

Producers of 'Japan' in Israel: Cultural Appropriation in a Non-Colonial Context

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ABSTRACT *This paper is concerned with the appropriation and re-production of Japanese culture by Israelis in Israel. The paper argues that both studies that locate processes of cultural appropriation in the context of a clear colonial or post-colonial relationship and studies that emphasize the free 'global cultural supermarket' cannot fully explicate the processes of cultural appropriation. Since the 1980s there has been a growing popular interest in Japanese culture in Israel. This Japan craze is characterized by the high involvement of local Israelis in the promotion of Japanese culture and by the obvious absence of Japanese in the 'Japanese' cultural projects and displays. The study sees the local brokers as 'global cosmopolitans', who act as if this unique objectified culture is their own. The case presented enables us to see yet again that cultural globalization is more about cultural difference than about the creation of a 'world culture'. The paper also emphasizes the role of the Other itself in its own Othering by highlighting the role of Japan in the construction of a particular 'Japanese culture'.*

KEYWORDS *Cultural supermarket, Japanese culture outside Japan, 'the Other'.*

- Are you a magician? – No. – Are you a clown? – No.
- So what are you? – [I am] Japanese. – Are you Chinese? – No, I am Japanese.
- How do you speak Japanese? – With [my] mouth.
- How did you study? – In Japan. – All the words? – (No reply).

This dialogue took place between the kimono-clad party maker, an Israeli young woman, and the mostly eight-year-old children at a private house in an Israeli suburban middle-class neighborhood at Itamar's birthday party. Ruth, a tour guide and drama instructor who offers 'Around the World' cultural experiences for parties, was invited to the house to perform a Japanese-style birthday. Itamar's mother thought that 'Japan' would be a good idea since the children '[knew] least about this culture'. The mother

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of another child, who also selected a Japanese birthday for her son from the global cultural repertoire offered by Ruth, which also includes Spanish, South American, and Middle Eastern cultures, explained her choice: 'Japan seemed to me the most exotic'. Children's birthday parties have recently become grand events in Israel, and this has resulted in the growth of a large industry of attractions and birthday 'operators'. Thus, having 'Japan' as the theme for a birthday is not an exception; 'Japanese culture' is offered as one of many other educational entertainments.

The popular interest in Japanese culture in Israel has been growing from the 1980s. One of the characteristics of this Japan craze is the high involvement of local Israelis in the promotion of Japanese culture in Israel. They have visited Japan mostly for relatively long periods, and now they offer courses, workshops, or lectures for the general public, organize artistic, cultural, and commercial displays at galleries, public centers, or specialized shops as well as organize and contribute to local festivals of Japanese culture.

This paper is concerned with the nature of the process in which these local cultural brokers *appropriate* Japanese culture. Processes of 'cultural appropriation', or more specifically the appropriation of the culture of the Other, have usually been analyzed in colonial or post-colonial contexts. However, with regard to Israel and Israelis Japan is an ultimate Other, a total stranger that does not share any historical or cultural heritage. In comparison with the USA and most of Europe, even the relatively minor economic relationship between Israel and Japan cannot be described in terms of power relations. Nevertheless, this distance between the societies/cultures has not prevented the development of high popular interest in Japanese culture.

Since the mid 1990s, there has been a growing academic interest in the theme of 'Japan Outside Japan'.¹ The majority of the works, including those of Ben-Ari and Clammer (2000) and Befu and Guichard-Anguis (2001), is mainly concerned with Japanese people outside Japan as well as with the more general theme of globalization. Although this paper is in many ways part of this general concern, it is distinct in at least two main points. First, it is not about Japanese living in Israel. There is a small community of Japanese living in Israel,² but the production of 'Japanese culture' as discussed in this paper is marked by the absence of Japanese people. The second distinction is related to the remoteness of Japan. This is a different case from studies about Japanese culture in Asian countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Korea, or even big European cities like Paris (Guichard-Anguis 2001). Not only does a marked set of historical relationships exist for each of these cases,

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but they also emphasize the clear involvement of Japanese agencies like the Japanese embassy. This paper, in contrast, focuses on activities and events on which local Japanese agencies have no, or only minor, influence.

The Israeli case highlights cultural appropriation in a non-colonial context. Undoubtedly, 'Japan' as the Other is an interesting case in relation to Western countries since Japan was never colonized by any of them. The Israeli case takes this absence of colonial or power relationships to an extreme. This seems to leave us with a serious question regarding the nature of the processes of cultural appropriation in which local Israeli 'Japanese culture' producers are involved. A relatively easy way out of this dilemma could have been adopting alternative interpretations of cultural appropriation, which emphasize the context of the 'global cultural supermarket' as the arena in which the world's cultures can be relatively easily appropriated as one chooses, with allegedly no attributes of power relationships (see Mathews 2000).

In this article I attempt to reach a better understanding of the processes of the appropriation of the culture of the Other. My argument is that both the approaches that locate processes of cultural appropriation in the context of a clear colonial or post-colonial relationship and those that emphasize the free 'global cultural supermarket' are unable to fully explicate the complexities of these processes. Nevertheless, I do not intend to ignore them. For example, the post-colonial discourse of cultural appropriation teaches us the significance of cultural practices such as *mimesis*. Although mimetic devices are certainly used in the process of cultural appropriation discussed here, I show that they are used as *cultural devices* that do not necessarily imply a clear power relationship.

In the same manner, I do not intend to discard explanations relating to processes of cultural globalization. I argue that we can look at the local brokers of Japanese culture as a new type of cosmopolitans, seeing themselves as living in the global world, which offers them a vast cultural choice. Nevertheless, as we will see, this 'global cultural supermarket' is in fact not that open, in the sense of free-flowing cultures just waiting to be seized by ('globalized') people 'with free choice' (Mathews 2000). Most local producers of 'Japanese culture' have in fact gained their 'cultural' expertise in Japan. It was there that they became acquainted with the Japanese version of 'Japanese culture', which refers mainly to objects, including 'intangible properties', relating primarily to traditional crafts (Guichard-Anguis 2001). It is thus not surprising that the traditional know-how of traditional crafts seems to be the main representative of 'Japanese culture' in foreign countries, including Is-

rael. This is the 'culture' that local brokers of Japanese culture had acquired in Japan and from Japan.

