

## Japan through Greek Looking Glass: N. Kazantzakis and N. Kasdaglis\*

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I

The exotic, aesthetic image of Japan in Europe was created by artists, connoisseurs and romantics. But more importantly, the umbrella of "Orientals" was extended to cover countries as far apart as Persia, Arabia, India, China, Mongolia and of course Japan. Negative, racist, reflex habits developed and expectations for an Alice in Wonderland world, in direct contrast to Europe, lived on as potent as ever. Jumbo-jet tourism went further east and what was once for Kazantzakis a long journey to a distant country by boat, was in 1980 a relatively short one for Kasdaglis, who arrived in the tough, metallic densely packed, steaming city of Tokyo, 20 years after he first planned the journey in order to be able to complete his novel. This of course was circumstantial, notably due to a customary indifference on the part of authorities involved and the political restrictions of the time. Nonetheless, the gap in time separating the visits of the two writers situates Kazantzakis in the pre-war theoretical imaginary, whereas Kasdaglis shares the longevity of postwar developments including the cold war spectrum, the Greek junta and the European Disarmament and Anti-nuclear movements<sup>1)</sup>. In this respect, attitudes to Japan may differ even though the embeddedness of their literary works in the situations and imagery of tourism makes them both take departure from similar points of reference, and in fact leads us to believe that by staging "culture" in its several guises, they have attempted to remain writers for a Greek readership, despite their experience of the visitor coming perilously close to sensory overload. Until very recently the contact between Greece and Japan was rather limited and very few Greeks this century visited the Far East. Amongst them N. Kazantzakis and more recently N. Kasdaglis undertook writing their impressions of Japan in two forms: travelogue and fiction. The purpose of this paper will be to examine the causes, characteristics and perceptions of their views on Japan, the perceptions of Greekness and otherness as reflected on Japanese culture.

II

Kazantzakis' s first journey to the Far East took place between February and May 1935. Already

well acquainted with Russia, he had recently visited Spain and Italy, officially under assignments from newspapers and had already published his experiences in the form of articles and travelogues. He was, in fact, well versed in the ideological developments of the time and seems to be particularly concerned to write in his own literary manner about highly charged political discourses dominated by nationalist rhetoric, often with insights suggesting or emulating the sharpened precision of a foreign military observer. Upon returning to Greece, Kazantzakis published a series of articles in the newspaper *Akropolis*, the travelogue *Japan China* appeared sometime later and *The Rock Garden* first written in French, was initially to be translated and published in Germany. Within a few months the war broke out and the text was never published. Prevelakis translated it in Greek after Kazantzakis' death and prefaced it. This preface emphasizes the use of *Askitike* and goes no further. Such attitude was not without followers<sup>2)</sup>. The Japanese historical background and the relevant context of *The Rock Garden* remained un-commented, revealing a profound Eurocentric approach, always turned to the philosophical connections of the writer, to French and German thought, and through that to Buddha. And all that at a time when so little was known to Greece about the Far East. Nevertheless, Kazantzakis' texts on Japan almost introduced the subject to Greece and of course they remain rooted to historical events of the 30's, as well as to a system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generated the writer's perceptions, appreciations and actions.

By the time Kazantzakis visited the Far East, the Japanese military operations in the region had often reached the stage of open conflict with Chinese armies, and the interests of Japan for territorial expansion had attracted the constant attentions of European and American diplomatic forces. In 1932 the whole Manchuria was under Japanese military control and the Japanese put forward the establishment of an independent Manchurian state, ultimately changing the political map of China. The appeal of China to the League of Nations led to the Lewtton report and the subsequent vote of censure on Japan. By 1933 the Japanese army in China had advanced into Jehol province and the Chinese were forced to accept a demilitarized zone between Peking and the Wall. Back in Japan, the rediscovery of the values of a past age, firmly promoted the conviction that the Japanese possessed unique qualities ( such as a courageous self-sacrifice) that entitled it to be sooner or later the leader and the liberator of Asia. From the spring of 1933 to the summer of 1937 there was a peace, of a kind, between China and Japan. Foreign powers were however warned to keep their hands off China. At that time economic recovery was well advanced and unemployment had fallen steeply (thanks to a semi-war economy).

