

Review of the chapter: *National-Cultural Phantasms and Modernity's Losses*,

Marylin Ivy

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The author discusses processes of production of modernity in Japan. She understands modernity not as a moment in time, or as contemporaneity, but as a set of social processes which create specific idea of a person, of a culture, of proper associations of people, etc. Modernity is most often seen as European product. So, the author reminds that, in western discourses, even though Japan is economically and technologically conceptualized as modern, culturally it is often represented as pre-modern, or non-modern. It is thought of as “homogenous”, “ethnic”, “tribal”, both physically and culturally “isolated”, “Japanese behavior” follows different logic than European, etc.

Marylin Ivy also reminds that modernity produces a specific notion of culture which is inseparable from the idea of a nation. National unification requires national culture – hence tradition is modernist concept. Tradition does not signify specific cultural practices which once were used, and are disappearing at the present – it is not a predecessor to modernity. Notion of tradition appeared within modernist processes and nation building practices – and should be seen as their constitutive part.

The author says that there is no idea of Japan as unified space prior to 18<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, Japan ethnos, its culture and nation are modern. Modernity in Japan is not just “variation on a theme” of European modernity, nor is it radically different from it. Ivy shows that production of a nation in Japan happened through mimicry and exclusion.

Ivy says that: “*Recent works on colonialism and nationalism have tried to account for the working of mimetic desire in colonial discourses; in Homi Bhabha’s terms, the colonized responds to colonial domination via a complex ‘mimicry’, a mimicry that can never succeed in effacing the difference between the western original and the colonized copy*” (pp 6-7). In other words, the desire in postcolonial frameworks can be seen as a desire to be someone else, as a copy full of tensions because there is always certain excess. The copy becomes so good that it is better than the original itself. Japan is “radically

different” from West, pre- or non-modern, but at the same time its “economic miracle” makes Japan more successful in being modern than the West.

She often speaks about cultural anxiety – the feeling produced when hybrid reality of Japan is being framed into discourses of cultural purity and isolation. Modernist types of associations are produced through exclusion, separation, and absences.

Absence (of cultural purity, of traditional cultural practices, of something which never existed except as a narration, as a desire for, as absence) produces nostalgia. The author writes that “logic of fetish” replaces absent and desired object, but the very replacement reminds and announces the absence, which produces anxiety. She reminds that national culture follows this type of logic.

Representations of traditional and ethnic – through festivals, tourism, media, or anthropology – are precisely replacements of the lost/absent, which have never existed, and which reproduce the sense of the absence.

The author argues that difference and ruptures are at the very core of the discourse of national culture – and she tries to explicate them. She studies “vanishing” – those who vanish at this moment, those who both are and aren’t here and there, who point to ruptures and anxieties of allegedly homogenous conceptions.