This study is based on over 60 in-depth interviews with Israeli producers of representations of Japanese culture in all areas, including Japanese art, calligraphy, ink painting, flower arrangement (*ikebana*), Japanese paper production, the art of paper folding (*origami*), ceramics, martial arts, dance, tea ceremony, and Japanese food. The ethnographic data also includes descriptions based on 'participant observations' in Japanese art workshops and all major and some minor events representing Japanese culture, mainly in central Israel, from 1998 to mid-2001. Although the paper is mainly based on qualitative data, it also includes analysis of over 450 questionnaires filled out by people interested in Japanese culture, such as visitors to Japan-related festivals, visitors to the Japanese museum in Haifa, students of Japanese, and participants in non-academic courses about Japanese culture. The intention of the questionnaires was to define the local concept of 'Japanese culture'.

'Japanese Culture' Made in Israel

An increasing popular interest in Japanese culture in Israel can be observed from the 1980s. During the 1990s, Japanese Studies at universities also gained an unprecedented popularity, as did non-academic lectures on Japanese culture. In 1992, the book *Havaya Yapanit* (A Japanese Experience) was published and became a bestseller.³ Japan has also become a destination for travel, mainly for young backpackers after their army service. Travel to remote destinations such as the Far East, which has been termed the 'big trip' (*hatiyul hagadol*), has grown into a large-scale phenomenon (Jacobson 1987; Mevorach 1997; Simhai 2000). The growing accessibility of Japan has also made it a favorable destination for other groups in Israeli society, including people with a deep interest in Japanese arts and culture, who are the main 'protagonists' of this study.

The motivations for visiting Japan of the latter group vary. For some of them 'Japan' has been a life-long dream. Others want to develop their artistic skills in one of the areas where Japan has much to offer, such as ceramics, the art of paper, martial arts or flower arrangement. Yet others had the chance of dwelling in Japan for a relatively long period, either as a perfect spot for working and saving money to continue their big journeys (see Bloch-Tzemach 1998), or for other reasons. Although they cannot be easily characterized as a social group other than being largely young and middle-class, varying in age from their mid-twenties to their forties, they are distinguished by their attraction

and dedication to Japanese culture and its promotion in Israel while back home.

One of the main locations for the promotion of Japanese culture is at local events dedicated to the representation and celebration of this culture. From the mid-1980s, the popularity of Japanese events has been gradually increasing. While these events may carry different titles, such as 'festivals', 'events', or 'happenings', and may vary in size as well as in orientation, ranging from more 'purely' cultural events to commercial ventures, they are not only very similar in structure but also often organized by the same people, and they include the same representations of Japan. The latter are usually designed for 'the whole family', i.e., adults and children. Among the popular performances are those of martial arts, dance, tea ceremony, and ikebana. Activities for children usually include origami and making and drawing on Japanese fans, kites, or dragons. Japanese food of some variety is also usually offered, often including sushi, yakisoba (fried noodles), and tofu prepared in experimental ways. The visitors to such events are to see and experience 'Japan' not through an interaction with Japanese people, who almost as a rule are absent from these organized representations of Japan, but through interaction with things Japanese produced and exhibited by other Israelis.

'Scents of Japan in the Botanical Gardens – The Japanese Culture and Art Festival for the Whole Family', which took place at the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens in October 2000, is an example of the more 'cultural' events. Over 20,000 people attended the 2-week festival, which was planned to be in the festive spirit of the Jewish holiday, and unfortunately ended up taking place in the midst of very unsettled political conditions.⁴ The unprecedented campaign before and during the event included a promise to supply the visitors with 'the sensations, the rituals and the excitements ... [in] a Japanese festival as they have never seen before. An amazing experience for whole the family'. In effect, the event included the usual representations of Japan, though some on a larger scale than the usual, including performances of tea ceremony, Japanese dance, martial arts, and calligraphy as well as presentations of bonsai trees, arranged flowers, and folded paper.

Attempts to create a unique Japanese experience as a cultural display are certainly not typical only of contemporary Israel. Beginning with the big world fairs of the nineteenth century, 'Japan' was one of the major attractions both in American and European fairs (cf. Harris 1990; Hotta-Lister 1999). Festivals of 'Japan' or 'The Far East' in contemporary Israel certainly cannot be compared in their scale and scope to the grand spectacles of the late nine-

teenth century, which were foremost formal political events of international and commercial relations. Yet they *do* have in common the view of the Orient in general, and Japan in particular, as major attractions. As Japan was never a colony of any Western empire, it was usually not represented with other exotic colonies and in fact often even had a national pavilion of its own. Nevertheless, a Western image of Japan as part of the 'mysterious Orient' has been developed in world fairs, especially through representations of Japan (and China) in the fairs' amusement zones (Benedict 1994:49-50), which were discovered to be excellent 'money-makers' (Benedict 1994:34).

This 'money-making' quality of the 'mysterious Orient' seems to have been recognized by contemporary Israeli entrepreneurs, who find 'Japan' a favorite attraction for festivals and happenings. The 'Modern Living'⁵ fair is the largest commercial annual event promoting consumer products in Israel. It is defined by its organizers as a 'big happening of events and presentations', appealing to 'the whole family'. The 1998 fair included furnishing, modern home, and international pavilions. The fair attracted over 250,000 visitors in its seven days of activity. A unique attraction that year was the pavilion dedicated to creating an 'Authentic Japanese Experience'. The fair organizers were worried that attendance would be low, and they thought that a Japanese spot would be an attraction. As the general marketing manager of the 1998 fair explained, the logic behind this endeavor was that 'Japan is exotic, different, and interesting'. In the call for participants, the organizers of the Japanese pavilion – a wood artist who specializes in the production of Japanese-style screens and furniture and the owners of a shop specializing in 'things Japanese' – explained the attraction:

This year's Fair gives notable attention to the culture of the Orient, which lights the imagination of many Israelis, who open up to this culture, and who are keen to discover more and more. This will take shape in an entire pavilion that is wholly dedicated to Japan and will contain the majority of the cultural contents, products, ideas and food types that are related to this fascinating subject.

