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Japan in the works of Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes
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JAPAN IN THE WORKS OF PIERRE LOTI AND WENCESLAU DE MORAES

Natália Vital

1. Japan: place of passage or chosen homeland
   (biobibliographical elements)

   Pierre Loti, whose real name was Julien Viaud, born in 1850 in Rochefort-sur-Mer, and Wenceslau de Moraes, born in Lisbon in 1854, were two aficionados of exoticism and two authors whose works are so intimately intertwined with their respective lives that it is almost impossible to separate fiction from autobiography.

   The French writer, a navy officer, embodied, both in his eyes as well as in the eyes of his readers, the ideal of an adventurer who travelled the world (Tahiti, Senegal, Turkey, Britain, Japan, Morocco, the Basque Country, India, Egypt) without ever settling in any single place. His most well known works are exotic novels in which the author/narrator/protagonist, Loti, is an improved version of Julien Viaud, who experiences numerous amorous adventures, all of which are doomed to fail on account of the ever present idea of an inevitable departure. His novels were a great success amongst his feminine public.

   The Portuguese author, who was also a navy officer, abandoned his career to settle permanently in Japan, which then became the subject of all his works. In the Land of the Rising Sun, Wenceslau de Moraes would carry out diplomatic activities and sought to integrate himself into Japanese life, marrying a Japanese woman, Ô-Yoné. After his wife’s death, he retired to the island of Tokushima, where he lived in a state of almost complete isolation, pursuing a mirage of becoming Japanese.

   Pierre Loti views the innumerable exotic places to which the warships of the French navy took him and which he described to his European readers with the same curiosity, albeit with different sentiments. The empathy he felt for Arab nations becomes a veritable fascination with respect to Turkey. Closer home, Britain and the Basque Country impress him on account of their landscapes and people. The wonders of Easter Island, Tahiti, Senegal or
India only engross him for the duration of his stay. The Far East is perhaps that part of the globe that attracts him the least. If, in his opinion, China is “yellow hell”, Japan, when it does not amuse him, annoys or even frightens him.

He first became acquainted with the Land of the Rising Sun in 1885, when he stayed for a little over a month in Nagasaki, where he lived with Okané-san. His impressions of this first contact appear in the novel *Madame Chrysanthème*, which was published in 1887. He then travelled for a period of two months in the region of the Sea of Japan, spending fifteen days in Kobe and a week in Yokohama. In 1889, he published his notes about this journey under the title *Japoneries d'Automne*. The term “Japonerie” is a neologism created by Loti, as opposed to “Japonaiserie”, which means “Japan-ness”.

He would only return to Japan after a gap of fifteen years, in 1900-1901, as part of a French fleet that was sent to China to quell the Boxer revolt. This time, his ship made two long stopovers in the Land of the Rising Sun (December 1900 to April 1901 and June-July 1901), which would result in the work entitled *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune*, a curious mix of travelogue and novel that was published in 1905.

*Madame Chrysanthème*, Loti’s first book on Japan and his most successful work, greatly influenced the way in which his French contemporaries pictured this country.

An oneiric treatment of the landscape, the relationship between a Western officer and a Japanese woman, in the form of legalised concubinage, the teahouses, the geishas, the elegance of Japanese clothing, ridicule of Japanese etiquette and criticism of the country’s attempts at modernisation and, above all, the insistence on presenting Japan as a nation where everything is minuscule, with an excessive use of diminutives, are customary elements in French and English travellers’ accounts and constituted a stereotypical image of Japan that Loti took with him when he disembarked in Nagasaki.

The plot of *Madame Chrysanthème* is almost a parody of the other works by Loti. Just like in *Le Mariage de Loti* and *Aziadé*, the protagonist/narrator simultaneously discovers an exotic country and a local woman with whom he has an amorous relationship that ends with his departure. However, contrary to what happens in his other novels, this time the relationship is the result of a previously established plan and not mere sentiments. Loti tries in vain to recreate the magic he experienced in Tahiti and Istanbul, and finally ends up by acknowledging his failure.

From the very outset of this novel, one can sense that the exoticism of the Land of the Rising Sun, which he viewed as a source of amusement, is excessive and oppresses him, to the extent of frightening him. The house he tried to make his home in Japan seemed overly strange in his eyes; he felt
isolated and far from everything that was sufficiently familiar to him to be able to understand and appreciate it.

Each time that Japan ceases to correspond to the image of the infantile and comical small country that had been formed in Loti’s spirit even before he came in contact with the nation, one can sense his inquietude, such as, for example, when he hears Madame Chrysanthemum sing, he suspects that she is not just the decorative object that he wishes to see in her. Any trace of sympathy for Japanese reality is seen as something dangerous, as though the fact of beginning to adapt oneself and ceasing to have a critical view of Japan and her people was the beginning of a process of personal decadence.

The novel ends in a climate of total disillusion. On the day he has to return to his ship, the scene in which Loti bids farewell to Madame Chrysanthemum, where he surprises her verifying the authenticity of the coins with which he paid her, reduces the entire relationship of the narrator with Japan to a mere commercial transaction. All along the route that takes him to his ship, Nagasaki appears as a melancholic city, populated by avaricious and ridiculous inhabitants. This time, Loti’s departure seems a deliverance.

In *Japoneries d’Automne*, the result of his journey after his sojourn in Nagasaki, this alternation between moments of sympathy and antipathy for Japan is even more accentuated, justified by the existence of two Japans: an ancient, medieval and genuine Japan, the Empire of the Rising Sun, and a modern Japan, that westernisation had made ridiculous. The awareness that the author must have experienced a fleeting moment in which these two facets co-existed, before modern Japan permanently engulfed this ancient land, bestows a certain nostalgia to this set of texts about that which Loti considers to be “the most bizarre country in the world” 1.

If Pierre Loti is able to unstintingly admire ancient Japan, which is condemned to disappear and does not represent any threat, he is unrelentingly sarcastic with regard to modern Japan, sensing a threat to the West. In “Toilette d’Impératrice”, “Au tombeau des Samouraïs” and “La Sainte Montagne de Nikko”, he presents medieval Japan as something strange, magnificent, heroic and monumental. In “L’impératrice Printemps” and “Kioto, la Ville Sainte”, he conveys an idea of the moment of transition through which the country was passing; he compares ancient and modern Japan in order to ridicule this new Japan by means of this contrast. In the texts entitled “Un bal à Yeddo” and “Yeddo”, he highlights the most ludicrous aspects of westernisation.

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In *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune*, fifteen years have passed since Loti first visited Nagasaki, a fact that is reflected in his description of the city, Loti himself and the lives of some characters of *Madame Chrysantheme*.

Loti’s lack of emotion is the most striking feature of the narrator’s re-encounter with Japan and the memories of the weeks he spent there: “Countries where one has neither loved nor suffered leave us nothing”\(^2\).

Nagasaki continues to be, above all, a place for the amusement tourists, like “a pleasant garden where they had sent us on holiday, amongst delicate bibelots and dolls”\(^3\). However, one can find two new elements: on the one hand, since Loti’s last visit, modern Japan had gained ground over ancient Japan, a fact that reinforced his antipathy towards the country. However, on the other hand, this time Japan appears as a counterpoint to China that, in Loti’s eyes, makes the former more attractive and even more comical. These new elements would accentuate the alternation between sympathy and antipathy for Japan that was present in his previous works.

During these sojourns that were longer than his preceding visit, Loti reveals himself to be less indifferent to Nagasaki’s charms, going so far as to consider himself, on occasion, to be one of the city’s inhabitants. However he more keenly feels the hostility of the Japanese with regard to Westerners. His ship, a symbol of a remote homeland, appears as a place of refuge, somewhere where he can recoup from the surfeit of exoticism and Japanese animosity.

The discovery, almost at the end of the work, of the site where the dead are cremated, a site that had been kept a secret from Loti, is the revelation of a hidden Japan that exists beneath the surface of the Japan that was visible to tourists, to which they had no access. But Loti did not manage to penetrate this Japan. The awareness of this and the certainty that he was definitively bidding farewell to the Land of the Rising Sun made his departure more poignant than fifteen years earlier.

