

**EDWARD SAID AND THE JAPANESE:  
BRITISH REPRESENTATIONS OF JAPAN IN THE YEARS  
BEFORE THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR**

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Japan is a great empire with a most ancient and elaborate civilization, and offers as much novelty perhaps as an excursion to another planet!<sup>1</sup>

Emphasizing the novelty of Japan whilst simultaneously praising the country and its people was a recurrent feature in many of the texts written by British travelers to Japan in the years before the Sino-Japanese War. Authors never seemed to tire of providing diverting, and often amusing, examples of the ways in which the two countries differed. In an entry on “Topsy-turvydom” in his miniature encyclopedia of *Things Japanese*, the eminent Japanologist Basil Hall Chamberlain clearly relished imparting such amusing facts as “[w]hen building a house, the Japanese construct the roof first” and “strangest of all, after a bath the Japanese dry themselves with a damp towel!”<sup>2</sup> For some authors, it was their avowed intention to record for posterity the peculiarities of the country. Barely a week after his arrival in Yokohama, Douglas Sladen felt he should chronicle some more of his impressions “before the strangeness of the country loses its edge.”<sup>3</sup>

The forcible juxtaposition of a strange Japan with a familiar West, while at first glance appearing harmless, is redolent of Edward Said’s discourse of Orientalism in which a known Europe is contrasted with an unfamiliar Orient.<sup>4</sup> It is the intention of this paper to explore the extent to which the application of Said’s notion of Orientalism provides fresh insight into Western writing on Japan in the late nineteenth century. It is simply not

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<sup>1</sup> Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* 1 (New York: G. P. Putman’s Sons, 1881), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Basil Hall Chamberlain, *Things Japanese: Being Notes on Various Subjects Connected with Japan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1891), pp. 427–429.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Sladen, *The Japs at Home* (London: Collins’ Clear-Type Press, n.d.), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 43.

possible in the space available here to summarize, and at the same time do justice to, Said's complex work. Nonetheless, I should declare that despite the (often fair) criticism leveled at Said's work, the arguments in this paper assume that his notion of Orientalism remains a useful theoretical framework within which to explore the relationships between East and West.<sup>5</sup> Although Said effectively eliminated Japan from his own analysis, it has been convincingly argued that his notion of Orientalism can be applied to Western writing on Japan.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that even in the absence of overt Western political domination, Western writing on Japan often resembled closely that of Said's Orientalists.<sup>7</sup> In the writings of Chamberlain and Sladen quoted earlier, Japan, like Said's Orient, appears to have been viewed as a platonic essence to be known and contrasted with Europe. In the same way that Said's Orientalists created the Orient,<sup>8</sup> the intentions of the authors to chronicle the peculiarities of Japan effectively cast the country in the role of unfamiliar "other" and, in a sense, created a strange Japan. In Said's notion of Orientalism, value judgments often accompanied this vision of an unfamiliar Orient and a familiar Europe.<sup>9</sup> The Oriental was "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike;" the European, "rational, virtuous, mature."<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, the essence of Said's Orientalism is the "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For criticism of Said, see John MacKenzie, "Edward Said and the Historians," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18 (1994): 9–25; and Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 159–219.

<sup>6</sup> Said's Orient comprises the "near Orient" including Egypt, Syria and Arabia and the "distant orient" of which Said considers India and Persia the most important. See Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 16–17. For the applicability of Said's notion of Orientalism to the case of Japan, see Richard Minnear, "Orientalism and the Study of Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 39/3 (1980): 507–517; and P. L. Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient: English Representations of Japan, circa 1895–1910," *Japanese Studies* 19/2 (1999): 163–181.

<sup>7</sup> Minnear, "Orientalism and the Study of Japan," p. 515; and Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 34–40.

<sup>9</sup> Minnear, "Orientalism and the Study of Japan," p. 507.

<sup>10</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 42.

This paper examines these more value-laden representations of Japan in texts written by British authors who either resided in Japan or traveled to Japan in the years before the Sino-Japanese War. Additionally, this paper explores how Said's notion of Orientalism might help us better understand late nineteenth-century British writing on a country that challenged the foundations of the Western imperialist world view.<sup>12</sup> In the late nineteenth century Japan apparently defied categorization. As Kipling's friend, the professor, proclaimed, "the Jap isn't a native, and he isn't a sahib either."<sup>13</sup> I seek to shed light on British representations of this apparently indefinable country by exploring the three most striking aspects of Orientalist discourse evident in six contemporary British texts. In the first section of the paper, I will consider representations of Japan as childlike and innocent compared to a mature and knowledgeable West. In the second section of the paper, I will examine representations of Japan as feminine in contrast to a masculine West. In the third and final section of the paper, I intend to explore the seemingly contradictory representations of, on the one hand, a stagnant and archaic Japan and on the other hand, a modern and dynamic Japan. Despite the fact that the final three decades of the nineteenth century saw Japan achieve quite staggering progress along Western lines,<sup>14</sup> the British authors, to varying extents, persisted in depicting Japan as part of a stagnant and unchanging Orient. At the same time, however, the very same authors, with some reservations, commended Japan on the progress achieved thus far. In this final section of the paper, I intend to explore these contrasting images of stagnation and progress within the theoretical framework of Said's Orientalism.

