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Meet the *Mousmé*. The Otherness of the Japanese Woman in the Writings of French Women Travellers of the First Half of the 20th Century*

Poznaj *Mousmé*. Odmienność japońskiej kobiety w dziełach francuskich podróżniczek z pierwszej połowy XX wieku

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Abstract. From Pierre Loti to Nicolas Bouvier, via Roland Barthes and many other Western travellers, the perception of Japanese women and their otherness since the 1860s has been constantly enriched by diverse and recurring mental images linked to a certain form of exoticism and Japonism. It seems essential to enrich the reflections on the concept of the otherness of feminine discourse in order to shed new light on major issues of the history of French women travellers, the French imagination of Japan and Japanese exoticism. This article explores some avenues of reflection on the construction of the figure of the Japanese woman, a pillar theme of travel literature, present in travel writings produced by French women. How to meet the other and the other's elsewhere when this other is also a woman? What is the perception of Japanese women in French women's travel writings? What areas of the allegory of the elsewhere inherited from a dominant discourse of male

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travellers can be found (or not) in these discourses of women travellers? Beginning from the concept of *Mousmé*, introduced by Loti, and all the exotic load that results from it, the author reflects on the circumstances of encounters and the particularities of writings from the perception of the other as a female and her feminity. But it is not simply a question of entering into a purely comparative vision by confronting women travellers with dominant male travel literature. By analysing several writings in the light of a collective Japanese imagination in French, the author can reveal facets of Japanese exoticism and otherness hitherto subcontracted and intrinsically linked to women's travel practices; but also open the door to a reflection on the importance of enriching the mental representations of Japan with narrative produced by women about women.

Keywords: French women travellers, travel literature, mental representations of Japan, otherness, exoticism

Abstrakt. Od Pierre'a Loti do Nicolasa Bouviera, przez Rolanda Barthesa i wielu innych podróżników z Zachodu, postrzeganie japońskich kobiet i ich inności od lat 60. XX wieku stale wzbogacane jest przez różnorodne i powracające obrazy mentalne związane z pewną formą egzotyki i japońskości. Wzbogacenie refleksji nad pojęciem inności kobiecego dyskursu wydaje się autorce tego artykułu niezbędne, aby rzucić nowe światło na główne zagadnienia historii francuskich podróżniczek, francuskiego wyobrażenia Japonii i japońskiej egzotyki. Niniejszy artykuł zgłębia niektóre kierunki refleksji nad konstrukcją postaci japońskiej kobiety, filaru literatury podróżniczej, obecnego w zapisach z podróży, których autorkami były Francuzki. Jak spotykać się z innym i jego przestrzenią, gdy innym jest ona? Jaka jest percepcja japońskich kobiet w literaturze podróżniczej tworzonej przez Francuzki? Jakie obszary alegorii innego miejsca, odziedziczonej po dominującym dyskursie podróżników płci męskiej, można odnaleźć (lub nie) w dyskursie podróżniczek? Wychodząc od koncepcji *Mousmé* wprowadzonej przez Lotiego i wynikającego z niej egzotycznego ładunku, autorka zastanawia się nad okolicznościami kontaktu z odmiennością i specyfiką literatury dotyczącej kobiecej inności z punktu widzenia kobiet. Ale nie jest to tylko kwestia wejścia w czysto porównawczą wizję poprzez skonfrontowanie kobiet podróżujących z dominującą męską literaturą podróżniczą. Analizując wybrane teksty w świetle zbiorowej japońskiej wyobraźni, możemy ukazać aspekty japońskiej egzotyki i inności, do tej pory nierozerwalnie związane z kobiecymi praktykami podróżniczymi, a także stworzyć dogodne warunki do refleksji nad znaczeniem wzbogacenia mentalnych obrazów Japonii o narrację tworzoną przez kobiety o kobietach.

Słowa kluczowe: francuskie podróżniczki, literatura podróżnicza, wyobrażenie Japonii, inność, egzotyka

If the voyages of the French to Japan and their travel literature are particularly well represented in the Japanese Studies in France, it must be admitted that these comprehensive academic works on the subject tend to overshadow female travellers who drown in a vertiginous number of male travellers. Greatly overlooked in the historiography of French travel to Japan, and sometimes even in the history of travel in general,[1] French women travellers to Japan were present in academic

[1] Nicole Pellegrin's theories, which deal in particular with the reasons for historical and historiographical silence with regard to women travellers, highlight this aspect particularly well (Pellegrin, 2011).

works in a very anecdotal and recent manner. It is also interesting to note that the French women travellers are much more cited (though not specifically studied) in the Anglo-Saxon and American research on foreign women in Japan during the Meiji[2] era and in gender and travel studies (Robinson, 2001), as well as in Japanese work on foreign presence in Japan than in French-language studies.

Therefore, it seems important, as part of the process of writing and understanding Women's History, to work on women's travel writings and to present in this article a few lines of analysis that will enrich both the dominant discourse on Japanese women and their otherness, as well as the challenges of the system of representation of the elsewhere verbalised by them.[3]

How do French women travellers encounter the Japanese elsewhere and its otherness in their travel writings? What areas of the allegory of the elsewhere inherited from the dominant discourse of male travellers can be found (or not) in their discourse? How do they meet and approach a Japanese woman, this other feminine form?