Unfortunately, *Japoneries d’Automne*, where Loti speaks of the charms of medieval Japan that was about to disappear forever, and *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune*, in which one can find some passages that reveal a true affinity with the Land of the Rising Sun, did not have the same degree of success as *Madame Chrysanthème* in which the author conveys the image of a frivolous and slightly ridiculous Japan.

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3 *Ibidem*, pp. 30 and 31: «un agréable jardin, où l’on nous aurait envoyés en vacances, parmi des bibelots délicats et des poupées». 
No other country ever held a similar fascination for Wenceslau de Moraes as "Dai Nippon". His personal discovery of the Land of the Rising Sun, with its landscapes, legends, history, art, literature and religions and the way of life of the Japanese people became the central theme of his works. The many years he lived in Japan, first as Portuguese Consul, and later simply as one who was fascinated by this land, his marriage with Ó-Yoné, his attempt to "become Japanese", constitute the most striking aspects of his biography.

In 1889, when Wenceslau de Moraes, who was living in Macao at the time, visited Japan for the first time on board a warship that visited Nagasaki, Kobe and Yokohama, he was amazed by the beauty of the landscape and frightened by the gracefulness of Japanese forms of dress. The idea of living in this country that he barely knew soon began to take root in his mind. Almost as a premonition, he wrote to his younger sister: “To speak to you of Japan, I will tell you that from what I know for now, I think it is beautiful, enchanting. I could happily spend the rest of my days there”.

This first contact was so fruitful that Moraes returned to the Land of the Rising Sun in 1893, 1894, 1895 and 1896. Throughout these years, the overwhelming need to go and live in Japan became increasingly imperative, as he declared in 1897, in his great impressionist work Dai-Nippon (O Grande Japão): “For me, this forlorn motto became a fact: that it is not worth living, when it is not the sun of Japan that warms us”. In the prelude, the narrator recounts that to discover Japan after the hardships of the high seas and hostile countries (Africa, Asia and, especially, China are presented as places of material and moral misery) is to find paradise, a land of happiness and calm. He explains how, in Macao, the recollection of the Land of the Rising Sun became an obsession for him. The simple, idealised, frugal Japanese lifestyle appeared to be an unattainable dream for a Westerner like him.

In 1898, at his request, he was sent to Japan as interim Consul in Hiogo and Osaka, subsequently being appointed Portuguese Consul in Kobe and Osaka the following year.

Unlike Pierre Loti, whose greatest fear was to lose his capacity for criticism as a European with regard to Japan, Wenceslau de Moraes avoids judging the Land of the Rising Sun according to western criteria:

“Imagine that the visitor to Japan must wear the kimono, at least morally. It seems to me that the great error, and consequently the great injustice, of those who take an interest in the unfamiliar,

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4 Wenceslau de Moraes, Cartas íntimas, Lisbon, Empresa Nacional de Publicidade, 1944, pp. 65 and 66, letter sent from Nagasaki on 9 August.
consists principally of this norm of conduct, of measuring all
civilisations by the standards of their own; one does not measure
distances in litres; in this way when one goes beyond the frontiers
of a country, it is imperative to get acquainted with the prevailing
psyche, the characteristic features that result from the mental discipli-
ne of the new family, in order to be able to judge the affective
manifestations of life on the basis of this”.

In 1900, Wenceslau de Moraes wed, by Shinto rites, Ó-Yoné, a geisha
trained in the Osaka school. He then embarked upon life as a “Japanised
European”7, living in a Japanese house and practising the Buddhist faith,
which would interfere with his diplomatic career.

In 1902, he began to publish his texts entitled *Cartas do Japão* in the
journal *Comércio do Porto*, and would continue to do so until 1913. In this
correspondence, he sought to acquaint his Portuguese public with Japan and
the Japanese and stimulate commercial relations between the two countries.
Over the course of eleven years, he dealt with the most varied of themes,
ranging from the Osaka Industrial Fair to the Russia-Japan war, Japan-
ese patriotism, the Japanese victory, international hostility against Japan,
the Japanese sense of aesthetics and the condition of women in Japan. He
narrated legends, translated brief poetic compositions and attempted to trace
a psychological profile of the Japanese people, a frugal race that was affected
by the period of rapid changes through which the country was passing. He
exhorted the docility of Japanese women and spoke of the impossibility of a
Westerner being completely happy in Japan.

In 1905, in Kobe, Moraes published *O culto do chá*, illustrated with prints
by the Japanese painter Yoshiaki. It recounted the legend of the appearance
of tea in China, linked with Darumá, a Buddhist, and explained how tea was
brought to Japan by Chinese *bonzos*. He then described the collection and
treatment of the tea bushes in the village of Uji, portraying an idyllic rural
scenario that was in stark contrast to the dismal description of westernised
factories. He reflected upon Japanese ceramics and the various ways of
serving tea and concluded with stories of two dual suicides for love.

Also in 1905, he began to publish a series of articles entitled *Serões
no Japão* in the magazine *Serões*, where he dealt with subjects as varied as
nature, reincarnation, suicide and the concept of honour, temples and Japan-
ese religions, Japanese women, proverbs, Japanese coats of arms, the traces

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6 *Ibidem*, pp. 257 and 258.
7 *Idem, Cartas do Japão – 2nd series*, vol. II 1909-1910, Lisbon, Portugal-Brasil Sociedade
of the Portuguese discoverers left in Japan... A year later, in *Paisagens da China e do Japão*, he narrated legends from the two countries and compared the habits and customs of the two peoples.

In 1912, Ó-Yoné, his Japanese wife who had played such an essential role in his assimilation into Japanese life, died of heart disease. An abrupt rupture took place in Wenceslau de Moraes’ life and, in the following year, he decided to withdraw to Tokushima, a small town on the island of Shikoku that had been the birthplace of Ó-Yoné and was the site where her ashes had been taken. On 10 June, a symbolic date, he renounced the official posts he held.

In Tokushima, despite the hostility that he faced from the provincial population, for whom Europeans were “Ke-tojin”, or bearded barbarians, he lived the frugal and simple life that he had always envied the Japanese, in the company of Ko-Haru, Ó-Yoné’s niece.

It was there that, in 1913-14, he wrote a series of letters in the form of a diary entitled *O Bon-Odori em Tokushima* that were published in the *Comércio do Porto*. In these texts, he explained his intention to go to Tokushima to remember the town’s dead while he, too, awaited his own death. He discussed Japanese autobiographical texts, of which he translated some passages. He spoke of the landscape and the everyday life of the inhabitants of the small town, his simple home, his garden and the isolated life he led there with his cat and other pets. He recounted how children would hiss at him in the street during his walks. Death is the central theme of this correspondence: Buddhist cremations, Japanese cemeteries, the different ways of looking at death and the remembrance of European and Japanese sensibilities, ancestor worship, the “Bon-matsuri” (festival of the dead), the “Bon-odori” (dance of the festival of the dead)...

In 1916, Ko-Haru, with whom Wenceslau de Moraes had had a complicated romantic relationship, died of tuberculosis, leaving him in a state of almost absolute solitude. The following year, Moraes published *Ko-Haru* and, a year later, *Será Ó-Yoné... Será Ko-Haru?...*, in which he spoke of the partners he lost. When, one night, upon reaching home, the light of a firefly helped him to open the door, he asked himself whether that tiny insect could have been a reincarnation of one of the two women.

In 1919, he narrated the death of Ko-Haru in *O Tiro do Meio Dia* (Ainda Ko-Haru). At this point, he was already in such a state of depression that he was indifferent to everything around him. He wrote to Polycarpo de Azevedo:

“I now live in what I can call a cloud of apathy. I do not feel anything, I do not know if I am well or not, I do not care about
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anything, I do not read newspapers, I see the past as though it were
a dream, I see myself as though I were dreaming, everything seems
to me to have finished, and I almost doubt that I am alive”.