During that time Kazantzakis visited Japan, and his travelogue alludes with more than one way to the political and military upheavals of the time, as well as to the process of westernization. From the very beginning of the text he claimed that he travelled as a white man, vis-à-vis the yellow races and their souls, and seems to have recorded his continual tension between self-knowledge and the new

experience. His self knowledge as white European of Greek origin gave him the comparative context for perceiving otherness. It was inevitable that his self inclusion alludes to the founding role of Classical Greece. Japanese co-travellers are compared to Spartans for austerity, and the laughing habits of the former ones are associated with the cult of Yelotas in Sparta. For him Japan emerged out of the sea like an Eastern Aphrodite and the colour of the sea was just like the Mediterranean. In the islands of the Japanese archipelago, the fishermen kept themselves entertained by telling folk tales, and they knew how to laugh<sup>3)</sup>. Furthermore, explanations are given about the birth of twin sisters, tragedy and comedy, in the Noh tradition, and it seemed worth mentioning that Japan had its Aeschylus and Sophocles, called Kan Ami and his son Se Ami, who lived in the 14th century. There was a gradual development which had people playing the first roles and not the gods, in similarity to their long distanced Greek sisters. Comedy helped to relieve dramatic action and like in Ancient Greece, the performances lasted a day and possibly a night. Just as the Christians followed overnight the Passions of Christ and the Greeks who used to go and attend Dionysos passions, the same happens now with the buddhists and Buddha's passions. Because Buddha, Christ and Dionysos are one, the eternal man who suffers.

In addition the man-eating Homeric Kirke is believed to be of the yellow race, as all her attributes appear to be part of the Chinese beliefs of the time. This is also one of the qualities of Yiosiro, the Oxford graduate modern woman who rejects traditions of tea ceremonies and what the tourists normally appreciate and who was to become in the plot of *The Rock Garden* a Japanese agent corrupting Chinese officers, either with money or sex. Kazantzakis' female fictional character presents the menace of a femme fatale, a modernist figuration of male anxiety about women's rejection of conventional "designs of conduct" and their generally less passive attitude during the suffragette period. Such a character however had consequences for the form of the novel. Rejection of restraining social conventions extends into rejection of the conventions of fiction. *The Rock Garden* shows a narrator perplexedly grasping at explanations as to the motives of the behaviour of characters. This sometimes involves associating and juxtaposing episodes separated by years in their actual occurrence, past associations are triggered powerfully yet almost arbitrarily in the present. Yiosiro works as an agent against her ex-lover Lie Tech, a Chinese Intelligence man. They are both friends of the narrator-traveller and it is through them that he is given the insider's story<sup>4)</sup>. Yiosiro's acting as an agent is presented as a kind of revenge against her previous lover, the China man. This is reminiscent of Bergson according to whom, nothing is forgotten states of consciousness, even when successive, permeate one another, and in the simplest of them the whole soul can be reflected. Yiosiro's powerful memories move the plot further and the fiction becomes an allegory of personal experience and political clash of interests. The whole case of the Japanese expansion policy is presented by means of a struggle between two ex-lovers. Thus history is rewritten for the sake of the reader and Bergson's

preference for apprehending experience through intuition, rather than intellect or rational analysis, is put into good use. Yiosiro's almost symbolic gestures in her persistence to corrupt the Chinese and put them under Japanese control and her convictions, make her something new, a new world order woman, who struggles to develop policy making for herself, much like Japan did at the same time, and this disposes her firmly against the restraining attitudes of men. So Japan is once more presented like a woman, never quite taken seriously, reflecting the 19th century stereotypes, but this time not like Lady Murasaki but in the form of bodily action and western education.

