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**The Evolution of Cultural Transfer:
The Dialectic of “Self” and “Other”.
Review of the Collective Monograph
“*Japanese Culture in the West*”
ed. by Katasonova, E.L. and Dolin, A.A**

N. N. Izotova

Abstract

The article presents an overview of the collective monograph “Japanese Culture in the West” ed. by Katasonova, E. L. and Dolin, A. A (Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies of RAS, 2024. 544 p. ISBN: 978-5-907846-81-4). The monograph, for the first time in the history of Russian Oriental studies, presents a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the spread and influence of Japanese culture on the countries of Europe and America in the 19th – 21st centuries. The reviewer notes that analyzing the experience of “exporting Japanese culture” makes it possible to develop a methodology for transcultural processes, broaden the concepts of cultural authenticity and identity, and propose an alternative to binary models of cultural interaction.

Keywords: Japan, influence, culture, West, *japonisme*, spread.

Author

Izotova, Nadezda Nikolaevna – Doctor of Cultural Studies, Professor at the Department of Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, and Mongolian Languages, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (76, Vernadskogo Av., Moscow, 119454, Russian Federation).

E-mail: n.izotova@my.mgimo.ru
ORCID: 0000-0002-2817-004X;

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The phenomenon of cultural otherness and the mutual reflections that arise from it constitute the semantic core of any intercultural dialogue. The classical East-West dichotomy has for centuries been one of the key paradigms in understanding global cultural processes. Perceptions associated with East and West, often reduced to a set of binary oppositions: progress vs. tradition, collective vs. individual, spiritual vs. material, rationalism vs. mysticism, etc., form established cultural stereotypes. Ideas about the complete incommensurability of the values of the West and the



East, as well as the illusions of creating a Western-Eastern synthesis based on the notion of the universality of the Western socio-cultural model, cannot provide the basis for a full-fledged inter-civilizational dialogue. The experience of cultural interaction between Japan and Western countries, which has a long and rich history, represents one of the most representative models for studying the mechanisms of intercultural communication.

The collective monograph “Japanese Culture in the West” edited by leading Russian Japanologists, Elena Leonidovna Katasonova, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Head of the Center for Japanese

Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Aleksandr Arkadyevich Dolin, writer, poet, translator of classical and modern Japanese poetry and prose, professor at the School of Oriental Studies at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, is a fundamental study that, for the first time in the history of Russian Oriental studies, offers a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of the spread and influence of Japanese culture on the countries of Europe and America in the 19th – 21st centuries.

The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that the era of globalization, characterized by an unprecedented speed and scale of communications, migration, and information exchange, has turned the world into a complex interconnected system. In this context, the mutual influence of cultures, which is a complex, dynamic, and contradictory process, has reached a fundamentally qualitative level. The world is moving not towards the creation of a single “global culture,” but towards the formation of a complex mosaic in which the global and the local continually interact. The work was published at a time when the phenomenon of cultural globalization requires not just a statement of the facts of reception, transformation, and adaptation, but their deep, systemic understanding.

The authors pursue an ambitious goal: to analyze the “three waves” of cultural export from Japan to Europe and the United States; to examine the influence of the “Japanese style” on fine arts, architecture, literature, theatre, cinema, fashion, martial arts, sports, landscape architecture, and popular culture; to identify the historical stages, dynamics, and diversity of forms of cultural transfer. “For over a century and a half, the fashion for Japanese art has been one of the most important trends in Western culture. Its emblematic image is the famous engraving *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai. But how could it happen that this image, created by a Japanese artist for his compatriots many years ago, sank so deeply into the hearts of Europeans? The explanation may lie in the waves of influence of Japanese culture that have swept across the world more than once over the past century and a half,” E. L. Katasonova and A. A. Dolin note in the preface of the monograph (p. 7).