In 1920, he wrote the article “Fernão Mendes Pinto no Japão” for the
Comércio do Porto, in which he discussed the hypothesis of Mendes Pinto
having been one of the three Europeans who were the first Westerners to visit
the Land of the Rising Sun.

In 1923, he published Ó-Yoné e Ko-Haru, where he gathered together all
his texts about his two partners, about Chiyo-Ko, Ko-Haru’s younger sister
who, just like her, died of tuberculosis, and about the solitary life he led. In
the text entitled “O Barril do lixo do cemitério de Chiya On-ji”, he painted a
self portrait, that of an old man with an almost miserable appearance who
children hissed at in the street, and he spoke of Ko-Haru’s tomb, about how
he had managed to get authorisation for his own ashes to be deposited there
one day, and the fact that it already housed the ashes of several other people.

The following year, the work entitled Relance da História do Japão was
published, in which Wenceslau de Moraes presented the principal elements
of Japanese history: the historical origin (migrations) and mythological origin
(divine ancestry) of the Japanese people, the Chinese influence, the formation
of the Land of the Rising Sun, the appearance of the Shogunate, the evolu-
tion of the political system, arts and letters, Japanese habits and customs,
the tense relations between shoguns and emperors, the introduction of Chris-
tianity and the subsequent expulsion of the Portuguese and Spanish mission-
aries, the re-opening of ports imposed on Japan by Commodore Perry in
1853, the end of the Shogunate, westernisation, the China-Japan war and,
finally, the Russia-Japan war. He predicted that, in the long term, Japan
could become a leader amongst Asian countries and even on a global scale.

In his last book, Relance da Alma Japonesa, published in 1924,
Wenceslau de Moraes tried to find the origins of some characteristic features
of the Japanese people. He attributed, for example, the Japanese spirit of
expansion to their Mongolian origins, their tradition of courtesy to their
milieu of hospitality, their superstitions and irritability to the frequent occur-
rence of natural disasters. He spoke of the non-existence of the individual
and the way in which this was reflected in the language, the feudal spirit and
the Japanese people’s love for and submission to the Emperor. He described
Japanese houses and the patriarchal system, linked with ancestor worship,
upon which the family was based. He mentioned the secondary role of women

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in the family structure and the place of geishas and prostitutes in society. He discussed Buddhism and Shintoism, resignation in the face of death and suicide. He praised the Japanese people’s capacity for adaptation and their eager desire to acquire new knowledge. He compared Western and Japanese art, distinguished various periods of Japanese literature and translated some popular songs, legends and proverbs.

Until his death, in 1929, Wenceslau de Moraes lived in a state of increasing isolation and alienation. Tending to his garden and visiting the tombs of Ô-Yoné and Ko-Haru were his main distractions. His pets were his only company.

All of Wenceslau de Moraes’ work is the result of his state as a Portuguese far from Portugal, fascinated by a Japan in which complete integration was denied to him. His absolute surrender to a country whose people reject him was the drama of his existence.

The difference between the image of Japan in the writings of Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes was not just the result of the fact that Loti only spent a few months in the country while Moraes lived the last forty years of his life there. It lies especially in the fact that Pierre Loti viewed the archipelago from the viewpoint of a tourist, steeped in stereotypes, while Wenceslau de Moraes viewed Japan as the land that he wished to make his homeland, “the staff that bore the weight of his fatigue, the meaning of his existence”, in the words of Fidelino de Figueiredo.

2. Wenceslau de Moraes: reader of Pierre Loti and Lafcadio Hearn

In Wenceslau de Moraes’ eyes, Pierre Loti was the author who was the most responsible for the diffusion of a distorted image of Japan in Europe:

“In my opinion, the general conception that has been built, until a very short while ago, in the West, of Japan and its people is one that is highly ridiculous, sadly guaranteeing our discernment as Europeans. Japan was the land of fantastic landscapes, a country with a fussy and decadent civilisation, amply confirmed by their art and customs; the land of comical mimicry, inclined to induce peals of laughter; it was also the land of musumé, caricatural, sweet and puerile, delightful on account of its exuberant exoticism; and

9 Fidelino de Figueiredo, “O homem que trocou a sua alma” article written in 1925, in Wenceslau de Moraes, Páginas Africanas, Portugal, Editorial Cultura, p. 108.
nothing else. Needless to say that the acclaimed Loti condensed into his delightful books, in the most gracious and suggestive manner, everything that was thought about Japan.”

From amongst all the foreign authors who wrote about Japan, the writer whose works Wenceslau de Moraes most admired, the one he took to be a model for his life and work, “the delightful storyteller of all things Japanese”\(^{11}\), “the finest narrator about Japanese things”\(^{12}\), “the finest Western writer about the things of Japan”\(^{13}\), “Japan’s great friend”\(^{14}\), “the impressionist writer who has occupied himself most charmingly with Japan and its people”\(^{15}\), is Lafcadio Hearn.

Moraes considered Hearn’s work to be the best texts written by a foreigner about the Land of the Rising Sun:

“Hearn was an impressionist writer of the finest order; and, as a narrator of Japanese things, no other pages, written in any Western language are equal to his golden prose in terms of extremely subtle perception, in sentiment, in adorable sympathy, in moving raptures, in loving and suggestive accounts. Hearn was, amongst foreigners, one of Japan’s greatest friends.”

Wenceslau de Morais frequently dealt with the same subjects as Lafcadio Hearn (Japanese legends, the Bon-Odori ceremony, episodes from Japanese history, the psychological characteristics of the Japanese people) and cited long passages from the works by the English author, with whose life he identified his own and whose books he read and re-read until his death. The personal paths of the two men were similar in many respects; both tried to become Japanese and suffered greatly when they realised the impossibility of fulfilling this dream.

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13 Ibidem, p. 213.
3. Two views of the Japanese people

One can find diametrically opposite attitudes with regard to the Japanese people in the works by Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes.

From the moment in which the concept of the “yellow peril” began to take shape, Loti took care to ensure that the Japanese were never placed on the same level as Europeans. He presented the Japanese as comical and somewhat ridiculous figures. However, behind this attitude of superiority, one can discern his fears with regard to a proud people in whom he sensed the capacity to take on the West. For Wenceslau de Moraes, on the contrary, the Japanese were perfect and possessed all the qualities that were lacking in Westerners. He felt that their links with nature, filial piety, their refined sense of aesthetics, the serene way in which they faced death and their keen concepts of honour and patriotism made the Japanese a superior and happier race. For the author of *Dai Nippon*, the Japanese were a model to be emulated.

In his works about Japan, Pierre Loti sometimes revealed a profound antipathy and lack of comprehension towards “this small race, arrogant and full of mystery” 17. He presented the Japanese people as an infantile race in decline, that had lost all the qualities that had been responsible for its erstwhile glory, a race that was physically and morally small, rendered ridiculous by their attempts to imitate Westerners.

The image that predominates in Loti’s works is that of a caricatural and wretched Japanese, personified by the figure of Mr. Canguru, his landlord in *Madame Chrysanthème*. Cunning, stupid, mercenary, ugly and ridiculous in his occidental garb, Mr. Canguru embodied all the flaws that Loti attributed to the Japanese and played the role of making it impossible to feel any iota of sympathy for the Japanese people, both on the part of the protagonist as well as on the part of the reader.

In the books by the French writer there appear some passages in which one can discern a veritable racial dislike, and early sense of repulsion that suddenly overwhelms the protagonist through his olfactory sense.

His physical description of the Japanese people, who the author of *Madame Chrysanthème* considered to be “the ugliest race on earth”, is extremely depreciatory: round glasses, small myopic eyes that squint and are set too close together, flaccid cheeks, hanging lips... this is the Japanese of Loti’s works.