Virginia Woolf argued that in 1930 it was impossible not to be interested in politics: not to find public causes of much more pressing interest than Philosophy. Kazantzakis tried to combine both. His aesthetic emotions are offered in combination with a lot of philosophical remarks and some of his commentaries on politics are given as prophetic. According to him the future war was to take place in the Pacific as four great powers were looking for outlets and by comparison the Mediterranean world was a small neighbourhood<sup>5</sup>). Japan is seen as the fourth mermaid of the Pacific, the mysterious fatal country which struggles to mix the two immense opposites and to create the highest synthesis. At the cross roads, integration was to be achieved. One way was to follow Western civilization whereby Japan would refuse its old soul by intensifying the worship of the machines, the other was for her to keep the traditions and by maintaining Western civilization as an external shield, to reach a higher vision in contrast to that of the time which saw the world in decline. Maybe the Japanese who followed the spirit of the samurais were the Quixotes of Asia, Kazantzakis wrote, but they had faith and this could lead to actions and results<sup>6</sup>). Their strong belief in the heroic spirits of the ancestors, their devotion to the emperor and their lack of fear for individual death, their belief of life in the race rather than the individual, must have convinced Kazantzakis that he was dealing once more with the Elan vital of this race which adapted very quickly to the need to compete with world powers, unlike China which is called the tortoise of the nations for its agrarian slowness and its inability to transform itself to a rapidly growing industrialized country<sup>7</sup>). Even so the narrator presents us with the poverty of the labor forces particularly that of women in the textile industries (originating in the often hunger stricken area of Tohoku) and he views machinery and industrial environments with comic terror. The travelogue *Japan China* reflects an image of Orient with a culture deeply seated in agrarian societies and this becomes more apparent in the case of China where amongst others he meets yellow Psycharis, a linguist who acts to take further, matters of the Chinese language interests, with theories close to those of the demoticists<sup>8</sup>). And it is I believe these very theories that made Kazantzakis even more sensitive and perceptive to instances of cultural difference, described in a refined lyrical manner. The delicate appreciation of spring rituals, geisha's singing and bows under cherry trees, are highlighted with descriptions of unfulfilled desires and powerful emotions.

### III

Kasdaglis' travelogue *Journeys to Land and the Sea* consists of various sections. The first one focuses on Japan, the rest describe visits to Lycia, Meteora, Patmos and the Mount Athos. The connecting thread of all these trips appears to be the visits to sites of religious importance in the Near and the Far East<sup>9)</sup>. Thus the spiritual element of the East is clearly emphasized. The narrator unobliged to join in group tourism and maintaining his distinctiveness pursues cultural tourism on his own. If the description of his intermediate stops to Bangkok, Taiwan and Hong Kong reminds one of the businessman's route to Computerlands, it also suggests new Greek preferences in current travel destinations and styles.

The narrator begins with the all too familiar urban sprawl and finally reaches Kyoto where in Buddhist temples and Zen gardens he is at last able to find Oriental exclusiveness. Japanese hosts and travel entrepreneurs followed Western expectations and arranged trips to Shinto shrines and, by accident, a meeting took place with a bilingual geisha who was aware that "We Greeks and Japanese have very old cultures"<sup>10)</sup>.

