

WHY HEARN?: THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF LAFCADIO HEARN IN JAPAN

RIE KIDO ASKEW

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

Introduction

Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) or Koizumi Yakumo has long enjoyed fame in Japan as the ultimate foreign connoisseur of Japanese culture. The critical literature on Hearn is replete with testimonials that claim that no foreigner to date has been able to match his influence.¹ As can be seen in terms such as “today’s Hearn” (*gendai no Hân*) and “the second Hearn” (*daini no Hân*), Hearn’s name is still used for the Japan lover *par excellence*.²

Why is Hearn so special in Japan? The popular answer is that Hearn’s love for Japan was special and unparalleled. In fact, it is claimed, Hearn loved Japan so much that he went so far as to “go native”, exchanging British for Japanese nationality, and marrying a Japanese woman (Hirakawa, 2004: 94, Takagi, 1992/2004: 17, Umemoto, 2009: 462).

Hearn’s relationship with Japan, however, should not be exaggerated. First, he wrote all his works in English, and throughout his career his literary identity remained that of a Western individual (Hirakawa, 1992: 285). Moreover Hearn’s affection for Japan was not unconditional. In fact he had a love-and-hate relationship with the country and, in his late years, wanted to return to the West (America).

1 As far back as 1914, Tanabe (1914/1980: 205) observed that:

Not a few foreign academics specialize in Japan. (...) However, in terms of deep sympathy and insight, and in terms of an inimitable prose style, how many can hope to equal Hearn? It is a fact that those across the globe who are sympathetic to Japan today are all influenced by the works of Hearn.

Hearn’s axiomatic status remains intact. In 1991, Kajitani (1991/1994: 230) stated:

Not a few foreign authors write about Japan. However, no man of letters before or after Lafcadio Hearn (Koizumi Yakumo) revealed the beauty of Japan or the Japanese heart, or introduced Japan in such a beautiful style and with such understanding, observation, and deep insight based on a heartfelt love for Japan’s landscape.

2 Known for his love for Japanese pottery and the “good old Japan” (*furuki yoki Nihon*), Bernard Leach (1887-1979) is sometimes called “today’s Hearn” (Suzuki, 2000: 678). Donald Keene (1922-), known for his appreciation of Japanese literature, has been called “the second Hearn” (Ôhira, 1993).

Second, Meiji Japan (1868-1912) was relatively open to foreigners, and Hearn was far from unique in marrying a Japanese national.³ Moreover, there was nothing romantic about Hearn's marriage and naturalization. Instead, both took place for "legal reasons" such as inheritance (Hearn, 1895/1922: 378).⁴

It is because of this discrepancy between image and reality that Ôta (1994) challenged the popular image of Hearn. According to him, Hearn's image as a Japan lover is nothing but a "myth": Hearn's Japanese language ability was poor, his specialized knowledge of Japanese culture was patchy, and his love for Japan was dubious.

Is the cult figure of "Koizumi Yakumo", then, a complete invention? Not necessarily. Hearn did intensely admire Japan and was insightful about its culture. Miner (1958:64) is right in saying that Hearn "idealized the people of Japan and their culture, not simply or blindly, but in the terms in which the Japanese themselves like to think they excel. The Japanese ideals were close to his own". Thus Hearn has come to symbolize the virtues of Old Japan. It was in this context that Yu (1964: 184) said that "it was Hearn alone who became part of Japan".