It should be noted that the Japanese experience demonstrates unique strategies for preserving national identity while simultaneously actively participating in the formation of a global cultural code. At the same time, E. L. Katasonova and A. A. Dolin raise a question that is significant not only for Oriental studies but also for the contemporary humanities discourse – a unified space for reflection on human experience in all its complexity and multifacetedness: has Japan become truly understandable to the West?

In our opinion, the collective monograph under consideration goes beyond narrow professional boundaries and addresses fundamental problems of intercultural communication, which are necessary for understanding cultural dynamics in a globalizing world. The authors convincingly demonstrate that Japan's cultural dialogue with Western countries is a model case of transculturation – a process in which cultural elements are not simply borrowed but creatively reinterpreted, generating new hybrid forms and aesthetic systems that are not reducible to the original cultures. An analysis of Japan's experience of cultural interaction allows us to develop a methodology for transcultural processes, expand the concepts of cultural authenticity and identity, and offer an alternative to binary models of cultural interaction. "Export of Japanese culture" demonstrates that transculturation is not a fusion of cultures, but a process of giving birth to new cultural configurations that retain the memory of their origins but acquire their own logic of development.

The uniqueness of the monograph "Japanese Culture in the West" is largely determined by the thoughtful composition of the authors' team, which brought together masters of Russian Japanese studies and promising young researchers. This approach creates a multi-layered analysis, with each topic examined from a historical perspective through the lens of modern research methods. The monograph's literary merits are highly commendable. The choice of a lively language and of the format of popular science essays, accompanied by colorful illustrations, creates a dialogue with the reader. Each chapter represents a complete intellectual journey into a specific topic. The reader can begin their acquaintance with the monograph with any essay that corresponds

to their interests. The combination of analysis and narrative – cultural processes are presented as fascinating stories – not only expands the potential audience, but also becomes a substantive element of the research.

The structure of the monograph represents a well-thought-out system that combines chronological, thematic, and problematic principles of organizing the material. This approach makes it possible to examine the phenomenon of cultural interaction in its historical dynamics, without losing sight of the specifics of individual areas and cross-cutting theoretical problems. The book consists of four extensive sections, comprising fifteen chapters. The preface to the collective monograph, written by E. L. Katasonova and A. A. Dolin, plays a key role in shaping the conceptual framework of the entire study. This is not a formal introduction, but a methodological statement, setting the tone and frame of reference for the subsequent research.

The “East and West” section recounts the first Great Wave of “Japanese cultural export” to the West in the 19th century, when Europe was gripped by a veritable Japanese boom. The widespread and profound influence of Japanese art and aesthetics on Western culture gave rise to a powerful aesthetic movement known by the French term *japonisme*. *Japonisme* had a significant influence on the development of Western art and culture in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the first chapter, V.E. Molodyakov, drawing on a wide range of sources and scientific research literature, presents a deep, detailed analysis of the content and evolution of the main approaches to the interpretation and study of this concept in Europe, America, and Japan. Initially, *japonisme* meant a passion and fashion for Japan; then it encompassed Japanese motifs in European and American literature and art, and the study and assimilation of the artistic practice of Japanese masters (p. 22). V. E. Molodyakov rightly points out the need for a “synthetic description of *japonisme* as an original, albeit particular, phenomenon of artistic culture, aesthetics, and literature of European and American modernism, which has long since transcended national boundaries” (p. 34).

In the second chapter, E.S. Shteiner explores the phenomenon of Orientalism as a mechanism of constructing the “Other” in Western consciousness. The author presents a philosophical and cultural analysis of the aesthetic and ideological paradoxicality of perception of Japanese art, which balanced between the categories of ugliness, beauty, and exoticism. E.S. Shteiner views Orientalism as “the process of turning the West into a less Western world,” “successive and increasingly accelerating stages of expansion (destruction and at the same time nourishment) of the European cultural paradigm” (p. 56).

