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A pioneer in the burgeoning field of Transpacific Studies, Koichi Hagimoto explores two regions he knows intimately—Japan and Argentina—in his newest monograph, *Samurai in the Land of the Gaucho: Transpacific Modernity and Nikkei Literature in Argentina*. This incisive study illuminates how early twentieth-century Latin American intellectuals turned their eyes eastward in search of an alternative, non-Western civilizing paradigm that Hagimoto deems a *transpacific modernity*, a coinage that builds upon Beatriz Sarlo's "peripheral modernity." Focusing on writers of European descent, he argues in the book's first half that Argentina's intellectual class came to glorify and essentialize everything from Japan's hygiene culture to its religious and spiritual traditions on to its imperial prowess; they imagined how such qualities might be infused into the inchoate Argentine society. This celebratory view even informed the Argentine government's portrayal of Japanese immigrants as "desirable" and worthy of a sort of symbolic whiteness (7). Fascinatingly, Japan latched onto such estimations of their superiority and disseminated idealized representations of themselves, an example of what Ignacio López-Calvo calls, in the book's excellent Foreword, *Nihonjinron*, a "strategic essentialist move" to repair the island nation's damaged reputation after World War II (xvii).

In the book's second half, Hagimoto examines works created by second-generation Nikkei (Japanese Americans) that pull at the loose threads of both "Japaneseness" and "Argentineness" (98). He showcases how twenty-first-century creatives are revising, challenging, and complicating previous simplifications of Japan *and* Argentina based on their lived experience. The book's two-part structure offers readers a brilliant snapshot of change over time to carry out its primary thesis: literary and cultural approaches to Japan have played an understudied and instrumental role in "both defining and defying Argentine modernity" for the last two centuries (2).

Hagimoto divides *Samurai in the Land of the Gaucho* into five chapters organized as comparative close readings. In what is likely new territory for many Latin Americanists, his tight introduction dovetails two histories: a genealogy of Japanese immigration to Argentina and an illuminating account of modern Japan's westernization. Creating a transnational panorama, Hagimoto explains that the Nikkei immigrant experience in Argentina vastly differed from that of their compatriots in Brazil or

Peru. He points to three primary reasons for this difference. First, since Argentina maintained neutrality during World War II, discrimination against Japanese descendants was unlike that experienced in Allied nations. Second, the Argentine Nikkei population consists of approximately 65,000 residents at present, a small demographic relative to Brazil (1.9 million) and Peru (100,000). Third, Hagimoto attributes Japanese immigrants' positive experience in Argentina to assimilation. Intermarriage with European-heritage Argentines and conversion to Catholicism, he notes, were far more common for Argentine Nikkei because they settled in the urban ambit of Buenos Aires rather than in rural zones, as happened in Brazil and Peru. In the capital city, Japanese Argentines worked hard to rise the ladder by establishing businesses like the *tintorería*, or dry cleaners. They found monetary success, stayed out of politics, and maintained a low profile (7).

With this trifecta, Hagimoto contends, they attained "model minority" status and benefited from a sort of "positive prejudice," a notion he borrows from anthropologist Marcelo Higa (4-5). By means of their higher socioeconomic status, Argentine Nikkei attained a sort of whiteness that set them apart from other Asian groups—namely Chinese or Koreans—who allegedly possessed more "'non-white' characteristics" within Argentina's racial imaginary (10). Argentine intellectuals' century-old interest in Japan, he maintains, thus becomes another iteration of its long-standing desire to be white, western, and civilized. In fittingly dialectic fashion, these qualities manifested in contradistinction to Japan's non-white, eastern, and "barbaric" neighbors, in particular China (15).