Hearn's fame is thus the product of a beguiling mixture of truth and fancy. Certainly, Hearn was an astute observer of Japan. Yet his fame is also based on a number of myths. One thing, however, is clear: "Koizumi Yakumo" is the product of an emotional need to re-evaluate the traditions which the Japanese have lost or are losing through the rapid modernization since the Meiji era. What matters in the cult of "Koizumi Yakumo" is not Hearn himself, but the fact that the Japanese needed a symbol like Hearn. If an "invented tradition" is a product of modern nationalism that creates "traditional" symbols to restore national unity, "Koizumi Yakumo" can be said to be an invention: a product of nationalism in order to maintain or restore Japanese virtues.⁵

Although there is a large body of literature on Hearn and his works, there has been little analysis of his critical reception in Japan, and even less that focuses on Hearn and nationalism. Fukuma's *Henkyô ni utsuru Nihon* (Japan Reflected in the Margins, 2003), however, made an important contribution by illuminating how Hearn's name has been exploited as a tool of nationalism in Japan. Unfortunately, Fukuma limits the object of his study to Hearn specialists, which is unnecessarily circumscriptive. The cultural mobilization of Hearn, so to speak, is much too pervasive to be confined to the narrow field of "Hearn studies". A wide range of non-specialists, academic and otherwise, drew on Hearn as a kind of representational tool to tackle the identity crisis of modern Japan. In order to fully grasp the nationalist discourse embedded in the Hearn reception, my analysis in this paper covers the reception of Hearn not only by Hearn specialists, but also by intellectuals who are not strictly Hearn scholars, and even the use of his name in the Japanese popular culture.

3 Other noted foreigners who married Japanese include Erwin von Bälz, (1849-1913) and John Milne (1850-1913). On such marriages during this period, see Kamoto (2001).

4 As Starrs (2006: 206) explains, to give one example, if Hearn had remained a British citizen, "his property could have been claimed by his British relatives".

5 For the "invented tradition", see Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

Here rises one problem. What do we mean by nationalism? The nationalist discourse in the Hearn reception is not a monolithic entity, but is diverse and complex. As will be seen below, some depict Hearn as a folklorist, others as a state nationalist. Starrs is conscious of this point, and in his paper “Lafcadio Hearn as Japanese Nationalist” (2006), he distinguishes two types of nationalism, cultural and political: the former is in the tradition of the Herderian school which is “a nostalgic attachment to ‘dying’ folk” and the latter is “an aggressive form of modern state nationalism” (Starrs, 2006: 181). Many Japanese Hearn specialists would find Starrs’ depiction of Hearn as a state nationalist disturbing, since it has been a (postwar) taboo to associate Hearn with state nationalism (in fact the nationalism of the Hearn specialists that Fukuma discusses is purely cultural). Neither Fukuma nor Starrs, however, clarifies how these two types of nationalisms appeared in turns in modern Japanese history.

In this paper, I will discuss the changes in the history of Hearn’s reception with these two types of nationalism in mind (the time frame is from the early 1900s, when Hearn was first read by Japanese intellectuals through to today). By doing this I will shed light on modern Japan’s identity crisis.

Before the 1930s

Since Hearn published his works in English, his works were initially read in Japan only by those intellectuals who could read English, and in the popular imagination remained obscure (Ikeno, 2004: 306). The language was not the only explanation for this obscurity, since Samuel Smiles’ (1812-1904) *Self Help* (1859) was quickly (almost immediately after the Meiji Restoration) translated into Japanese in 1871 and “became a bible for young Japanese men eager to emulate Western ways” (Anon., 1995: 1042). In the Meiji era, Hearn was merely regarded as an “eccentric” (*kawarimono*) *oyatoi* foreigner, and was even regarded as an obstacle to modernization (Oguma, 1998: 396, Hirakawa, 1984: 213-18). As Ôta (1994: 185-86) notes, Hearn’s (arguably) backward-looking stance was the reason he was ignored by ambitious young men in Meiji. He simply did not fit in with the contemporary *Zeitgeist*.

Nevertheless there were some passionate admirers such as Okakura Tenshin or Kakuzô (1862-1913) who did not approve of the direction Meiji Japan had been taking. Okakura wrote four books in English including the noted *The Book of Tea* (1906) in order to introduce Japanese (and Eastern) culture to Western readers. His works are characterized by his belief in the spiritual superiority of the East over the West and by his doubts about what was then understood as “civilization”. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Okakura did not believe that civilization equals material progress, but instead judged a country to be civilized (or not) by the moral state of its people.