In a relatively large and defined area within the huge commercial exhibition, Japanese arts and crafts were presented. There was enough space for on-the-spot shiatsu treatments. It goes without saying that performances of martial arts, tea ceremony, and Japanese dance were included, and there was the requisite 'traditional Japanese cuisine'. The 'typical Japanese decorative elements', including wood and paper screens and fans, were scattered all over the pavilion, and it contained a miniature Japanese garden made of stones and rocks.

The background Japanese music, though hardly heard, especially during the hectic evening hours, was considered by the organizers as part of the unique Japanese atmosphere deemed necessary in order to create a 'real' Japanese experience.

Smaller-scale Japanese commercial festivals carrying titles such as the Festival of the Rising Sun, The Far East Festivities, or The Enchanting East, are held at local shopping malls. Adhering to the Orientalist image depicting the Orient in large collective terms or in abstract generalities (Said 1991 (1978):154-55), these events often include more than one Oriental attraction. For example, the Festival of the Rising Sun included a 'Thousand Nights Show' and performances of an 'Indian fakir' and a 'sword swallower' to add an additional Oriental flavor to the Japanese attractions, which included ikebana, 'a Japanese grocery store', and 'Japanese hosting with a hostess just like in Japan'. The organizers of the two-week festivities of the Orient at another shopping mall preferred to include a Thai Experience together with the Japanese Legend. The latter included the usual presentations of flower arrangement, a display of Japanese products and pottery, and sushi and noodle bars. The central stage offered performances each evening at the fast food plaza, including a Japanese Experience, mainly for children, featuring 'Japanese culture' through Japanese activities such as the use of chopsticks, fans, and kimono.

What, then, is the 'authentic Japanese experience' offered in such organized representations of Japan in contemporary Israel? In all these events, including the more explicitly commercial endeavors as well as the more 'culturally' oriented, Japan or 'Japanese culture' is presented through its objects. Bonsai trees, arranged flowers, folded papers, dance, and martial arts are all offered as representations of 'Japan'. The display of Others and/or their artifacts as amusing curiosities has a long history. However, while in organized representations of ethnic differences like the world fairs the people on show and their products used to 'form a unity' (Benedict 1994:30), this is certainly not the case here, where there are no Japanese people in sight. Japanese culture is objectified (see Handler 1984; 1988) and presented by local people who act as if this unique materialized culture is their own.

Local Brokers of Japanese Culture as 'Global Cosmopolitans'

I, everywhere I go, I take what's possible. I also studied in Japan. I studied Japanese, and flower arrangement, calligraphy, and tea ceremony. From the moment I arrived in Japan, for half a year, I attended evening school twice a week... I came to take out as much as possible from Japan.

In the description above, as in similar accounts, Japan is portrayed as a 'Land of Culture'. The image that arises is of a vast shop, which offers 'culture' on its various shelves, from which each 'cultural visitor' takes whatever necessary and leaves. Later on we will see that this image is not rejected and in fact is in many ways a product of the way interested parties in Japan choose to present 'Japanese culture' to foreigners. Here, however, we are more concerned with the ways in which the local brokers themselves view Japan.

This 'grab as you can' orientation recurred frequently in the lengthy interviews with local Israeli producers of Japanese culture. For example, a flower arrangement artist recalled how she went to Japan to join her husband with no time to prepare and no real intentions. However, as soon as she arrived there, she began to treat it instrumentally, as she explained: '[F]rom the first week I understood that I ha[d] to grab as much as possible... I understood that I ha[d] to experience Japan, I ha[d] no time, it [was] the most precious time in the world'.

This attitude toward Japan as a 'cultural' location was so typical in the interviews that it crossed all lines of different occupations. Even in the cases in which the visitors came to Japan from motivations not directly related to Japanese culture, they seem to have left Japan with the burden of bringing the 'culture' back home. As an origami expert explained:

I will always see origami as a Japanese thing ... nothing can be done about it. The origin is Japanese; there is no certainty from the scientific point of view, but from *my* perspective origami is from Japan, and I highly appreciate the simplicity, the aesthetics, the sophistication that is sometimes minimalism, that in my view are Japanese. For me, the feeling is of Japan... [E]ven when I use origami for other purposes it is always with a Japanese orientation in my mind, or at least in my feelings.

A very similar link between the culture and the specific personal project is made by a Go (Japanese board game of territorial possession and capture) specialist who went to Japan for a few short visits only after he was already very deeply involved with the game of Go. As he explains, he was introduced to the game while in junior-high school, and at first he played it 'just like chess and checkers'. Now, after some years of involvement and trips to Japan, he is positive that 'the game is factually connected to Japan'. Moreover, he thinks that in Israel 'it is more related to Japanese culture' and defines the Israelis who are playing Go in Israel as '*Japanophiles* who play Go'.

Local brokers of Japanese culture often highly regard their own role in conveying the culture, using strong terms to describe their task. A performer

of Japanese dance and tea ceremony said, '[T]o show Japanese culture is often [my] mission; I really feel like a missionary'. This mission is regarded in favorable terms as bringing 'something beautiful' back home. A professor of Japanese studies saw a resemblance between scholars of Japanese culture – unlike, for example, students of the Japanese economy or its geography – and the performers of Japanese culture engaged in pursuits such as martial arts, dance, or tea ceremony. He believed that in both cases there is a joy in transferring Japanese culture to others. He also used similar fervent terms when he summarized:

I think that there is something missionary in us all. We discovered something beautiful and we want to share it with others, and there is something in all these performing people: they have something of an actor, and any actor likes an audience.