The psychological profile that he traces is no less implacable: dishonesty, deceit, cunning and hypocrisy are the most evident defects of the Japanese

people in their contacts with foreigners, due to which it is necessary that
the tourist always view the Japanese with a certain degree of mistrust. Even
their positive qualities, such as their energy, dedication to their work and
patriotism were viewed by Loti as though they were defects, given that, in
his eyes, they constituted a threat to Western peoples. However, what most
exasperated him about the Japanese was their immense pride and barely
disguised hostility towards white men.

Loti sought to soothe his inquietude, portraying the Japanese as a
Liliputian people in physical and psychological terms, a race that could not
be taken seriously. He realised this effect by accentuating those aspects of
Japanese life that seemed to him to be the most comical: their mannerisms
of etiquette and their imitation of Westerners. He stripped Japanese etiquette
of its solemnity, in order to transform it into a farcical element, a spectacle to
amuse the tourist, and he was never so sarcastic as when he referred to the
imitation of Western habits and customs by the Japanese.

In contrast to the adults, he found Japanese children, who fit admirably
into the frivolous and comical image that so pleased him, enchanting. In his
eyes, the children of the Land of the Rising Sun possessed a charm that
disappeared as they grew up. Just as Japanese women were decorative
objects, Japanese babies were dolls. In La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame
Prune, for example, it was the childlike and unprotected facet of the geisha
April Rain that attracted him.

Likewise, the more humble amongst the Japanese people, for whom he
could feel a mixture of pity and condescension, pleased Loti. At the end of
Madame Chrysanthème, her “djin” was the only person to whom he bid fare-
well with some regret. In the Mountain of Nikko, he felt moved by a young
boy who bowed to him and offered him some flowers, in gratitude for having
given him some coins.

The contradiction between the admiration Loti felt for Japanese works
of art and the heroic acts that abound in Japanese history and the image of
wretched frivolity that he sought to confer to the Japanese people is resolved
by means of a stratagem: according to him, the Japanese people were a
degenerate race, who do not resemble their ancestors at all.

Although the Japanese victory over Russia in the 1904-05 war forced
Loti to acknowledge, in the preface that he wrote to La Troisième Jeunesse de
Madame Prune in January 1905, that the puerile image of the Japanese people
transmitted in his works did not wholly correspond to reality, he refused to
renounce this image.

For Wenceslau de Moraes, his discovery of the Japanese way of life
inspired him to follow the example of the Japanese who, “hold the best part
of one’s existence to be the sharing of joys” and whose spirits “are moved by delights that are completely unknown to us.”

In his works, Moraes reacted passionately against the depreciative image of the Japanese people transmitted by the works penned by Loti and other European writers, an image that he regarded as profoundly unjust. He even responded directly to some savage comments by Loti, such as, for example, the Frenchman’s statement that the Japanese would use spectacles only to imitate Westerners.

Although Moraes’ physical description of Japanese males was also negative (“The Japanese male is, generally, wretched in stature, weak, with a squashed nose, prominent cheekbones, wispy bears, stiff hair, often gummy teeth, that jut out almost horizontally from their eternally gaping mouth; slightly simian physiognomic features and gestures” 19) he felt that the portrait painted by the French novelist was too harsh. In Moraes’ eyes, the ugliness of the Japanese male stood out in contrast to the beauty of Japanese women, who were the most graceful and delicate creatures in the world: “When ceasing to gaze at musemé and considering the Japanese male, the change is desolating; it is to go from a smile to a grimace, from a rosy cloud at dawn to the scowling gloominess of a squall” 20.

In contrast, the psychological portrait that Wenceslau de Moraes drew of the Japanese people was extremely positive and was completely different from Pierre Loti’s vision. In the eyes of the author of Culto de Chá, the Japanese possessed innumerable qualities that made them a happy people, blessed by the Gods, from whom they descended according to Shinto beliefs, and a model for anyone who wished to find true happiness.

He opposed the image transmitted by the French novelist of a libertine and mercenary people, a prudish race whose homes, the family sanctuary, were off limits for Western tourists.

For Wenceslau de Moraes, the Japanese joy of life, in which Loti only saw superficiality, was, on the contrary, the result of a greater bond with nature and of an immense wisdom in the serene way in which the Japanese viewed life and death. The occurrence of suicide and homicide, that frequently appear in the Japanese world, side by side with an astonishing love for life, made a profound impression on him; but he explained them by the existence, in Japan, of a conceptualisation of death that was completely different from that of Western peoples.

“The profound sentiment of love of the Japanese for the graceful things of creation” was perhaps the quality that Wenceslau de Moraes most admired in the Japanese people, which was the thing he most desired to possess and that, as a European, seemed to him to be the most inaccessible:

“It is almost as though these Asians have an additional sense, a je ne sais quoi, that enables them to be emotional participants in the mysterious creative industry of Mother Nature. In this regard, we Europeans are infinitely inferior to them, to the extent that we cannot even begin to imagine the psychological synthesis that the appearance of things suggest to them and what goes through their minds, in joyful enthusiasm, before the simple ordinary sights of everyday life. This is and always will be the greatest barrier that separates and will separate the European from the Japanese; we do not see like them, we do not feel like them, we do not love like them, they feel and love far more delicately than we do; before their refined pantheism, our hearts are as cold and inert as a block of marble.”

He sees the basis of all the other qualities of the Japanese in this pantheistic sentiment:

“This love for trees, for plants, for all of Nature, makes the cultivation of the land a priesthood. It implants patriotism and all civic senses into one’s soul. It is a fount of happiness and solace; if life is hard, if luxury is prohibited, if pleasures are expensive, there is one delightful thing in the midst of this all, free, permanent, that offers itself to everyone: – the spectacle of creation. Isn’t it this blessed pantheism that is generally lacking in Westerners?”

The way in which the Japanese love for nature extended to all beings enchanted him. Just like Lafcadio Hearn, he mentioned, touched, the affection with which the Japanese treat even insects such as crickets and cicadas.

The filial respect and love that the Japanese have for their ancestors, along with their keen sense of aesthetics and their capacity to be content with a frugal existence greatly impressed Wenceslau de Moraes.

21 Idem, Os Serões no Japão, ed. cit., p. 9.
The Japanese power of imitation, that was so derided by Loti, was, for the author of *Dai-Nippon*, a positive trait, that reflected a great intellectual curiosity. Likewise, the pride and patriotism that so irritated the author of *Madame Chrysanthème*, greatly enthused Wenceslau de Moraes, who admired the Japanese dedication to their homeland and its most visible symbol, the Emperor:

“In Japan, patriotism is not a duty: it is a love, a passion, a contagious fever that makes the blood of soldiers boil, as also that of peasants, and also of the women, and also that of the children, everybody forgetting everything for a single purpose - the glory of Dai-Nippon” 24.

Even the smothering of the individual in the face of society and the psychological homogeneity that he saw in the Japanese people were presented as positive elements, as they result in the aggrandisement of Japan: “In the Japanese soul, individuals don’t count; they are no more that a stone in pieces and the mortar that binds the bewitching social edifice that is called *Dai Nippon*, Great Japan!…” 25.

According to Wenceslau de Moraes, if the individualistic European could comprehend neither the exacerbation of Japanese patriotic sentiments nor their spirit of abnegation, this was because, from a moral point of view, the Westerner was inferior.

Just like Loti, Moraes felt that it was impossible for a Westerner to understand the Japanese people. However, this notion, that in the French author’s works appears as a justification for his lack of interest and sympathy, was, instead, a stimulus for Wenceslau de Moraes. The enigma that surrounded the Japanese attracted him even more towards them.

It is, however, in the context of the hostility of the Japanese with regard to Westerners, a hostility that greatly exasperated the author of *Madame Chrysanthème*, that the position of the Portuguese writer is more original: he suffered from this hostility far more than Loti, given that he tried to integrate himself into this Japanese society that rejected him. However, instead of revolting against the discrimination of which he was a target, he considered this attitude to be something that was absolutely natural. About this subject he wrote:

“Another point that one must consider is the hatred that the Chinese and Japanese profess for Westerners (poor Westerners! As though this hate was not reciprocal...). This hate exists, if it is hate, as it would perhaps be better to term it aversion, repulsion, incompatibility. But racial hatred is a quality of man, perhaps even a salutary one, that will persist as long as the world is not a single family, which is a remote prospect” 26.