Hagimoto sets the stage for the perceived Japan-China hierarchy in the book's first chapter, which focuses on Eduardo Wilde and Jorge Max Rohde. As a member of the *Generación del '80* that saw progress in military machinations and positivist paradigms, Wilde—a physician, statesman, and writer—stood apart from his peers with his utter disenchantment with Europe. Japan, however, awakened something in him. Writing about his 1897 visit to the East Asian archipelago in *Por mares y por tierras*, Wilde, according to Hagimoto, found in Japan a society that had managed to modernize without losing its traditional values (24-29). At the crossroads of tradition and modernity, he saw Japan as a model for Argentina to imitate. This desire for political and cultural imitation was particularly strong within the realm of hygiene, which had become a national obsession in *fin-de-siècle* Argentina. As Hagimoto explains it, "the concept of 'filthiness,' in both moral and social sense, was one of the most representative metaphors of 'barbarism' in the continental imaginary of the time" (31). China, he shows, was a key character in this narrative, its alleged "poverty," "misery," "abominable food quality," "dirtiness," and "humidity" functioning as a counterpoint to its neighbor (24). Wilde's Argentina could find public health in the Cartesian order of Japan's tidy streets, or it could fall prey to

the disorder and disease that he saw within China's labyrinthine cities (31). These positivist impressions, Hagimoto makes clear, were wholly spatial.

Hagimoto situates Wilde within Argentina's nineteenth-century open-door immigration policy, *gobernar es poblar*, a notion coined by Juan Luis Alberdi under the premise that settling Argentina's so-called "empty lands" would settle it into modernity. While much is known about Italian and Spanish migration to Argentina, Hagimoto adds another dimension to this account by demonstrating that Wilde was one of the first Argentine intellectuals to advocate for Japanese immigration to the country. Yet Wilde not once beckoned Chinese immigrants to Argentina. According to Hagimoto, Wilde zeroes in on Chinese women as being particularly illustrative of barbaric tendencies, whether for what he diagnoses as their deformed feet or their allegedly backward, disloyal, and ungrateful ways (34). While Hagimoto does not explicitly state it, his observations lead readers to understand that, for Wilde, Chinese women would not advance Argentina's project of *blanqueamiento*. Japanese women, contrarily, appear as pristine objects whose feet, hands, arms, and—most especially—necks captivate Wilde. These women would help birth the ideal nation.

We learn that Wilde's sexualized writings inspired a generation of Argentine writers, including and especially Jorge Max Rohde. Traveling to Japan some thirty years after Wilde, Rohde longed for a pre-Western "authentic" Japan that he exalts as untouched and nearly virgin. Japan's geishas, for Rohde, metonymized a pre-Western and pre-modern aesthetics, a sort of beauty untainted by Western knowledge. Yet, as Hagimoto smartly observes, Rohde's ostensible exaltation of Japanese tradition was, in fact, a "calculated strategy to insert his Western, masculine subjectivity into the Oriental, feminine Other" (41). Yet since Rohde also applauds Japan's decidedly masculine militarism and expansionism, Hagimoto concludes that "his implicit approval of Japanese imperialism is indicative of how his interest in the 'old Japan' parallels his indifference toward the geopolitical conflict in the region" (43). Put another way, Rohde could not but view Asia through a reductive Eurocentric lens. He did not care about Japan. He cared about Argentina.

While Hagimoto shows off his synthesizing abilities throughout, his second chapter does an especially fine job of capturing long histories in brief summaries that do the hard work of contextualizing his literary analyses. Here, he focuses on the impact of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) in Argentina, and in particular on how early-twentieth-century writers represented Japanese imperialism. This war, we learn, inaugurated a series of events: it marked the first international conflict of the twentieth century, the first use of wireless communications during wartime, the first extended trench warfare, and most importantly, the first time in modern history that a Western country