The six contemporary texts used in this paper are an assortment of travel memoirs and more serious treatments of Japan. Like P. L. Pham, I have chosen texts in which the authors attempted to present an image of

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<sup>12</sup> For the difficulty contemporary observers had in classifying Japan in this period, see Jean-Pierre Lehmann, *The Image of Japan: From Feudal Isolation to World Power, 1850–1905* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1978), pp. 20–41; and Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," pp. 163–169.

<sup>13</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea: Letters of Travel* (New York: Doubleday and MaClure, 1899), p. 309.

<sup>14</sup> See Akira Irie, *Japan and the Wider World: From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Harlow, UK: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), pp. 11–23; and Sydney Giffard, *Japan Among the Powers, 1890–1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 1–24.

Japan as a whole.<sup>15</sup> The authors comprise five men and one woman of varying degrees of prominence. Rudyard Kipling traveled through Japan in the period 1889-90 as part of a world tour. Basil Hall Chamberlain arrived in Japan in 1873 on a trip for his health. He settled in Tokyo and became one of the foremost experts on Japanese art and literature, eventually becoming professor of Japanese and philology at Tokyo University. He eventually left Japan in 1911.<sup>16</sup> Sir Edwin Arnold resided in Japan in the late 1880s. He was prominent as an author, a publisher and as editor of the British newspaper, the Daily Telegraph. Isabella Bird traveled extensively throughout her life and often published her travel diaries. She visited Japan in the late 1870s. Douglas Sladen and Henry Baker Tristram both traveled to Japan in the 1890s. Sladen was a prolific author whose work ranged from travel memoirs to anthologies of Australian poetry. Tristram was canon of Durham Cathedral at the time of his visit to Japan. Although his main intention was to visit his daughter who worked as a missionary in Osaka, he found time to travel through much of the country. Having briefly introduced the principal authors used in this paper, I must confess that I subscribe to Pham's theory that the relative prominence of the authors is of little consequence here.<sup>17</sup> The significance of these texts derives from their contribution to the myriad of often conflicting representations of Japan in this period; Japan as childlike, Japan as feminine, Japan as Oriental and stagnant or Western and modern. And it is to childlike representations of Japan to which we turn first.

#### **Childlike Japan: "A Nation at Play"<sup>18</sup>**

One of the most prominent and recurring features of the texts

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<sup>15</sup> Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," pp. 164–165.

<sup>16</sup> For a short introduction to Chamberlain's life in Japan, see Richard Bowring, "An Amused Guest in All: Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850–1935)," in H. Cortazzi and G. Daniels, eds., *Britain and Japan 1859–1991: Themes and Personalities* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 128–136. For biographical details of Arnold, Bird, Kipling and Tristram, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For biographical details of Sladen, see K. J. Cable, "Sladen, Douglas Brooke Wheelton (1856–1947)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*, 2006 (accessed March 28, 2009, <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A060152b.htm>).

<sup>17</sup> Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> This quote is a chapter title from Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 290.

under analysis is the sheer number of descriptions of Japanese children. Douglas Sladen claimed that the “streets literally swarm with children” and Edwin Arnold remarked that “[e]verywhere...are visible the delightful Japanese babies.”<sup>19</sup> It has been argued that a reified image of Japanese children and babies, to some extent, displaced other depictions of the population and perpetuated the idea of a childlike Japan.<sup>20</sup> The large amount of space devoted to descriptions of children in the texts examined in this paper certainly suggests that this was the case. Nevertheless, the predominance of descriptions of Japanese children was not the only way in which Japan and the Japanese people were cast in a childlike role.

The houses in which the Japanese lived, the meals they ate and the tools they used were frequently described in small, and often childlike, terms. Arnold, for instance, claimed that “all in Japan is *chiisai* [small]” and Sladen described “microscopic farms and tiny village houses.”<sup>21</sup> Isabella Bird thought that a “portable restaurant...looked as if it were made by and for dolls.”<sup>22</sup> Thirteen years later, Arnold continued the doll analogy by describing his *ryokan* (Japanese hotel) as “like a doll’s house.”<sup>23</sup> Tristram also referred to his *ryokan* as a “little wooden doll-house.”<sup>24</sup> What’s more, Japanese meals were similarly ascribed doll-like qualities. The dishes in a *bento* (Japanese luncheon box) purchased by Tristram were, he claimed, “not very much larger than the dolls’ feasts to which grandchildren invite me.”<sup>25</sup> The idea that Japanese buildings and meals were similar to those of dolls provides an important link between relatively neutral descriptions concerned simply with size and more value-laden representations of the Japanese world as childlike and feminine. The Japanese meals described by Arnold and Tristram were in stark contrast to what a strong, manly Briton would typically consume in a sitting. This is perhaps best illustrated by referring to Arnold’s self-prepared breakfast which he claimed was “more substantial than the airy appetites of the Japanese would demand.”<sup>26</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 292; and Edwin Arnold, *Seas and Lands* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1894), p. 187.