Travelling in the company of a guidebook, and not speaking the language, can be a deafening experience, an experience of descending silence setting a limitation, a limitation both foreign and familiar: foreign to the first time visitor, yet none the less familiar from the general, cultural discourses of home, which shaped visitor's expectations and experiences and furnished comparisons, sometimes favorable, to the social structures at home. For example, an epigraph for welcoming visitors provokes a statement about Greek hospitality and the lack of advertising or management in the parts of Greece unspoilt from tourism. Furthermore, calligraphy, Japanese and Chinese ideograms are all part of the same mysterious language, cut through with ruler-straight lines of woodblock rain but the author does not think this alphabet will survive. This certainly must have been the effect of being lost in calligraphic streets. We are naturally told of a charming and elaborate series of bows. But we are informed that it is a sin to get old in Japan, if you do not have children, a situation particularly difficult for women. In some other parts we read about the agony of the visitor observer to understand the ten basic points about Zen. The cultural traveller attempts to keep the reader close to the authenticity of these basics and inserts the translation of the text as he reads it in the guide book<sup>11)</sup>. This travelogue, written in a diary form, a near literary action description, with its focus on the peculiarly authentic and the ongoing life of contemporary places, maintains a critical and sometimes satirical view of tourism's commodification of culture when he comments that the Japanese are reopening old temples for the sake of tourists, and often the redecoration is of poor quality and does not match the craftsmanship of older forms of art, since this is to be seen only by tourists.

So Kasdaglis turns upside down the phrase "Bon pour l' Orient " and transforms it to " Bon pour

les touristes ". This is certainly a short text on Japan written for Greeks without actually disseminating negative stereotypes. Hiroshima is not included in this cultural journey. It is however the backdrop of the novel *I Maria peritigai tin mitropoli ton neron*.

Like the theatre Noh characters, Maria is a traveller who arrives at a spot filled with dramatic meaning and elicits its tale. After a striking brief affair with a French fellow traveller, a journalist, she goes to Hiroshima museum where she is confronted with the historical exhibition and the horrifying pictures<sup>12</sup>. Secondly, she finds herself amongst a violent young gang in a car graveyard<sup>13</sup>. Thirdly, Maria appears to be a member of a type of Green peace force, opposing in fact nuclear tests undertaken during the 60's. It appears that she takes part in a suicide mission, while she is pregnant. While she is there, to protect the rights of nature, she risks a double loss<sup>14</sup>. One could argue that these substories of Maria's journey into achieving action constitute a story, moving from a quite start, to active development and then to an urgent finale, and this has something of the traditional three part development segmentation of Noh. From the first stage to the third one, Maria's desire is further constructed into the source of the tension between reality and fantasy, leading to the projection of ambiguity, the ambiguity that Maria inhabits in all three different stages of the novel. She comes into contact with otherness and it is often difficult to say whether she hallucinates or has nightmares.

The contact with spots filled with dramatic meaning, energizes Maria's almost double existence, creating a source of ambiguity. Here we could be reminded that ambiguity is the source of the Noh drama. Based on the Buddhist premise that what we accept as reality is in fact an illusion, Noh demonstrates that these are not polar opposites but realms that interpenetrate in complex ways. It is precisely this complex dimensionality, embodied in the character of Maria, that permits the interpenetration in a seemingly threatened identity crisis of the carnal and the spiritual, purity and impurity, the mundane and the ethereal, and this makes possible the meeting of two worlds, that of Maria the traveller who creates the future, and that of Maria the journey maker in time, dramatic time, in which the horrifying brutality of the landscape signifies an archetypal cycle of terrifying and chaotic excess. Maria's weakness and strength in the face of ambiguity and arbitrariness is the very emblem of the modernity of this Greek text through which we are confronted with the illusion of the perceiving consciousness of a certain Maria, who willingly endows it with phenomenological reality. In this instance, the significant character is a woman who may appear simply as a pragmatically cynical modern woman, who undergoes a transformation by which her awareness of self becomes an awareness of space in time. Maria has taken the matter down to a clear existential choice by which she must assume personal responsibility and join forces with others. The idea of destiny begins to play a crucial role in the development of the story and presents Maria as becoming a bold person, by achieving an awareness through historical understanding. During that stage, life is determined largely, perhaps entirely, by forces beyond control on the part of the sufferers.

