle vendute al barbaro servaggio maschile, la legge di umana libertà individuale. (96)

Yet it would be wrong to rank Villaurea as an activist for women’s rights since her considerations of women’s status in Japan are not always negative; at times they unexpectedly leave room for sadness and anxiety about the ongoing transformation of gender relations. We find statements scattered throughout the book in striking contradiction to claims of individual freedom:

Giacché il vecchio deve a poco a poco fatalmente scomparire — rassenniamoci nobilmente ad accettare anche la donna nuova. E quasi a consolarcene pensavo: quale contrasto fra questa gioventù attiva e sana e l’altra di quel lontano quartiere del vecchio Giappone dello Yoshiwara! (96)

Further down, she adds the ironic comment: “Penso, che ne farà di esse la futura civiltà galoppante? Non riesco a realizzare un Giappone con la donna nuova. Oh! poveri futuri turisti” (123). We could ask at this point, what does Villaurea like about the traditional Butterfly? She seems to be especially attracted by these figures to the extent of visiting them, while in Tokyo, at the Women’s Educational School where they receive their education. As Alice Mabel Bacon
points out, this school was “one of the most conservative and anti-foreign of the Tokyo schools, — a school for noble girls, under the management of the Imperial House-hold Department” (v). Villaurea is quite impressed by the school environment:

Confinata al limite estremo della città ... è l’università delle ragazze, una dimostrazione di quanto di più completo ed evoluto si può immaginare in fatto di educazione femminile — dà l’illusione di trovarsi molto lontano dall’Asia estrema, piuttosto in pieno Nord, Scandinavia o Olanda, dove la donna impara con l’istruzione, il rispetto e il controllo di se stessa, senza l’umiliante condizione creata dalle nostre vecchie abitudini, che costituiscono intorno alla ragazza, una gabbia preservativa per la sua onestà.

Mille e duecento ragazze fra interne ed esterne vivono in questi sani ed igienici ambienti, divisi a vari padiglioni e seminati a mezzo a vastissimi giardini....

Ma io dimenticavo... qui l’educazione maschile non è quella dei nostri evoluti paesi. Nessuno si occupa di disturbare o portare offesa alla gentile studentessa, che va tranquillamente e dignitosamente per la sua via. Si vuole questa ostentata indifferenza maschile per il gentil sesso, attribuire non a educazione acquisita, ma all’atavica continuazione di quel disprezzo per l’amore, ricavato dalle antiche leggi della cavalleria giapponese, il Bushido. (92)

By observing examples of women with a social and cultural pedigree similar to her own (noble and highly educated girls), Villaurea is inevitably drawn into a comparison with herself and with the position of the woman in Sicily at the turn of the twentieth century. The typical portrait of the subjugated Japanese woman is replaced by the image of an unconventional female whose education allows her to gain self-control and a certain degree of independence.

For Villaurea this unexpected positive example of femininity is a crystallizing moment that enables her to reflect on gender disparity in Southern Italy in regard to freedom and moral respect. First, a wide gap existed between the
politics aimed at implementing mass education and the reality in many areas of Italy. At the dawn of the Italian unification the so-called Casati Law (1859) introduced an advanced public education system that provided elementary instruction for children of both sexes. Despite a decline in female illiteracy, the social reality of the time, especially in regions like Sicily, underscored a situation similar to that described by Villaurea in the above passage. At the turn of the century in South if Italy:

The continuing gender disparity was partly because girls were more likely to be denied schooling, as their “need” for education was considered less important. Some parents, moreover, kept daughters at home because of fears of their morality. (Willson 16)

As a member of the noble Palermitan class Villaurea realizes that her education, although advanced when compared to the average Sicilian woman, cannot match the level of her Japanese counterpart. Nevertheless, Villaurea does not take this as a cue to make the case for social reform toward more equal gender relations because of an ultimately conservative spirit that limits her openness to the feminist cause.

My conclusion is that the hesitation manifested by Villaurea in condemning the traditional mores of gender roles in Japan lies in an interior anxiety in regard to social change that could undermine the social prestige of the noble class to which Villaurea belonged. By observing social relations in Japan the baroness is intimately attracted by a predominant sense of backwardness in gender roles as well as in the labor force:
Lo spirito di sottomissione ereditario nella classe inferiore, non contaminato ancora da moderna utopistica livellazione sociale, non conosce ribellione, ed accetta il lavoro con serena rassegnazione. L’umile ignora la piaga dell’odio verso il superiore, e gli dimostra rispetto, sottomissione e spesso un attaccamento perduto nei nostri paesi da anni e anni. (118)

Villaurea’s longing for an ultraconservative policy and her anxiety regarding a subversion of the social ladder represent an aristocratic feeling that the Sicilian writer Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896-1957) expressed in the novel *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), 1958. *The Leopard* is the story of the elderly Sicilian prince of Salina, Don Fabrizio, at the time of Italian unification in 1861. Don Fabrizio is the last representative of the old aristocratic order that is now threatened by the depredation of Garibaldi’s campaign to unify Italy. His properties are crumbling and his power is undermined by the new bourgeoisie class that is taking over the feudal administration of Sicily by establishing a democratic policy. Don Fabrizio, the “Leopard,” is a giant whose death, as well the death of his class, is approaching; the novel is dominated by his “feeling of an immobilized present animated and enlarged by a sustained reflection on the past” (Said 2006, 98). An analogous feeling of melancholy and longing for an irrecoverable world must be taken into account when reading Villaurea’s journal on Japan. As a representative of a social class that has been losing prestige and authority since the unification of Italy, the Sicilian baroness cannot help but project her anxiety onto her analysis of the social transformation that Japan was undertaking at the time of her visit. What she is searching for is an ossified image of Japan, a confirmation of her immobile mental representation nourished by literary sources. Here, for instance, is her first impression upon her arrival:
Giappone! Ma ecco, accade in me un fenomeno stranissimo! A dispetto di tanto mare percorso e di tanta attesa, io non riesco a convincermi di essere arrivata! Sono i quadri raccolti nella mia fantasia ad animarsi, a vivere? Ponticelli snelli fra due alberi contorti, caseette di legno allineate con le imposte a vetri di carte per le vie strette ... donnine piegate in kimonò con la larga cintura ... Tutto è allucinazione! Un'allucinazione che fa muovere il mio Giappone, quello della mia costruzione, del mio sogno! Possibile sia ancora il reale rimasto così intatto? (47)

The reality she describes is filtered by memories of Madame Chrysanthème (1887), the best-seller novel written by the French author Pierre Loti (1850-1923), which features the stereotype of the charming, graceful and, above all, complacent Butterfly. The real Meiji Japan's impact on Villaurea draws her attention to a new kind of Japanese woman, as well as a new society that is trying to move away from its feudal past. Nevertheless, Villaurea's noble resignation (“Rassegnamoci nobilmente ad accettare la donna nuova,” 123) cannot help but unleash a conflict between continuity and change that is well-rooted in her identity as a Sicilian baroness.