<sup>20</sup> Pham, “On the Edge of the Orient,” p. 170.

<sup>21</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 168; and Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Baker Tristram, *Rambles in Japan* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1895), p. 113.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Baker Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 192.

insinuation is clear. Women, children, dolls and the Japanese had airy appetites whereas British men required something more substantial.

Physical descriptions of the Japanese population as a whole were often couched in childlike terms. Japanese adult bodies were described in ways that brought to mind the image of a child. Isabella Bird remarked that the Japanese looked young due to a lack of facial hair. She mistakenly believed railroad officials in their twenties and thirties to be only “striplings of 17 or 18.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore the authors frequently commented on the relatively small stature of the Japanese. Bird, for example, remarked on the “diminutive size of the people” and Tristram described the Japanese as “the bright little folk who cover this land.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps crucially, figures of authority were also described in physically diminutive terms. Bird wrote of “minute [custom-house] officials” and Arnold commented on the “little soldiers.”<sup>29</sup> Tristram described how his acquisition of a passport allowing him to travel freely in the interior of Japan commanded such respect from the “ubiquitous little policeman [as] to engender a triumphant feeling of superiority over ordinary mortals.”<sup>30</sup> It is not absolutely clear who the ordinary mortals to whom Tristram felt superior actually were. In all probability, Tristram was referring to the Japanese policemen but it is conceivable that he was alluding to the unfortunate fellow Western travelers who were not in possession of the aforementioned passport. Even so, descriptions of little policemen and soldiers, minute officials, and the little folk in general are indicative of an Orientalist discourse in which the childlike, subordinate Japanese were contrasted with the mature, dominant British authors.

Ascribing childlike character traits to the Japanese populace as a whole appeared to be almost routine in the writings of this period.<sup>31</sup> Rudyard Kipling agreed with his friend the professor’s remark that “the Jap is a child all his life.”<sup>32</sup> Perhaps most curiously, and apparently with no trace of irony, Arnold claimed that “the Japanese are fine sleepers.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Isabella Bird commented on the “childish amusements of [the]

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<sup>27</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 79; and Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 18; and Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>30</sup> Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> Pham, “On the Edge of the Orient,” p. 170.

<sup>32</sup> Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, p. 309.

<sup>33</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 350.

men and women” and Tristram characterized the Japanese as always amused and easily fetched by a joke.<sup>34</sup> Even in what should have been the serious matter of religion, the authors observed and recorded outwardly childlike behavior in many Japanese adults. Chamberlain remarked that the Japanese “take their religion lightly” and described visitors to the temple at Ikegami as “happy crowds...praying incidentally.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the country itself could be depicted as childlike. This characterization of the country as a whole was most pronounced in a chapter entitled “A Nation at Play” in Douglas Sladen’s *The Japs at Home*.<sup>36</sup> In only one of countless examples in this chapter, Sladen made the extraordinary claim that “[i]f a village is large enough to hold a shop at all, it will have a toy shop.”<sup>37</sup> Towards the end of the chapter, Sladen implored Japan to “[n]ever grow up!” He hoped Japan would never “grow up out of its delightful status of ‘a nation at play’.”<sup>38</sup> Although the intention, in all likelihood, was to praise Japan, these passages could well be read in Saidian terms as the contrasting of a childlike and innocent Japan with a mature and knowledgeable West.

Interlocking with the depiction of Japan as childlike and innocent was the representation of the entire population as students and the country itself as under the tutelage of the West. Actual Japanese students often came in for a great deal of praise. Chamberlain described Japanese students as “the schoolmaster’s delight – quiet, intelligent, deferential, studious almost to excess” and Isabella Bird claimed that “[i]ntellectual ardour, eager receptiveness, admirable behavior, earnest self-control, docility, and an appetite for hard and continuous work, characterize Japanese students.”<sup>39</sup> However, in an example of the frequent slippage between descriptions of children and descriptions of the population as a whole, J. Stafford Ransome claimed that “the most marked *trait* in the Japanese character [is] their feverish anxiety to acquire, and wonderful capacity for absorbing knowledge of any sort.”<sup>40</sup> This character trait undoubtedly evokes images of youthfulness. Although his intention was to praise the Japanese, Ransome

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<sup>34</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 78; and Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, pp. 290–300.

<sup>37</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 297.

<sup>38</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 300.

<sup>39</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, p. 128; and Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 2 (New York: G. P. Putman’s Sons, 1881), pp. 343–344.