So in a way a woman is allowed by her male author sufficient space for a believable and independent existence of truly political dimension, in what has traditionally seen as a man's world. The text constructs tensions by thematizing degrees of crises, of persons, values and ethics, the work somehow seems like an exercise in dramatizing the space available for political resistance, achieved by narrating Maria's hallucinogenic climax of developing a sense of resistance and taking active participation. The politics of the novel focus around international antinuclear peace protests, and by implication it rises above the Greek society of the time. There is certainly a degree of Internationalism with regard to the decade the novel appeared. In the early eighties there was a lot of discussion about nuclear disarmament, both in Greece as in other European countries, and one could recall that there were people dressed in white uniforms, with skeletons designed all over their bodies. This high performative element, was used in order to increase the awareness of the general public and at the same time to maximize its effectiveness by demonstrating the elements of death, the death of the human body. In a similar manner, Kasdaglis' story reveals the human powerlessness, and the horror of the actual historical experience of the Hiroshima nuclear explosion. Maria, the observer, dresses up her deepest human reactions to the events she reads about, or sees in photographs by actively re-entering the space provided by the limits of her visions, all emerging out of her visual experience. Maria just happens to be there on 6th of August, the anniversary of the Hiroshima bombardment. What happens to her, the climax of violence inflicted upon her could not be of the sort encountered in Kazantzakis. Through out the work, the language of the narrator toward her reveals a profound uncertainty and therefore an equally profound excitement as to whether she should be regarded and treated as a girl or a woman. On the other hand, the novel can be connected to the strong existential climate of the plays, written during the junta, and certain poems by Zoe Karelli written during the second world war which have a strong lament element<sup>15)</sup>.

#### IV

As the texts of the two writers were written at different times, they suggest wider attitudes of their time towards the East and yet both investigate the moral and emotional paradoxes which are central to the business of war. Constructing Japanese cultural history through the Greek eye of the visitor/writer, raises the problem of the readership of the texts under discussion, as well as that of the International Author, an idea which Kazantzakis pursued for the whole of his life. Japan, textualized and re-coded, has been presented as cultural otherness at the boundaries of historiography and fiction. Both Kazantzakis and Kasdaglis dealt with the travelogue as a poetic ethnographic genre. For Kazantzakis, culture in Asia comprises a sensuous style and turns to it with hope for a discursive space of Utopian transformation. His dilemmas were few for the mysterious Orient. Japan for Kazantzakis is conceived

as a supplement, framed within the limits of the rest of his writing. In actual fact he made several remarks on political evolution, culminating in Eurocentric perfection of the society, and the state of Japan and hoped that the East could provide the seed for world regeneration. Kasdaglis has however succeeded in displacing the Japanese culture from the margins of the literary interests of his audience, to the forefront of contemporary Greek novel and, by implication the writer has contributed to the critique of ethnocentrism. Interestingly enough Kazantzakis and Kasdaglis present the reader with certain descriptions of visuality, well explored in constructing the historicity of their so close, and yet far apart, ethnographies of Japan. Their difference is a rhetorical one if we are to follow Michael Herzfeld's conclusive comments from his magisterial book *Anthropology through the looking-glass*<sup>61</sup>.

## NOTES

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- 1) For a general study on Kazantzakis as a novelist see P. Bien, *Nikos Kazantzakis, novelist*, Bristol Classical Press 1987.
  - 2) N. Kazantzakis, *O Vrahokipos*, Athens: Estia 1960, pp. I-XIII.
  - 3) Ibid., pp. 31-33, 50.
  - 4) Ibid., pp. 12, 17, 26-29, 230-237.
  - 5) N. Kazantzakis, *Taxideuondas Iaponia Kina* Athens: Pysros 1938, pp. 48-49.
  - 6) Ibid., pp. 125-127.
  - 7) Ibid., p. 48.
  - 8) Ibid., pp. 233-227. For Kazantzakis' linguistic views see P. Bien, *Kazantzakis and the linguistic revolution in Greek Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1972.
  - 9) N. Kasdaglis, *Dromoi tis sterias kai tis thalassas*, Athens: Kedros 1988, for Assakousa pp. 28-29, for Meiji / Heian Tzingou p. 33, Ninan Tji, p. 47, Myosin Tji, p. 47, Syon-in, p. 53, for churches of Lycia see pp. 75, 81, for the Mount Athos see pp. 136-163.
  - 10) Ibid., p. 46.
  - 11) Ibid., p. 41.
  - 12) N. Kasdaglis, *I Maria periigitai ti mitropoli ton neron*, Athens: Kedros 1982, pp. 69-94, 168-169, 187.
  - 13) Ibid., pp. 98-123.



