

TINAJERO, ARACELI. *HISTORIA CULTURAL DE LOS HISPANOHABLANTES EN JAPÓN*.

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Araceli Tinajero's *Historia cultural de los hispanohablantes en Japón* focuses on the cultural history of "Spanish-speaking" immigrants into Japan and their cultural productions based on their living experiences in Japan during the last three decades. As a literary/cultural historian and critic, Tinajero meticulously traces, researches, and provides very detailed documentation and impeccable close readings of the cultural products she could have encountered during her research trips to Japan over years since 2011. She does not include, in purpose, cultural products via the digital platforms such as YouTube or Twitter in this volume. The wide array of examples that Tinajero uses throughout the book, from scholarly works of intellectuals to amateur radios and poems of factory workers, from flamenco to Cuban salsa, not only allows readers to grasp why certain groups of Spanish-speaking people moved to Japan since the early 90s but also provides a wider view on how they have created a community, constructed an identity, and interacted with others within and out of the community, based on the same language, Spanish.

"Allá en el Perú no somos peruanos, acá en el Japón nos maltratan por extranjeros. ¿Qué diablos somos? (There in Peru we are not Peruvians, here in Japan we are mistreated by being foreigners. What the hell are we?)" (*Japón no da dos oportunidades*, p. 58-59; quoted in Tinajero, p. 258) This testimonial novel was written in 1994 by the renowned author Augusto Higa Oshiro, a second generation born in Peru to Japanese-born immigrants (*nisei*), upon his return to Peru, disillusioned after working as a factory worker. As detailed in the book, Japan's economic prosperity at the end of the 20th century caused great shortage of cheap labor; and thus, in 1991, the new Law on Immigration Control permitted Japanese descendants overseas special permanent residence status. Ironically, as thousands of Japanese had migrated decades prior, mainly to Peru and Brazil, due to poverty, now their sons (*nisei*) and grandsons (*sansei*) came back to the land of their ancestors for the same reason, most of them not even speaking Japanese fluently. Like Higa Oshiro mentioned above, even with a university degree, they had to work at a factory and went through an identity crisis since they were not welcomed and often abused and discriminated in their father's land just as they were in their native countries. I say, the issues of identity that Tinajero richly conveyed to its readers is the most promising points of study in this book: the feeling of not belonging to either Latin America or Japan in case of ethnically Japanese immigrants, the sense of belonging to both worlds (global citizenship) in case of some Spaniard intellectual immigrants, and most importantly, the construction of "Latino" identity through the same language (Spanish) that served to create a community regardless of people's nationalities.

Tinajero's book is comprised of four chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue. The book begins by offering an imperative yet concise historical background of the relationship between Japan and the Spanish-speaking world since 16th century. As waves of immigrants began in the 90s after her stay in Japan in the 80s, she confesses sincerely that she did not lived with them, but rather studied, interviewed and observed in the field, visiting various cities in Japan, with the great respect to them and their stories. The introduction is short, but

it is full of valuable data which is really hard to obtain, such as the list of previously published scholarship on encounters of Japan and the Spanish-speaking West and the ratio of the Spanish-speaking population in contemporary Japan (70,432/70% of them are Peruvians) which is less than 1% of the entire population.

The first chapter, named “Los intelectuales,” and the third chapter “La música, la danza, los festivales y las asociaciones” chronicle intellectuals with higher education and professional immigrants in the music and dance industry and their involvements in the creation of local Hispanic festivals and how associations emerged in Japan, respectively. Interestingly, it seems to me that first waves of Spanish-speaking immigrants who “successfully settled in” Japan are Spaniards in both cases. It was Montse Watkins (who arrived in 1985) who established the very first editorial in Spanish and translated very important Japanese literature directly from Japanese to Spanish. Similarly, Elena Gallego Andrada (1993) from Spain, has translated several works and has published various anthologies of *haikus* in diverse themes such as death, war, and countercurrent *haikus*, that expand our understanding of the form’s traditional theme of nature. Likewise, in the third chapter, it is the flamenco that is best received and proliferated “hybridizing” Japanese cultural elements, as the critical essay “El flamenco se viste de kimono (Flamenco dresses in kimono),” examined in the book (186). Japan is the “second homeland” of the flamenco, where has currently more schools of the dance than its homeland (181). On the contrary, I want to point out that there are only few *nisei* or *sansai* immigrants like Alberto Shiroma who successfully received by Japanese public, as studied in Tinajero’s book.

Chapter two, “Los medios de comunicación” is the most extensive chapter in the book, comprised of three sub-chapters on the local medias in Spanish: the newspapers, the magazines, and the radio. The newspaper section introduces *International Press*, the first newspaper in Spanish in Japanese history. First published in April, 1994, it calls for responsibilities of the Spanish-speaking community to alter their negative images in Japan, saying: “Debemos demostrar que ser ‘pobre’ no significa ser deshonestos (We must show that being ‘poor’ does not mean being dishonest)” (88). Unlike the intellectuals dealt above, in this chapter, the majority of contributors to these medias are mostly factory workers in difficult physical, economic, and social situations. They often write about various problems they face living in Japan, such as marginality and loneliness.