<sup>40</sup> Pham, “On the Edge of the Orient,” p. 170.

effectively reduced the status of the entire population to that of a child.<sup>41</sup> On the surface, this appears to conform to Said's notion of a Western discourse which sought to subordinate a childlike Orient. However, the Japanese were not simply reduced to the status of children; they were cast in the role of willing students. As a result, it could be argued that the entire population was accorded the corresponding dynamic character traits such as intellectual ardor and eager receptiveness. These character traits fundamentally subvert another of Said's key distinctions between the West and the Orient. The depiction of a young, dynamic Japan is simply not consistent with Said's contention that the Orient was represented as stagnant and unchanging.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the portrayal of Japan as young and dynamic calls into question the overall consistency of applying Said's discourse of Orientalism to British representations of Japan.

Japan was represented as childlike through a reified image of its children. The Japanese population as a whole was often described in physically childlike terms and attributed childlike, although generally positive, character traits. Regardless of the positive nature of these representations, Japan was consistently positioned as childlike and subordinate in contrast to a mature and dominant West. However, interconnecting portrayals of Japan as young and dynamic destabilize a different aspect of the application of Said's discourse to writings on Japan. Representations of a youthful, dynamic Japan fundamentally challenge Said's notion of a Western discourse on an unchanging Orient.

#### **Feminine Japan: "Young Miss Japan" and "Mr. John Bull"**<sup>43</sup>

In Arnold's *Seas and Lands*, of the 31 full-page illustrations contained within the chapters covering his travels in Japan, women were the principal focus of fourteen. Men were the focus of only three. Moreover, women were the main focus in the vast majority of the part-page illustrations. Often these illustrations exhibited little or no connection to the content of the chapter. In a chapter entitled "Militant Japan," Arnold, or his publisher, saw fit to insert a picture of a Japanese woman dressed in a kimono.<sup>44</sup> It almost appears as if such illustrations were included to remind the reader that, although the written content of the chapter might be

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 96.

<sup>43</sup> Evelyn Adam (1910) quoted in Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," pp. 171-172.

<sup>44</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 367.



inherently masculine, Japan remained in essence a feminine country. The written content of the texts also exhibited a similar tendency towards the prioritization of depictions of Japanese women. Even a cursory glance at the contents page of Douglas Sladen's *The Japs at Home* reveals that two chapters were devoted to descriptions of Japanese women while the only conceivable equivalent chapter pertaining to Japanese men focused specifically on "Japanese Firemen."<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in a chapter concerned with daily life in Japan, Arnold framed his account exclusively through the activities of women. The reader learned about the charming games Japanese women played in the evening, the reader discovered what a Japanese woman wore in bed and the reader was informed as to the first thing a Japanese woman did upon waking.<sup>46</sup> In Arnold's rather one-sided account, daily life in Japan was essentially a feminine life.

In some cases, images of Japanese women could even displace the popular image of Japan as a land rich in history and culture. In one example, Arnold described a young woman who worked at one of the temples in Nikko.

Her dark eyes, fair, quiet face, and pious gravity were perhaps the best and nicest things we saw in the renowned temple grounds at Nikko.<sup>47</sup>

In Arnold's account of his visit to what Basil Hall Chamberlain and W. B. Mason considered one of the foremost examples of Buddhist temple architecture in all Japan, the description of one woman took precedence over all else.<sup>48</sup> The prioritization of descriptions of Japanese women is also evident in the accounts of crowd scenes. In only one example, Sladen described streets filled to overflowing with *musume* (young unmarried women).<sup>49</sup> Like the depictions of children, the portrayals of Japanese women were often so prominent they displaced alternative images of the

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<sup>45</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 351. According to Arnold, the first thing a Japanese lady did upon awakening was smoke a little brass pipe.

<sup>47</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 202–203.

<sup>48</sup> Basil Hall Chamberlain and W. B. Mason, *A Handbook for Travellers in Japan Including the Whole Empire from Yezo to Formosa* (London: John Murray, 1901), p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 148.

Japanese populace as a whole.<sup>50</sup>

The authors' descriptions of Japanese towns and buildings also contributed to the feminization of the country. From the deck of his ship, Tristram observed "fairy-like villas" on the side of the hills.<sup>51</sup> Once ashore, Tristram described stepping into a "fairyland...of minute prettinesses [where] even the butchers' shops are decorated with vases and flowers."<sup>52</sup> Images of a feminine Japan persisted in descriptions of the interior of Japanese residences. Arnold believed that "[n]othing is ugly in the very humblest Japanese home." He was charmed by the "numberless little signs of feminine taste and decoration."<sup>53</sup> The images of dolls' houses and dolls' feasts discussed earlier with regard to the representation of a childlike Japan also contributed to the portrayal of a feminine Japan. A pretty, fairylike dolls' world was not simply a childlike world, it was a feminine world too.