3. A Nippon Nightmare

Angela Terzani Staude (1939-) is another Italian woman writer who spent five years in Japan, between 1985 and 1990. Unlike Angelina Fatta, she came to Japan with her Italian husband, the well-known writer and journalist Tiziano Terzani (1938-2004), whose expertise on East Asian countries definitely had a strong influence on his wife. She was born in Florence from German parents and studied in Munich. Angela began as an editorial writer by translating into Italian Titus Burckhardt's L’Alchimia (1961) and Scienza moderna e saggezza tradizionale (1968). In 1987 she served as editor of the volume Japan: The Beauty of Food,
with photographs by Reinhart Wolf. In 1972 she joined her husband in his journey around Asia as a correspondent for the famous German weekly *Der Spiegel*. Over roughly thirty years Terzani’s family lived in Singapore, Beijing, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Delhi, following Tiziano, who was on the front lines for such earthshaking historical events as the end of the Vietnam War and Maoist China. Her experience of the Asian continent inspired Angela Terzani to write *Giorni cinesi* (1987), a diary of the three years spent in China between 1980 and 1983. As an ideal follow-up, *Giorni giapponesi* (1994) is the result of her experience in Japan in which she expresses her uneasiness and anxiety about her Japanese life:

Se penso agli anni che ho passato in Giappone (1985-1990) assieme a mio marito Tiziano e ai nostri due figli, mi vengono in mente i coniugi Webb che nel 1932 tornarono dall’Unione Sovietica con la famosa frase: “Abbiamo visto il futuro e funziona!” Ma devo metterla al negativo. Noi, in quei cinque anni vissuti a Tokyo come famiglia, non ci siamo mai tolto di dosso l’impressione che quella vita non fosse fatta per noi. Non fosse fatta neppure per i giapponesi. Non fosse fatta per l’essere umano. Avevamo visto il futuro e non funzionava. (vii)

Because of her husband’s job as correspondent for *Der Spiegel*, Terzani lived her Japanese days inside the protective cocoon of a group of Western journalists and writers, such as the American Donald Richie and the Dutch writer Karel von Wolferen. Her encounter and subsequent negative appraisal of her journey must thus be filtered through the network of Western intellectuals who also were appalled by the rising of the so-called *Jap-inc.* as a worldwide
Among those writers and journalists, the influence of Tiziano Terzani is by far the most forceful on Angela’s views. When he recalls the time spent in Japan he reaches the same conclusion as Angela:

Era triste vedere una civiltà così particolare che si suicidava, con 120 milioni di persone che ansimavano per competere economicamente con l’Occidente. I poveri giapponesi mi facevano pena, li vedevo così degradati, così disumanizzati, così soli, così poco persone. Ruoli! Questa società, di tutte quelle che poi finisco per criticare, era la più dura. Spingeva l’uomo verso comportamenti standard dal momento in cui si alzava fino a che, vomitando, buttava di nuovo la testa sul guanciale. (Terzani 2006, 263)

The consequence of this negative impact of the new country was that Tiziano went through a difficult period of depression, which must be taken into account when considering Angela’s point of view:

Avevo tempo e silenzio: qualcosa di così necessario, di così naturale, ma ormai diventato unlusso che solo pochissimi riescono a permettersi. Per questo dilaga la depressione! A me era cominciata in Giappone. La vita era una continua corsa piena, di doveri. Ogni rapporto era difficile, contorto. Non avevo — o credevo di non avere — mai un momento in cui tirare il fiato; mai un attimo in cui non mi sentissi in colpa per qualcos’altro che avrei dovuto fare. Mi alzavo la mattina e mi pareva di avere sulle spalle il fardello del mondo; c’erano giorni in cui il solo vedere il pacco dei quotidiani sotto la porta di casa mi faceva venire il groppo in gola. Ovviamente il Giappone in sé, con la sua società tutta in una camicia di forza, con la sua gente sempre a recitare una parte e mai naturale, era opprimente (Terzani 2011, vol. 2, 302-303)

59 As Tiziano Terzani recalls: “Quando siamo arrivati in Giappone, a metà degli anni ’80, la storia che affascinava il mondo era che tecnologicamente il paese era avanzatissimo rispetto a noi, no? Adesso non ci fa più paura, ma allora il Giappone era la grande minaccia economica e non era affatto escluso che nell’anno 2000 non avrebbe dominato il mondo” (Tiziano Terzani. La fine è il mio inizio, ed. Folco Terzani [Milano: Longanesi, 2006], 256).
Her husband’s influence on Angela’s views is remarkable not only for his ideas, but also because it determined the network of people with which Angela was in contact during her Japanese days. Even the local people that Angela encountered were not met by chance, but were Nippon journalists and intellectuals who had experience in dealing with Europeans and Americans. This is the case with Otomo, a journalist that was charged with accompanying Tiziano and his wife on his journey. Angela had the opportunity to meet rare examples of Japanese women intellectuals with westernized educations and values, such as the feminist activist Shidzüé Ishimoto, whose autobiography *Facing Two Ways, the Story of my Life* (1935) brought her international recognition.60

The core of Ishimoto’s ideas was not “made in Japan” but come from the American wave of the feminist movement that she experienced during her several journeys to the United States. Among her favorite acquaintances there was Steven Platzer from the University of Chicago, whose major effort consisted in making the public aware of the alleged threat represented by Japanese ambitions to rule the world:

Steven Platzer, il suo nuovo amico e alleato, un iamatologo americano della Chicago University incontrato un giorno per caso davanti al palazzo imperiale e diventato da allora un frequентatore abituale della nostra casa, sostiene che i suoi ideologi sono i filosofi della scuola di Kyoto degli anni 30’, influenzati dal pensiero della destra tedesca: gli ideologi della

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60 At the time of the encounter with the Terzanis Ishimoto was a popular speaker and advocate of women’s rights. In an interview with the Italian journalist she stated: “I giapponesi non hanno coscienza. Dietro l’Occidente industrializzato c’è almeno il cristianesimo, per cui anche le persone non religiose sanno bene cos’è e cos’è male; cosa è giusto e cosa ingiusto. Ai giapponesi, che non possiedono testi sacri, questo criterio manca. L’uomo onesto cerca di rimanere fedele a se stesso e si dice: ‘Manterrò la fede nell’imperatore e nella bandiera giapponese!’ E lo dice per quanto questi ideali si siano rivelati falsi: altri valori cui rifarsi non mancano” (Angela Terzani, 180).
“giapponesità”. I politici di oggi, dice, continuano a orientarsi su quel modello di sviluppo nato negli anni ’30. Per fortuna dei giapponesi, è un modello estremamente efficace che ha permesso al paese di diventare una potenza economica vincente. Il fine di questo “sistema giapponese” sarebbe la dominazione del mondo. Il suo prezzo, il controllo totale del cittadino. (174)

Platzer will be the English translator of *Educational Thought and Ideology in Modern Japan* (1988) by Teruhisa Hori, a Japanese professor at the University of Tokyo, who is also a leading activist against the Japanese state’s domination of the nation’s public schools.

