

Araceli Tinajero, *A Cultural History of Hispanic Speakers in Japan*. Nueva York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, pp. 256. ISBN: 9783030644871.

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There has always been a mutual curiosity between the West and the East. It has received many names, depending on the relation's idiosyncrasy but the one that is more prominent in the book written by Araceli Tinajero is the fascinating concept of cultural dialogue.

Regarding the literary history of the contacts between Japan and the Western world, it is possible to find extremely valuable examples in the writings of the first travelers, namely Isabella Bird, Basil John Chamberlain, and, of course, Lafcadio Hearn, whose works offers a vivid glimpse of Japanese life, culture, and legends at the end of the 19th century. However, even if Hearn's works still provide us with interesting material to study the image of Japan in Western countries, it is clear that this representation has changed throughout time and does not correspond to the new perspectives of the present day. It is here where the book written by Tinajero reveals itself as a fundamental reading to deeply understand the contemporary image of this country through the social and artistic interactions of the Spanish Speaking communities (both from Latin America and Spain) that live in it. In its pages, we will not find geisha, samurai, or ukiyo-e, the main stereotypes of the *fin-de-siècle* Western Japonism. Instead, we will dwell on the strokes that compose the complex portrait of Japan in the context of our interconnected world.

If we have a look at the index, we will rapidly perceive the committed research that had shaped Tinajero's book. First, thanks to its well-organized structure, that begins with an introductory approach on the relations between Japan and the Spanish Speaking countries to proceed then with the detailed analysis of several fields of study. Secondly, due to its holistic perspective that considers the impact of the cultural dialogue in different disciplines such as media, music, dance, festivals, literature, or the digital world, among others. I would like to add here two more aspects that are also important with regard to the overall impression of the book. The author's clear and personal style and the wide

array of photographs that complement each chapter, make the reading experience both enjoyable and illustrative.

After this prelude to *A Cultural History of Hispanic Speakers in Japan*, I will try to go briefly through the core of each chapter in the next paragraphs, in order to provide a more precise description of their contents.

Tinajero starts her book with a detailed introduction focused on the relations of these two cultural areas (Japan and the Hispanic World) from the first contacts in the 16th century to the nineties decade in the 20th century when there was a notorious increase in the growth of the Spanish Speaking community in Japan. This chapter will help the reader to get familiarised with the topic and to better understand the situation of the connections between Japan and the Hispanic world in a more recent context (from the end of the 20th century until today).

The following section is based on the cultural dialogue among intellectuals (both from Spain or Latin America and Japan) who had helped to tighten the links between their two cultures. One thing that I would like to point out about this chapter is that Tinajero chooses to represent the progressive development in the Hispanic-Japanese exchange through the voices of its protagonists. The life and works of all the chosen translators, journalists, and scholars are not only carefully depicted, but also narrated in a touching and emotive way, such as the story of Montse Watkins.

The third chapter studies the presence of Hispanic media in Japan from newspapers and magazines to radio. Tinajero acknowledges that this is the longest chapter in all the book mainly due to the great quantity and diversity of the all-considered data. It seems that after all journalism has proved to be of extreme importance to the Hispanic community in Japan not only to integrate into the Japanese society but also to built links among the different Spanish Speaking countries. Tinajero expresses it beautifully in a sentence: “As people from all over the Hispanic world consume and contribute to media, it is especially in this space where Spanish speakers from different communities coexist”.

Another field that eases the interactions between cultures is the one related to dance music and festivals, which are investigated in detail in the fourth chapter. It is surprising to know how two artistic disciplines such as music and dance, where words play a secondary role, have offered one of the most successful scenarios for cultural dialogues in Japan. Concerning the presence of Hispanic dances, Tinajero focuses on the specific cases of salsa, flamenco, and tango. This description is completed with the analysis of the reception of Hispanic music in Japan and how it has inspired many music bands both from Hispanic countries and Japan. The chapter ends with an extensive list of all the festivals that are related to Hispanic culture in Japan, like the Fiesta Peruana, propelled by the Peruvian Community.

The section dedicated to the literary representation of Japan is based in the double conception of the book as the vehicle to tell a story (literature), but at the same time as a reading material (libraries). Interestingly, the selected authors' novels and tales conform a description of those lesser-known facts of Japanese society, that affect the lives of many

foreigners: loneliness, discrimination, nostalgia... Therefore, far from insisting on the idea of mythical Japan, which had defined the literature from the 19th century and is still popular today, they offer another perspective that is also necessary to fully understand the essence of this country. Tinajero's aim to depict the veridic reality of Japan has influenced too her perusal of the Hispanic literary works that can be found in Japanese libraries, including those in Universities, language centers as the Instituto Cervantes, Christian organizations, or even jails.

The book concludes with a research of what can be considered as the latest or newest interactions from the Hispanic community. On one side, its influence in a digital environment, that is the blogs, webpages, and twitter profiles created by Latin Americans or Spaniards about Japan. On the other side, the initiatives that are made in a more physical level and that also are contributing to the consolidation of bonds among with the Japanese society, such as the foundation of the Hispanic School *Mundo de Alegría* in Hamamatsu (Shizuoka Prefecture) not far from the centric city of Nagoya.

In the light of all the above-mentioned facts, it is possible to assert that Tinajero's book is a precise reflection of the cultural dialogue that exists between Japan and the Hispanic Countries, as it includes an overview of its current situation, its issues, its achievements and also a hint of its future challenges. Therefore, like Lafcadio Hearn's books, *A Cultural History of Hispanic Speakers in Japan* can be considered another indispensable reading to all the people who are interested not only in Japanese culture, but also in the captivating account of encounters, exchanges, and connections between Japan and the West, that have determined the cultural and historical relations of our contemporary world.