Upon the prior understanding of the frameworks of women's travel in Japan (1) the author may provide several elements of answers to these questions and lines of thought and then the ways in which a Japanese mental image is constructed via travel literature affecting women travellers-authors[4] (2). Once these milestones have been set, it is possible to confront these dominant mental images surrounding the

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[2] At this point, it is worth mentioning the work of Klein (2016), which remains a reference in the matter and which points out, with great precision, many French women travellers including nuns. Similarly, Lorraine Sterry mentions some French women travellers in her book (Sterry, 2009).

[3] The author would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that this work is part of a more advanced scientific approach: long research work and a thesis in Japanology (*Des Françaises au Japon : les mécaniques de l'exotisme et de l'altérité dans la littérature de voyage au XIXème et au XXème siècle* [*French Women in Japan: The Mechanics of Exoticism and Otherness in 19th- and 20th-Century Travel Literature*], under the direction of Professor Jean-Pierre Giraud – thesis in Studies in Asia and its diasporas, Jean Moulin University Lyon 3), which explores the historical, literary and sociological aspects of French women's travel to Japan and its travel literature in the light of, among other things, the question of gender, the history of travel and the French presence in Japan and the history of Franco-Japanese relations. By doing so, the present article proposes a non-exhaustive and rather reduced list of women travellers referred to in the aforementioned work and wishes above all to present a few lines of reflection on the journey of French women to Japan and on the writings of their experience of travel and otherness under the prism of the *topoi* linked to exoticism.

[4] To refer to a female author in French, the word *autrice* instead of the neologism *auteure* has been chosen. The anteriority of use favours the word *autrice* (from the Latin *auctrix*) since its use is attested from the Middle Ages to the 17th century. In addition, the feminisation of the word "auteur" is audible for the form *autrice* which is not the case with *auteure*. Therefore, that indicates the place of women in literature and their function in its creation. The reader is referred to the excellent article written by Aurore Evain, heritage researcher and historian, about the use of the term *autrice* in history (Evain, 2008).

Japanese woman, with the discourse produced by women travellers (3) and finally to address some particularities attached to the theme of the other in the women travel's writings (4).

1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF FRENCH WOMEN TRAVELLERS TO JAPAN

As historical and literary perspectives on women travellers, explorers and adventurers are developed in Gender Studies, it is appropriate to lay some foundations regarding the issues and conditions of women's travel and the travel literature that stems from it.

There is of course no question here of falling into the easy trap of a discourse based on the idea that women write "like women" or that women who write the story of their Japanese journey do so in a more romantic or romanticized way than men[5] in order to speak of a Japanese mental image that would be different because it is produced by women travellers, and not by their male companions. It goes without saying that being a woman and travelling at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century assumes different realia as for a man at the same time. Even if travel conditions have improved, roads and means of locomotion were safer and routes and other hazards of travel were more under control, travelling as a Western woman in these times, and moreover, travelling in Asia and specifically in Japan, if only because of logistics or travel practices, offered an opportunity to see and experience Japan in a singular and different manner. It is obvious, for example, that a French wife of a Japanese man, mother of a mixed-race child who travelled to Japan with them for several months in the 1930s, had different attachment and discourse on Japan than another French traveller, an enthusiast of Japanese art, going to Japan for pleasure and deciding to take a Japanese wife for a few weeks there so as he could buy a piece of furniture or a vase, inspired by Pierre Loti a few decades earlier.[6]

These are different types of experience based on particularities of travel practices and their purposes, intrinsically linked to gender, which in fact produce a range of different discourses. In general, the circumstances of the trip were different for ladies, whose mission was diplomatic, military or commercial, unlike for men

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[5] The author relies here on several theories evoked in the work by Kristi Siegel, who tends to underline the fact that there is no gendered way of writing that is recognizable and which is based on examples of female authors who have adopted male pen names without anyone ever knowing who they really were when they read them (Siegel, 2004).

[6] When he arrived in Nagasaki in 1885, Pierre Loti had the idea of marrying a Japanese woman for a few weeks before leaving her on his departure.

travellers. Nevertheless, some women travellers were true adventurers eager to taste Japanese exoticism. It would be far beyond the scope of this article to draw up a precise topology of French women travellers to Japan and women "authors-travellers."[7] However, the author would like to point out an important terminology that exists within this large group of women who travelled. In the author's opinion, they can be divided into two groups: opportunistic travellers and intentional travellers.[8] The first category of opportunistic travellers, these are women travellers adapting to circumstances who take advantage of a particular situation to travel to Japan: often a mission (diplomatic, military, commercial etc.) or a trip of a husband, a father or even a brother. Some left with more or less enthusiasm, others with more apprehension. For most of opportunists, their Japanese parenthesis is unknown, and they often remain in the shadow of the one they accompany. If no letters or stories from the latter mention these travellers, it remains difficult without archival work to reveal their presence,[9] unless they have published something or a handwritten trace persists in some archives and a recent account has drawn attention to it. There are, however, a few exceptions, such as Arlette Leroi-Gourhan (1913–2005), known mainly for her work on the mummy of Ramses III, who considerably advanced the work of her husband, the ethnologist and archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan (1911–1986) by accompanying him to Japan when he obtained a scholarship for an ethnographic mission to Hokkaido in 1938.[10]

The other side of this terminology is based on intentional women travellers: a larger and more protean group of women travellers who chose Japan, some of whom even strongly desired it: from tourists to adventurers of all kinds,[11] including

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[7] The reader is referred to the thesis work mentioned in the notes.

