Beyond “the West” and “the East”:
Occidentalism, Orientalism and self-Orientalism in Italy-Japan Relations

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Institute of Comparative Culture
Sophia University, Tokyo

Toshio MIYAKE
FP7-Marie Curie IIF Fellow
Ca’ Foscari University of Venice
Beyond “the West” and “the East”: Occidentalism, Orientalism, and Self-Orientalism in Italy-Japan Relations

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OUTLINE

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II. Occidentalism as a hegemonic process
   • interrelationality
   • intersectionality
   • positionality

III. Ambivalent status of Japan and Italy
   • double Orientalism of “Japan”
   • “Italy” as orientalised “West”
I. “Occidentalism”

? pro-Westernism
? anti-Westernism
? only ideologies, ideas, images

• constellation of signifying practices (discourses, actions, institutions) since modern age based on the notion of “the West”, playing a hegemonic role in terms of collective identity and alterity
• imagined geography of “the West”: effective in inscribing the whole modern world and humanity along hierarchic and fluid lines of inclusion and exclusion, encompassing global relations of power in geopolitical contexts, as well as knowledge practices in geocultural spheres
Critical Studies on Occidentalism


Why study Occidentalism today?

1. US/Europe-centric world order.
2. Neo-Occidentalism, neo-Orientalism, neo-nationalism, neo-racism etc.
3. Limits in previous studies.
Limits of previous studies

1. Monological approach
2. Neo-essentialism of “the West” and its others
3. Hiatus between general theory and ethnography of the globalising present
The objectivity of the real. In order to understand precisely what significance this concept might have, it seems to me opportune to dwell on the example of the concepts of ‘East’ and ‘West’, which never cease to be ‘objectively real’ even though when analyzed they turn out to be nothing more than a ‘historical’ or ‘conventional construct’ [...] It is obvious that East and West are arbitrary and conventional (historical) constructions, since (outside of real history) every spot on earth is simultaneously East and West. Japan is probably the Far East not only for the European but also for the American from California, and even for the Japanese himself, who, through English political culture, might call Egypt the Near East, which from his viewpoint should be the West, etc. Furthermore, the purely historical nature of the significance attached to these terms can be seen from the fact that the words ‘East’ and ‘West’ have now acquired supernumerary meaning and even refer to relations between whole civilizations.

II. Occidentalism as hegemony

Occidentalism as hegemonic process

- dynamic and unstable balance of constraint and consensus
- effectiveness: material force and ethic-cultural leadership aimed to mobilize active contribution and participation by the subaltern sides
- reciprocal process between hegemony and subalternity → no material constraint

my interpretation:
Occidentalism: *interrelational* identification and othering process, articulated through a cumulative *intersection* of discourses and practices, resulting in differentiated *positionality* of all actors involved in this process
“OccIDENTALISM”

1. Foundational identification process of Eurocentric and Americacentric modernity, as well as of collective identity and othering in non Euro-american context
(→ positional approach)
"Occidentalism"

2. Every kind of discourse, practice and institution, contributes to the idea of the existence of something as “the West” or something as “Western”.

Occidentalism as the condition of possibility of Orientalism itself.
“Occidentalism”

3. Reciprocal articulation between Euro-american and non Euro-american sides, within a broader and entangled process of Occidentalism, Orientalism, and self-Orientalism (→ interrelational approach).
“Occidentalism”

4. Effective hegemony as capacity to cross-cut every sphere of human action and experience, becoming naturalised, and ultimately invisible (→ *intersectional* approach).
Doing Occidentalism: *interrelationality*

- Euro-american hegemony
- (SELF-) OCCIDENTALISM

**ORIENTALISM**

- Non Euro-american subalternity
- (SELF-) ORIENTALISM

“the West” as universal reference
Doing Occidentalism: intersectionality

“the West”
(“MODERNITY”)
- reason-science, progress,
- universalism, individualism,
- freedom, human rights
- white race, masculinity,
- wealth, adulthood, etc.

“the East”, “the Rest”
(“TRADITION”)
- emotionality, stasis,
- particularism, groupism,
- oppression, authoritarianism
- coloured race, femininity,
- poverty, infancy, etc.