The actor-audience relationship between the performers of Japanese culture and the general public who come and enjoy their representations of Japan can be more accurately described as the relationship between cosmopolitans and locals. Certainly, I am referring to a new kind of cosmopolitans. These cosmopolitans operate in a new environment, which is 'cosmopolitanism minus modernism' (Friedman 1999:238). Friedman refers to them as 'postmodern cosmopolitanism', and I prefer to call them *global cosmopolitans*. I believe that the term 'global' captures more accurately the same 'we are the world' perspective Friedman observes in relation to these new cosmopolitans. It is also more applicable to the way these people regard themselves and their own cultural pursuits as being on 'a trans-national or a trans-societal level' (Featherstone 1990:1). This kind of cosmopolitanism, which is best described as 'a perspective, a state of mind' (Hannerz 1990:238) is the kind of self-identification that can be observed, for example, in the self-definition of a local Japanese calligraphy expert who considers herself an 'artist in the universe, in the world, in space, in life'. Although this 'we are the world' perspective may have clear hybrid characteristics (Friedman 1999:238), it does not prevent its carriers from presenting themselves as having a competence in other cultures, or as having a unique 'personal ability to make [their] way into other cultures, through looking, intuiting and reflecting' (Hannerz 1990:239).⁶ This unique competence with the cultures of the Other often makes the cosmopolitan into an *aficionado*, who views these cultures as art works. Being an expert in any kind of Japanese art, craft, or other pursuit always involves much more than the specialized competence. A performer of traditional Japanese dance puts it into words when she defines herself 'as a vessel, a vessel that transmits a pic-

ture of things, a vessel that transmits a picture of culture'. Like the cosmopolitans described by Hannerz, such 'vessels' carrying the culture of the Other often become brokers, entrepreneurs who make a profit (Hannerz 1990:248).

Presenting Japanese arts and crafts in organized representations of Japan and teaching Japanese calligraphy, Japanese black ink painting, or the making of Japanese paper are often about becoming brokers of 'Japanese culture'. When asked why she emphasized 'Japan-ness' in her promotional material, the same Israeli artist of Japanese calligraphy who regards herself in cosmopolitan terms responded: '[B]ecause I think that this sells well. I think it [the Japan-ness] has more demand'. The demand is in fact not only for Japanese aestheticism and exoticism, but also for cultural difference itself.

No doubt one of the projects of global cosmopolitanism is the mere accumulation of cultural differences, as suggested by Friedman (1999:239). This 'globalized' concern with cultural diversity has certainly reached Israel. Recent social and cultural analyses of Israeli society emphasize its particular 'emotional involvement with all the nuances of the cultures of the world' (Rosenblum 1996:246) as well as the recent breach of the national borders and the opening to the 'culture of the world', which in earlier stages of nation-building was rejected or marginalized. These processes have yielded a new type of identity, portrayed as 'New Israelness' (Herzog 1992). As Herzog argues, while the latter may typify mainly the middle and upper classes, it has also had influence on other layers of society. This 'we are the world' perspective that seems almost 'natural' in big and open Europe or free America may appear to be out of place on the background of the intense political situation in Israel. Nevertheless, several parallel processes, including the 'privatization' of former Israeli values and dreams (Ohana 1998:53), the 'normalization of the war experience' (Lumsky-Feder 1998), and more general practices of escapism, together with the recent influence of general processes of globalization and postmodernism (see Eisenstadt 1996; Ram 1993), seem to have been powerful enough to create local cosmopolitans (see Almog, forthcoming).

In this section I have emphasized the instrumental nature of this new local cosmopolitan identity, and later on we will look into its individualistic and eventually also narcissistic nature. Although this 'globalized' identity may have unique Israeli characteristics,⁷ it nevertheless should be understood against the background of a world that offers vicarious participation in multiple kinds of worlds (Harvey 1990:301), a world that supplies a 'global cultural super-market' (Mathews 2000), or an age that offers a 'culture with choice', as observed by Jencks:

Why, if one can afford to live in different ages and cultures, restrict oneself to the present, the locale? Eclecticism is the natural evolution of a *culture with choice* (Jencks 1984:127; quoted in Harvey 1990:301; my emphasis).

Local Brokers as Narcissists: 'Japan' as a Mirror for the Self

The coordinators of the Japanese pavilion at the Modern Living fair in 1998 described their project to the invited presenters in the following way:

We committed ourselves to this mission [of organizing the Japan pavilion] following the idea of combining all the people who are occupied with the Japanese subject for their living and in general, in a shared assignment in the fair and afterwards.

The organizers hoped to build upon the success of the fair to create a commercial center specializing in Japanese culture. For that reason they made an effort to locate and gather the majority of people engaged with Japanese art and culture in Israel. A large group of people involved in Japanese culture, painting, pottery, origami, design, Go, cooking, martial arts, kites, masks, dance, and flower arrangement showed up to the first meeting. In the meeting, Yaron,⁸ the wood artist, articulated his grand plans to follow the fair. He envisaged a commercial center designed as a circle with niches containing a variety of shops and businesses all related to Japan. Unlike most of the other producers of Japanese culture he gathered, he himself has never visited Japan in person, believing that 'he still has a few things to do here [in Israel] before going there.' Nevertheless, he had a very clear image of Japan. His Japan was a place that allowed a special kind of 'legitimate privacy'. Experiencing Japanese society as providing privacy is very atypical among visitors to Japan, including anthropologists (see Bernstein 1983:15-24; Kondo 1990:17-23), but this image and the idea of constructing a center composed of niches came to Yaron's mind from his familiarity with the producers of Japan in Israel, whom he described as 'people living in their own niches, that is, in their own private circles'.