succumbed to an Asian one. According to Hagimoto, Japan's victory consecrated its status as an "'honorary white' in the network of colonial powers" (46). Refusing to accept "Yellow Peril" stereotypes, Japanese intellectuals instead used their military triumph to confirm their superiority in relation to Korea and China. To create parity with Western society, they assumed whiteness and, therefore, racial and cultural hegemony that justified their expansionist projects, chief among them the 1874 Taiwan Expedition, which Hagimoto creatively aligns with Argentina's 1879 Conquest of the Desert. He shows that the Argentine public's intrigue with the Russo-Japanese war had everything to do with its shared drive to be white and, on the other hand, to strengthen its military in service of expansion. Drawing on deep archival work and fascinating primary sources dating to the late 1800s, Hagimoto argues that Argentine media "internalized [Japan's] imperial discourse, perhaps not unrelated to their own sense of exceptionalism" (50). Many newspapers even went so far as to suggest that Argentina had a great deal to learn from Japan in its own efforts to consolidate into a modern nation-state.

At the heart of this chapter is Hagimoto's discussion of two Argentine intellectuals who saw in Japan's steadily increasing geopolitical power an alternative model of transpacific modernity: Manuel Domecq García and Yoshio Shinya, the authors, respectively, of *Guerra Ruso-Japonesa 1904-1905: Estudio sobre la preparación y la eficiencia de la Marina Japonesa* (1917) and *Imperio del sol naciente: su maravillosa evolución moderna* (1934). Domecq García, for his part, visited Japan with little knowledge of the country's traditions except its military strategy. Under the rubric of *organization*, he praised qualities that even now are perceived as "Japanese" in our contemporary post-Marie Kondo world; Hagimoto underscores the Argentine author's emphasis on "organization," "structure," "efficiency," "perseverance," "method," "reserve," "work ethic," and "self-discipline" as characteristics to be "understood within the context of Japanese nationalism" (53). Domecq García, Hagimoto points out, dissected these characteristics in *Guerra Ruso-Japonesa 1904-1905* to create a heuristic for his Argentine compatriots, whom he believed could learn from both Japanese patriotism and militarism.

This belief was shared by the next figure featured in Hagimoto's second chapter, Yoshio Shinya, who was the first official Japanese immigrant to set foot on Argentine lands. Together with his close friend Domecq García, Shinya established the Japanese Cultural Institute in 1933, the same year that he published *La verdad sobre la cuestión Manchuriana*, a justification of Japan's military ambitions in Manchuria and a defense of Japan's control of China. Shinya, Hagimoto tells us, developed these ideas a year later in *Imperio del sol naciente* (1934), where he argues that Japan's colonial administration had successfully imbued all of East Asia with law and order while also improving the region's political

and economic stability. Hagimoto draws an intriguing parallel between Shinya's nationalist discourse of Japanese cultural superiority and Argentine politicians' forceful incorporation of non-white peoples into the fabric of the nation. "Both Argentina and Japan," Hagimoto argues, "turn to the invention of racial homogeneity as an integral part of political consolidation as well as the suppression of topographical differences" (59). Colonialist attitudes thus drive expansionist and assimilationist projects on both sides of the Pacific.

In the second part of *Samurai in the Land of the Gaucho*, Hagimoto shifts focus from homogenizing portrayals from outsiders to heterogeneous representations from insiders. In the third chapter, he examines Japanese Argentine subjectivity as a hyphenated hybridity (though curiously, he does not hyphenate the descriptor Japanese-Argentine). He unravels a singular understanding of Japaneseness in two groundbreaking works of Nikkei literature in Argentina, Héctor Dai Sugimura's novella *Buscadores en mis últimas vidas* and Maximiliano Matayoshi's *Gajin*. These authors, Hagimoto shows, offer readers a more honest and reflective assessment of "the country of their ancestors" while providing a useful way to unpack what it means to be of Japanese descent *and* reimagine Argentine identity in the twenty-first century (17). After situating his reading within a brief history of Japanese immigration to Argentina—in which we discover that Juan Domingo Perón was instrumental to cultivating Japan and Argentina's steadfast relations and even bestowing upon Japanese immigrants relative privilege (71)—Hagimoto argues that Japanese immigrants have come to be "instrumental symbols of diversity" in modern-day Argentina, which has, since the 2001 economic crisis, sought to reformulate and modernize its national identity as a "self-proclaimed melting pot of racial and ethnic blending" (72). Postcolonial theorizations of hybridity inform Hagimoto's reading of Sugimura's 1995 novella, which depicts the tale of a young law student (Dai Hombre) who curiously morphs into a cat (Dai Gato). Hagimoto reads this Kafkian metamorphosis as a metaphor to depict the Japanese immigrant's struggle to thrive in Argentina. This struggle has everything to do with one of Maslow's most basic needs: belonging, indeed, "the constant search for some sort of fixed subjectivity" (77). The immigrant longs to belong. Drawing on Trinh Min-ha's understanding of the hybrid, hyphenated reality between Asia and America, Hagimoto asks, "what does the hyphen refer to when discussing the hyphenated 'Japanese-American' identity? Can the hyphen speak for itself without implying a discrepancy between Japanese and Argentine elements?" (77).