The magazine section covers a vast selection of magazines also in Spanish that went out into the world to date: *Mevado Latino* (1994), *Kyodai/Kyodai Magazine* (1990/2012), *Hyogolatino* (2000), *Mujer Latina* (2005), *Latin-a* (2010), *Wakaranai* (Japanese word meaning ‘I don’t understand,’ 2004), *Impacto Semanal* (2010), *Acueducto – La Revista Española en Japón* (2010), *Escape* (2011), *Kanto – Arte, Cultura, Literatura, Comunicación* (2013). Except for the *Impacto Semanal*, which, according to the editor “is the official press of Peruvian government,” all other magazines were created by immigrants for immigrants in great shortage of information like the most practical ones to survive in Japan. To serve the objectives to fill this shortage of information, people volunteered to make the magazines and distribute them basically free of charge into various regions in Japan. The most recurrent topics, according to Tinajero, are the announcements of jobs, sale advertisements of products imported from Latin America, the schedule of mass in Spanish at local churches, how to send money home, learning Japanese, children’s education in Japan, tax system in Japan, success stories, lawyer services, etc. As the names of the magazines manifest itself, they evoke issues concerning language (mainly Spanish, but also Portuguese and *Portuñol*) that unite the immigrant community in Japan and allude to the “Latino” identity constructed living in a distant foreign country, not speaking their language and thus, having difficulties to interact and assimilate into this new society.

The last section of the chapter two is “the radio.” The importance of the radio in Spanish emerged during times of natural disasters like the Kobe earthquake in 1995 and the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011. All breaking news and needed information were only available in Japanese. Thus, various radio stations in foreign languages were initiated in hands with local municipalities. But it is also worth to note that there are also amateur radio stations that function to console factory working immigrants’ solitude with vivid voices in their own language and Latin music.

Tinajero continues her analysis of Spanish-speaking immigrants’ cultural productions in the fourth chapter, “La literatura y las bibliotecas (The Literature and Libraries).” Here she states that there are very few writers in Spanish, who have actually *lived* in Japan and so, it remains to be superficial except for the literature that she chooses to analyze; thus, she awakens readers’ attention to not yet studied texts written by immigrants and explores the recurrent themes they concern the most living in this foreign country: the city, the technology: trains and cellphones, the solitude, the quotidianness (day-to-day existence), the working life as professionals, factory laborers, and prostitutes, the diversity: living together with other foreigners, the discrimination, the nostalgia, and the suicide. As the topics speak themselves loudly, one can easily grasp how hard and lonely it could be “living” in Japan. In the city, often depicted as “cancer,” “spiderweb,” or “ant’s nest,” they live feeling ill, trapped, discriminated, working non-stop with no hope to escape. These narrations written by Spanish-speaking immigrants in contemporary Japan remarkably distinguish themselves from the long tradition of Latin American Orientalist Literature (i.e. *modernismo*). They rip off overly exoticized fascination and the tendency to romanticize the Other—distant and mostly, medieval Japan—decolonizing Latin American knowledge and imagery of the Orient. In the rest of this chapter, Tinajero documents the libraries or little selections of books in Spanish at local churches or detention centers of undocumented immigration.

In summary, I enthusiastically recommend Tinajero’s book as a great contribution to any field of the following studies: Migration, East-West Encounter, Identity, Asian Latin American, Asian “Latino,” Latin American Orientalism, and Cultural Hybridization Studies. Those interested in Interdisciplinary Studies outside of Spanish and Portuguese Studies would also benefit greatly from reading Tinajero’s work. In addition, since I particularly appreciate the decolonial and modern orientalist aspects of immigrants’ narratives presented here, I am afraid that the cover image of the book—a medieval and decadent-looking geisha laying down with a syringe in her hand and blood in her mouth—could reinforce the merely exoticized gaze toward the Asia.

However, I must admit that her careful interweaving of history and politics and her analysis of literary and cultural productions studied in the book help readers to better understand why people have moved between Japan and the Spanish-speaking world and how they have lived. I heartfully appreciate professor Tinajero for this book, because the scholarship on the Spanish-speaking population in the Asia is truly scarce and Tinajero’s book, in company with her previous book *Kokoro, una mexicana en Japón* (2012), goes beyond previously published scholarship that focuses almost exclusively on the movement of people from Asia to the Americas—poor Chinese and Japanese indentured laborers (*coolies*), their descendants like *nissei* and *sansei*, and their cultural/literary productions throughout the 19th and 20th centuries in the Americas. As an ethnographic researcher myself, I know how hard it might have been to collect all data mentioned in her book. Future investigators will take great advantage from this research to deepen further the field of study.