In this regard, Wenceslau de Moraes recalled the aggressiveness that Europeans always had for other peoples. In Fernão Mendes Pinto no Japão, he denounced the violence, greed and religious fanaticism that, in his view, were the main impetus of the Portuguese expansion. He saw the same attitudes of avariciousness and intolerance of these 16th century adventurers in the European and American businessmen who engaged in trade with other races.

He thus considered it to be natural and just that Asia should seek to shake off the yoke that weighed her down: “The yellow peril is, first and foremost, the danger, that Europe and America can already foresee, of the Asians, finally aware of their rights and strengths, offering a tenacious resistance to the series of injustices of which they are victims” 27.

While Pierre Loti, fearful of the possible effects of the energy of the Japanese people, their pride and animosity towards the West, preferred to represent a Japanese civilisation that had already reached its limits, a people that, despite everything, only managed to amuse tourists, Wenceslau de Moraes, in his work Relance da História do Japão, predicted a brilliant future for the Japanese people: casting Japan in the role of liberator of the Asian continent and, perhaps, a world leader, “regenerating, by an infusion of blood and ideas, the faded races of the West” 28.

4. Visions of Japanese women

In his three books about Japan, Pierre Loti portrays women from different social classes (prostitutes, geishas, commoners, aristocratic ladies, the Empress) and his treatment of these figures reflects these differences.

In *Madame Chrysanthème*, the Japanese woman is essentially represented by the personality of Madame Chrysanthemum, the *musumé* with whom the protagonist lived in Nagasaki, by her women friends, the “wives” of other French officials, and by Madame Plum, the caricatural middle aged landlady. In this novel, Loti transmits a very negative image of Japanese women: frivolous, childish and mercenary beings, whose superficial charms disguise a hollow interior, women without intelligence or feelings, dolls.

When he arrived in Japan, Loti already brought with him a stereotypical image of Japanese women, which was a result of the way in which they were portrayed in Japanese objects and in accounts by other European travellers, and, to amuse himself, the idea of “marrying” someone who corresponded to this image occurred to him. It is rather significant that it was his friend Yves who chose Madame Chrysanthemum, this being the only novel by Loti in which the protagonist does not choose the main feminine figure himself. His “marriage” with Madame Chrysanthemum that, in reality, was no more than a form of legalised concubinage, was viewed as a mere joke, an amusing way of spending his time during his stay in Nagasaki. He and his colleagues, the other French officers, considered their temporary female companions to be cute, elegant and decorative creatures. And when Loti sensed that Madame Chrysanthemum could, after all, have feelings and thoughts, he drew back in fear. He even stopped learning Japanese so as not to develop his relationship with the *musumé*.

The protagonist soon realised that the farce of his “marriage” is more a spectacle that he offered to others than any amusement for himself. He envied those who observe Madame Chrysanthemum from a distance, without having occasion to grow weary of her company. This “romantic” relationship, whose objective was to make his stay more agreeable, proved to be a complete failure and when, while recalling Istanbul, Loti compared Madame Chrysanthemum with Aziadé, he even hated the Japanese woman.

Not even the prospect of a relationship between his friend Yves and Madame Chrysanthemum, which could have been a turning point in the romantic plot, assumes serious proportions. Loti’s suspicions soon disappear and harmony once again reigns between the two friends, the *musumé* being definitively relegated to a secondary plane. Loti’s “marriage” ended, just like it began, without any sentiments on either part, with the scene in which Madame Chrysanthemum confirms the authenticity of the coins with which Loti paid for her services.

In this first Japanese novel by Pierre Loti, Madame Plum, the landlady, appears only as a complement to Madame Chrysanthemum. Hypocritical, ugly and venal, her character appears as a glimpse of what Madame Chrysanthemum will later become, when she loses her ephemeral beauty.
In *Japoneries d’Automne*, Loti described the ladies of the Japanese aristocracy as elegant, exotic and distant beings and, above them the mythical and inaccessible figure of the Empress, who is presented as a semi-Goddess.

The ladies of the court, who belong to the ancient Japanese nobility and are shrouded in mystery, appear for the first time in “Un bal à Yeddo”, where they stand out from the numerous *musumés* dressed in Western fashions. Portrayed as idols of a strange religion, almost unreal creatures, miniature women, with bizarre hairstyles and wearing extraordinary robes, they dazzled Loti.

This first appearance of the Japanese noblewoman prepares the reader for the extraordinary spectacle that takes place later in the imperial palace, in “L’Impératrice Printemps”. Here, the ladies appear in all their splendour and finery; they are not women but, instead, are fairies, butterflies or exotic birds, whose colourful robes stand out against the immaculate whiteness that surrounds them. Amongst the many unreal creatures, one figure stands out, even more elegant and strange, that of the Empress Spring who, in Loti’s eyes, symbolises all the exoticism of the ancient Japanese civilisation that is about to disappear forever. For him, this imposing woman, a descendent of Amaterasu, the Goddess of the Sun, possessed the charm of unattainable things. Her proud and masterful attitude, the demeanour of one who was aware of the role that she played at the apex of Japanese society, enchanted the French navy officer.

Even more than Empress Spring, it was Gziné-gou-Koyo, the warrior Empress of the 3rd century, a mythical figure from a distant age, a personage who survived only by means of legend, who, for Loti, embodied the extreme exoticism of the ancient Japanese civilisation.

On a secondary plane, behind these elegant, noble and inaccessible women, appear the *musumés*, charmingly insignificant creatures, and the geishas, deluxe objects that afford aesthetic pleasure.

In this collection of impressions of his travels, the Japanese woman, whether an unattainable being or a mere distraction, is never placed at the same level as the protagonist and, consequently, a true relationship is never established between them.

In *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune*, a great variety of female characters can be found: the geisha April Rain, girl/cat, the *musumé* Inamoto, surrounded by the solemn atmosphere of the temples and mountain, the old Madame Plum, the distinctive Madame Jonquil, Madame Ichiara, who sold monkeys, Madame Bear, the flower seller, Madame Stork, waitress in a tea house...

Upon his return to Nagasaki, fifteen years after his first sojourn in the city, Loti could not help remembering his mock marriage with Madame
Chrysanthemum. He did not meet his former lover, who had married in the meanwhile, but did come across several characters from his first book, amongst whom one can find his former landlady, Madame Plum, now a widow, who, throughout this work, continues to play a comical role. The last image of the old landlady is, in much the same manner as happened with Madame Chrysanthemum in the first novel, extremely negative. Loti accepts the physical decadence of Madame Plum and her sudden lack of interest in him with the same irony with which he viewed the venality of Chrysanthemum fifteen years ago.

Amongst the various female characters that appear for the first time in *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune*, one can highlight the geisha April Rain and the *musumé* Inamoto, the only Japanese women for whom Loti manifests a true affection.

Loti succumbs to the charms of the young geisha April Rain, an ambiguous creature who was different from all the other Japanese women he had ever met, a figure who is simultaneously comical and tragic, more a child than a woman, half doll, half cat, successively a fairy, queen and marionette. He described the young geisha as “the toy that I perhaps vaguely desired my entire life: a small cat that talks”\(^\text{29}\). After visiting April Rain's modest home, she ceased to be merely a cute and childlike figure and was transformed into a fragile, unprotected creature without a future who touched the protagonist’s heart. In his final visits to the teahouse, neither she nor Matsuko, the shamisen player don their professional adornments to receive him as their relationship had already evolved beyond this state. However, Loti felt that he was unable to understand April Rain because she was too different, because her way of thinking and feeling were so far removed from his that any sort of less superficial communication between the two was impossible.