This is where Okakura is attracted to Hearn. For Okakura (1906: 725), Hearn was a man who understood “our life and ideals” better than any other foreign observer, and realized the importance of the virtues of the East. As Oketani (1987: 155) notes, Okakura finds an affinity in Hearn as a critic against the falsely civilizing Japan.

Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961) was another admirer of Hearn. In 1919, he noted:

“Perhaps no one has ever understood the essence of Japan as much as Hearn. There are hundreds of books on Japan by foreigners, but none can match the beauty, acuteness, and warmness of his works. He was an artist who understood Japan better than some Japanese” (1919/1981: 24).

Yanagi as a folklorist is known for his understanding of and love for the sentiments of ordinary Korean people then under the rule of the Japanese Empire, and claimed to want to become “the Korean Hearn” (*Chōsen ni okeru Hân*) (Makino, 2000: 653). Deploring the fact that Korean culture was underappreciated because of a lack of a gifted interpreter like Hearn to communicate its real worth, Yanagi decided to become one himself. Hearn’s love and insight were his intercultural ideals.

Hearn’s readership in Japan included political figures such as Komura Jutarō (1853-1911), a diplomat who is known for the conclusion of the Treaty of Portsmouth after the Russo-Japanese War. According to Koizumi (2005: 19), Komura read Hearn’s works on the ship to Portsmouth, thinking it necessary as a Japanese delegate to have a better understanding of Japan. Here Hearn is treated as a foreigner who knows Japan better than Japanese.

Ôkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922) was also a great admirer of Hearn. He founded the prestigious Waseda University in 1882 in Tokyo, where Hearn worked in 1904.⁶ It was Ôkuma who invited Hearn to his university. For an individual like Ôkuma who values the Eastern spiritual heritage, Hearn’s appreciation of Japan was more than welcome (Sekita, 2000a: 88-90). In 1915, when Ôkuma was Prime Minister, Hearn was officially decorated posthumously by the Japanese government for his literary achievements (Sekita, 2000b: 727).

The eminent philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) also had “not a little” (*sukunakaranu*) interest in Hearn and contributed a foreword to Tanabe’s *Koizumi Yakumo*, the first biography of Hearn published in the Japanese language (Nishida, 1914/1980: x). According to Nishida (1914/1980: xi), Hearn’s philosophy is close to what is called “animism” (*bukkatsuron*). Yet it is unique in that Hearn “saw the activity of ghosts behind every phenomenon”. Nishida (1914/1980: x) notes:

“Hearn not only felt the history of the past thousands of years in our simple feelings and emotions, but in every physical expression saw the activity of ghosts that goes back to our generations of ancestors. According to him, our personality is not an individual product, but the accumulated complex of the personalities of our ancestors”.

Here we can see the seed of Nishida’s thought in which he thought to overcome the limit of Western humanism which defines a human being as an “atomistic” (*atomisutikku*) existence by redefining it as a “creative element of history” (*rekishi no sōzōteki eremento*) (Nishida, 1936/1999: 260).

6 On this matter, see Sekita (1999).

Noguchi Yonejirō (1875-1947), a poet internationally known as Yone Noguchi, was another admirer of Hearn. When Hearn died in 1904, Noguchi (1926/1946: 3, 11) grieved about Japan's loss of "its greatest representative in the English speaking world", crying in the middle of the Russo-Japanese War that "I would not mind losing a warship or two, if only I could let Hearn live".

Though the reception of this period is not overtly political, it was nationalistic and prepared the ground for the political nationalism of the 1930s.

1930s to 1945: Hearn as "Japan's Benefactor"

In the aftermath of the victories in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, Japan garnered global attention and a measure of respect. As Peattie (1975: 18) suggests, the generations brought up in Japan after this period were less liable to fear or feel in awe of the West.