[8] This distinction (established by us and based on our own research and analysis of archive sources) is valid only for certain periods and the destination that is of the authors' interest, i.e. Japan, taking into account several French specificities and particularities linked to Franco-Japanese history.

[9] As mentioned before, this article presents a limited axis of research and reflection for further work on the presence of French women in Japan. An examination of archives and diverse and varied sources, often unpublished, was carried out in order to identify the women travellers and their writings, published or manuscript, when they existed.

[10] Arlette Leroi-Gourhan took a very active part in her husband's ethnographic project on the Ainus and, after his death, published a work on the subject that she wrote alone but included her husband's name as co-author (Leroi-Gourhan, 1989). As her husband's work has considerably overshadowed her great contribution (taking and developing photos, "field surveys" carried out alone, transcription, researching information, organising travel), the author would like to highlight her substantial, and often little-known, work she has done in Japan.

[11] Countess Marguerite Marie Sipière du Bourg de Bozas (1876–1935) or Laure Durand-Fardel (1817–1887).

artists, journalists,[12] wives and companions of the Japanese,[13] nuns[14] and even "knowledge peddlers;"[15] this group has as many facets as the number of women travellers who could make it up. From the 1920s onwards, the latter group tended to take precedence over opportunistic women travellers, who did not disappear, of course, but produced far fewer stories[16] as the group of women travellers by intention grew, and more women travellers wrote about their experience of travelling in Japan.

It must also be borne in mind, however, that not all women travellers wrote and that most of those who did were not published. Indeed, many women travellers did not necessarily publish their letters, notes and notebooks, which blackened during the trip, sometimes even embellished with sketches, photos or watercolours. And even if some of them managed to penetrate the very closed circle of travellers-authors of Japan and were therefore able to offer their readers a different discourse on the journey to Japan and Japanese otherness. It should be remembered that this difference in discourse is mainly based on the fact that travelling as a Western woman to Japan at the time the author is interested in brings not only some closeness to Japanese women (maids, companions or even in-laws depending on the case), covers issues and situations that are unknown to men (periods, the possibility of pregnancy and other female physiological particularities), and, therefore, also gives these women travellers an opportunity to experience Japan to a different degree and to enrich their discourse with these experiences.

The question arises: to what extent does female travel influence the production of mental images *a priori* different from the Japanese exoticism in travel literature?

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[12] Like Andrée Viollis (1870–1950), Gabrielle Bertrand (1908–1961), Titaÿna (1897–1965) and other.

[13] One may think in particular of two of the companions of painter Foujita: Youki Desnos (1903–1964) and Madeleine Lequeux (1905–1936), who both travelled with him to Japan, the former leaving impressions of this trip in her memoirs.

[14] Halfway between opportunist travellers and intentional travellers, French nuns have played a very important role in the history of the French presence in Japan. Since the arrival of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus-Nicolas Barré in 1872 on the archipelago, soon other women's congregations joined.

[15] Such as the architect Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999), who came to Japan at the official invitation of the Japanese government in 1940 to improve the country's production of industrial art.

[16] In comparison to the early 1900s.

2. THE AREAS OF THE ALLEGORY OF THE JAPANESE ELSEWHERE: CONSTRUCTION, COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Whether French, American or English, every traveller who has written about his experience in Japan since the end of Sakoku[17] enjoyed writing about his encounter (or at least his impressions of it) with Japanese women. In fact, never before had so much been written about Japanese women as in the works of Western writer-travellers of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. Fascinating exoticism from afar, mixed with eroticism rooted in Orientalism and a flood of Western travellers,[18] each one more prolific than the previous one about this Japan that was finally "opened" to the world[19]; it was enough to construct the image of the Japanese woman based on numerous exotic prejudices and expectations nourished by particular mental images. Among all these French travellers, the best known of all is undoubtedly Pierre Loti (1850–1923),[20] who travelled to Japan from July to August 1885 and lived in Nagasaki where he took an 18-year-old[21] Japanese girl as his wife under a "short-term contract." She inspired his very famous novel *Madame Chrysanthème*, published in 1887, which was a huge success among Parisian booksellers.

France inherited from Loti a whole exotic imagination of Japan and the Japanese woman which has been widely popularised and taken up in many other travel stories afterwards.

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[17] Isolationist policy adopted by Japan from 1641 to 1853. The end of this period was marked by the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry (1774–1858) and the US Navy, which forced Japan to come out of its relative retreat and open trade relations with the United States and Western countries in general.

[18] With the end of Sakoku and the beginning of the Meiji era, a large number of foreign visitors came to Japan (diplomats and officials, traders, tourists, engineers and specialists on mission at the request of the Meiji government, etc.).

[19] If the isolationist policy of Sakoku (1641–1853) was intended to be a policy of isolation and complete closure of the country, much research has helped to put this closure into perspective since Japan maintained contacts with the outside world, particularly commercial ones.