This image of 'Japan' as providing a private and unique cultural niche was evident in the interviews with other local brokers of Japanese culture. For example, an artist and teacher of Japanese art described her own occupation as 'my own distinct niche, which I put life into'. She explained her relationship with the locals whom she teaches Japanese art and culture using vocabulary of 'give-and-take': 'All the process of my own receiving was in Japan. I had received so much [in Japan] and as a result my will to contribute is related to things Japanese'. Hannerz's observations concerning the relation-

ship between considerations of self and the involvement with the culture of the Other are illuminating in this respect:

Cosmopolitans can be dilettantes as well as connoisseurs, and are often both, at different times. But the willingness to become involved with the Other, and the concern with achieving competence in cultures which are initially alien, relate to considerations of self as well. Cosmopolitanism often has a *narcissistic* streak; the self is constructed in the space where cultures mirror one another (1990:239; my emphasis).

The 'mirroring' effect of the interaction with the culture of the Other is typical of the ways in which many of the interviewees described their own relationship with Japan:

If I try to give one title to my own Japan, it is indeed 'my own Japan', because it is in fact my own mirror. It is really Alice in Wonderland. It is a kind of a big gift. Japan was a big gift for me; it is wrapped with many wraps, and each time I open one more wrap and another wrap, and I discover...

Indeed, the 'Japan' to which this performer of Japanese dance and tea ceremony is referring is her 'own Japan'. The emphasis on *self* was evident in other descriptions of the experiences the cultural visitors to Japan had while in Japan and more often in retrospect. Not a few of them portrayed their interaction with Japan in strong expressions, such as 'Japan transformed my life' or 'Japan was the most significant developmental stage [in my life]'. The narcissist line is obvious in such descriptions. The interaction with the Other seem to be experienced as emphasizing one's own self:

Because everything is so very alien, other, your own self becomes as clear as crystal for you. Within the chaos around, you suddenly grow and become important.

Mira, a flower arrangement artist, described her own revelation of Japanese culture in a very vivid manner:

One day I was riding the train and a Japanese person sat in front of me and looked at me, and suddenly, all at once, I still remember that feeling, the penny dropped, really, with all its strength... And I understood, I suddenly grasped this terrible screen, and I suddenly felt the strengths, the great spiritual strengths that he had on the other side, which were both spiritual and also very heavenly... But I felt magnificent strengths..., and I suddenly understood what being Japanese is actually about, and suddenly I realized it just like that, from myself, the holistic issue, that everything connects with everything... So there is both extremeness and also softness... I couldn't understand before how could they be so aggressive in the Second

World War, I couldn't understand, and suddenly through the look of that Japanese... I will never forget it.

Although Mira had her insight about Japanese culture while she was in Japan, Japan was and still is a virtual Japan for her. The Japanese person in her story was not located in any social context. She did not interact with him. Instead, she used his facial expression in order to gain her own spiritual insight about Japanese culture. The living physical Japanese person, who perhaps never had given a thought to such revelations about his own people, his own culture, was actually *used* by the visitor – the cultural visitor – to get her own spiritual and mental insights or her 'own [Japanese] way'. Another cultural broker, an expert in Japanese paper, while finding it difficult to define what it was that the cultural visitor goes through while in Japan, was yet certain 'that you go through something there ... but [that] in a certain stage you must find *your own way*'. He also added that this search for a way is preferably done outside Japan.

It is no wonder, then, that there are no Japanese people involved in any representations of Japan in Israel. The Japanese culture brought into Israel is a culture with no real living people. It is a *people-less culture*. Such a culture is more easily prone to essentialization as well as objectification. 'Japan' is understood and then displayed 'as a thing, a natural object or entity made up of objects and entities ("traits"), which gains its own reality and can be gazed at' (Handler 1988:14).

'Japanese Culture' as an Alternative Cultural Identity?

Jonathan Friedman argues that 'from the global point of view, culture is a typical product of Western modernity that consists of transforming difference into essence' (Friedman 1995:80). The difference of Japanese culture is indeed emphasized and often essentialized in its local representations. Moreover, another layer of difference is added by highlighting the specific differentiation between Japan and Israel. The cultural dissimilarity between Japan as an entity and Israel and Israelness occurred often in the interviews as well as in the questionnaires.⁹ A ceramic artist described what she gained in Japan in terms of a tremendous cultural revelation: 'I went for a one-month workshop during which you lived and worked with Japanese people, and it opened for me a *whole new alphabet*'. This personal transformation is positioned in the context of the extreme contrast between her native culture and the new culture she discovered, as she explains: 'Japanese way of thinking? – If there is an Israeli [way of thinking] that is *day*, so Japanese is *night*'.

A typical area of comparison between Japan and local culture is that of aesthetics. The unique Japanese aesthetic perspective is considered by Japanese and foreigners alike as one of the most characteristic aspects of Japanese culture (see Minear 1980). Such an image is also typical in Israel. For example, when asked how they see Japan, a large number of visitors to the Scents of Japan festival in October 2000 described Japan as an impressive and aesthetic culture.¹⁰ This view of Japanese culture is quite common among local cultural producers, who would usually agree with the origami artist who argued that 'by [its] nature, Japanese art cannot be a common [or vulgar] art'.

The refined quality of Japanese art and culture is usually explained by the manner in which such aspects of Japanese culture are appreciated and presented in Japan itself. The image conveyed is that in Japan people always do things properly. Doing things properly and appreciating beauty is often positioned in a strict opposition to the 'Israeli way'. Ben, who just completed an eight-month amateur course of Japanese-style painting with a strong emphasis on general aspects of Japanese culture and aesthetics and now plans his first trip to Japan, explains why Israelis are so attracted to Japan:

I thought about it for a long time and ... at least in my opinion, there is a very serious problem generally in our country, that disturbs very many people, and it is aesthetics... In the Israeli culture there is no room for aesthetics, just like that.