The young Inamoto, the last of the Japanese female figures created by the French writer and the one who is portrayed with the most positive characteristics, is also, curiously, the least Japanese of all his Japanese characters. Perhaps because of this, he is able to see a true woman in her and not just a decorative object or a pet. However, if on the one hand, for Loti, Inamoto seemed to be more important than the other Japanese women he had known, on the other hand she never really has an autonomous existence, disconnected from the exotic environment of the mountain where their silent meetings took place. Just like all the other Japanese women, Inamoto was an enigma that Loti was unable to solve.

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\(^\text{29}\) Pierre Loti, *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune*, ed. cit., p. 21: «le jouet que j'avais peut-être vaguement désiré toute ma vie: un petit chat qui parle.»
The women of the Land of the Rising Sun fascinated Wenceslau de Moraes and were a recurring theme in his works:

“It is well known that the Japanese woman is one of the great charms of Japan. Well now, to speak of her, and to speak of her yet again, and to stubbornly keep returning to the subject, like a moth to a flame that dazzles and enchants it, seems to me to be a pardonable sin”.

The Portuguese author’s romances in Japan were, simultaneously, what kept him tied to Japan and the means by which he sought to integrate himself in Japanese society.

Just like Pierre Loti, Wenceslau de Moraes was impressed by the extraordinary similarity between Japanese women and the representations of Japanese women in Japanese objects (fans, screens, porcelain and prints). Just like the French novelist, Moraes also frequently resorted to images of dolls, children, butterflies, flowers and fairies to describe Japanese women.

The author of *Dai Nippon* rejected the image of Japanese women being of easy virtue that was transmitted in several works by European writers and, particularly, in *Madame Chrysanthème* and tried to explain that physical love was viewed in Japan in a very different manner than in Western societies.

If, for Loti, the Japanese woman’s charm was superficial and could not withstand a more profound scrutiny, for Wenceslau de Moraes, “The charm of the *musumé* lies in her company, […] it is present in the exoticism of all of her individuality, of all of her way of being and feeling; her slightest gesture is itself a surprise to us, a revelation”.

In *Dai Nippon*, in the symbolic figure of Ô-Hana-San, he brings together all the characteristics that, in his eyes, make the Japanese woman, “the most fantastic, the most adorably feminine woman that was ever born in this world...”, “the most gracefully puerile, most enchantingly romantic, most feminine Eve, of all the Eves of this world”: elegance, daintiness, sensitiveness, grace and tenderness.

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Their docility and abnegation were the qualities that Wenceslau de Moraes most appreciated in the Japanese woman:

“In her subaltern position, the Japanese woman undoubtedly feels happy. With a soul *par excellence* that is extremely delicate and extremely dedicated, profoundly instructed, by tradition and education, in the principles of obedience and self sacrifice and to outdo themselves in pleasantness and tenderness to satisfy everyone, objective to the extreme, the Japanese woman is everything in the home without being anything at all, she is the joy of the house, and makes her entire happiness consist of this” 34.

From amongst Japanese women, he highlights the geishas, “mystic vestals of a pagan ritual” 35, who are presented as the most unreal and most charming women in the world: “The Japanese woman can be defined as the puerile refinement of femininity. The geisha is the puerile refinement of the Japanese woman; which is to say that to speak of her is to travel in ether” 36.

Wenceslau de Moraes was forty-six when, in a restaurant in Osaka, he met the twenty-five year old geisha Ô-Yoné, Madame Grain of Rice, whom he subsequently married according to Shinto rites.

Although she had humble origins, Ô-Yoné had received a fine education at the academy for geishas in Osaka and played a very important role in the Portuguese author’s bond with Japanese culture. Despite the difference in their ages, the couple lived in harmony for twelve years, in Kobe.

During this period, concrete references to Ô-Yoné are rarely found in Moraes’ works. He almost always pays homage to Japanese women as a collective figure. This was because, according to him, the qualities of the Japanese woman were generic characteristics, the result of their inheritance and education, rather than individual manifestations:

“All *musumés*, in paintings, look like one another. And I would add, no matter how strange it may seem, that all *musumés*, in flesh and blood, look like one another. [...] The women are, thus, always the same; with regard to the distinction that we make, for example, between Madame Chrysanthemum and Madame Snow, this errs on account of being prolix and overly detailed, as there are no women in Japan, bur rather – the Japanese woman. In this way, the Japa-

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36 Ibidem, p. 250.
nese woman thus finds a place, so to speak, on the list of beautiful things of a generic nature, such as flowers, such as trees, such as insects, such as landscapes, such as the clouds, such as the stars.”

When, in 1912, Ó-Yoné fell sick, her sister, Yuki, and niece, Ko-Haru, came to Kobe.

In 1913, after his wife’s death, Wenceslau de Moraes went to Tokushima, following the Japanese custom of the widow or widower going to live near the ashes of their spouse, which were taken to the birthplace of the deceased. There, he lived with Ko-Haru, Madame Little Summer, forty years his junior who, unlike Ó-Yoné, had never received any sort of education. He traces a fairly detailed physical and psychological portrait of her in his text “Ko-Haru”:

“Ko-Haru was a slender, dark, cheerful and lively girl, who seemed to radiate health. One could not have called her a beauty; she was really far from being so. However, there was much charm to be found in her slim profile, in the nimbleness of her gestures of a street urchin – as she had mainly been raised on the streets –, the frank gentleness of her gaze, the smile in which her mouth curved at any given moment, allowing one to see two rows of pearly white teeth, and in the exemplary shape of her hands and feet. In addition: – intelligent, more than the great majority of women of her humble social level; endowed with a fine artistic temperament, curious, inquiring, easily impressionable, before beautiful things of nature; and with a touch of dreamy poetry stirring up within her, at the heart of that wide-eyed little head…”

Although, both in O Bon-Odori em Tokushima as in Ó-Yonê e Ko-Haru, he always presented Ó-Yonê as his spouse and Ko-Haru as his housekeeper, Wenceslau de Moraes once again sought to integrate himself into Japanese life via his companion. His dream of realising this integration by means of a child was never realised, as the girl’s first child was not his and the second did not survive.

In the final phase of his life, after the death of Ko-Haru, Moraes ceased to write exclusively about the Japanese woman as an abstract generic being. 

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and transformed Ó-Yoné and Ko-Haru into characters in his works. However, more than the two women themselves, the central theme of his writings was the obsessive nostalgia that he felt for them:

“The memory of these two women, humble and almost insignificant during their lifetimes, tormenting my aching sensibilities, sorely tried by the horrors of extreme agony and death, suddenly assumed an overwhelming importance in my spirit. Ó-Yoné and Ko-Haru, cleansed of their faults, their defects, ennobled by the halo of the agony they suffered, beautiful and good with the kindness and beauty with which their state of non-existence paints them, helped to fill my thoughts. I think of them constantly. I think of them during the long hours of seclusion to which I submit myself; when I read; when I write; when I talk to someone; when I tend to my garden or do any other task; when I walk through the city or the fields; finally, when I sleep, dreaming. And I live in this and I live of this, involuntarily, unconsciously; sometimes only a brief cry escapes my lips: “Poor things, poor things!…” – If I ceased to think of them, it is quite possible that I should die, just like I would die if I no longer had the air that I breathe… nostalgia, transformed into a normal and permanent state, indispensable for the regular exercise of my own mentality!…” 39.

Wenceslau de Moraes always presented the Japanese woman as a perfect being, both when referring to Japanese women in general, an abstract creature to whom he attributed all the qualities that he sought in a woman, as well as when he spoke of specific women who had been purified and rendered idyllic by death and nostalgia.

5. **Japanese Religions, Art and Nature**

Both in the works by Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes, Japanese religions, art and nature appear interlinked.

In Loti’s books, it is the relationship between nature and art that is more evident. The French writer observed the Japanese landscape by using the portrayals of this very same landscape in art as a point of reference. He viewed the Japanese people’s love for nature as a result of their aesthetic

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sense. He, likewise, took an interest in arts that were specifically Japanese in which nature was recreated with materials supplied by nature itself: the art of gardening and flower arrangements.