Finally, another relevant figure in Terzani’s environment is the Dutch journalist, writer, and professor Karen Van Wolferen (1941-), who lived in Japan for thirty years. At the end of this period he published the book *The Enigma of the Japanese Power* (1989), an articulate investigation into the system of censorship and repression that lies behind Japanese economic achievements.

The list of illustrious scholars and keystone books that are quoted in her diary is even longer, but these mentioned here are enough to highlight the common ground on which they stand: they are all representative of a critical voice in regard to the paradigm of “Japan as Number One” (to quote Ezra Vogel’s essay), that is, they opposed the large movement of cultural and political consensus in support of Japan’s rise as a superpower (the so-called “Japanese Phoenix”) from the debris of World War II. Angela Terzani’s diary is embedded in this movement of “historical revisionism” that came to the fore at the end of the cold war in the context of an international reassessment of the geopolitical forces at the end of the Communist threat. It is an international movement that is mainly American, and French to a lesser degree, and that has no relevance in the
Italian intellectual context; for this reason Angela's references are, above all, in English. Such a critical voice was hardly popular during the eighties, but it drew much more attention a few years later when the Japanese economic bubble burst and the revisionists' theses were able to gain weight and consideration. In Patrick Smith's words:

> At the brink of the Cold War's end the Chrysanthemum Club [by which Smith means those intellectual that, during the Cold War, were uncritical apologist of Japan] was openly challenged for the first time in many years. It was the challenge of journalists and scholars known as the revisionists. They were (and remain) a loose group; on many questions they are far from universal agreement. None of them especially likes the revisionist label (as members of the Chrysanthemum Club did not like theirs). But they are legitimately bound by a simple assumption: The paradigm is false; the West should reassess the way it looks at Japan. ... Revisionism arrived like fresh air in a windowless room. It was an act of creative destruction in that it began the work of dismantling the postwar paradigm. It bore no ideological load, no Cold War imperative, so that it made the prospect of clear sight at least realistic. (Smith, 1997: 35)

Similar to these revisionists, Angela Terzani wants to warn Italian readers about the fallaciousness of the Japanese paradigm:

> I giapponesi sono sempre stati bravissimi nell'imporre al mondo un'immagine pubblicitaria del loro paese e hanno sempre avuto i loro “protagonisti”. Personaggi come D.T. Suzuki, il divulgatore dello zen come espressione di un misticismo eminentemente giapponese, e Inazo Nitobe, che proegò l'idea che il Giappone fosse una civiltà così misteriosa e raffinata da non poter essere capita da nessuno, hanno dato enormi contributi nel quadro di questa opera di propaganda e disininformazione. Oggi, fondazioni giapponesi e gruppi di pressione come la lobby giapponese a Washington, la più grande fra le lobby americane, portano efficientemente avanti il lavoro di quei personaggi del passato. L'utilità del loro operato è stata eloquentemente espressa da un filosofo di Kyoto studiato dal Platzer che disse: “Controlleremo il mondo quando controlleremo quello che il mondo pensa del Giappone.” (221-222)
Since Angela Terzani’s goal is to debunk a well-established image of Japan, she also offers a revised image of the Japanese woman. While she notices the subjugation of the wife to the husband and the mother-in-law, she also emphasizes an ongoing change in gender relations. "Butterflies" whose former goal was to please their husbands at all costs, were now gaining slightly more authority and independence, in spite of appearances:

Le donne, obbligate a consumarsi servendo la suocera e gli anziani, lo hanno fatto docilmente per secoli. "Non sarai felice, ma diventerai forte", diceva la madre alla figlia che si sposava, avvolgendole la testa con un panno bianco, il giorno del matrimonio, in modo da nascondere le sue "corna", la sua volontà. Nel corso di centinaia d'anni di questa scuola, la donna si è liberata dall'indipendenza sentimentale del suo sposo. La sua dipendenza oggi è puramente finanziaria; questa certo è ancora grande perché il Giappone non permette alle donne di emanciparsi e di lavorare. Mi pare però che la donna cominci a raccogliere le proprie forze, freddamente, spietatamente, se si vuole, e che gli uomini, ingaggiati nella guerra economica e meno liberi di pensare, d'informarsi, di sbizzarrirsi, comincino a rendersi conto che le donne, che fanno tante belle moine e che parlano la loro lingua “mite”, in verità recitano una parte: e sempre più controvoglia. (52)

Angela Terzani discovers that Japanese woman had mastered the role of playing “Madama Butterfly” as soon as their husband walks into the house or when the couple has to make a public appearance. The women of the 1980s still carry the burden of their marriage duties on their shoulders: “Le donne sposate sono in questo paese la categoria umana più ardita, più tragica, Molte sono così frustate dalle poche possibilità che hanno di sbizzarrirsi che si mettono a bere in cucina e finiscono alcolizzate.” (85) Nevertheless, it also becomes evident to Angela that Japanese women are increasingly comfortable with the life they happen to live since they can make the best of a situation in which they disguise their identity in order to gain room for freedom and independence. This is what Angela learns by
listening to the story of Ayako, Tiziano Terzani’s secretary, an educated girl who lived in America for a few years before returning home and settling down with a Japanese husband:

“Una volta sposate, noi giapponesi partiamo dal presupposto che il matrimonio deve durare fino alla morte”, mi spiega Ayako nel suo modo piacevole e diretto. “Escludiamo la possibilità del divorzio e accettiamo il marito com’è. Tutt’al più cerchiamo, per amore dei figli, di stringere un po’ d’amicizia con lui. Voi vi rifiutate di vivere con un uomo che non amate e ci commiserate perché i nostri mariti non sono mai a casa. Noi invece diciamo: ‘Il marito ideale è sano e sempre fuori’... perché così siamo libere di fare quel che vogliamo. Io sono contenta così. Non so però cosa sia meglio... (85)