Here Hagimoto might have considered evoking some of the excellent theorization of hyphenated identities done by U.S. Latinos, for instance, Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Life on the Hyphen* (1994). This classic study's conceptual framework especially resonates with his reading of Matayoshi's

2003 novel *Gaijin*, which, Hagimoto notes, probes the "shifting boundaries between insider and outsider" from its very title, *gaijin*, a term simultaneously used to refer to Westerners, to white colonizers, and to Japanese immigrants in Argentina, including the novel's protagonist Kitaro (81). Teasing out the challenges of Kitaro's hybrid, transnational, and multilingual identity, this chapter hammers home the discomfort of residing in Homi Bhabha's "third space" (81). In so doing, it offers a fresh lens to think through notions of multiculturalism, diversity, and whiteness in Argentina.

While Hagimoto underscores the Nisei (second-generation) characters' racialized experience in Chapter 3, his fourth chapter treads into gendered waters. He focuses on two female Nikkei writers, Anna Kazumi Stahl and Alejandra Kamiya, whose protagonists instantiate feminist solidarity through a process he calls "gendering Orientalism" (86). Drawing on feminist theorists of color, he demonstrates that Stahl and Kamiya fashion a different variant of Argentine Orientalism that demands female agency and refuses to commodify Asian women. In the case of Stahl, this agency manifests through the mother/daughter dyad featured in her 2002 novel *Flores de un sólo día,* which weds three distinct national identities (Japanese, Argentine, and U.S.), thereby articulating, according to Hagimoto, a "ternary identity" that challenges traditional Hegelian dialectics (87). By unpacking the stereotypes that constitute these characters (quietness, beauty, flower arranging) and emphasizing their ability to communicate despite the mother's muteness—which Hagimoto reads as symbolic of the immigrant's difficulty in communicating tongue—this chapter argues that Stahl "employs a discourse of gendering Orientalism" to develop female characters that refuse to accept masculine control (91). This resistance resurges in lands as far away as New Orleans, the birthplace of both Stahl and her protagonist, as well as the protagonists' black servant, who raised her in the French Creole city till age eight. Hagimoto makes the case that the novel's multicultural, translingual space transgresses borders and poses an original understanding of identity. Ultimately, he demonstrates that Stahl and Kamiya put forth a sort of counter-modernity that contests both patriarchy *and* whiteness in twenty-first-century Argentina.

Hagimoto's concludes the book with an analysis of Argentine films created and directed by non-Nikkei who represent the Nikkei experience. These cinematic works, he argues, present a more nuanced depiction of immigrant reality, including patriarchal attitudes and intergenerational conflicts. Examining Clara Zappettini's 1986 documentary *La otra tierra: Japoneses en Argentina*, Hagimoto suggests that the film sheds light on immigrant labor, from traditional realms (think: dry cleaning, floriculture, martial arts) to less traditional ones like the Argentine film industry. By probing the life of Miguel Ángel Ganiko, a Nisei (second-generation) actor in Argentina, this chapter showcases the fight against

being cast, quite literally, into a singular role, both in terms of being "'an Oriental person in an Occidental country'" but also by Issei (first generation) parents wed to traditional notions of what constitutes professional work for their Nisei children.