[20] Writer and officer of the French Navy, he is particularly known for his exotic novels inspired largely by his travels around the world (Japan, Turkey, Tahiti, etc.), which earned him great success and even a place at the French Academy in 1891.

[21] At that time it was common and easy, though costly, for a foreigner to marry a Japanese woman on a fixed-term contract in all legality since the practice, supervised and registered by the local police and with the parental consent of the girl, allowed the union and marriage with a Japanese man a few weeks after the husband's departure.

Mousmé is a term that denotes a young girl or a very young woman. It is one of the prettiest words in the Japanese language; this word comprises a pout (a nice and funny little pout like women make) and above all a nice face (a crumpled face like theirs). I'll use it often, as I don't know any French word that's worth it. (*Madame Chrysanthemum*, chap. XI, p. 50)[22]

In his work, Loti baptised the Japanese girls *mousmé*[23] and it is the very same term which was then popularised in other works and in the Parisian salons where Japonism found many amateurs and adepts.[24] Since then, basic representations of the Japanese woman for Western people (which still persist in certain aspects to this day) are laid and infiltrate and reproduce themselves in the exotic Japanese imagination and in travel literature.[25]

The works on exoticism and otherness in 19th- and 20th-century travel narratives in Asia and the East (but also more generally with regard to literature from faraway places) highlight an important point. There is a discourse on Aboriginal women that is often eroticized and their appearance constitutes the main subject of descriptions. The encounter with the other passes largely through an interaction with its feminine declension and becomes a catalyst for reflection and issues surrounding her representation (disgust, eroticism, acceptance, etc.). The Japanese woman is no exception to the rule, of course, and there are several recurring themes in her case.[26]

First of all, it should be noted that the lexical field associated with Japanese woman's body or gestures is often derived from the term "small." Then one sees a "little *mousmé*," with her "little steps", her "little manners" and her "little face."[27]

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[22] "Mousmé est un mot qui signifie jeune fille ou très jeune femme. C'est un des plus jolis mots de la langue nippone ; il semble qu'il y ait, dans ce mot, de la moue (de la petite moue gentille et drôle comme elles en font) et surtout de la frimousse (de la frimousse chiffonnée comme est la leur). Je l'emploierai souvent, n'en connaissant aucun en français qui le vaille."

[23] Loti's hazardous transcription of the Japanese term *musume* (娘, pronounced [mu̥su̥me]) used to refer to Japanese girls. However, the term has a connotation and meaning that goes beyond the simple qualification of a binary gender. It is interesting to note that in some parts of France the word lost its Japanese connotation in the 1940s and 1950s to designate mainly a promiscuous girl or a rather a young mistress, before falling into disuse.

[24] Since the 1860–1870s, as collectors and art critics set out to discover Japan, painters, writers and artists from all walks of life have been inspired by distant Japan and its aesthetics. Whole Paris flocked to art dealers to buy all sorts of exotic Japanese objects and four world exhibitions held in Paris in 1867, 1878, 1889 and 1900 are evidence of the French craze for Japan.

[25] The comparisons between female and male narratives for the given period are based not only on Loti's writings on Japan, but also on a corpus of about 30 texts compiled based on two Pierre Beillevaire's bibliographical references: his anthology of accounts by French travellers (Beillevaire, 1993; 2001).

[26] The author refers here to the themes present in the stories of French and Western travellers in general.

[27] These are occurrences that may be observed in the course of research of numerous accounts of French people's travels to Japan that were consulted.

The Japanese woman embodies all aspects of smallness. She also often finds herself infantilized as her manners are compared to those of children. Consequently, several authors, starting with Loti, used the animal lexicon in their description of Japanese women, sometimes referring to monkeys, other times to cats but in particular to inanimate objects: dolls, jewels, puppets, etc. Taking into consideration that Loti opened the way to this kind of designation, the author observes several other authors, well inspired by his ideas, who followed him and make such references in their descriptions of Japanese women and frequently, even in a more contemporary context, make a persistent association between a "Japanese" and a "doll." On top of that, there is a whole lexicon linked to the smell of the Japanese woman, supposedly flowery in many cases, sometimes musky (and regularly associated with her clothes, like the perfume she may leave behind). There is, however, relatively little mention of an unpleasant odour in women, unlike the sweat of Japanese men, which is mentioned in several stories, mainly from the 1920s and especially the 1930s,[28] by both male and female authors. There is also a whole range of ideas related to the skin colour of the Japanese, and especially Japanese women, which come in a whole range of diluted tones[29] from "yellowish" to "whitish." Add to all this an apparent lack of modesty[30] and a sprinkle of some flowery kimonos and other "typically" Japanese fabrics, and one arrives at a nice example of the image (and its prejudice) of the Japanese woman that is outlined based on travel stories. It is nevertheless tinged with some political and ideological preoccupations,[31] but also, and above all, with the mood of the traveller, sometimes amused by these little dolls balancing on their wooden *geta*, sometimes bewitched by playful little faces who, according to them, know neither modesty nor decency. Postcolonial studies have already well explored these questions and issues[32] and the mechanisms of creation of such mental images in travel narratives and in exoticism literature are known enough to be easily identifiable in French travel narratives.

