

Rebecca Riger Tsurumi. *The Closed Hand: Images of the Japanese in Modern Peruvian Literature*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue UP, 2012. xv + 314 pp.

This book examines the role and impact of Japanese culture in contemporary Peruvian literature—specifically narrative and poetry, since theatre is absent from the study. Rebecca R. Tsurumi demonstrates how Japanese characters are primarily portrayed as negative, thus questioning the relevance of Japanese culture in mainstream Peruvian society. In order to do that, she examines works by both non-Japanese Peruvian authors, as well as second-generation Japanese writers (*Nisei*, those already born in Peru, who provide a different perception and sensibility regarding the immigrant experience).

Tsurumi structures her study in ten chapters, plus an appendix that contains interviews with some of the writers studied. If the reader is not bilingual, this appendix can be problematic, since the interviews are in Spanish, whereas the rest of the book is mostly in English—when citations from works or interviews are in Spanish, there is no alternative English translation available in the text. This decision on the part of the author or the publisher makes the work less accessible to the English-only reader, limiting direct access to those scholars who may be interested in the topic from a Japanese angle, and not so much from a Latin American one, and are therefore not fluent in Spanish. The interviews are particularly fascinating for those approaching the book as a study of immigrant literature in the Americas, and their value is unavailable for the English-monolingual reader.

Although the chapters are not organized into parts, one can notice four main structural blocks in the book: an introduction, a section analyzing works by non-Japanese authors, a section with works by *Nisei* writers, and a conclusion. The first two chapters are introductory in nature. The first is a historical summary that serves to contextualize the presence of Japanese people in Peru, going back to Japan and the Meiji restoration in the second half of the nineteenth century. In their desire to modernize the country, the ruling elite created conditions that would force some citizens to go abroad to make a living, a situation that matched the Peruvian need for manual labor at the time. The chapter takes the reader from this point to the 1990s, when Alberto Fujimori became the first *Nisei* president of Peru. The second chapter studies the presence of oriental imagery in Latin American letters, focusing on the “boom” during the *Modernista* movement at the turn of the twentieth century in both the narrative and the poetry of Ruben Darío, José Martí, Julián del Casal, and José Juan Tablada, among others. The chapter ends with two writers who employed oriental imagery in their works later in the twentieth century: Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz.

The next five chapters constitute the block containing studies of individual authors and works by non-Japanese writers: recent Nobel Prize laureate Mario Vargas Llosa in chapter three (especially in the clearly negative image of the Japanese protagonist of *La casa verde*, Fushía, although the end of the chapter discusses two minor Japanese characters in *Travesuras de la niña mala*); Miguel Gutiérrez's "Matavilela" and Alfredo Bryce Echenique's "Muerte de Sevilla en Madrid" in chapter four (two completely different short stories); Carmen Ollé's *Las dos caras del deseo* in chapter five (where the exotic takes a lesbian twist, with the female protagonist embracing her sexual desires); Pilar Dughi's *Puñales escondidos* in six (a novel where the middle-aged protagonist discovers in Japanese literature some help to confront her problems); and Mario Bellatin's *El jardín de la señora Murakami* and *Shiki Nagaoka: Una nariz de ficción* in chapter seven (here, unlike what we have seen so far, the influence of Japanese is noticeable in the author's writing style and atmosphere, not in the characters).

Chapters eight and nine set up the third block, moving from the outsiders (writers without Japanese heritage) and the narrative genres (novel and short story) to the insiders (*Nisei* writers, second generation Japanese already born and raised in Peru) and poetry. The focus, though, is still on individual writers. Chapter eight is a reflection on Japanese elements in the poetic work of José Watanabe, and chapter nine discusses the representation of Okinawa in the poetry of Doris Moromisato. Besides the difference in genres, there is a fundamental change in sensibility that provides an in-depth understanding of the Japanese experience in Peru.

The final chapter, ten, is a conclusion reflecting on Japanese images in Peruvian letters, with special attention to the gender difference: whereas male Japanese characters are consistently portrayed in a negative way, the female Japanese characters sometimes receive better consideration—not that they are necessarily good. Tsurumi bases that negativity on three factors: World War II, the fact that the Japanese set themselves apart from Peruvian society (unlike the previous Chinese immigrants) by not marrying Peruvians and having their own schools and social circles, and President Alberto Fujimori, who left a negative imprint on Peru that lasts to the present day. As mentioned above, the book concludes with an Appendix containing interviews with six of the authors studied, but unlike the rest of the book, the interviews are in Spanish.

Overall, this book is a very solid contribution to the analysis of Japanese immigration to Peru and the impact of Japanese culture in contemporary Peruvian letters. It shows that Peruvian society is much more diverse and complex than one might expect, as it goes beyond European and Amerindian, containing an Asian component that needs be taken into consideration. Tsurumi's book will be of interest to scholars not only of Peruvian and Latin American literature, but also those interested in diversity, Asian studies, Latin American Studies, and other

related disciplines, provided they have some knowledge of Spanish in order to access the Appendix.

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