In tandem with this trend, a new nationalistic sentiment started to emerge and Hearn came to gain a wide readership in Japan (Ôta, 1994: 188-89). The publication of the first Japanese version of Hearn's complete works in 1926-28 matched the demands of the age. Here Hearn ceased to be an *unwanted* individual, and instead came to be celebrated as a national hero. In fact, from the late 1920s, the identification of Hearn as Japan's "benefactor" (*onjin*) started to be seen.

Many rejoiced publication of a Japanese version of Hearn's complete works in 1926-28.⁷ The novelist Satō Haruo (1892-1964) said that "it is a courtesy that the Japanese nation ought to pay to a gentleman (*sensei*) who was willing to become the soil of Japan" (cited in Zenimoto and Koizumi, 2003: 213). Becoming "the soil of Japan" refers to Hearn's alleged willingness to die and be buried in Japan, a significant act in a country where ancestor worship was practiced and annual visits to the family grave were viewed as an essential part of family and religious life.

Of course, even at this time, there were exceptions such as Masamune Hakuchō (1879-1962) who sarcastically dismisses Hearn's Old Japan as "the dream record of a poet" (1933: 79). The overall reception, however, was favourable. A Hearn Museum was built in Matsue – a traditional feudal town in Shimane prefecture where Hearn spent his early days in Japan – in 1933 to commemorate the author. Hearn's family donated some of his personal items to Matsue city in 1927 (Koizumi, 2000: 219). But the decision to build a museum must reflect the cultural climate of the age.

Hagiwara Sakutarō's celebration of Hearn (1886-1942) is a typical example of this period. Though a Romantic poet, Hagiwara also had an aspect of a hard-headed

7 The first translation of Hearn's works appeared in 1920-23 as *Koizumi Yakumo bunshū* (The Works of Koizumi Yakumo) in nine volumes. They included Hearn's literary works on Japan. The eighteen volume *Koizumi Yakumo zenshū* (The Complete Works of Koizumi Yakumo) published in 1926-28 included Hearn's works in pre-Japan days, his literary works on Japan, and essays.

nationalist. In 1937, he published a paper titled “Return to Japan” in order to remind his contemporaries of the values of Japanese traditions. The symbol he used as a vehicle of nationalism was, of course, Koizumi Yakumo (Hagiwara, 1937/1975: 485-89).

In his paper, Hagiwara (1937/1975: 487) mentions Hearn’s “prediction” that Japan would realize its traditional values once it had absorbed Western civilization well enough, and claims that this “prediction” had now come true. Hagiwara depicts Hearn as a pragmatic individual who promotes Japanese causes. Indeed, he notes that “just as Yakumo observed, Japan’s enthusiasm for the West was not an effort to submit to the West, but to compete with and fight it”.

Hearn was thus mobilized as a symbol to restore the traditional cultures and virtues. In the 1930s, however, the “return to Japan” movement was not just a call to nationalism. It was also a demand that Japan contribute to the world. Having witnessed the disaster of the First World War, some Japanese thought that Japan was entitled to contribute to an improvement of the world as the only non-Western Empire. Indeed, “the new culturalism of 1930s proposed that Japan was appointed to lead the world to a higher level of cultural synthesis that surpassed Western modernism itself” (Najita, 1998: 208). Here Hearn was exploited as a kind of talisman, a symbol of a higher solution to the world’s moral crisis. A newspaper article in 1930 refers to Hearn as follows:

“Now Western material civilization has reached its dusk, while dawn is about to break on the Eastern spiritual civilization. At this time, we have to listen to the voice of this graceful prophet of Eastern culture” (Anon., 1930).⁸

What characterizes the Hearn discourse of this period is the persistent claim that his love of Old Japan constituted something more than an innocent folkloristic interest. Indeed, it was often seen as an expression of political nationalism. One typical episode is introduced by Koizumi Kazuo, Hearn’s eldest son. In 1941, after Japan first attacked America, a Japanese military figure said to him that “[t]he spirit of your honored father must be really rejoicing at the success of our great attack on Pearl Harbor. Have you already paid a visit to his tomb to report this?” (Koizumi, 1950: 6).⁹