Hagimoto also attends to the tradition/modernity dialectic in his analysis of Gaspar Scheuer's 2013 drama *Samurai*, which, according to Scheuer himself, creates a historical dialogue between Japan and Argentina. The plot is worth recounting. Set in late 19th-century Argentina on the Pampas, the film offers an unorthodox iteration of the *gauchesca* form that features a samurai (Takeo) and an armless gaucho (Poncho Negro). The unlikely duo sets across the Argentine countryside in search of a legendary samurai—the "last samurai"— rumored to be creating a new Japan in rural Argentina after a failed rebellion against the Meiji government. Hagimoto argues that the director's fascination with Japan exposes another layer of transpacific modernity. The film positions Argentina as a utopia where traditional Japanese values might be reinstated. At the same time, he argues, it aligns the two characters, the gaucho seeing "his own marginality in the life of the Asian immigrant" (107). Just as the gaucho was emblematic of the Argentine nation in the nineteenth century, Takeo himself, the chapter contends, becomes a central figure in imagining the Argentina of the twenty-first century. Hagimoto understands Takeo as a contemporary symbol of transpacific modernity insofar as he embraces both Japanese and Argentine characteristics, embodying life on the hyphen as a "samurai-turned-gaucho" who epitomizes the ideal "multicultural nation" (109).

If the Japanese Takeo represents the future of Argentina, then Hagimoto looks to Sebastián Borensztein's 2011 blockbuster *Un cuento chino* to further illustrate his argument that non-Japanese Asians, in particular those of Chinese descent, have long been perceived negatively in Argentine culture. Not unlike Takeo, the film's Asian protagonist, Jun, must align himself with an Argentine—Roberto, a scrupulous shopkeeper played by Ricardo Darín—as he embarks on a quixotic journey to locate his uncle. But whereas Takeo's armless gaucho Poncho Negro truly takes him under his proverbial wing, Roberto wants nothing more than to rid himself of Jun. Roberto dehumanizes Jun as a "'package'" to be disposed of, teaches the newly arrived immigrant nothing, and mocks his Spanish accent, Hagimoto tells us (112). Perhaps worse, Jun's spoken Chinese is never subtitled, thus "he is made into a 'voiceless' subject not only because of his incommunicability in Spanish, but also because of the inability of the audience to fully understand him speaking in his native language" (113). Hagimoto continues tracing the throughline of communication in his analysis of Pablo Moyano's 2015 documentary *Silencio roto: 16 Nikkeis*, which gives voice and volume to sixteen Japanese Argentine

desaparecidos and offers, he proposes, a way to rethink Nikkei identity in "today's Argentina and beyond" (119).

Ultimately, this is Koichi Hagimoto's overarching, and realized, objective in his carefully researched and sharply argued study: while the title and cover evoke Japan, the book as a whole paints a picture of the global Asian diaspora and their relations with the multilingual and transcontinental politics of immigration across the Americas. He takes to task long-consecrated paradigms of race, ethnicity, and nationality, while offering an innovative entry point into transnational Nikkei subjectivity. Refreshing stale approximations to modernity, his book offers insight into Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's enshrined dialectic of civilization versus barbarism and reveals unexpected hierarchies. With lucid prose, his highly readable intervention enrichens multiple fields, from Transpacific Studies to Asian American Studies to New Ethnic Studies in Latin America. Hagimoto works across spaces and genres to defy Cold War-era area studies models, disrupting notions of a homogenous Asia and creating a framework to understand decolonial projects across the globe. In the end, *Samurai in the Land of the Gaucho* leads readers on a riveting journey where novices and experts alike can travel deftly constructed theoretical bridges to appreciate the slippages between Nikkei cultural production in Argentina and Japanese Argentine lived reality.