For Wenceslau de Moraes, nature was the basis of all the other aspects of Japanese life. Religion and art were both derived from the Japanese love for creation:

The exceptionally pleasant climate, the extraordinary richness of the soil and the impressive beauty of the landscape make the Japanese worship the Sun and other forces of nature in gratitude. Pantheism, which combines worship of the divine with worship of nature, imposes itself when nature is as generous to man as in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Likewise, the Japanese sense of aesthetics also derives from a contemplation of nature. Japanese art, whose purpose is to represent life, is a form of expression in which the artist seeks to recreate reality, not in the manner in which he sees it, but rather how he remembers it, down to the smallest detail. Its specificity does not lie just in the faithfulness of the imitation, but in the love for nature that shines through in this art. Art thus enables one to view nature better.

Wenceslau de Moraes greatly admired the sensibilities of the Japanese people, which were simultaneously naturalistic, aesthetic and religious.

The treatment of the Japanese landscape is the point where one can find the greatest similarities between the works of Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes. Both writers describe an idyllic, Lilliputian, paradisiacal, extravagant, strange and luxuriant landscape.

However, while the overly strange and artificial appearance of this landscape bothers the French writer, Wenceslau de Moraes was enraptured by this extravagant and varied display of nature, full of contrasts, which never ceased to surprise him. He wrote: “The people ask nature not to outdo herself in any more marvels, because emotions already suffocate us, because the passion of life already escapes us, the spirit being sublimated in the suggestions afforded by this chimera…”

Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes both viewed Japanese art as something exotic, that did not have anything in common with Western art, the result of sensibilities of completely distinct origins. However, the authors of Madame Chrysanthème and O Culto do Chá did not react in the same way to this reality that was so profoundly different.

The French writer, for whom Japanese art was to be found in temples, palaces, gigantic Buddhas, the dances of the geishas and the music of the

shamisen, felt the lack of a point of support, of a similarity, howsoever slight, of a common basis with Western art, howsoever remote, that would enable him to understand this art. He seemed helpless while measuring the immense distance that separated Japanese art from everything else that he had known until then.

For Loti, the two most impressive characteristics of Japanese art were its “sauvrenu” and extreme simplicity.

The author of Japoneries d’Automne understood “sauvrenu” to be the association of elements that, in his eyes, did not have any relationship amongst themselves. He considers “sauvrenu” to be the unexpected appearance of a figure, a piece of music, a comment, that is completely out of context. This “sauvrenu” sometimes took the form of macabre and frightening elements, such as the “nightmarish figures” \(^41\) of the Temple of a Thousand Gods, in Kyoto, to which he felt an intense aversion.

The simplicity of the Japanese bewildered Loti. Houses, temples, decorative objects, everything made a strong impression on account of its bareness. He described the temple of the Leaping Turtle, in Nagasaki, as “the zenith of deliberate simplicity, of elegance made from nothing, of immaculate and incredible cleanliness” \(^42\). He spoke of bronze vases of “such a deliberate simplicity that, to our eyes, they are like a revelation of the unknown, like a subversion of all the acquired notions about form…” \(^43\). He is astounded by the Japanese habit of “hiding” works of art, of taking great pains over details that are concealed, so that the overall effect is one of extreme simplicity. For Loti, simplicity was the main feature that distinguished Japanese art from the Chinese art, from where he sought to trace its origins. It was in the combination of this excessive simplicity, linked to Shintoism, coupled with an almost unimaginable sumptuousness of materials of construction that, according to him, lay the elegance of Japanese temples and palaces.

The author of Dai Nippon, for whom Japanese art could be found not only in monuments, music and dance, but also in literature, painting, calligraphy, textiles, ceramics, lacquerware, “cloisonnés”, paper houses..., experienced, just like Loti, the sensation of finding oneself in the presence of

\(^41\) Pierre Loti, "Kioto, la ville sainte" in Japoneries d’Automne, ed. cit., p. 106: «personnages de cauchemar».


\(^43\) Ibidem, p. 717 : «une simplicité si cherchée que, pour nos yeux, c’est comme une révélation d’inconnu, comme un renversement de toutes les notions acquises sur la forme...»
an art that was completely different from European art, but was fascinated by this difference. While referring to Japanese coats-of-arms, he wrote:

“Whoever imagined these lines, whoever conceived of these curves, whoever let their paintbrush develop in these whimsies, does not think like us, but is imbued with the aesthetic principles of remote civilisations, that have nothing in common with the civilisations where white men went to procure elements to constitute their own” 44.

For Wenceslau de Moraes, the originality of the art of Dai Nippon lay in its being an art of innovation, in which a love for nature and a joy for life predominate, whilst the opposite happens in Western art, which is based upon the internal suffering of the artist. According to him, this fundamental difference meant that Japanese art could not benefit from the influence of the West and only became unnatural when trying to imitate European art.

Moraes does not view Japanese painting as a mere imitation of nature but, instead, views it as an invocation in which the artist portrays nature, not exactly like it is, but rather as the artist felt it to be and how it was engraved in his mind: “That intelligent paintbrush doesn’t paint, it thinks and remembers” 45. Based on his memories, the painter offers whoever contemplates his work with a view of nature filtered through his sensibilities and imagination. Reciprocally, whoever looks at that work of art cannot be content with what he sees, he has to resort to his own recollections, his own sensibilities and imagination in order to be able to understand and appreciate it.

Likewise, Japanese music, too, is an invocation for Wenceslau de Moraes. Like Loti, he was impressed by the grace and sadness of this music that reminded the foreigner of the distance that separated him from the Japanese.

Unlike the French writer, the Portuguese author took an interest in Japanese literature aimed at entertaining commoners and women instead of that which was aimed at educated men (who, during the classical period read and wrote works in Chinese and later read works in European languages). It was this “plebeian” aspect of Japanese literature that, according to Wenceslau de Moraes, gave it a unique charm. Throughout his works, he translated innumerable Japanese proverbs and poetic compositions. In O "Bon-Odori" em Tokushima, he dwelt at length upon authors and works written in the style of reminiscences and translated passages from these works.

44 Wenceslau de Moraes, Os serões no Japão, ed. cit., p. 116.
The various religions practised in Japan occupy completely different spaces, both in the lives as well as in the works of Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes. While Loti viewed Japanese religious rites as one of the elements of the country’s folklore, Wenceslau de Moraes’ intimate acquaintance with Buddhism and Shintoism, over the years, greatly influenced both his everyday habits as well as his religious sentiments.

In Loti’s work, Japanese religions appear as yet another exotic element, yet another strange element of the Japanese people.

If, on occasion, he sometimes distinguished between Shintoism and Buddhism, he mainly referred to Japanese beliefs as though they were one religion.

In his eyes, the religion of the Land of the Rising Sun, just like Japanese art, was something that was so profoundly different that it could not be understood by someone who was not Japanese. According to him, Japanese rituals, which were superficially frivolous and comical to entertain tourists, disguised a mysterious, sinister and disturbing inner core that was based upon concepts that were so far removed from Western concepts so as to be completely incomprehensible and impenetrable for a European like himself. Upon entering Japanese temples, Loti felt like an intruder, someone who had come to disturb remote gods, sometimes interesting, sometimes frightening, who were not his own deities and who he was unable to understand.

For Wenceslau de Moraes, Asia was a spiritual continent, which had not yet been corrupted by the disease of materialism, the main cause, according to him, of the decadence of the Western world. Japan, particularly, was a country in which people acted according to the spirits that surrounded them, where each human task acquired a religious significance. It was in this spirituality that, according to him, lay the charms of “Dai Nippon”. Japanese legends and gods were subjects that fascinated him.

When he spoke of religion in Japan, Moraes always made a very clear distinction between Shintoism, a contemporary Japanese religion that dated back to the very origins of the nation, Buddhism, a religion that originated in India and was introduced to the Land of the Rising Sun by Chinese bonzos, and ancestor worship, a cult that was even more ancient than these two religions and had been assimilated by both faiths.