According to Ôta (1994: 192), Hearn’s works captured the heart of the Japanese of this period because they demonstrated Japan’s “cultural superiority” over the West. That is, Japan is considered to be “superior” because of its altruistic spirit, while the West represented egoism (Ôta, 1994: 190). (Needless to say, this was the basic idea of the wartime ideology.¹⁰)

Such sentiments can also be seen in a work of popular fiction on Hearn. In *Shôsetsu – Koizumi Yakumo* (Novel: Koizumi Yakumo, 1943), by Okado Buhei, Hearn

8 The page number is not shown.

9 This line is cited and translated into English in Ota (1997: 217). I have followed Ôta’s translation here.

10 See Eizawa (1995).

is depicted as a political nationalist who sings the Japanese national anthem, *Kimi ga yo* (literally, You Are the World,) and extolls the culture of loyalty and self-sacrifice – especially self-sacrifice for the Emperor (Okado, 1943/1995: 118, 143-44). Here Japan is presented as “a civilized country” which is spiritually superior to the Western “material civilization”, and Hearn clearly factors as a promoter of the wartime ideology (Okado, 1943/1995: 44, 45, 34).

This image of Hearn as a political nationalist came to be negatively viewed in the postwar era, which may explain why Okado’s novel went out of print after the war and remained so until 1995, by which time the Japanese people had become collectively less allergic to political nationalism.

After 1945: Popular Receptions

As a backlash against the wartime nationalism and postwar Japan’s conversion to a re-Westernization policy, Japanese traditions came to be treated with disrespect.¹¹ For many postwar Japanese intellectuals, it was somewhat taboo to celebrate someone who extolled Old Japan like Hearn. Nevertheless, among ordinary (non-intellectual) readers, his works remained popular (Hirakawa, 2004: 5). Hearn in fact continued to be appreciated as a “benefactor” of Japan, and little by little he started to regain his reputation in a visible fashion.

The Kumamoto Hearn Museum opened in 1961, and the Matsue Hearn Museum, which was first opened in 1933, was rebuilt in 1984. The Yaizu Hearn Museum – Yaizu was Hearn’s favorite beach town in Shizuoka prefecture – was opened in 2007 on 27 June, Hearn’s birthday. Of all the Hearn Museums, the Yaizu Hearn Museum seems to be most determined to depict the contemporary relevance of a Hearn. When asked about the theme of its exhibition, the Yaizu Hearn Museum replied as follows:

“Yakumo literature shows us the power of the nation that we inherited from our ancient ancestors and are now forgetting. We hope that the Yaizu Hearn Museum will function to serve to encourage people to look back on what we have lost or are losing, instead of only looking forward and progressing, and to cross a bridge to the future”.¹²

In 1971, the name Koizumi Yakumo re-appeared in a textbook on morality for primary school students as “a lover of Japan” (Yamamoto, 1971: 184-191). Using the persona of Hearn, the textbook urges readers to re-examine the direction of Japan:

11 According to Lummis (1981: 186), the Japanese people believe that Japan was defeated in the Second World War by “Western civilization”. That is, Japan’s defeat represents not merely a defeat in terms of technology or intelligence, but a defeat in terms of culture and ethos. Thus Japanese tradition has become discredited.

12 Yaizu Koizumi Yakumo Kinenkan (Yaizu Hearn Museum), personal communication to the author received on 28 August 2007.

“Japanese people born in this beautiful Japan! Let us love Japan. Your ancestors made a great effort to make Japan a good country. Please inherit the spirit of your ancestors and try to make Japan an even more respectable country. I [Hearn] have become a Japanese national, and so will help you” (Yamamoto, 1971: 190).