[28] This last detail may be correlated with the fact that at that time Japan was perceived as a disturbing military power and had just invaded Manchuria in 1931. Some authors have a very ambivalent discourse on Japan, constantly oscillating between the search for Japanese dreamlike exoticism and a very negative discourse using the lexical register related to disgust and contempt.

[29] To be understood here in the sense of a pigment that is not "pure."

[30] The practice of bathing is one of the Japanese peculiarities which appeals to foreigners visiting Japan and which, colliding with the Judeo-Christian values of travellers, partly gives rise to the idea that Japanese men and women in particular have little sense of modesty and little need to hide one's private parts.

[31] Yellow peril, armed conflicts, post-war context and others are all issues and events to be taken into account here.

[32] The book by Jennifer Yee (2000) explores the prejudices linked to the "exotic woman," especially the Japanese one, in a very specific manner. This paper relies heavily on her theories regarding the construction of an exotic myth of the Japanese woman.

Faced with these mainstream images of the Japanese woman, one can ask themselves where female travellers-authors stand and what these themes become in female writings.

3. FRENCH WOMEN TRAVELLERS MEETING THE *MOUSMÉ* IMAGINED BY LOTI AND HIS SUCCESSORS

Therefore, the French women, being educated and having more than likely been exposed to these exotic presuppositions about Japanese women,[33] cannot escape certain preconceived ideas when they travel to Japan.

Some women authors, mainly at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 20th century, took up and religiously used the terms applied by Loti. This is notably the case of Countess Du Bourg de Bozas,[34] literary heiress of the first wave of French travellers-writers discovering Japan from the 1860s onwards, during diplomatic, military or economic missions. She drew on the writings of her predecessors and thus often invoked the intertextuality of travel narratives in her writings[35]. In doing so, she uses extensively the term *mousmé* introduced in France by Loti throughout the Japanese part of his travel narrative and even makes a few references to the latter.

> Already the land of the *mousmés* appears to me as a charming vision. (Du Bourg de Bozas, 1903, p. 425)

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[33] Women travellers are dependant on the various structures that have brought the exotic world of Japan to the West (Japanism in the broadest sense of the word, but also fairs, art and exotic shops, numerous travel stories, influential collectors and other artists with a passion for Japan). Women travellers who wrote belonged to privileged circles and were educated. Influenced by their previous readings on Japan but also by a whole French-Japanese mental image that infiltrated literature and the arts in general, they did not arrive in Japan without the slightest idea of what they were going to discover there. Actually, it was quite the contrary.

[34] As the wife of the wealthy aristocrat, Robert Du Bourg De Bozas (1871–1902), who became an explorer, she set off on a trip around the world alone from Marseille on 28 December 1900 while her husband was on a mission in Africa.

[35] In *Mon tour du Monde* [*My Trip around the World*] in 1903, she recounts the story of her great journey, which took her to India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan and other. Her passage in Japan is only one stage of a long journey, but nevertheless she surveyed Japan as much as possible from April 7, 1901, when she reached the coast of Nagasaki, until April 12, armed with her cumbersome photographic equipment, before leaving Yokohama for America. Several photographs taken by her are included in her travel story.

The Japanese women so beautifully wrapped in their brightly coloured silks, with their childlike faces, their mawkish attitudes, their studied grace, remind us of the exquisite Madame Chrysanthemum, whose melancholy Pierre Loti has brought to us. (p. 428)[36]

Although Du Bourg de Bozas made excessive use of the word *mousmé*, it became increasingly rare after the 1920s among women travellers (although for some it was still used by their male counterparts until after the Second World War!) and almost completely disappeared in the second half of the 1930s.

From the 1920s to 1930s, a small shift in the ratio of French women travellers was recorded. If, by then, opportunist travellers, adventurers and other tourists in search of Japanese exoticism had a monopoly on travel, the whole category of women travellers by intention (women reporters, nuns, wives or companions of Japanese people, etc.) had rapidly gained strength. Their discourse on Japan was a little bit less "tourist"[37] and made, with a few exceptions,[38] an attempt to bury the application of the word *mousmé* to refer to Japanese women. Moreover, these women travellers, especially in the case of journalists or even wives of the Japanese, wished to report on the "real situation in Japan" (or at least on their interpretation of what Japan was in the context of their trip), implying in some way that certain presuppositions about the country and its inhabitants may need to be corrected. It seems important to insist on this point since the political, cultural and ideological context exerts strong pressure on ways of representing and confronting the world. Female travellers, just as male travellers, are therefore not only nourished by dreamlike and exotic texts by travellers from the 1880s, but also depend on Western intellectual and political current events[39] that influence their perception of Japan, as well as their personal situation (being married to a Japanese man, a nun on a mission, a reporter or an artist).

In spite of everything, although the use of *mousmé* was gradually reduced, Loti's shadow still hovers, firmly anchored in the practices of intertextuality specific to travel literature, so much that Andrée Viollis, almost fifty years later, still refers to it.

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[36] "Déjà la terre des mousmés m'apparaît comme une charmante vision." / "Les Japonaises si joliment drapées dans leurs soieries aux couleurs éclatantes, rappellent, avec leurs visages enfantins, leurs attitudes mièvres, leur grâce étudiée, l'exquise Madame Chrysanthème, dont Pierre Loti nous conta la mélancolie."