Physical descriptions of the Japanese populace as a whole were frequently couched in feminine terms. Arthur Diósy described Japanese men as having "small delicately formed hands with slender, supple fingers" and Arnold remarked that the male *jinrikisha* (rickshaw) drivers had a "tireless quick trot" and "twinkling little legs."<sup>54</sup> Arnold was also struck by the sing-song voices of "all Japanese readers," even the Emperor Meiji.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, distinctly feminine character traits were often ascribed to the Japanese population as a whole.<sup>56</sup> For Arnold, Japan was a "Land of Gentle Manners."<sup>57</sup> He was particularly charmed by "[t]he light perpetual laughter of the Japanese."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, many authors commented on the agreeable nature of the Japanese. Arnold noted a "universal alacrity to please...[and an] almost divine sweetness of disposition which...places Japan in these respects higher than any other nation."<sup>59</sup> In fact, Arnold wondered whether the Japanese could be of the same race as "that which you left quaffing half-

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<sup>50</sup> Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," p. 172.

<sup>51</sup> Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 292 and 271.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur Diósy, *The New Far East* (London: Cassell, 1898), p. 53; and Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 278.

<sup>55</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 504.

<sup>56</sup> Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," p. 172.

<sup>57</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 160.

<sup>58</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 206.

<sup>59</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 242.

and-half and eating rump steaks on the banks of the Thames.”<sup>60</sup> Whilst undoubtedly intended as praise, this kind of comparison could also be read in Saidian terms as contrasting a coarse but inherently masculine Britain with a delicate and feminine Japan. This vision of the nature of the relationship between Britain and Japan was most neatly illustrated a few years later by Evelyn Adam who characterized the Anglo-Japanese Alliance as the partnering of “young Miss Japan” and “Mr. John Bull.”<sup>61</sup>

The image of a masculine Britain and a feminine Japan was also reflected in the authors’ comments on the status of women in Japanese society. This was an emotive subject for many of the authors as evidenced by the harshness of the criticism reserved for Japanese men and the male-oriented Japanese society. The criticism leveled at Japanese men was in stark contrast to the almost unanimous praise heaped upon Japanese women.<sup>62</sup> Basil Hall Chamberlain even jokingly suggested that Japanese women “could not be of the same race as the men.”<sup>63</sup> For Chamberlain, the way in which Japanese women were treated by their husbands should cause a “pang to any generous European heart.”<sup>64</sup> Both Chamberlain and Sladen remarked that even the greatest lady of the land was essentially her husband’s drudge.<sup>65</sup> The authors also commented on the lack of gallantry displayed by Japanese men. Chamberlain explained this deficiency by looking to Japan’s feudal past and the ancient custom of filial piety. He argued that first and foremost a samurai’s duty was to his lord or father. Hence, a samurai did not perform his valiant deeds for “such fanciful reward as a lady’s smile.” This fact, Chamberlain surmised, was reflected in contemporary attitudes and behavior towards women.<sup>66</sup> A lack of gallantry was apparently not confined to the samurai class. At the other end of the social spectrum, Tristram observed Japanese peasant women shouldering a considerable amount of manual labor and similarly concluded that the menfolk were short on gallantry.<sup>67</sup> The assessment of Japanese men as lacking a sense of chivalry effectively contributed to the feminization the country. As Japanese men could not fulfill their masculine role as defined

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<sup>60</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 269.

<sup>61</sup> Pham, “On the Edge of the Orient,” p. 172.

<sup>62</sup> Lehmann, *The Image of Japan*, p. 86.

<sup>63</sup> Pham, “On the Edge of the Orient,” p. 173.

<sup>64</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, p. 451.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*; and Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 152.

<sup>66</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, p. 452.

<sup>67</sup> Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 191.

by a Western code of chivalrous behavior, the women, who certainly could fulfill their feminine role, “deserved a better class of man, and who better...than a sterling Englishman?”<sup>68</sup> The low status of women in Japanese society allowed the (male) authors to nourish fantasies of Japanese female subservience.<sup>69</sup> These fantasies of submissive Japanese women are evident on a macro scale in the portrayal of a subservient, feminine Japan and a dominant, masculine and chivalrous Britain. The authors examined in this paper effectively cast Japan and the Japanese in the role of Young Miss Japan, while at the same time, casting Britain, and more often than not themselves, in the role of Mr. John Bull.

The authors’ views on Japanese women and their position in society did not simply contribute to the feminization of the country. The status of women in Japanese society was also considered an important factor in determining the level of civilization Japan had attained.<sup>70</sup> For instance, Arnold wrote that the first Parliament of Japan was “sadly uncivilised” because women were denied the right to attend the opening ceremony.<sup>71</sup> It is to this representation of Japan as either civilized or uncivilized, modern or archaic, progressing or stagnant, to which we now turn.

#### **Stagnant Japan, Progressing Japan**

On her approach to Japan, Isabella Bird recorded her first impressions:

The air and water were alike motionless, the mist was still and pale, grey clouds lay restfully on a bluish sky, the reflections of the white sails of the fishing boats scarcely quivered...our noisy, throbbing progress, seemed a boisterous intrusion upon sleeping Asia.<sup>72</sup>

Other authors made similar observations of a sleeping, stagnant Japan. Sladen wrote that Japan was “creative of rest, not to say languor” and rather

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<sup>68</sup> Pham, “On the Edge of the Orient,” p. 173.