14) Ibid., pp. 216-223, 238-239

15) See Zoi Karelli, *Ta poiimata*, Athens: Ekdoseis ton Philon, 1973.

16) M. Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the looking-glass: critical ethnography in the margins*, (Cambridge: CUP 1987).

## ギリシア人が見た日本カザンツァキスとカズダグリス

マリアナ・スパナキ

ギリシアと日本との接触は、最近まで限られたものであり、今世紀に日本を訪れたギリシア人はごく僅かであった。その中に、日本の印象を旅行記と小説の二つの形式で描いた作家、カザンツァキスとカズダグリスがいる。本稿では、両作家が、どのように日本を観察したか、その問題点や特徴、或いは、ギリシャ性と日本文化に映し出された他性(otherness)をどのように認識したかを分析することにする。

日中戦争が勃発する前夜、1935年の2月から5月に来日したカザンツァキスの旅行記『旅の途次に、日本・中国』と小説『石の庭』は、1930年代の歴史的な事件に根ざしている。『旅の途次に、日本・中国』では、カザンツァキスは、黄色人種に対する白色人種としての自己認識を通して、対照的に他性を描いている。『石の庭』の登場人物の中で、中国人の恋人に復讐するため、中国に潜伏、スパイ活動をする日本人ヨシロは、西洋化された新しい女性で、アジアの覇権を狙い中国勢力を拡大していく日本の姿でもある。また、『石の庭』には、知性や合理的な分析ではなく、直観により経験を理解するというベルグソンの思想が見られる。更に、カザンツァキスは、当時の政治的状况と哲学とを結びつけ、太平洋における第四番目の列強となるべく、より高い次元で西洋文明化と伝統維持とを行う日本を、サムライ精神を信奉するアジアのドンキホーテとして描いている。

一方、冷戦、ギリシアの軍事政権、ヨーロッパの軍備縮小と反核運動の時代のカズダグリスは、1980年に来日し、旅行記『陸と海の旅路』、小説『マリアは水の首都を訪れる』を書く。文学的行動を記録する日記形式の『陸と海の旅路』には、日本の精神的要素が強調され、言葉が通じない外国人が、

異国の体験に関して、自国と比較して得た見解が述べられている。文化の真髄と現代生活に焦点が当てられると同時に、観光のための文化の修正に対する批判的風刺的な観察も見られるギリシア人のために書かれた日本に関する小品である。小説『マリアは水の首都を訪れる』には、広島を訪ねたマリアが政治的抵抗意識に目覚め、積極的な運動に参加する過程を通して、多義的なマリアの世界が、能に見られる三部構成で展開される。そして、そこには、人間の無力さと広島の被爆という歴史の実体験への恐怖が、明らかにされる。

異なる時代の二人のギリシア人作家は、日本に対する各時代の姿勢を示唆するとともに、戦争というものの中核にある精神的感情的パラドクスを探求した。カザンツァキスは、日本を、全著作の枠組を補足するものと見なし、日本が、世界再生の種を与え得るとの希望を抱く。これに対して、カズダグリスは、日本文化を、読者の文学的興味の境界から同時代的ギリシア文学の最前線へと移行することに成功し、同時に、民族中心主義を否定する立場を暗示している。

(この要旨は編集部が付したものである)