[37] Namely, their stories were not umpteenth descriptions of the usual tourist itinerary of foreigners and visitors to Japan. There is in fact a "typical itinerary" that can be found in the great majority of stories as well as in the tourist guides of the time with passages that cannot be ignored during a trip to Japan: certain districts of Tokyo but also the cities of Nikko, Kyoto, etc. For reasons linked to the practicalities and motives of a certain category of women travellers, they escape from the beaten tourist path.

[38] The journalist Andrée Viollis is one of the few to use the term *mousmé* in her writings.

[39] For example, naturalism and eugenics of the 1930s, complex post-war vision, feminism.

Is it *Mrs Chrysanthemum*, her little laughs, her little pipe, or Mrs Butterfly and her vocalisations? Or countless graceful images that Japanese prints have inscribed in our memories? With just a word of a Japanese woman, European faces blossom. (Viollis, 1934, p. 200)[40]

Another noteworthy development in the discourse of women travellers is the fact that as the number of women travellers increased, the ratio of "descriptions of Japanese women's physical appearance to descriptions of clothing and make-up." Of course, they do not stop describing the appearance of Japanese women (especially the body, skin colour and hair) in favour of their outfits, but the descriptions of costumes and clothes become longer, more precise and more detailed; whereas the physical descriptions become shorter and often keep only the "essentials:" smallness, laughing face, childish and/or delicate manners and skin colour.[41] Descriptions of the way of walking, for example, are less common, while *geta* (which still are an inescapable "object" of the "Japanese panoply" and are therefore well known and expected by both the reader and the traveller) are described in detail in many cases. Conversely, in the same period, this trend is not found among male travellers and one can observe certain constancy in the description of the body and face of Japanese women among the latter and a balance in the ratio of physical appearance/costume descriptions, even if the outfits are often described in much less detail among male authors.

Finally, the eroticization of the Japanese woman's body is much less present in the writings of women travellers. If there is still in some cases a lexical field associated with seduction, one must nevertheless note the absence of erotic load and desire which is often found in male authors. At the same time, the idea of lack of modesty is very strong, but does not necessarily have the same implied content linked to lust and debauchery, while many authors stress a certain "complacency" on the part of Japanese women with regard to body.

It must be said that one of the characteristic features of the Japanese woman is the complete absence of a sense of modesty: she does not know that one should hide some parts of her body from the eyes rather than others, and dresses only to adorn herself and make herself more attractive. (Durand-Fardel, 1881, p. 393)[42]

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[40] "Est-ce Mme Chrysanthème, ses petits rires, sa petite pipe, ou Mme Butterfly et ses vocalises ? Ou bien encore les multiples et gracieuses images que les estampes nippones ont imprimées dans nos mémoires ? Au seul mot de Japonaise les visages européens s'épanouissent."

[41] It concerns the physical descriptions of Japanese women in general. It is often the case that if an author lingers on a particular Japanese woman (by name, for example), the physical description is much richer and more detailed.

[42] "Il faut vous dire qu'un des signes caractéristiques de la Japonaise, c'est l'absence complète du sentiment de la pudeur : elle ne sait pas qu'on doive cacher aux yeux une partie de son corps plutôt qu'une autre, et s'habille seulement pour se parer et donner plus d'attraits à sa personne."

This idea of lust therefore remains fairly marginal in women's stories, which tend to emphasise the inability of Japanese women to assess what is or is not proper.[43] The exotic erotic load of the Japanese woman therefore tends to be reduced in women's stories, without affecting the seductive potential of her exotic attributes.

4. CIRCUMSTANCES OF MEETING THE FEMININE AND PARTICULARITIES OF ITS DESCRIPTION

Could the women authors therefore be able to distance themselves in some way from the recurring themes and images attached to the *mousmés*?

These women travellers are privileged, well-educated women who enjoy certain freedoms and prerogatives (connected, for example, with the status of their husband or father, particularly in the context of "opportunistic" travel). Moreover, is it not also necessary to have a certain degree of emancipation in order to take the road "alone" in the case of our most recklessly intentional travellers? Although accompanied by a whole crew, a translator and a guide... This is why it is not surprising to find out that some women travellers thought in favour of women[44] and were committed to feminist ideas, for example, women traveller reporters such as Viollis or her daughter Simone Téry (1897–1967).[45]

There is a whole new aspect of otherness and of the discourse on the other that is played out when the other is also a woman. Can some kind of sorority be expected? Some connivance between French and Japanese women? It is not uncommon for women travellers to comment on the status of women, their rights and ways of life, much more than their male counterparts, and with great interest. However, Japanese women are never treated as equal, even in the case of a friendship with a Japanese woman from a privileged background, having studied abroad and speaking several foreign languages. No difference seems to be made on this point between women from more modest backgrounds encountered during the trip and well-educated and wealthy Japanese women attending embassy receptions. Little interested in these dissimilar backgrounds, women travellers then tend to take an ethnocentric

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[43] For many women travellers this lack of modesty is evoked as the result of a lack of belief and recognition of God and the Catholic religion.

[44] Here the author refers to the 19th-century currents of thought that were the precursors of feminism, such as the defence of the status of women in literature, with Maria Deraismes (1828–1894) in France, in particular, or the creation of associations and newspapers fighting to advance the status of women.