The third chapter (by A. V. Gudkova) contains a biographical overview of the activities of famous Japanologists of the 19th and 20th centuries who “discovered Japan” for the Old World. The emphasis in this chapter is on the study of the influence of Western Japanologists, who shaped the mass perception of Japan in Europe and the United States, on Japanese studies in modern times from the point of view of modern historiography. The second section of the monograph, “All Shades of Japonisme,” consists of four essays. In the first chapter, A. A. Dolin traces the main stages of the reception and adaptation of *haiku* in the West in the first decades of the 20th century. Japanese three-line *haiku* poems have long held a special place, being, in fact, the only poetic genre that unites lovers of suggestive lyricism on all continents. A. A. Dolin notes that “*haiku* has evolved from an endogenous Japanese genre of Zen poetry into a unique transnational genre, only indirectly connected to Japanese soil and forming a vast audience that unites hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts, thereby undoubtedly facilitating the convergence of Eastern and Western cultures” (p. 171).

The second chapter (by A. V. Bakina) deals with the influence of Japanese style and aesthetics on European fashion. The author reveals the mechanisms of adaptation of Eastern forms in Western design, analyzes the factors that influenced the growing demand for Japanese goods (literature and theater), and explores the phases of reception of Eastern motifs in fashion. While in the 1860s, traditional Japanese clothing was perceived as a symbol of geisha and samurai, by the 1890s, leading fashion houses and major designers began to actively work

with Japanese symbols in the Art Nouveau style. In the early 20th century, the influence of Japanese costume on fashion begins to be expressed not so much as a set of established symbols and motifs, but as a new constructive form (p. 189).

The third chapter (by N. F. Klobukova (Golubinskaya)) attempts to analyze Japanese influence on Western European musical culture. The author demonstrates that the fashion for Japanese musical aesthetics reached Europe relatively late and was initially limited to Japanese plots in operettas and operas. However, "...with the gradual penetration into the hidden depths of the Japanese musical tradition, a whole world opened up to composers and listeners...in which the West and Japan together create beautiful works of musical art" (p. 208).

The fourth chapter (by T. N. Matrusova) examines the spread and adaptation of Japanese garden art beyond Japan from the mid-19th century to the present day. The origins of this phenomenon are linked to the growing interest in Japanese culture and aesthetics, particularly Zen Buddhism. The author examines the factors of the spread, the evolution of the Japanese garden's image, and the current state of this phenomenon. T. N. Matrusova characterizes "non-Japanese Japanese gardens" not as unsuccessful copies, but as an independent cultural phenomenon "not so much of Japanese as of global culture," "a form of a dialogue of cultures" (p. 250).

The second section of the monograph, "The Post-War Boom," analyzes the second Great Wave of "Japanese cultural export" to the West after World War II in the 1950s and 1960s. E. L. Katasonova's article is devoted to the history and development of Japanese cinema. The author notes that the West's acquaintance with Japanese cinema began in the 1950s, when Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon* won the Golden Lion prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, marking a significant milestone in the recognition of Japanese cinema worldwide. On the cusp of the 20th and 21st centuries, the world learned the names of Takeshi Kitano, Naomi Kawase, Hirokazu Koreeda, and other masters who are now considered representatives of the new Japanese cinema. E. L. Katasonova identifies the influence of Japanese film festivals

on the formation of Japan's image in world culture and their significance for the promotion of contemporary Japanese cinema, emphasizing the importance of new directorial voices and their contribution to the development of world cinema.

The second chapter is also written by E. L. Katasonova. The essay describes how the Japanese became familiar with European clothing and highlights the most important moments in the biography and work of the outstanding Japanese fashion designers Hanae Mori, Kenzo Takada, Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto, and Kawakubo Rei, analyzing their influence on the development of Western fashion. This was not just a new trend, but a paradigm shift: rejection of traditional cuts, silhouettes, and concepts of luxury in favour of new forms based on Japanese aesthetics. "...it is the Japanese, with their particularly subtle vision of the world, their caring attitude towards the environment, their amazing ability to combine traditions and modernity, the national and the borrowed from other cultures, and their sense of the subtle connection between the past, present, and future, who will continue to actively influence the development of world fashion in the 21st century," notes E. L. Katasonova (p. 335).