<sup>69</sup> Ian Littlewood, *The Idea of Japan: Western Images, Western Myths* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1996), p. 114.

<sup>70</sup> See Lehmann, *The Image of Japan*, p. 68; and Littlewood, *The Idea of Japan*, p. 114.

<sup>71</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 502.

<sup>72</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 14.

bizarrely claimed that in Japan, a retired British man of modest means could “end his life in the placid content of a well-looked-after vegetable.”<sup>73</sup> For Sladen, Japan was the ideal place for a Western man to come and relax. Arnold seemed to agree. He regarded Japan as place where a man could forget the problems of modern Britain. “Was there really ever an ‘Irish question’” he asked. For Arnold, contemporary problems in Britain appeared “vain and tedious” when contrasted with “placid Japanese insouciance!”<sup>74</sup> There is no doubt that Arnold, and perhaps Sladen, preferred the Japanese lifestyle. However, their tributes to life in Japan were inextricably tied to representations of the country as placid, restful and opposed to modernity. Taking matters more seriously, Arnold believed that Japanese civilization grew up in the “placid atmosphere of secluded Asiatic life.” This, he continued, was in stark contrast to Britain which grew up “among the clash and turmoil of competing nations.” The result for Britain, Arnold claimed, was the evolution of a civilization based on “active science and ceaseless industry.”<sup>75</sup> These passages clearly illustrate what Jihang Park describes as the most distinct feature of Said’s discourse of Orientalism; the representation of the East as stagnant in contrast to a constantly progressing West.<sup>76</sup>

The placid atmosphere that Arnold took so much pleasure in and his belief that life in Japan was the “softest tonic” for Western life were intimately linked to the idea of Japan as a country of “antique grace.”<sup>77</sup> The considerable amount of space the authors devoted to recounting their experiences in Japanese tea houses suitably illustrates this connection.<sup>78</sup> Arnold, for example, described being served by *musume* clad in traditional costume. He also recounted watching mysterious and antiquated song and dance routines.<sup>79</sup> The tea house was a space where images of a placid Japan and images of an archaic Japan intersected, and the result was the representation of Japan as a country of antique grace. Some authors made

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<sup>73</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 316.

<sup>74</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 289–290.

<sup>75</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 253.

<sup>76</sup> Jihang Park, “Land of the Morning Calm, Land of the Rising Sun: The East Asia Travel Writings of Isabella Bird and George Curzon,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36/3 (2002), p. 507.

<sup>77</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 286.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 230–239 and 258–270; and Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 249.

<sup>79</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 239 and 261.

other, more direct, assertions to give the impression that Japan was a country of-the-past. Sladen, for example, remarked that the best way for an Englishman to get an unadulterated impression of Japan would be to study the fifteenth-century paintings at the National Gallery in London. For Sladen, the *jinrikishas* (rickshaws), the bow-and-arrow shops and the suits of armor on sale in the curio shops, gave the visitor the impression of living in medieval times.<sup>80</sup> On the one hand, through the numerous accounts of time spent in tea houses, Japan was portrayed, somewhat favorably, as a country of antique grace. On the other hand, through Sladen's account of street life in Yokohama, the country was portrayed, rather negatively, as backward and mediaeval. Nevertheless, both depictions fixed Japan, in line with Said's discourse of Orientalism, as a country opposed to modernity; as a country of-the-past.

The authors' translations of the Japanese language also contributed to the depiction of an archaic Japan. Edwin Arnold's attempts at translation in *Seas and Lands* provide the best examples. Arnold rather curiously translated the Japanese expression *O yasumi nasai* as "[c]ondescend to take honourable repose."<sup>81</sup> In two further examples he refers, again somewhat oddly, to "honourable old charcoal" and "honourable old hot water."<sup>82</sup> Through these translations, Arnold effectively portrayed the native speakers of this language as extraordinarily polite. As discussed earlier, many contemporary observers praised the gentle manners and antique grace of the Japanese people. However, through the frequent use of such archaic translations, Arnold also represented the Japanese as remote and somewhat ridiculous. Surely no Englishman would say "Condescend to take honourable repose" when retiring for the night. Susan Bassett-McGuire argues that Victorian translators often "felt the need to convey the remoteness of the original in time and place" and that writers in the Victorian period were prone to "archaizing" in their translations.<sup>83</sup> This tendency is certainly evident in Arnold's translations. It should be understood that Arnold made a choice to translate these Japanese words and expressions into such archaic and ridiculous English. Natural and concise translations were readily available in guidebooks such as Basil Hall

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<sup>80</sup> Sladen, *The Japs at Home*, p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 191.

<sup>82</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 268 and 330.

<sup>83</sup> Susan Bassett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1980), pp. 68–73.

Chamberlain and W. B. Mason's *A Handbook for Travellers to Japan*.<sup>84</sup> In fact, Chamberlain and Mason accurately translated *O yasumi nasai* as "Goodnight."<sup>85</sup> By choosing to use such archaic English in his translations, Arnold undoubtedly contributed to a Saidian discourse in which Japan, although praised for its antique grace and gentle manners, was positioned as archaic in contrast to a modern West.