There are a large number of films and dramatizations of Hearn’s works or life. The most notable attempt is the stage play, *Nihon no omokage* (Vestiges of Japan) by the leading postwar playwright Yamada Taichi’s (1934-), which was first made into a television drama in 1984 and triggered a “Yakumo boom” in the 1980s (Sekita, 2000: 730). Yamada (2002: 387) talks about the intentions of his play in an interview as follows: “In the process of becoming a world power, Japan has ruined the sensibility that has been formed during its long history. I would like to look at and re-examine what we have lost and abandoned”. The play thus depicts Hearn as someone who opposed modernization and its spiritual poverty.

Hearn’s name also started to appear in popular fiction in the 1990s. The most notable example is Uchida Yasuo’s *Kaidan no michi* (The Road of Ghost Stories, 1991). This is a detective story in which the hero visits in the footsteps of Hearn and becomes involved with murder cases. Unlike other detective novels on Hearn which only use Hearn as a symbol of a ghostly atmosphere, this novel articulates a modern cultural criticism through Hearn. For example, the hero notes:

“Yakumo, though a foreigner, seems to have understood the proto-scenery of Japan and the subtle parts of the Japanese spiritual structure better than the Japanese. We can indeed learn from Yakumo’s works about the “heart” of the Japanese that [modern] Japanese have forgotten” (Uchida, 1991/1994: 61-62).

Atôda Kô’s *Kaidan* (Ghost Stories), serialized in various newspapers such as *Tokyo shinbun* from July 1992 to June 1993, is a love story in which the hero and heroine visit in the footsteps of Hearn and become close through their shared interest in the author. This too can be read as a cultural criticism of modern Japan, using Hearn as a tool in developing the critique. For example, there is a scene in which the hero and heroine compare the “kind” and “sincere” Japanese whom Hearn loved with the modern Japanese who have become “mean shopkeepers” (*kosukarai shônin*) (Atôda, 1992-1993/1998: 185). Hearn is used as a symbol to restore the “true” Japan – the simple and innocent pre-modern Japan which can be found in Hearn’s *Kwaidan* and the Japan which was lost in the process of modernization.

As was the case with the prewar receptions, Hearn’s name here is used to promote a restoration of traditional cultures and virtues. This time, however, his name is depoliticized. In the social climate which views political nationalism as dangerous, cultural nationalism was the only way for many postwar Japanese to celebrate Hearn and the traditions of Japan.

After 1945: The Reception among Intellectuals (Non-Researchers)

Unlike his popular reception, Hearn's reputation among intellectuals declined immediately after the war. According to Hirakawa (2004: 5), this is due to the fact that intellectuals tended to accept the opinions of their Western counterparts more readily and without question. Hearn came to be dismissed as an "irrational" figure who had blindly extolled Japan.

Nevertheless, there were some exceptions, such as Mishima Yukio (1925-1970). Mishima (1946/1977: 20) retained his respect for Hearn even immediately after the war, and noted that "Koizumi Yakumo never ceases to appeal in any age". Over two decades later, when he killed himself, some understood his dramatic death as a confirmation of Hearn's romantic world of the *samurai* (Matsumoto, 1994: 132). It is in this context that Saeki (1974: 62) called Mishima "the second Hearn".

As time went by, Hearn started to gain respect in wider intellectual circles. Tsurumi Shunsuke (1922-2015) mobilizes Hearn to re-examine postwar Japanese culture. In 1965, he discussed the irrational that Hearn praised in his ghost stories as a hope to overcome the modern Western civilization that has reached an impasse (Tsurumi, 1965/1975: 192-212). Since he realized that any defense of Hearn could be mistaken for the revival of the wartime nationalism, he clearly expressed his disgust for such nationalism, saying that "Yakumo's view of society is not the adoration of [Japanese political] nationalism, although (some) Japanese since Meiji have misinterpreted Hearn this way" (Tsurumi, 1965/1975: 200-01).