OCCIDENTALISM
(as self-definition)

ORIENTALISM
(as hegemonic other-definition)

CUMULATIVE INTERSECTION
of all dimensions of identification (modes of representation, levels of actions, spheres of affect)

mobilisation of every field of human life

OCCIDENTALISM
(as subaltern other-definition)

ORIENTALISM
(as self-definition)

CUMULATIVE INTERSECTION
of all dimensions of identification (modes of representation, levels of actions, spheres of affect)

mobilisation of every field of human life
Doing Occidentalism: *positionality*

ITALY (other Euro-american nations) ↔ JAPAN (other non Euro-american nations)

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("MODERNITY")
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CUMULATIVE INTERSECTION
mobilisation of every field of human life

ORIENTALISM (as hegemonic other-definition)

OCCIDENTALISM (as subaltern other-definition)

OCCIDENTALISM (as self-definition)

ORIENTALISM (as self-definition)

ITALY (other Euro-american nations) ↔ JAPAN (other non Euro-american nations)

governmental, economical, political, societal, individual actors, etc.
III. Ambivalent status of modern Japan and Italy

Modern Japan and Italy:
- both nation-states (Italy 1861, Japan 1868) constructed through a process neither at the very centre of modernization, nor external to it
- both active agents of colonialism/imperialism and orientalistic othering, but also objects of Orientalism by more hegemonic nation-states (USA, Great Britain, Germany)

not completely hegemonic or subaltern, not completely “eastern” or “western”
Reciprocal popularity within contemporary Italy-Japan relations (late 1980s-present)

Italy:
Japan as the most popular “eastern” nation (highest number of TV anime series broadcast outside Japan; widespread inculturation through the Japanese media mix since the early 1980s)

Japan:
consumer boom of Italy (1991-97); Italy as the most loved foreign country among the whole female and young population
Double Orientalism of Japan

“Japan” vs “West” vs “Japan”
(we-identity) (other-alterity) (other-alterity)

(HYPER) TRADITION (HYPER) MODERNITY

geisha
samurai
zen, shintō
martial arts
mount Fuji
ritualized aesthetics
technique
science
reason
individualism-society
freedom
history-progress

robot, cyborg,
high-tech gadgets
otaku, hikikomori
salarymen
Japan Inc.,
nuclear apocalypse

⇓

model of humanity

⇓

?
Double Orientalism of Japan: hyper tradition + hyper modernity = “JAPAN” as OXYMORON

mount Fuji, cherry blossoms (“TRADITION”-”NATURE”)
+ bullett train Shinkansen (“MODERNITY”-”TECHNOLOGY”)

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“JAPAN”
Modern Japan: Occidentalism, self-Orientalism and cultural identity

“[...] what gives the majority of Japanese the characteristic image of Japanese culture, is still its distinction from the so-called West.

[...] the loss of the distinction between the West and Japan would result in the loss of Japanese identity in general.”

Modern Japan: self-Orientalism and strategical positionality

Schema of co-figuration:
(Sakai, Naoki, Translation & Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism, 1997)

Universalistic “West” vs. particularistic “Japan”

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Ethno-linguistic and cultural entity “Japan”
Modern Japan: self-Orientalism and strategical positionality

Complicity of Occidentalist, Orientalism and self-Orientalism

“the West”
(Europe, USA)

“the East”
(Asia)

“Japan”

- cultural exclusivity in regards to “the West”
- cultural superiority in regards to “the East”
- strategical hybridity as a successful synthesis” of “the West” and “the East”

internal mobilisation of social cohesion and consent
1. Superior-seeming premodern “West” (ancient history, classical art, beautiful landscapes)

2. Inferior-seeming modern “West” (economic inefficiency, political instability, corruption, organized criminality, etc.)
“Italy” in Contemporary Japan: most stupid country, most loved country?

1986:
“Americans are the stupidest people in the world”
- Too euphoric, strikes, ugly women, girl-hunting, obsessive eating and laziness

(Dime, November 1986)

2007:
“Italy is the (second) most loved country in the world” (first among women and youth)

(NHK Broadcasting Research Institute (ed.), Nihonjin no sukina mono, 2008)
日本人の好きな国ランキング

複数回答結果 単位：%
Italy as orientalized “West”

“Japan”

superiorization (tradition)

inferiorization (modernity)

“Italy”

orientalized ‘West’
respectable for being ‘western’ / exoticable for being ‘non-modern’

“THE WEST”
modern and hegemonic

Orientalism

self-Orientalism
Occidentalism

superiorization moder (tradition)
Conclusions: towards Critical Occidentalism Studies?

deep-rooted and unquestioned naturalisation of occidentalist assumptions
(see *inferential racism*, Hall, Stuart, “The Whites in Their Eyes: Racist Ideology and the Media”, 1990)

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invisibility of Occidentalism and its hegemonic reproduction

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Critical Occidentalism Studies?