Is Japanese culture offered, then, as an *alternative* to the local culture? Do the cosmopolitans offer an alternative identity to the locals? Israelis used to be proud of being not particular about insignificant matters such as style. As explained by Katriel (1986), the ethos of the *Sabra* subculture – the subculture of native-born Israelis, mainly of European descent, which has been most influential – included a strong attitude of 'anti-style'. Furthermore, an emphasis was put on the spontaneity of the local culture. Due to recent trends, however, people are now more interested in style and thus are more prone to criticize these 'old' values and see the lack of stylization as problematic (Katriel 1999:210).

'Japanese culture' can offer this missing stylization, although in no way it supplies a total alternative. Yet the global cosmopolitans discussed here, appreciate this room for cultural diversity that the involvement with Japanese culture offers. This kind of diversity has become possible in an era in which 'one can choose and make – and then remake – one's identity, as fashion and life-possibilities change and expand' (Kellner 1992:142).

**Becoming Japanese? Or Mimesis
as a Device for Appropriating the Culture of The Other**

Kellner (1992:174) emphasizes 'the theatrical play with identity', which characterizes our epoch, in contrast to the earlier more serious epoch of modernity. This kind of theatrical play can be observed in the ways in which the culture of the Other is presented. The dialog that opened this paper, between children celebrating their friend's birthday and the party maker who did her best to present herself as 'Japanese' in kimono and Japanese hairstyle and make-up, revealed how familiar the children are with make-ups. Eight-year-old children seem to be old enough to know that the person that performs for them is not really Japanese. They know she is *playing*. In fact, in some cases the children themselves, warmly encouraged by the birthday operator, come dressed in Oriental-style costumes, mainly in martial arts suits. The party maker also dresses them in kimono during the event and makes them play with Japanese chopsticks and fans. As she explains, '[T]he idea behind this is that it would be an activity, not a show, not a lecture; through the experience, the children absorb and understand'.

Walter Benjamin (1979:65) emphasizes the relation between the 'faculty of mimesis' and play:

To begin with, children's games are everywhere interlaced with mimetic modes of behavior... The question that matters, however, is the following: what does a human being actually gain by this training in mimetic attitudes?

One of the answers Benjamin gives to this crucial question is that through the faculty of mimesis human beings attempt 'to get hold of something by means of its likeness' (Taussig 1993:20-21; my emphasis). Michael Taussig, whose recent work is concerned with mimesis and the Other, and Homi Bhabha (1994), who is concerned with mimicry and colonialism, describes the 'appropriation' of the Other through mimicry. Bhabha and Taussig regard mimicry as part and parcel of clear power and, more particularly, colonial relations. On the other hand, I suggest that we can look at mimesis as a *cultural device* that does not necessarily imply a clear power relationship. My analysis of Israelis who perform and produce Japanese culture in a non-colonial context reveals the more 'primordial' social characteristics of mimesis highlighted by Benjamin's observations of the playfulness of the process of cultural appropriation. Nevertheless, some observations made by Bhabha and Taussig are very helpful here. One of them is the idea of metonymy, as explained by Bhabha (1994:90):

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In mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy. As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not as harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically.

The Japanese kimono, which has become a symbol of 'Japaneseness' also in Japan (see Goldstein-Gidoni 1999), is no doubt one of the main metonymic devices used by local producers of Japanese culture. In some cases it is indeed used symbolically. Orna, who for the last seven years has made her living mainly from activities related to Japan and the Far East, including guiding tours to Japan and giving popular lectures on Japanese culture throughout Israel, explains that she always wears a sort of kimono for her Japan-related activities. Usually she wears only an upper coat (*happi*), as 'something symbolic', but she has recently initiated a program that includes a full kimono appearance, with another Japan expert. Orna is fully aware of the mimetic aspects of this special performance: 'It is Purim [a Jewish holiday in which people, especially children, disguise themselves], it is disguising ourselves'. She is also very conscious of the attractiveness of such acting: '[I]f you want to sell something you need gimmicks; both of us coming dressed in kimono is a gimmick.'

Dressing like the Japanese no doubt has commercial benefits, but for some of the cultural producers it has deeper meanings as well. Gila, a calligraphy artist trained in Japan, conducts workshops for adults and children. Recently she was advised by a business consultant to dress in Japanese costume for her classes. In her case, this is simple attire worn by traditional Japanese artisans at work. For the business consultant, the Japanese costume was 'something authentic' that Gila's students 'deserve and expect to get for their time and money', but Gila at first strongly rejected the idea. She accepted the consultant's advice only after she realized that it would not be a pretense, since the costume was actually 'a part of [her]'. As she explains:

Later on, I did some thinking, and I accepted what she [the consultant] said. And I thought, well, it is not a pose, it is really the thing itself. There is a ritual of calligraphy, and if in Japan I had always worn [the same costume] out of respect for the teacher, now I needed [to do it] out of respect for the students.

Although Gila sees the Japanese costume as an inseparable part of her own self, in fact she mimics the ritualistic scene of the Japanese calligraphy class back at home.

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Michel, who performs Japanese dance and tea ceremony in front of adults and children, is very meticulous about the Japanese décor she carries with her around the country. She is also extremely conscious of her feelings towards the kimono as a mimetic device:

I think that for me to get into the kimono, to do the [dancing] movements... I feel as if I am becoming... Do you remember? There was once Wonder Woman; she would make a turn and enter the clothes of Wonder Woman. And this is how I feel; I get into the clothes of the kimono, I make a turn and I am Japanese. That's it. Even my voice changes... Michel becomes... I feel as if I am changing, I simply become a different person, Japanese, something different.

Michel has more to add. In a long and reflective interview, Michel described a 'very very big breakthrough' that she had recently gone through. She was invited to perform at an elegant and exclusive social gathering, and just before her performance was about to begin she found out that she had forgotten to bring her kimono with her. At first, she was shocked:

I did not bring the kimono..., and I said [to myself], how come? Will I perform the subject of Japan without a kimono? But I have never done such a thing in my life. It is, it's impurity. No way. And then I said [to myself], excuse me, this is not impurity; I am not Japanese. I am a Western person.