Tsurumi warned about the American consumerism that has permeated postwar Japan, saying "if they continue to consume so frivolously, human beings will use up all natural resources, and will not be able to coexist with nature". What is needed is the ability to listen to the "warnings of the little ghosts" that Hearn depicted in his Japanese ghost stories (Tsurumi, 1965/1975: 204). Inspired by Nishida's interpretation of Hearn, Tsurumi saw Japanese culture as embodying the wisdom to overcome the inhibiting limitations of Western rationality. Hearn matters to him because he understood the limits of Western rationality and the importance of a more humane "irrational". (Needless to say, Tsurumi's view of Japan is something Meiji intellectuals would have rejected.)

Yoshimoto Taka'aki (1924-2012) also notes in 1980 that "what attracted Hearn to Japan is the rich emotion in superstitious manners and customs as depicted in 'Ningyô-no Haka' [Doll's Grave, 1897]. It is the sensitivity that exists in irrational customs" (Yoshimoto, 1980: 178). Like Tsurumi, Yoshimoto saw modern rationalism as a factor that destroyed many customs and traditions, which in turn caused the spiritual chaos of today.

Umehara Takeshi (1925-) developed a similar argument. Umehara (1967/2002: 13-17) attempts to overcome the perceived limits of Western philosophy with the Japanese (or Eastern) spiritual heritage. He labels the Japanese civilization a "civilization of mercy" (*jihî no bunmei*) which is contrasted to the Western "civilization of anger" (*ikari no bunmei*) – needless to say, this idea echoes the traditional Asianist dichotomy of

the Eastern rule of right (*ôdô*) *vis-à-vis* the Western rule of might (*hadô*) (Umehara, 1966b/2002: 187). Here Hearn matters to Umehara, for Hearn understood the “true” meaning of Japanese traditions which, according to Umehara, many Japanese fail to understand (1990/1993: 305).

Like Tsurumi, Umehara (1966b/2002: 169) differentiates a “true” Japanese culture from what he sometimes calls “Tennôkyô” (Emperor Religion): the former is much more generous, peaceful, and merciful. He claims that Hearn understood the generosity of spirit that survived the Meiji vandalism. For Umehara, this generosity is symbolized in the term *kokoro* (heart), as in the title of Hearn’s book, *Kokoro*. In 1966, he said:

“Kokoro” seems to have been an untranslatable word. It is not mind or spirit or intellect. It includes consideration for others and deep prudence as well as feelings. What surprised Hearn most was the Japanese idea that everything on earth including animals and plants has a *kokoro*. (...) In the word, *kokoro*, the whole history of the spiritual life of Japanese and the whole tradition of Shintô and Buddhism are included (1966a/2002: 212).

This spiritual heritage of *kokoro* provides the key required to save the world from the “desperate crisis” it faces (1968/2002: 32). Western philosophy has “revealed its limits”, and “Tennôkyô” is no better (Umehara, 1967/2002: 17). What is needed is “to restore the spiritual beauty of the Japanese that Koizumi Yakumo extolled” (Umehara, 2004/2006: 19).

In tandem with this political trend, Hearn’s name also started to appear in more (arguably) chauvinistic political debates. For example, Saeki Shôichi (1922-2016) argued for the Prime Minister’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, using Hearn. He said “as Yakumo notes, in Japan, as is the case with the Yasukuni Shrine, those who are dead have been enshrined and worshipped as gods” (Saeki, 2000: 3). What Saeki means here is that the Japanese view of the dead is very different from that of Christianity, which denounces evil people even after their deaths. Saeki attributes Hearn’s insights into Shintô to his Greek background. Saeki claims that thanks to his Greek background, the polytheistic culture of which has a different perspective from Christianity, Hearn could understand the essence of Shintô.

While Saeki rather hesitatingly defends Yasukuni, the conservative Kobori Kei’ichirô (1933-) overtly justified Yasukuni, again using Hearn. In a pamphlet on the Yasukuni Shrine, Kobori (1999/1999: 11) cited Hearn as a strong supporter of Yasukuni.