[45] The latter also travelled to Japan, a few years before her mother in 1927.

look at the living conditions of Japanese women, deploring their lack of freedoms and rights, or at least complaining about them, taking as their starting point their own privileged status as women travellers and their Western living conditions.[46] Therefore, they cannot help but project their own desires and visions of women's rights onto Japanese women. Viollis, for example, a convinced feminist, particularly appreciates the Japanese women's desire for emancipation, which she thinks she noticed during her journey. In her book[47] *Le Japon intime* [*Intimate Japan*] (Viollis, 1934), she is even exalted when describing scenes of Western-style café waitresses' strikes, which she never saw during her trip.

This kind of consideration for the status of women, and particularly such anecdotes, are not echoed in male narratives, which, although obviously often deal succinctly with the status of Japanese women, rather quickly evade the issue in favour of the exotic and erotic load of the latter.

One can also question the relationship of the women traveller to the Japanese woman in the case of Japanese companions or wives who enter into the family sphere and intimacy of Japanese women much more than any French traveller busy with military and diplomatic affairs, or simply tourism and adventure. And even if he could have followed in Loti's footsteps and marry a Japanese wife for a few weeks or months of cohabitation, would he achieve the same degree of closeness?

Beyond the feminist concerns mentioned above, women travellers seem, in general, to be much more prolific in their stories about children, pregnancies and the intimate family sphere than their male counterparts. Without falling into a simplistic gendered discourse implying that these are "women's things" and therefore only of interest to women, it is preferable to point out that their closeness to Japanese women in many specific situations (in the bath,[48] with companions or friends,[49] during

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[46] Which, as it has been already pointed out, is quite remarkable (not constituting in fact the norm for the majority of French women), whether they are opportunistic travellers enjoying privileges associated with the function or mission of the person they accompany or whether they are intentional "emancipated" travellers, they all benefit from a certain degree of education and economic means.

[47] Viollis does not give precise details of this event, which she probably did not witness, but relates in detail (particularly with regard to the strikers' clothing) in chapter XXI *Les Japonaises tentent de s'émanciper* [*The Japanese Women Tend to Emancipate*] (pp. 229–239) of her work *Le Japon intime* [*Intimate Japan*] (1934). The author assumes from the details given that she refers to events that took place in 1922 (i.e. well before her trip) but it remains difficult to know how she obtained information about this strike and how much imagination she used in her description.

[48] A bath is often a moment which women travellers shared with Japanese women.

[49] Some women travellers (especially those who stayed longer because they accompanied their husbands, for example) find themselves sharing a daily life with ladies' companions or types of governesses, who, in most cases, do not speak the same language as them. Other travellers, often coming from journalistic or artistic circles, have some Japanese friends, coming from rather well-to-do backgrounds, speaking at least English and having sometimes even studied in Europe.

moments of play with children or in everyday life[50]) gives them the opportunity to see and discover aspects of Japanese women's lives which are totally unknown to male travellers and which they can therefore describe more fully. In doing so, female travellers discover and describe their skincare routines, the use of beauty products and intimate hygiene.[51]

The theme of the child is also very present when women travellers tackle the characteristics of the female other. Inevitably, when talking about living conditions of Japanese women and girls, the authors almost logically end up talking about children and their education. Of course, the Japanese child is not absent in male narratives, but it is generally seen by travellers as an extension of Japanese women more than as a being in their own right. This trend can also be found in women's stories, however, some of the writings of women travellers provide valuable information about children's upbringing, games and clothing that is not very well known.[52] Within this protean group of French women travellers, some of them, whom the author calls "intimate travellers,"[53] enjoy an insider-outsider position giving them the privilege of taking part in scenes of daily life and entering the intimacy of Japanese families. One can cite the example of Geneviève Morita,[54] who lived with her in-laws for several months and spent a lot of time with other women in the family. In her story, she talks about breastfeeding children or describes in great detail different ways of carrying them. By extension, the issue of maternity and childbirth are also aspects which are more readily apparent and which the author compares with France. Another group of women travellers, the nuns,[55] who enjoy a very close relationship with Japanese women and their children, also offer in their rich correspondence[56] a great deal of information that is totally absent

[50] This aspect rather concerns female travellers, who share the daily life of the Japanese in-laws or nuns, who are very close to the population and who have often learned to speak Japanese.

[51] It is obvious that for women, who are a priori not menopausal, the question of intimate hygiene and menstruation arises during these long months of travel. The latter are therefore at some point confronted (pushed by their curiosity or constrained by the situation) with the practices related to intimate hygiene among Japanese women.

[52] This is particularly noteworthy among women travellers who were already mothers or who were planning to become mothers in the near future and who were very interested in children.

[53] The reference is made here to the companions or wives of Japanese men who have privileged access to the family nucleus in the true sense of the word – the family home.

[54] Morita publishes, under the pseudonym Tormia, the account of her trip to Japan with her Japanese husband in the early 1920s. She lived with her in-laws for several weeks in Japan, although she spoke very little Japanese (Tormia, 1928).

[55] Because of their role, certainly in evangelisation, but above all in education and assistance to the most disadvantaged, and their ability to communicate.