The traditional image of the Japanese family in which the man holds absolute authority and the woman is unconditionally loyal and faithful is only a façade; what is really happening is a sort of performance in which each actor respects the other’s role. This is what Ayako and the journalist Otomo explain to Tiziano and Angela:

Tiziano s’informa con Ayako sui costumi delle giapponesi.
“Di che cosa si meraviglia tuo marito?” mi ha poi chiesto lei. “È di moda andare a letto con gli sconosciuti. Da voi no?”
“No. Da noi le ragazze vanno a letto con il loro ragazzo.”
“Sono all’antica! Da noi vanno a letto con chiunque.”
Otomo dice che le ragazzine preferiscono gli uomini anziani per il semplice fatto che le pagano. Anche le donne sposate cominciano a tenersi un qualche uomo o a frequentare club dove si affittano gli accompagnatori. Otomo questo lo chiama “divorzio interiore” e sostiene che le giapponesi lo preferiscono a quello reale. La moralità non è coinvolta. Il sesso per la donna giapponese è come fare la doccia, è qualcosa che fa bene alla pelle. (130)

From these examples that show a lack of lasting moral values, disenchantment about any feelings of love, or any sincere behavior, it is inevitable that Angela
Terzani would reflect on her own identity, comparing it with these distant models. Italian women — as we can assume by observing Tiziano and Angela’s reactions to this alternative model — still believe in marriage for love; they still engage in mutually faithful relationships and do not hesitate to reveal their real feelings, either positive or negative. It is interesting to note that Angela Terzani does not dismiss the alternative as hypocritical and corrupt; on the contrary, she can detect positive aspects. On the one hand, she observes that the Japanese woman appears quite satisfied with the life she is living. On the other hand, despite the supposedly higher level of freedom, the Italian woman feels more anguish and restlessness:

Le donne come categoria non mi hanno mai interessato, né mi interessa in teoria il problema della loro emancipazione, ma le donne giapponesi nella loro disciplinata rassegnazione del tutto priva di aggressività mi ispirano una grande simpatia. In loro non si manifestano mai la rabbia, lo scontento, la frustrazione, il nervosismo che possono rendere le donne occidentali così spiacevoli e come dominate da una quotidiana delusione.

(50)

This observation perfectly matches the point of view of the American writer Jane Condon. In her book *A Half Step Behind: Japanese Women in the ‘80s*, she describes the serenity of the Japanese woman’s life as opposed to the Western model:

American women in Japan are not accustomed to being jostled in the elevator or to having their opinions only begrudgingly listened to. The number-one complaint of American women living in Japan is that they are not taken seriously.

But Japanese women have never been first off the elevator. They are accustomed to deferring to men and keeping their opinion to themselves. In one survey of women in six countries, Japanese women topped the list in believing in separate roles for women and men (71
percent); putting one's husband and family first (72 percent); and affirming that housework is the woman's responsibility (89 percent). Another survey revealed that most Japanese men and women were content with their lives, and at 80 percent, compared to 74 percent, women scored even higher than men. The majority of Japanese women are, in short, satisfied with their lot in life. They speak of a web of circumstances, obligations and events that have made their role what it is. Although some talk as if they were indeed caught in a web, others see societal restrictions as a warm and protective cocoon. (295)

Angela Terzani, of course, does not go so far as to reassess the image of the Japanese woman of the 1980s, or to use this model to criticize her fellow Italians. Nevertheless, she notices that time had made huge changes in the supposedly immobile Japanese society and women seemed comfortable with the gender roles, allegedly more than Italian women who show more uncertainty and uneasiness. But the overall image of the Japanese woman falls short of being representative of Japanese society, insofar as Angela Terzani's encounter with the visited country is obviously partial. Most of the local women mentioned in the diary are highly educated, westernized people, some of whom had lived in America or Europe; they strongly criticize their own society and gender roles in light of Western values. In general, most of the Japanese people that Angela is in contact with hardly identify themselves with the society to which they belong, and they implicitly offer a confirmation of Angela's critical perspective. For instance, Otomo's criticism of women's identity in Japan is the result of a point of view alien to his own society. The person speaking is a Japanese man, but his ideas are equivalent to the point of view of an outsider:

“Cosa ne pensi delle ragazze giapponesi? Non le trovi ipocrite?” mi ha chiesto Otomo l'altra sera. “In Giappone gli uomini sembrano forti ma in realtà sono deboli; le donne sembrano vittime ma in realtà sono forti e spietate. Da noi la donna gioca il ruolo della madre, tipico in se stesso del
matriarcato. È lei che prende tutte le decisioni, è lei che perdona. Con questo tiene in ostaggio il marito.” (53)

Unlike Otomo, Angela finds these hints of an oncoming revolution in gender roles attractive; nevertheless, having her own voice (in the diary) supported by alleged representatives of the other world is ultimately satisfying to her.

4. **Attempts of comprehension**

Of a completely different sort is the experience of Antonietta Pastore (?), a Sicilian writer who spent sixteen years in Japan between 1977 and 1993. While she was studying pedagogy in France under the supervision of Jean Piaget, she met a Japanese man who would become her husband. Together they decided to move to the “Land of the Rising Sun” and start a new life.\(^6\) While her husband experienced major problems in starting a new job after many years spent abroad, Pastore managed to build up a solid career as a teacher of French and Italian at the Osaka University of Foreign Studies. During these years Pastore was able to overcome the linguistic barriers by learning to speak and read Japanese. This brought the opportunity to become one of the most appreciated Italian translators of Japanese novelists, such as Abe, Ikezawa, Inoue, and Murakami. In 2004 she published a book titled *Nel Giappone delle donne* in which she describes

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\(^6\) As she tells in her account: “Prima di stabilirmi in questo paese ho vissuto a Parigi con mio marito, che è giapponese; insieme a lui conducevo un’esistenza precaria ma spensierata tra studio, lavoro saltuario, letture, frequentazione assidue di cinema d’art et d’essai, musei e gallerie. Dopo sette anni però quella vita no ci soddisfaceva più, e il malumore costante dei parigini cominciava a pesarci. Così abbiamo concepito l’idea di trasferirci in Giappone, paese che mi aveva conquistato, durante un primo breve soggiorno, per la cortesia della popolazione e la raffinatezza della cultura” (Pastore, 2010: 4).
the condition of the Japanese woman and her place in society by telling the stories of her personal encounters. In 2010 she wrote an autobiographical novel on her Nippon experience titled *Leggero il passo sui tatami*.