The authors often stated that it was their intention to focus on accounts of real Japan. It appears that in many cases real Japan signified old Japan or a Japan that was still recognizably Oriental. Chamberlain declared that his encyclopedia of *Things Japanese* was in essence a book about "old Japan."<sup>86</sup> Real Japan could also signify rural Japan or a Japan which was unaffected by modernization. The authors were often keen to visit and observe first-hand this increasingly elusive real Japan. Tristram, for example, wrote that he had not crossed three oceans to see the "match factories" and "cotton mills" of Osaka.<sup>87</sup> Isabella Bird also longed to "get away into real Japan."<sup>88</sup> Bird's real Japan was the unbeaten tracks of the title of her book in which "the rumble of the wheel of progress is scarcely yet heard."<sup>89</sup> This desire to report on real Japan or old Japan is, of course, understandable. Temples and tea houses must have appeared far more interesting to the contemporary observer than match factories and cotton mills. However, the eagerness of the authors to represent authentic Japan as old, Oriental, rural and unaffected by modernization was unquestionably a significant factor in sustaining the image of Japan as a country-of-the-past.

Often the authors seemed to will Japan to remain authentically Oriental. Modernization in the guise of the adoption of Western dress and architectural styles was often perceived as unnatural and regrettable.<sup>90</sup> The authors often reacted negatively to the idea of Japan as a country in development along Western lines, particularly when key components of an authentic Japan such as traditional dress were threatened.<sup>91</sup> It is perhaps Rudyard Kipling who most vividly expressed this feeling of consternation

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<sup>84</sup> Chamberlain and Mason, *A Handbook for Travellers in Japan*, pp. 17–37.

<sup>85</sup> Chamberlain and Mason, *A Handbook for Travellers in Japan*, p. 24.

<sup>86</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, p. 229.

<sup>88</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 9.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 217 and 310; and Tristram, *Rambles in Japan*, pp. 78, 136, 212 and 275.

<sup>91</sup> Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," p. 176.

at the impending loss of authentic Oriental Japan:

[I]t would pay us to establish an international suzerainty over Japan; to take away any fear of invasion or annexation, and pay the country as much as ever it chose, on condition that it simply sat still and went on making beautiful things while our men learned. It would pay us to put the whole Empire in a glass case and mark it, "Hors Concours" Exhibit A.<sup>92</sup>

At first glance these passages appear to conform to Said's argument that the reverence of the past Orient allows one to disregard the contemporary Orient.<sup>93</sup> However, this application of Said's theory in the case of Japan is problematic. Although the authors clearly revered old Japan, it did not necessarily follow that they disregarded contemporary Japan or could not accept the need for the country to modernize. Chamberlain may have lamented the "substitution of common-place European ways for the glitter, the glamour of picturesque Orientalism," but he also accepted that there was a need for Japan to modernize.<sup>94</sup> Despite acknowledging that *Things Japanese* was quintessentially a book about old Japan, Chamberlain accepted that, as a book, it was an "epitaph" for old Japan. Indeed, contrary to Kipling, Chamberlain declared that "[o]ld Japan is dead, and the only decent thing to do with the corpse is to bury it."<sup>95</sup> Regrettable as it may have seemed, Chamberlain was not alone in accepting the need for Japan to modernize.<sup>96</sup> Having said that, in some cases modernization was portrayed not as something regrettable but rather as a cause for celebration. In fact, positive descriptions of Japan's modern cities and modern institutions abound. And it is to these accounts to which we now turn.

I would like to return briefly to Isabella Bird's depiction of Japan as part of a sleeping Asia quoted earlier in this paper. Prevalent as the image of an archaic and stagnant Japan might appear, an equally powerful but contradictory depiction of a young and dynamic Japan is also discernable in many of the texts examined here. Bird's metaphor of a sleeping Japan dissolves almost as soon as she steps ashore. She described the port of Yokohama as ebullient and energetic and Tokyo as "a city of business,

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<sup>92</sup> Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, pp. 311–312.

<sup>93</sup> Minnear, "Orientalism and the Study of Japan," p. 507.

<sup>94</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, pp. 5 and 220.

<sup>95</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 253.



politics, amusement, bustle, energy and progress.”<sup>97</sup> In the late Victorian period, industriousness was often viewed as an important indicator of civilization.<sup>98</sup> And the Japanese certainly appeared industrious to Isabella Bird. What struck Bird most after stepping ashore was the complete lack of “loafers,” for everyone she could see had “some affairs of their own to mind.”<sup>99</sup> The sleepy, stagnant image of Japan is simply not consistent with Bird’s account of bustling new cities and an industrious population.