Finally, she decided to go on performing in a Western evening dress and high heels and to share her feelings with the audience. She explains her consequent breakthrough as related also to the positive response of the audience:

[A]nd I came out [of this new experience] in a kind of an enchanted feeling that I ha[d] made a breakthrough for myself. I can speak about Japan, and it does not have to be done with the décor, and it does not have to be with a kimono. It is what I take out from inside; it is not external... I very gradually begin to be convinced, that it is indeed internal, and it is indeed mine and it is indeed I.

Michel not only feels one with Japan or with her Japanese experience like Gila; she *possesses* 'Japan'. 'Japan' is hers. Through mimetic and metonymic practices, she, like other local producers of Japanese culture, *appropriates* 'Japan', and in fact creates a 'Japan' of her own.

Local performers and producers of Japanese culture certainly do not become Japanese. In fact, the attractiveness of the representations of Japan they produce lies in a successful play with sameness and difference. In order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its difference, Bhabha states (1994:

86). Similarly, Taussig (1993:129) argues that 'mimesis registers both sameness and difference, of being like, and of being Other'. Explaining why the Japanese program is the *crème de la crème* of her cultural repertoire, Ruth, the birthday operator, emphasizes the alterity of Japanese culture:

This is the program I particularly recommend, not only because I am trained in it best but [also because] there is something very, very different; everything is different, the clothing is different, the way of eating is different, the writing is different. It is not like Spanish or Italian that you write in Latin. Or, say, in other countries there are no costumes. In the Japanese program I perform dressed in a kimono, and I give my lectures dressed in a kimono, so it is very special. It is a country that children have no access to, nor their parents.

Japan as Culture Land: Japan's Role in the Production of 'Japan'

Most Israeli brokers of Japanese culture gained their 'cultural education' in Japan. Cultural education refers to non-academic study, including Japanese culture and language and traditional arts such as calligraphy, ikebana, martial arts, and so forth (Bloch-Tzemah 1998:13). The Japanese government has institutionalized this kind of education in the official 'cultural visa', which allows foreigners a longer stay in Japan for the period of their 'cultural studies'. Japan offers vast opportunities in this area, with institutions of various sizes; some of them are private, some governmental or municipal. Several interviewees had obtained their cultural education in general 'cultural centers'. A martial arts instructor described such an institution in the traditional center of Kyoto:

In Kyoto there is a place for the international community, financed by the Japanese government and the Kyoto municipality. The teachers who work there are paid by the government in order to bring Japan and Japanese arts and language to the foreign community. There are courses in Japanese, ikebana, [and] calligraphy, a study center, a big library, lectures. [It is] a huge place, very glorious, beautiful. It has a Japanese teahouse, a huge Japanese garden. [It is] also for the Japanese, so that they will know their own culture.

The role of these cultural centers in conveying an essentialist image of Japanese culture is obvious. Such assembling of cultural representations in one spot naturally leads to the conclusion that 'actually all the arts in Japan are well tied and related one to another'. This kind of essentialist view of Japanese culture is typical. A local flower arrangement artist used holistic terms to describe Japanese culture. She recalled that when she arrived in Japan an-

other Israeli then living there, who is to this day very much involved with Japanese culture-related activities in Israel, gave her the advice he himself got from his Japanese professor, to take any of the Japanese traditional arts as her hobby in order to get the essence of things. She later understood:

He was right 200 percent, 1000 percent, that it doesn't matter at all in what [craft one is involved]; today I understand that ... that is, I understood very quickly that it doesn't matter if it is in martial [arts], [or] if [it is] in ceramics, or in painting, if it is in poetry or dance. In essence, Japan is Japan. It doesn't matter at all.

This kind of essentialization of Japanese culture, while well accepted and reproduced by the cultural visitors to Japan, is in fact promoted heavily by the Japanese themselves in Japan.

A typical way of essentializing Japan is by emphasizing the 'authenticity' of remote and so-called 'traditional' areas of Japan. The most 'authentic' way to be culturally educated is considered to be that of becoming an apprentice of a master in Japan preferably in remote areas in villages or monasteries. In other words, foreigners interested in Japanese crafts, just like foreign anthropologists, are sent to traditional cities like Kyoto or to countryside locations, where they are supposed to find 'real Japan' (see Martinez 1990:105; Smith 1995:29).

In fact, this traditional and aesthetic Japan is discovered quite easily. The casual traveler in Japan can receive at any tourist office a very detailed book listing Japanese craftsmen and their specific locations. A young woman who traveled in Japan for several weeks described how she and her partner got tired of urban Japan and how they 'decided to find this Japan which can be seen in pictures'. As she explained, this Japan that 'really exists the minute one leaves the city and goes to the small places', suited much better the picture of Japan she had in her mind. She recalled how easy their task was made not only by following the guidebook, but also by the help and guidance of the local people to the craftsmen's workshops. She also remembered how happy the craftsmen were for their visits.

Japanese craftsmen are not only hospitable to incidental visitors, they often open the doors of their workshops and houses to foreigners to live and study for long periods. An Israeli expert in Japanese paper who stayed with a Japanese master for over a year explained that although his own motivations were mainly professional or practical, i.e., to study a specific craft, his teacher and in fact all his village community were more interested in the cultural and traditional aspects of the encounter:

They were really happy that someone came to study because it is something that gradually vanishes. Also, in Japan it is important for them that the tradition will be preserved, even if it is abroad... They told me: 'We hope that you preserve it ... even if it is in Israel, so that it will have a continuance.'

This view of 'Japanese culture' and Japanese heritage as part of the present and not as references to a remote past enclosed in museums is typical in Japan (Guichard-Anguis 2001), and it is also related to the construction of a 'unified Japanese culture' (Vlastos 1998:11). From the 1950s the Japanese government has been involved in the protection of cultural properties (*bunka zai*). Prominent among them are intangible cultural properties such as traditional craft techniques and even the people who make them, who were actually designated by the government as 'human' or 'national' treasures (Moeran 1984:167).