Her journey in this new world is divided into two parts. In 1985 Pastore decided to divorce her husband and start a new life as an independent Italian woman in a country in which marriage is considered an obvious, natural step in a person’s life. Eventually, a few years later, she started an affair with a second Japanese man whose career provided the opportunity to move back to Italy in 1993. In *Nel Giappone delle donne* Pastore underlines the unequal condition of the Japanese woman, and describes the social constraints and obligations implied in her role.

Antonietta Pastore is the only case that I know of an Italian woman writer who enters Japanese society to the point of marrying a Japanese man and living with him and her parents-in-law for many years. Unlike Angela Terzani, whose resistance to the visited country keeps her at a distance, Pastore has the existential need to fill the gap between her culture and that of her new relatives. From an initial feeling of displacement and alienation, Pastore is able to gain more confidence and familiarity with her second country day by day; paradoxically, this was one of the reasons for the divorce. As a Japanese who spent many years abroad, Pastore’s husband developed a critical view of his own society based on Western influence. Even in Japan, Pastore and her husband continued to attend a group of Japanese unwilling to accept the mores and social rules of their motherland. At first this alternative group helps Pastore strike a
balance\textsuperscript{62} between her Italian roots and her will to become more familiar with native people:

\begin{quote}
Di recente è aumentato il numero dei giapponesi che mio marito ed io frequentiamo, mentre è diminuito quello degli occidentali. Abbiamo stretto amicizia con un gruppo di ex sessantottini che hanno a loro tempo rifiutato di farsi irregimentare nel meccanismo delle grandi ditte private, e si barcamenano svolgendo lavori free lance più o meno creativi nel mondo dello spettacolo e dei mass media. Sono persone alternative che hanno portato nella mia vita una ventata di freschezza. (Pastore, 2010: 79)
\end{quote}

Eventually, the process of integrating the Italian woman into the Asian country leads to the divorce from her native husband, who is paying the price of being isolated from a society that does not easily readmit those members who left the country looking for a better life:

\begin{quote}
è proprio adesso, dopo il trasloco, che comincio ad avvertire in mio marito i primi segni di distacco nei miei confronti. Sento crescere in lui, che non riesce a esprimere la sua intelligenza e il suo talento artistico in un lavoro che lo soddisfi, una progressiva amarezza. Amarezza che io non posso condividere, perché in questo momento della mia vita mi sento piena di
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{62} In other parts of the book Pastore expresses her dissatisfaction about living inside the community of foreigners and her desire to be more involved with the natives: “Gli occidentali che frequento sono persone colte e stimolanti, venute a stabilirsi in Giappone per interesse verso questa civiltà. La maggior parte di loro studia con impegno un’arte tradizionale ed è sposata o convive con dei giapponesi, che sono per l’appunto quei pochi con cui sono riuscita a stringere rapporti di amicizia. In compagnia di queste coppie miste mi sento a mio agio e passo ore piacevoli, ciononostante non sono del tutto soddisfatta: mi sento a metà fra l’integrazione nella popolazione locale e l’isolamento in uno di quei circoli composti da occidentali venuti in Giappone per conto di ditte private, poco interessati alla cultura del paese e arroccati nell’usanza dei loro luoghi d’origine. Mi disturba la sensazione di non capire i meccanismi profondi che regolano la società in cui vivo, di non saperne cogliere l’essenza vera. Ho come il sospetto, o piuttosto l’intuizione, che molte cose mi sfuggano. Soprattutto quando un evento inatteso crea uno squarci nella mia visione superficiale della realtà, rivelando per un attimo aspetti sorprendenti dell’ambiente che mi circonda, in apparenza omogeneo e rassicurante” (53).
energia e tesa verso le nuove possibilità che mi si offrono, verso le cose che vado scoprendo, verso il futuro. Questa discrepanza inevitabilmente mina il nostro rapporto, l’unione simbiotica che ci ha legati per tanti anni si allenta, aspettative e interessi diversi ci allontanano l’uno dall’altra. È una constatazione dolorosa che per molto temo cerchiamo entrambi di ignorare, continuaendo a vivere insieme con reciproco rispetto, ma consapevoli in fondo al cuore che la distanza fra noi va aumentando. Mio marito si ripiega gradualmente sulla sua disillusione, mostrando versi di me una crescente freddezza e legandosi sempre più al gruppo di ex sessantottini; mentre io, che dopo un primo momento di entusiasmo ho cominciato a percepire nel loro desiderio di marginalità una componente di ipocrisia, a poco a poco me ne distacco per frequentare persone meno platealmente alternative, ma più coerenti con le idee alternative che professano. (Pastore, 2010: 87-88)

Unlike other women writers, Pastore does not conceive her journey in Japan as transitional: even after the divorce, she chooses to stay in the foreign country, trying to build a future and a career that does not include a return home in the short term. For this reason her efforts to penetrate and overcome the cultural barriers between the I and the other are of utmost importance. But to turn an Italian into a Japanese, or even to accept and, to a certain extent, incorporate a foreign identity into the national identity takes too much effort and the result is far from perfect. Pastore is aware of the limits of her deeds; nevertheless, her openness to and appreciation of her second homeland is by no mean jeopardized:

Mi rassegno ad ammettere che per quanto io cerchi di comprendere la società giapponese e di adattarmi alle sue usanze, oltre una certa soglia non posso arrivare. Giungo a questa conclusione serenamente, senza amarezza, perché se è vero che mi scontro a volte con differenze culturali insormontabili, so anche che le virtù dei giapponesi mi hanno aiutata a crescere, e che la loro umanità, tenuta di solito sotto il livello di visibilità ma sempre pronta a manifestarsi concretamente quando se ne manifesti il bisogno, mi ha sostenuta nei momenti difficili. E poi non tutte le differenze culturali sono inconciliabili, molte le ho assimilate, al punto da trovare normali comportamenti che dieci anni fa mi apparivano esotici: mi viene spontaneo togliermi le scarpe quando entro in casa, adoro dormire in un futon, quando leggo un libro voltando le pagine da sinistra a destra non ho più l’impressione di sfogliarlo al
The passing of the years and the progressive immersion in the culture are conducive to a more comfortable stay in Japan; however, the prospect of growing older in a foreign land, the eventuality of making her journey in Japan a definitive and lifetime choice, make Pastore suddenly feel nostalgic for her motherland, to the extent of concretely setting out a plan to return home:

Dopo quattordici anni che abito in Giappone, proprio quando potrei vivere serena in questo paese, comincio ad avvertire una certa irrequietezza. Il fatto è che sento in maniera sempre più acuta la mancanza della mia famiglia d’origine e provo una nostalgia crescente del mio paese, dei suoi paesaggi, della bellezza delle sue città, di certe sue atmosfere. Ogni volta che vi passo una vacanza, poi, quando sono sull’aereo per tornare a Osaka, trovandomi in un ambiente prevalentemente giapponese, non posso fare a meno di chiedermi “Cosa ci faccio qui?” Eppure ho simpatia per questa gente, ne condivido tante abitudini e la mentalità, ma tra queste persone che tornano a casa provo un senso di estraneità che non avverto quando sono in Giappone. Forse perché vengo percepita da loro come una turista, una straniera, nonostante stia tornando a casa anch’io. O perché nel mio inconscio “tornare a casa” significa andare in direzione contraria, da Oriente verso Occidente. (Pastore, 2010: 152)

During these sixteen years Pastore had the benefit of being a female peer to other Japanese women as she shared the nationality and status of “Japanese wife.” This experience came with highs and lows, despite an initial deep attraction to the refinement and elegance of female mannerisms:

E poi la grazia delle donne, la soavità dei loro gesti: invidio l’eleganza con cui sbucciano un frutto, il garbo con cui scartano una caramella, ammiro la loro capacità di infondere sollecitudine nel semplice gesto di porgere un bicchier d’acqua…
In confronto ai modi delicati delle giapponesi, giudico bruschi i miei, temo che la mia spontaneità venga presa per sfacciataggine, e al fine di
adeguarmi ai canoni di femminilità vigenti cerco di contenere la mia gestualità e renderla più aggraziata. Il problema è che la donna giapponese è per me un modello solo dal punto di vista estetico, non da quello socioculturale, così finisco col fare una grande confusione e rischio di perdere il senso della mia identità. (Pastore, 2010: 13-14)

The sense of her identity is constantly at odds with her role of “Japanese” wife.  

The Italian woman perceives a difference in her way of expressing feelings and in her mannerisms. While the Japanese woman conceals her influence over the husband, the Italian cannot help but externalize her sense of independence and dignity:

La mia indignazione è tanto più forte davanti a comportamenti che mi coinvolgono personalmente: non sopporto che un uomo dia per scontato che io gli ceda il passo sulla soglia di una porta, e mi dà fastidio che venga servito prima di me a tavola. Quando qualcuno mi chiede cosa ho preparato di buono per cena “al mio signor marito”, mi tolgono la soddisfazione di rispondere che dal momento che torno a casa dal lavoro alle dieci di sera, mi aspetto che la cena la prepari lui, per tutti e due. Cosa che peraltro non ha mai costituito un problema nella mia vita matrimoniale. Quanto all’atteggiamento di debolezza delle donne nei confronti degli uomini, mi esaspera al punto che giudico la loro decantata grazia una forma di affettazione, e trovo i loro movimenti, più che delicati, legati. E a volte scopro dietro la loro apparenza delicata una mentalità strettamente pragmatica. (Pastore, 2010: 36-37)

As Angela Terzani noted the pragmatic attitude of the new Butterflies, Antonietta Pastore also has to revise her initial fascination for female refinement and turn to a more materialistic criterion to explain their behavior. Such a

63 In Nel Giappone delle donne, Pastore emphasizes the sense of inhibition that a Western woman has to overcome: “La donna occidentale percepisce subito quanto il proprio modo di “stare al mondo” sia diverso da quello di una giapponese, quanto il proprio atteggiamento sia più appariscente, più ingombrante, al punto che finisce spesso col limitare, consciamente o no, la propria spontaneità. Per sentirsi in armonia con l’ambiente, per non stonare troppo…. Nel mio caso, tutte queste motivazioni insieme hanno a lungo esercitato un’azione inibitoria sulla mia gestualità” (Pastore, 2004: vi).
pragmatic approach to life, apparently at odds with their outward demeanor, is particularly at play when women are engaged in their choice of their significant other. Nothing is more wrong than thinking that Japanese women of the 1980s would perpetuate Puccini’s image of a woman giving herself up for a ruthless naval officer. Pastore is literally bewildered when telling the story of one of her students, who readily breaks up with her boyfriend in order to meet someone better able to offer a wealthy life:

Yoko, che non ha l’avvenenza di Junko, vuole si convolare a nozze, ma non con il suo attuale boy furendo, nel quale non riscontra le qualità a suo avviso necessarie per costruire un buon partito: il ragazzo è troppo giovane, non guadagna abbastanza per provvedere ai bisogni e ai capricci della futura moglie, né si intravedono per lui possibilità di carriera…. Che le sorelle Yoshida non fossero delle anime romantiche l’avevo già intuito, ma la disinvoltura con la quale sono pronte ad accantonare i loro rispettivi ragazzi per stringere legami economicamente più vantaggiosi mi è del tutto incomprensibile. (38-39)

The issue of pragmatism in the choice of husband and in the general conduct of life is what makes the Italian women in Japan agree when faced with the portrait of the Japanese lady.

Marcella Croce (1949-) is another Italian writer who reached a similar conclusion. Croce was born in Palermo; after earning a Ph.D. in Italian at the University of Madison Wisconsin, she taught Italian at the University of Isfahan (Iran) and Kyoto on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for one year between 2005 and 2006. These experiences in the Asian continent drew her attention to the issue of women’s rights and identity in these countries. As a result, in 2002 Croce published the book Oltre il chador – Iran in bianco e nero and, in 2009, L’anima nascosta del Giappone in which she gives the account of her
experience in Kyoto. At the turn of the twenty-first century Croce stresses the same attitude toward marriage that Angela Terzani and Antonietta Pastore detected in Japan during the eighties:

“Massimo dieci anni”: con questa dura sentenza Yoko, Yumi, e molte altre donne giapponesi mi hanno definito la durata media di un matrimonio, dopo di che di norma si passa non a un divorzio, ma a una semplice convivenza dove sull’altare della reciproca convenienza si celebra quello che i sociologi chiamano “scambio di servizi”. Il fenomeno è acclarato, e accettato senza circonlocuzioni o rimpianti da milioni di uomini e donne che non fanno neanche finta di amarsi, e vivono, anche fisicamente, vite quasi del tutto separate. Non desiderano nulla di particolarmente diverso, o almeno così dicono, pensano che ciò rientri nell’ordine naturale, quasi inevitabile, delle cose. Non si cada nell’errore di pensare che queste coppie siano simili ai nostri “separati in casa”: il fenomeno non è nient’affatto recente in Giappone dove, come in gran parte dell’Asia, la vita sociale procede divisa per sessi. Moltissime volte abbiamo potuto verificare che fare o ricevere un invito a cena o per qualunque altra occasione sociale non significava affatto che l’invito fosse automaticamente esteso al marito o alla moglie. Marito o moglie vanno così poco in giro insieme che addirittura molti cinema a scopo precauzionale danno prezzi ridotti per le coppie. Pare che molti giovani si ribellino oggi a queste “regole” non scritte ma così strettamente osservate dai loro genitori. A Yoko e Yumi, mie coetanee, appariva invece stranissimo che mio marito e io, dopo ben trent’anni di matrimonio, avessimo ancora effettivamente voglia di stare insieme. ... La mancanza di amore è certo molto comune tra le coppie sposate in tutto il mondo, ma, a differenza del Giappone, nella maggioranza dei casi da noi la cosa viene nascosta, anche con se stessi, come una specie di vergogna, si preferisce illudersi, o fingere, e non rinunciare così all’ideale (o alla chimera) dell’amore romantico che dura per tutta la vita. (33-34)

Although Italian women praise their long-lasting and love-based relationships, when faced with the disenchanted alternative model they have to admit that Japanese wives enjoy more freedom and independence, compared to their allegedly superior quality of life. Croce recognizes that Japanese women experience a great deal of time away from their husbands, focusing on a variety of different activities:
Le mogli spesso non lavorano, si occupano dei figli se sono piccoli, altrimenti, con una libertà di movimento impensabile nella coppia media italiana, si incontrano con le amiche, vanno a cena fuori, viaggiano per conto loro, anche perché il marito di norma consegna loro l’intero ammontare del suo sudatissimo stipendio. Nelle società più antifemministe del mondo, e il Giappone è tra queste, quest’ultimo è un fenomeno molto diffuso. Anche gli antichi greci in quanto a maschilismo non scherzavano, eppure Penelope aveva tutte le chiavi della casa, e per Senofonte la donna è la vera regina dell’economia... (33-34)

Despite the striking contrast that Croce notes, her observation is quite recent and must be placed in a time in which Italian women are gaining more financial independence and freedom in general. The traditional role of the mother as housekeeper had been replaced by a more complex figure of a woman who is somehow able to split her daily time between family and work. During the eighties this process was just beginning, as Antonietta Pastore, by looking back at the disparity between her own society and the other at the time of hey journey, observes:

Possibile che in un paese in cui la parità tra i sessi, da quel che avevo letto o sentito, era ancora lontana, le donne godessero già di una libertà che in Europa iniziavamo appena ad assaporare? Durante i sedici anni che ho trascorso in seguito in Giappone dal ’77 al ’93, ho avuto modo di constatare quanto fosse giusta quella mia prima impressione: le donne giapponesi hanno un’ampia facoltà di muoversi autonomamente, di ritrovarsi con le amiche in caffè e ristoranti, andare al cinema e a teatro, spostarsi e viaggiare senza essere accompagnate da un uomo (V-VI).

Indeed, Pastore must tackle a striking contradiction between what she knows about women in Japan and the reality she is experiencing:

Una contraddizione incomincia allora a delinearsi. Come coniugare efficienza e decisione, spontaneità e naturalezza, con quella cappa di
inibizioni che continua a contenere, a ricoprire come una seconda pelle il corpo di queste donne? Come conciliare l’evidente autorevolezza della madre di famiglia, il suo libero potere d’acquisto, con l’atteggiamento sottomesso, addirittura servile, della donna nei confronti dell’uomo? Perché il sistema sociale che per secoli ha represso la donna non ha condizionato tutta la sua sfera d’azione, salvaguardando per lei sorprendenti zone di autonomia e un’innegabile libertà di movimento? (Pastore, 2004, xii)

Beyond the unacceptable image of the obedient housewife, the Italian woman finds in her Japanese counterpart a dimension of freedom and independence that is not part of the conception of the female role during the ’80s in Italy. On the one hand, the role of the father as absolute authority of the family, the image of the *pater familias*, had definitely dissolved; on the other hand the mother’s role became more and more central in the Italian family: “the new ‘supermother’ who, juggling the many balls of family responsibilities and employment, was determined to prove that she could cope” (Willson, 181). Splitting her daily schedule between work and family duties, the new Italian woman longs for time to focus on herself, similar to the apparently more constrained life of the Japanese woman.

Both Antonietta Pastore and Marcella Croce show that the Italian woman is uneasy with the quietness and compliance of her Japanese counterpart. They are also astonished by the extreme flexibility and pragmatism of the Japanese couple. For an Italian woman it is not easy to come to terms with the idea that the vows of marriage will not last. In a country with a solid Catholic tradition, it is not common for someone to accept alternative models of union. However, Croce — by pointing at the fact that in Italy married couples are encountering difficulties in their relationship, regardless of the low divorce rate — raises the problem of an unresolved conflict inside the Italian family in which the ongoing process of
secularization has undermined the Catholic model of union without offering any reliable alternative. As a result, although Italy has the lowest divorce rate in Europe, according to a 2007 statistical survey it also has one of the lowest marriage rates in the European Union. The pragmatic attitude of Japanese girls, especially when the time comes to choose their significant other, generates surprise and displacement in the three writers. Their restlessness and dissatisfaction speak of an unclear gender role, which is still far from being equal despite the astonishing progress she has made over the last twenty years. At first they cannot tolerate the passivity of the Japanese woman, but, when they are able to see beyond appearances, she discovers a space of freedom and independence that is still missing in her own life.

5. **A revised stereotype**

In conclusion, all of these Italian female writers compare the situation of women’s rights in Japan with the Western ideal of gender roles created by the feminist movement of the ’70s. As a result, Japanese society is considered conservative and unequal, regardless of the acknowledgment of a significant improvement in gender relations since the end of World War II. However, a more accurate observation of the woman’s style of life in Japan allows these writers to detect certain privileges and advantages that are not part of the supposedly more progressive level of women’s life in Italy. By acknowledging this gap in freedom, these writers reflect on their female identity and status within society. The overall picture shows an Italian woman living on the edge between traditional and modern interpretations of her role in the family. She is
not expected to walk three steps behind the husband as Japanese wives do, but she cannot enjoy a private and intimate space outside the complex system of duties and social obligations implied by her role as mother and wife. The traditional view of marriage as an everlasting union between two people is still able to guarantee family stability, but the Italian woman has to recognize that the more pragmatic Japanese model allows women to play a stronger role as decision maker and financial planner of the family. The portrait of the new modern Butterfly spotlights a restless Italian woman in the midst of a struggle for a new, stable identity.
Conclusion: Mutual Reflections of Transient National Identities

As I approached the end of this project I began to glimpse the huge body of research ahead and the opportunity to take a deeper step in my analysis. For this reason while I discuss my conclusions I will also sketch some of the points I want to consider in the future.