Many authors devoted a great deal of space to documenting Japan’s astonishingly rapid modernization that followed the opening of the country in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>100</sup> Chamberlain triumphantly listed many of the key stages in this process, from 1871 (“Posts and telegraphs introduced”) to 1890 (“Opening of the first Diet”).<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, Arnold described Japan’s progress as a period in which

new and enlightened criminal codes were enacted; the methods of judicial procedure were entirely changed; thoroughly efficient systems of police, of posts, of telegraphs, and of national education were organized; an army and a navy modeled after Western patterns were formed; the finances of the Empire were placed on a sound footing; railways, roads, and harbors were constructed; an efficient mercantile marine sprang into existence; the jail system was radically improved; an existence scheme of local government was put into operation; a competitive civil service was organized; the whole fiscal system was revised.<sup>102</sup>

Clearly Arnold believed that much had been achieved. Yet his use of the passive voice when describing Japan’s progress begs the question “by whom?” In answer to that, many of the authors expressed the view that the Japanese were sorely indebted to British and other Western teachers and

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<sup>97</sup> For the description of Yokohama see Park, “The East Asia Travel Writings of Isabella Bird and George Curzon,” p. 519. For the description of Tokyo see Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 2, p. 205.

<sup>98</sup> Park, “The Travel Writings of Isabella Bird and George Curzon,” p. 521.

<sup>99</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 17.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 2; pp. 324–345; and Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 375–376.

<sup>101</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, pp. 220–223.

<sup>102</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, pp. 376–377.

technical advisors.<sup>103</sup> Chamberlain went so far as to state that the “foreign *employé* is the creator of New Japan.”<sup>104</sup> Many contemporary observers believed that such dependence on foreign expertise implied that Japan’s progress was limited or perhaps even doomed to failure.<sup>105</sup> By emphasizing the extent to which Japan remained reliant on Western assistance, the authors continued to portray Japan as junior, subordinate and still under the tutelage of the West. What’s more, by implying that the progress achieved was somehow limited, the authors portrayed Japan as a country incapable of fully modernizing; as a country unable to catch up with the West.

Crucially, many of the authors tempered their praise for Japan’s progress with passages that reasserted the essentially Oriental nature of the country and its people. Arnold believed that “[u]nder the thickest lacquer of new ways, the antique manners and primitive Asiatic beliefs survive of this curious and delightful people.”<sup>106</sup> Some contemporary observers doubted whether Western institutions could ever be transplanted to Japan.<sup>107</sup> Chamberlain, for example, believed that Europeanization could never be completed.<sup>108</sup> Isabella Bird believed that any progress observed should be considered against the fact that the Japanese government was “despotic and idolatrous,” the peasantry were “ignorant and enslaved by superstition” and the official class suffered from the “taint which pervades Asiatic officialdom.”<sup>109</sup> For Isabella Bird, it was the very Orientalness of the Japanese people that rendered them incapable of successfully assimilating Western ideas. Any evidence of progress always carried with it the suggestion of superficiality. However much the country appeared to be modernizing, in the texts examined here, Japan could not shake the stigma of being Oriental and, as a result, continued to be represented as subordinate to a constantly progressing West.

### Conclusion

It is clear that Japan was not caught in the same discourse of

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<sup>103</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 241; and Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 1, p. 40.

<sup>104</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 171.

<sup>105</sup> Park, “The Travel Writings of Isabella Bird and George Curzon,” pp. 522–523.

<sup>106</sup> Arnold, *Seas and Lands*, p. 161.

<sup>107</sup> Lehmann, *The Image of Japan*, p. 37.

<sup>108</sup> Chamberlain, *Things Japanese*, p. 127.

<sup>109</sup> Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks* 2, p. 323.

Orientalism which captured Said's colonial East.<sup>110</sup> The texts examined here are not examples of a monolithic denigratory discourse. They are suffused with innumerable conflicts and contradictions. Nevertheless, certain striking elements come to the fore. True to Said's notion of Orientalism, the Japanese people and the country as a whole were depicted as childlike, innocent and feminine in contrast to a mature, knowing and masculine West.

On the other hand, through the image of the populace as admirable students and through depictions of modern cities and institutions, the authors represented Japan as young, dynamic and progressing; a representation that subverts Said's notion of a Western discourse on an unchanging Orient. Japan simply did not fit the Saidian stereotypical image of a stagnant Orient, but neither did undeniably rapid modernization along Western lines confer upon Japan anything like equal status with the West. The authors consistently credited Japan's astonishing progress to Western expertise as much as to the Japanese themselves.

Consequently, Japan's modernization was portrayed as limited. Race appeared to be an important factor in explaining this limitation. The progress made by the Japanese would always be tainted by the fact that they were an Asiatic race. Japan might have been "on the edge of the Orient," but, in the texts considered here, it was still very much positioned as part of the Orient.<sup>111</sup> Regardless of the praise for Japan's modern institutions, industrious population, and admirable students, the authors still positioned Japan as a fixed part of the Orient and as subordinate to a dominant West.

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<sup>110</sup> Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," p. 179.

<sup>111</sup> Pham, "On the Edge of the Orient," p. 163.