The third chapter (by A. A. Shangin) presents a review of Japanese literature from the mid-1960s to the present. The author analyzes the works of literary classics Yukio Mishima, Kobo Abe, Yasunari Kawabata, Kenzaburo Oe, and others. Special emphasis is placed on the "new wave" branch of postmodernism, represented by the works of Haruki Murakami, Banana Yoshimoto, Yoko Tawada, and others; the work of detective writers – Edogawa Rampo, Yokomizo Seishi, Akimitsu Takaji, Shimada Soji, and others – is studied.

The fourth chapter, written by A. G. Shekhter, talks about the spread and peculiarities of perception and institutionalization of Zen Buddhism in the USA in the first half of the 20th century.

The fifth chapter (by A. A. Dolin and N. E. Rudakov) is devoted to the West's introduction to Oriental martial arts. It examines the history of the spread of *budo* martial arts to the West and analyzes the reasons for their popularity in literature, cinema, and television. The authors

emphasize that “on the path to big-time sports, traditional martial arts undergo transformation, are modified, and most often lose their original spiritual component” (p. 424). The emergence and development of full-contact martial arts, such as MMA, kudo, kickboxing, etc., raises the question of the balance between the effectiveness of sport combat and the preservation of the ethical traditions of Oriental martial arts.

The fourth and final section of the monograph, “Pop Culture in Virtual Worlds,” talks about the third Great Wave of Japanese culture. According to the researchers, the third wave of Japanese cultural exports is no longer a spontaneous fad that arose by chance, but a product of the country’s clearly planned cultural policy, a new, primarily pop-cultural concept that began to be developed and implemented in the early 21st century (p. 18). This wave is covered in the essays by L. Sh. Kulieva, A. T. Ratnichkin, and G. B. Dutkina.

L. Sh. Kulieva examines the influence of Japanese video games on American popular culture. She describes the key stages of the Japanese video game industry’s development from the mid-1960s to the present day, the spread of video games in the United States, and analyzes the interaction between video games and cinema, animation, and the reflection of video games in fan art. All these processes are part of the global convergence of cultures.

The chapter written by A. T. Ratnichkin analyzes Japan’s successful “cultural export,” which has shaped a certain image of the country in the minds of millions of people around the world. Anime is not just a subculture, but a transmedia phenomenon, a full-fledged and influential part of the 21st-century global mainstream – pop culture. The author explores the history of anime’s introduction, the transformation of the perception of anime in the United States, and its influence on various fields of culture, media, and the IT industry.

In the final essay, G. B. Dutkina discusses Japanese *yokai* demons – “the treasured key to the nation’s cultural code, helping the Japanese understand their cultural identity” (p. 506). G.B. Dutkina traces the migration routes of *yokai* to the West, identifying the origins, content, and characteristics of the *kaidan* genre in the era of globalization.

Focus is made on the expansion of Japanese horror films (J-horror) into the global market.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the phenomenon of Japanese culture's popularity in the West is not just another cultural trend, but a multifaceted dialogue that goes beyond simple borrowing. As the reviewed work convincingly demonstrates, the West not only consumes cultural phenomena but also "recodes" them to suit its own needs, creating unique hybrid forms. This process is undoubtedly accompanied by commercialization, which reduces the richness of traditions to a set of stereotypical brands. The key merit of this work is its departure from simplistic interpretations: the authors avoid idealizing or devaluing the phenomenon of "Japanese cultural export." The interpenetration of cultures is proving fruitful: the West is discovering new forms of creativity and self-expression, while Japan is strengthening its status as a global "soft power." Thus, the dialogue continues, and its results will shape the cultural landscape of the post-industrial world for many years to come.

References

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