The four case studies I showcased in this dissertation uncover an unexpected tightly woven fabric of relations between Italy and Japan that would otherwise be overlooked by absorbing the Italian case into the more general discourse on the West vs. the East. I concluded that each country viewed the other as a way to assess differences, but also to carve out elements of national identity. When Fascist propaganda described the Japanese first as subhuman beings, then as examples of virtue, the goal of the discourse was to mold the national audience toward assumptions of racial superiority and to delineate the profile of the ideal adept for the regime. The political and military alliance of the Axis Pact suggested a specular model of identity in which Italians and Japanese could look at each other and detect elements of a disputable brotherhood. The model of cross-cultural closeness and mutuality that became popular during the regime was completely overthrown during the post-World War II recovery years. What made a difference was the debate about the war and the necessity of rebuilding a national identity in both countries.
In Italy the fall of Fascism came with the demise of the national dream of historical glorification built on the rhetorical image of the Roman Empire. The perception of the majestic past inherited by the Italian Kingdom became a major disillusion and ended up being called by Gaetano Salvemini “il cancro romano-imperiale” filled with “sogni di primati impossibili.” Many Italians joined Salvemini in this negative image of the nation and shared his inferiority complex. The Japanese also had to come to terms with the humiliation of defeat and being forced to accept a U.S.-imposed constitution, but unlike the Italians they were able to rebuild an identity as a strong and unique family based on the *yamanato-damashi* (Japanese spirit).

Using the writings of Maraini, Moravia, and Parise, I outlined a dichotomist construction of cross-cultural identity since they all share the opinion that Italy holds a backward position among Western societies; this view seems to be nourished by a general inferiority complex. The same dichotomy persists even from the opposite viewpoint. In the writings of Nanami Shiono the Republic of Venice represents the paradigm of modern Japan insofar as it presents the ideal example of a rational culture that has been able to translate its humanistic knowledge into military and economic dominion. By setting a parallel between the Republic of Venice and contemporary Japan, Shiono hints at a nationalistic plan for her country that includes the inheritance of Venetian culture and civilization as a necessary step to claiming a Western identity and a consequent right to compete as a peer with other world powers in the international contest for economic leadership. In contrast, the new Italian Republic is dismissed as an exotic country, a backward society afflicted by corruption and inefficiency. Finally, Antonietta Pastore, Marcella Croce, and
Angela Terzani describe through their travelogues the identity of an Italian woman living on the edge between traditional and modern interpretations of her role in the family. While they acknowledge that the traditional image of the Japanese “Butterfly” must be revised and updated to a new liberal model, they cast doubts on gender rights in Italy and question the supposed superiority of the Western model.

Chapters 2 and 3 show from a different perspective a negative portrait of contemporary Italy, depicted in contrast with an attractive image of Japan (except for the case of Moravia). This circumstance is conducive to the conclusion that a representation of the Orient is not always a contrastive comparison with the West, where the Eastern otherness plays the role of an irrational, inhuman counterpart: “Il Giappone come un topos che sembra essere fuori portata rispetto a una spiegazione razionale; un paese che deve essere misterioso e bizzarro, una ‘mente giapponese’ imperscrutabile nella sua essenza ultima, se non per intuizione mistico-estetica del suo enigma, o per riduzione tradizionalista a qualche tratto feudale, comunitario, animista” (Miyake 36).

Maraini describes Japan in terms of Otherness, but as a more rational Other compared to the West, which is perceived as enmeshed in its Christian roots. Parise praises the high morality of Japan as opposed to the corruption and immorality of Italy in the 1970s. In these examples, as well as in Shiono’s Italian journey, it is Italy rather than Japan that embodies the topos of a country “misterioso e bizzarro.”

I believe that my dissertation brings fresh insight to the cultural relations between Italy and Japan in a delicate, common historical process of nation building and the desire for stable national identities.
During my work on this dissertation I gradually saw my initial idea branch into two distinct research projects. Indeed, the writings on Japanese living in Italy that I included on chapter 3 may be the inception of a separate work in which the Japanese journey to Italy may take into consideration a considerable corpus of Italian travelogues from the twentieth century. This is uncharted territory in which I could consider the case of Italy in the broader context of Japanese travel in Europe and to focus on the perception of Italy from the viewpoint of other popular destinations such as England or France. Some of the topics covered in my dissertation are worth exploring from the Japanese perspective, especially the reception of Italian Fascism in Japan and the role played by Mussolini’s image within the narrative framework of the Axis Pact. For instance, I would study works on the Italian Renaissance by the Marxist historian living in Italy Hani Gorō (1901-1983), who visited Benedetto Croce’s salon in Naples.

In any case, I plan to expand my research on Nanami Shiono beyond the texts that are available in translation. Beginning in the 1970s, Nanami Shiono wrote extensive articles for Japanese journals about Japan and its international role, offering to her Asian comrades a perspective on their country from abroad. I plan to analyze this literary production by Shiono as an engaged intellectual in order to delineate the way her cross-cultural views of Italy and Japan were shaped in the years following the decision to make the Penisola her new home.

I also plan to expand the other branch of my project, which is related to Italians traveling to Japan for an extended time. Although I discussed in the
introduction how the Fascist Ventennio represents a watershed for my narration, I would like to broaden my analysis to include the years of post-Italian unification and subsequent establishment of the first diplomatic relations with the Land of the Rising Sun. I am interested in seeing how the newborn Italian Kingdom introduced itself to this Asian country, considered its controversial path toward unification: what values, identity, and traditions were connected with the symbol of the national flag?

Whatever future steps I take to continue this research project, it is a priority for me to undertake a research field trip to Japan not only to have a deeper understanding of what it means to experience a direct impact from the Far East, but also to conduct a rigorous investigation on texts discussing the Italian tour that are available only in Japanese. My dissertation turns the spotlight on Italians who spent an extensive period in Japan but finally decided to return to their homeland. The opportunity to be in Japan would allow me to study the phenomenon of the Italian diaspora from the Nippon perspective. I believe that this last field of analysis would provide the ideal completion of this project in which I suggest that elements of national identities are better understood outside national borders, especially in territories like Japan where the distance between the self and the Other set the stage for the representation of nonnegotiable differences and mutual attractions.
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