Shintoism, that made the first Emperor of Japan the son of Amaterasu, the goddess of the Sun, was, for Wenceslau de Moraes, more than a religion, it was the cosmogenic myth that was inextricably linked with the foundation of the Japanese nation itself, given that the divine status of the Japanese sovereign was the fundamental basis upon which the entire structure of Japanese society was built. Shintoism is a warrior cult that leads the believer to
realise himself, not as an individual, but as a member of the nation; a cult that does not promise rewards in the afterlife, but rather esteems those who, by their patriotism, their pride, courage and love for their ancestors, attain glory during their earthly life. Although he married Ó-Yoné according to Shinto ceremonies, Wenceslau de Moraes believed it was impossible to be a Shintoist without being Japanese.

The author of Dai Nippon felt that Buddhism, while introducing a comforting hope of life after death, enriched Japanese religiosity without coming into conflict with Shintoism. A salutary balance resulted from the alliance between Shintoism, that valued action, and Buddhism, a contemplative religion. In *Relance da Alma Japonesa*, he wrote:

"[In Buddhism] The Japanese found that which their spirit needed, i.e. the affirmation of an eternal life after successive metempsychoses, the rewarding of virtue, the punishment of evil, paradise and hell, precepts of piety to uphold with regard to men and all animals, a love of peace and a thousand other beneficial dogmas. Buddhism preached the inconstancy of all earthly things – pleasures, love – calling them to meditation, to the exclusive contemplation of divinity and divine things. This appeal to abnegation, to simplicity, fitted in well with the inner notion the Japanese had of themselves, of their own impersonality, and undoubtedly reinforced it" 46.

Contrary to that which happened with Shintoism, Wenceslau de Moraes felt that it was enough just to be in Japan to perceive the call of Buddhism, "religion of love and piety, benevolent not just to men, but also to all animals" 47.

For him, the cult of Buddha, that substituted the agony of death with the idea of the successive reincarnation of the spirit in different bodies until the attainment of nirvana, a final state of abstraction in which the individual being fuses with the universal whole, represented a source of serenity. If he refers to nirvana as an abstract notion that was hard to conceive, reincarnation and the process of purification that accompanied it appealed to his imagination.

In the process of wanting to become Japanese, the author of *Dai Nippon* also sought, in a certain way, to reincarnate himself, to be born again in the skin of another race and to purify himself by means of this transformation.

And one of the steps that he took in this attempt to “Japanise” himself was precisely the practice of Buddhist rituals.

However, one cannot say that Wenceslau de Moraes converted to Buddhism. In O “Bon-Odori” em Tokushima, he stated that he worshipped different gods, the majority of whom were Buddhist, without knowing until what point he believed in them or not or whether he was driven by the force of habit and his desire to imitate the Japanese people.

The practice of Buddhist rituals was also a way of paying homage to the memories of his lost companions, who believed in Buddha:

“Once a month, on a fixed day – the 20th – I receive a visit from an ama-san, i.e. from a bonza or Buddhist nun. She comes to say her prayers, besides the butsdan, the altar of the dead; prayers for some poor beings who have left this world; whose spirits one supposes, in a certain way, inhabit the hovel where I live. If it is not their spirits that dwell here, at least it is their memory, the memory of the poor departed souls, that inhabits it; innumerable domestic utensils, pieces of furniture, small decorative objects, remind me of them, every moment of the day, and pierce my sentiments. This is enough to fully justify the prayers; prayers of a religious cult that is not my religion, mine is another, – and what would my religion do here? – but that was their religion, the poor departed creatures, the religion that soothed them while they were children, during their entire lives and brought them a final glimmer of hope in another life, when they closed their eyes forever…” 48

Although Moraes considered cremation to be a means of purification, his desire to have a funeral according to Buddhist rites reflected, above all, his desire to ensure that his ashes would be placed besides those of Ko-Haru.

In the final years of his life, Wenceslau de Moraes realised that he had not found what he sought in Buddhism: a means of “Japanising” himself and serenity in the face of death.

Apart from Shintoism and Buddhism, the author of Relance da Alma Japonesa discerned a third cult, the cult of the dead, whose origins were so remote that it was impossible to clearly define them; a cult followed by all Japanese, be they Shintoists or Buddhists, that consisted of worshipping one’s ancestors in the small altar that exists in every Japanese home.

Just as Shintoism was the basis of the social structure of Japan, according to Wenceslau de Morais, ancestor worship was the foundation of the

Japanese family, a family where the individual is no more than a link in the chain of generations and is duty-bound to ensure that this chain is not broken.

The Portuguese author was attracted to this cult, which enabled the living to communicate with those who they loved and were no longer alive. On the day of “Bon-odori”, the day of the dance of the festival of the dead, which celebrated the return of the spirits of the deceased to their former homes, he sought to participate in the ceremony, thus evoking his own dead; however, his sensibilities as a Westerner, from which, no matter how hard he tried, he was unable to free himself, did not allow him to play any role in the ceremony other than that of a mere onlooker.

In the cult of ancestor worship, the Japanese found a way of accepting their own death, as they knew that, instead of disappearing, they too would be transformed into beings worshipped by their descendants and thus continue to be part of the family. This cult did not afford Wenceslau de Moraes any comfort as he was not able to realise his dream of having Japanese descendants.

The author of *O Bon-odori em Tokushima* did not manage to completely adhere to any of these religions practised in Japan, and reached the conclusion that, “The Japanese soul, moulded by thousands of ancient legacies, so different from the thousands of ancient legacies that moulded the European soul, delights in beliefs that the European will never be able to partake in, no matter how much he may yearn to do so” 49.

Nevertheless, these Japanese religions had an impact upon his sensibility as a Westerner and this alliance resulted in a personal religious practice that Armando Martins Janeiro defined as a “mixture of sentimental Buddhism and Portuguese nostalgia” 50 and what Wenceslau de Moraes himself termed “the cult of nostalgia”, where the influence of Buddhism and the cult of ancestor worship was clearly visible. The two most striking features of this cult were contact with his beloved companions who had died, and who appear purified of all the defects that they had in life, and respect for all living beings.

His personal beliefs enabled him to fill his life of solitude with memories of O-Yoné and Ko-Haru and the company of his pets and plants in his garden.

The Land of the Rising Sun played a different role in the lives and works of Pierre Loti and Wenceslau de Moraes. Loti produced books based on his visits to Japan. In his writings, just like in all aspects of his life, Moraes pursued the utopian objective of becoming Japanese.

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Abstract

The French novelist Pierre Loti (1850-1923) and the Portuguese author Wenceslau de Moraes (1853-1929) were contemporaries. Both knew Japan well and transmitted an image of the country that left an indelible impression upon their readers.

However, their views about the Japanese people and Japanese women, the natural environment, art and religion of 'Dai Nippon' are very different.

Loti produced exotic books based on his brief sojourns in the Land of the Rising Sun, whereas the works by Moraes, just like the other facets of his life, reflect his pursuit of the utopian objective of becoming Japanese.

Resumo

O romancista francês Pierre Loti (1850-1923) e o autor português Wenceslau de Moraes (1853-1929) foram contemporâneos. Ambos conheceram o Japão e dele transmitiram uma imagem que marcou profundamente os seus leitores.

As suas visões do povo nipónico, da mulher japonesa, da natureza, da arte e da religião do “Dai Nippon” são no entanto muito diferentes.

Loti tirou livros exóticos das suas breves estadias no Império do Sol Nascente; Moraes perseguiu nas suas obras, tal como em todas as facetas da sua existência, o objectivo quimérico de se tornar Japonês.

要約

フランス人小説家ピエール・ロチ(1850-1920)とポルトガル人作家モラエス(1853-1929)は同時代に活躍した。二人とも日本を良く知っており、そしてこの国の忘れえぬ印象を彼らの読者に与えた。

しかし、日本国民や日本女性、「大ニッポン」の自然環境、芸術や宗教における二人の見解はかなり異なっている。

ロチは日本での短期逗留に基づいた異国情緒にふれた本を著したが、モラエスの作品は、その人生の様々な面と同様に、日本人になるという叶わな目的の追求を映している。