[56] The archive service of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus of Nicolas Barré (located in the 6th arrondissement of Paris) contains a rich collection (notably letters and notebooks) related to the Sisters' missions in Japan.

from male accounts: ways of carrying children, breastfeeding, infant illnesses and others. Therefore, in these accounts by French women travellers, one finds mainly information on the living conditions of Japanese mothers and children, pregnancy and child-rearing practices.[57]

These women's writings on Japan exploring different aspects of the Japanese woman (e.g. the figure of the mother) and Japanese otherness in general should not be treated as discourses in opposition or contradiction to male discourses. On the contrary, they should be treated as enrichment of the existing dominant discourse, opening up a field of new possibilities to hitherto under-explored or unknown facets of the Japanese imagination. The female and male travel discourses are two sides of the same coin of French-Japanese exoticism.

CONCLUSIONS

The modalities and practice of women's travel give French women travellers the opportunity to see and live different experiences. Of course, their experiences but also their personalities, expectations and knowledge of Japan filter their discoveries and visions of Japan and Japanese women.

On the tip of their toes, some of them sneak where men cannot go, offering a rich variety of discourse, from the intimacy of their in-laws' house to confidences shared with a Japanese "friend" for a few weeks who speaks impeccable English and comes from a privileged social circle. With the increase in "women travellers by intention" in the early 1920s, who produced more stories wishing to present "the real Japan," one can observe the emergence of different themes that depend directly on the type of women travellers going to Japan[58] and the context of the trip. In writings teeming with details and preoccupations usually eluding male travellers and on which different socio-political-cultural perceptions are superimposed, the perception of Japanese women seems to take on new forms. It is then undeniable that the writings of French women enrich a dominant discourse with many aspects ignored or misunderstood (pregnancy, breastfeeding, education of

[57] However, this point is somewhat nuanced by pointing out that there are structural and stylistic differences in the stories of opportunist women travellers (more numerous at the beginning of the 20th century), who tend towards very "tourist" themes and the stories of intentional women travellers who seek to describe Japan "as a whole."

[58] In the case of male travellers, although the aims of their trips (tourism, diplomatic missions, Meiji government-sponsored missions bringing in foreign engineers, clergymen, traders, etc.) took many forms and influenced the content of their travel narratives (when there was one), such differences between the different discourses cannot be noted, contrary to what one can observe within the different groups of female travellers.

children, the place of women within the family unit, skincare routines, sexual life, intimate hygiene) and proposed a new way of reading the otherness of the Japanese woman, freed from a strong erotic charge or infantilisation.[59] At the same time, if the Japanese woman is not regarded as a sensual object, she is not considered as an equal, even if the authors recognize her rights and the duty to emancipate herself. Ignoring all differences in education and social backgrounds among Japanese women, women travellers transpose to Japanese women ethnocentric values inherited from the privileged Western environment to which they belong.[60] And if they bring a perception of Japanese women that is neither eroticized, nor perceived with lust or as potential companions by female travellers (unlike their male counterparts), they nevertheless recognise traditional and common attributes of seduction in the image of the *mousmé*, inherited from Loti and the first travellers at the end of the 19th century.

These French women could not completely escape the framework of exoticism and Japanese imagination established by the first travel stories about Japan and by the fashion of Japonism, which swept through the Parisian salons and invaded all the tasteful houses in the form of "Japoneries," porcelain and other lacquers. There are some strong ideas which, even if they are sometimes not particularly accentuated, nevertheless remain, irrigating the whole story and being linked to the "characteristics" then attributed to Japanese women: small, doll-like, cheerful, charming, shameless.

Female travellers-authors thus apprehend Japanese women through a certain exotic Japanese filter and a fixed imagination[61] of which they are prisoners, consciously or unconsciously. There exists in the foundations of French Japanese exoticism, a duality based on the fact that most travellers are far too imbued with it and therefore do not go to meet a living Japan but a beautiful painting, a beautiful print of which the Japanese would be beautiful elements of a decor prefabricated by imagination. Thus, even if the images of Japanese women are declined, enriched and sometimes even dialogued with and answered in the course of the stories of travellers, one always goes to meet images (expected or not) of what they had of this other more than the other himself as a human being made of flesh and blood.

French travellers are therefore constantly in tension and somehow succeed in stealthily extracting the Japanese from an exotic and dreamlike mussel, by escaping a little from the traced course of what is to be seen and is seen in Japan

[59] These elements are recurrent in the dominant discourse on Japanese women.

[60] For example, women travellers project on them aspirations related to the right to vote, women's emancipation or education.

[61] Physical attributes related to smallness, laughing faces or outfits and other kimonos, these are just a few examples.

in general by the travellers of the time. But they are always overtaken by a palette of dominant images whose contours may, of course, change according to context and travel, but whose essence always remains the same. It is therefore necessary to propose a two-layered reading of the accounts of French women's travels to Japan: at the same time, the perception of a Western woman, here French, who may have on another who is neither really her alter ego, nor really her exact opposite; but also a perception of the enrichment of the exotic heritage of an imaginary world stemming from travel literature and a cultural, literary and artistic context in which Japanism and Orientalism are at their best.

Translated into English: Agnieszka Stawecka-Kotuła

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