This governmental protection of cultural properties – which always refer to 'traditional' (*dentō-teki*) properties – should be understood against the background of the massive concern in postwar Japanese society with re-producing genuine Japanese tradition. Ivy (1988:21) argues that with Japan's 'economic miracle' of the 1960s and the development of its communication and transportation networks – and the reign of television – 'tradition' and its connections with Japanese identity became almost a 'national obsession'. Others relate to the tradition and nostalgic booms or fads that spread in Japan throughout the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Ben-Ari 1992; Bestor 1989; Ivy 1995; Kelly 1986, 1990; Moeran 1984; Robertson 1987, 1991). Japanese society has also been described as devoted to the reproduction of the myths of its own uniqueness, especially through the vast literature known as *nihonjinron* (theories of 'Japaneseness') (see Dale 1986; Iwabuchi 1994; Yoshino 1992).

The preoccupation with Japanese tradition and the construction of a unique and unified Japanese culture are, foremost, internal matters related to the creation of a cohesive Japanese identity (see Gluck 1985; Vlastos 1998). Nevertheless, processes of self-definition often tend to intensify the sense of self by dramatizing the difference from and opposition to the Other (Said 1991:55; Carrier 1995:3). In Japan, the Western Other is constantly presented and 'traditional' aspects of Japanese tradition are those that are emphasized in encounters with the West. The almost obsessive preoccupation of the Japanese with self-definition can be said to have reached the point of self-Orientalism (Miller 1982:209-211) and self-exoticism (see Creighton 1992:53; Ivy 1995). Thus, the exotic and mysterious image of Japan as portrayed in Israeli representations is – perhaps somewhat paradoxically – not merely the result

of a general Western Orientalist approach, but also the result of the direct contact of local brokers of Japanese culture with images of 'Japan' produced in Japan itself.

Conclusion

I have attempted to reach a better understanding of the processes of the appropriation of the culture of the Other. That the case discussed is situated in a non-colonial context makes it more evident that the practices that we observed represented the process of cultural appropriation *per se* rather than the colonial or post-colonial process. I suggested that although we cannot ignore the significance of cultural devices such as mimesis and metonymy in the kind of intimate relationship with the culture of the Other discussed here, we nevertheless need to separate the practical use of such cultural devices from the assumed power or colonial relationship in which they allegedly always exist – as seen, for example, in the work of Bhabha (1994) and Taussig (1993).

Another version of cultural appropriation in the context of clear power relationships is offered by anthropologists who analyze the ways in which the 'post-colonizer' exploits the culture of the previously colonized people. The latter is often related to commercial motivations, as in the case of the growing interest in things Indian in the United States and around the world (see McGowan 1993), and is regarded not only as potentially damaging to the survival of the native ways but also as a post-colonial version of expropriation (Howes 1996:138).¹¹ Although 'Japanese culture' has no doubt become a highly saleable commodity outside Japan, such processes are not destructive to this culture. Moreover, we have also seen the active involvement of the Other itself – and not from any inferior position – in its own exotification, in its own Othering.

The alternative context for cultural appropriation I discuss here is that of cultural globalization. The processes of globalization have obviously not resulted in a unified global culture; instead, the 'world culture' is 'marked by an organization of diversity' (Hannerz 1990:237; see also Beck 2002). This world has also been described as a stage for global differences that opens up a 'world showcase of cultures in which the examples of the distant exotic are brought directly into the home' (Featherstone 1995:13). Mathews (2000:63) believes that 'the sense of all the world's cultures as open, to be appropriated from as one chooses, is becoming inevitably more and more widespread'. He portrays a world in which 'cultures' – which he defines as 'the information and identities

available from the global cultural supermarket' (Mathews 2000:4) – are relatively easily accessible in the global environment, to be picked up by almost anyone at any time. We have seen the limits of this allegedly open cultural arena when emphasizing the role of Japan in the production of 'Japanese culture'.

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Notes

1. This interest is in many ways related to the jaws (Japan Anthropology Workshop) conference in Budapest in 1997, which carried the theme 'Japan Outside Japan'.
2. According to the Japanese embassy's records, about 550 Japanese lived in Israel in 2001.
3. Shifra Horn's (1992) book is based on the author's personal experience in Japan and strongly emphasizes the Otherness and strangeness of the Japanese culture and people.
4. The background is the Palestinian uprising known as *Al-Aqsa intifada* that began in October 2000. Whereas the number of visitors was disappointing with regard to the estimate of 70,000, still, according to the marketing manager of the botanical gardens it was a success in the unexpected circumstances.
5. Modern Living fairs were held in Israel from the 1940s. The Hebrew name used to be Adam Umeono, literally 'a person and his dwelling', and it was recently changed to Adam Veolamo, meaning 'a person and his world', in order to 'create a more modern atmosphere'.
6. Bloch-Tzemach (1998:62) finds a 'cosmopolitan perspective' among the Israeli 'dwellers-tourists' in Japan. She also emphasizes the significance these people give to acquiring knowledge in Japan.
7. The processes that have formed Israeli identity have been described as dualistic in nature. Side by side with openness to the world, there have been marked processes of fortifying the national borders and of seclusion (Herzog 1992).
8. All names are pseudonyms.
9. In over 100 questionnaires filled out by students in Japanese language courses and non-academic courses about Japanese culture, more than 60 percent replied that Japan is very different, and over 30 percent replied that it is different. Less than 5 percent replied 'somewhat similar', and less than 2 percent replied that Japan and Israel are similar.

10. Over 65 percent of the visitors who responded to questionnaires used the adjectives 'aesthetic', 'impressive' or 'beautiful' to describe Japan.
11. Howes (1996) describes the cultural appropriation of Native American culture in the United States and especially in the American Southwest. He discusses several works that compare the potential cultural damage to the expropriation of lands in the nineteenth century (see Burgess & Valaskakis 1995; Coombe 1993; Valaskakis 1993).

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