“it is certainly to the long discipline of the past that she [Japan] owes the moral strength behind this unexpected display of aggressive power [during the war with Russia]. (...) and all its splendid courage – a courage that does not mean indifference to life, but the desire to sacrifice life at the bidding of the Imperial Master who raises the rank of the dead. From the thousands of young men now being summoned to the war, one hears no expression of hope to return to their homes with glory; – the common wish uttered is only to win remembrance at the Shôkonsha [Yasukuni] – that “Spirit Invoking

Temple”, where the souls of all who die for emperor and fatherland are believed to gather” (Hearn, 1904: 440-41).

Another notable example around this period is a 2006 paper “Koizumi Yakumo no koe o kiku” (Listen to the Voice of Koizumi Yakumo) by Sekioka Hideyuki. This paper warned about the postwar Americanization of Japan which, it claims, has brought about a moral decline. It starts with the following words: “Whenever I want to contact the long lost nobility of the Japanese soul, I never fail to reach for [the works of] Koizumi Yakumo” (Sekioka, 2006: 114). He continues:

“Recently members of the Liberal Democratic Party, which claims to be a conservative party, have made unbelievably strange suggestions [in terms of legislation], and the nation (*kokuron*) has gone astray. This is due to the fact that today’s Japanese have completely lost the ‘moral impulse’ (*rinriteki shôdô*) and ‘moral instinct’ (*rinriteki hon’no*) that Hearn picked up from the behavior of our Meiji ancestors and verbalized. Hearn’s works remind us of our loss” (Sekioka, 2006: 117).

Here again “Koizumi Yakumo” is used as an example to lead Japan in the right direction, and to restore the Japanese “nobility of soul” (Sekioka, 2006: 118). This sentiment is shared by Andô Tadao (1941-). In a 2008 symposium on inviting the Olympic Games to Tokyo, the noted architect mentioned Hearn to remind people of the traditional Japanese virtues such as love for the family, nature, and all living things. He emphasizes how crucial it is for the future Japan to restore these virtues that are now lost in order to revitalize Japan (Andô, 2008: 20).

Like the postwar popular reception of Hearn, his postwar intellectual reception has in common the attempt to tackle the moral decline of postwar Japan and to use Hearn to restore Japanese virtues. Yet quite a few postwar intellectual receptions have been overtly political responses. Here Hearn is re-politicized and in some cases strategically summoned as a symbol of political nationalism.

Hearn Studies after 1945

Like other receptions, the critical reception of Hearn among postwar Hearn researchers also desires to re-evaluate Japanese traditions through Hearn. Makino Yôko’s (1990: 387) remarks sound familiar:

“Hearn’s writings are abundant in warm feelings about Japan and insights that grasp the heart of things beneath the surface. The scenes and manners of the Meiji Japan he depicts provoke nostalgia in the spirit of readers. For here is a depiction of the good old Japan that modern Japanese are forgetting”.¹³

13 Also see Ikeda (2000: 340).

Nevertheless, as was the case with the popular receptions and some intellectual receptions in postwar Japan, postwar researchers make it clear that their remarks should be differentiated from the wartime celebration of Hearn. Unlike intellectuals such as Umehara who claimed the Eastern spiritual superiority, the postwar Hearn researchers are notable for their egalitarian intention. Not only do they reject Eurocentrism and the idea of Japanese superiority, but they also reject the very notion of cultural hierarchy.

For example, the eminent Hearn scholar Hirakawa Sukehiro once noted how wrong the idea of a linear line of progress was, saying that “[u]ntil recently, not only in Japan but also in various parts of the world, people were convinced of the truth of laws of human development” (Hirakawa, 1992: 305-06). He praises Hearn because Hearn is, he believes, a “cultural relativist” who sympathized with marginalized cultures including that of Japan.¹⁴ For Hirakawa, Japan is one of the many non-Western countries whose native culture is misrepresented by the West and needs to be re-evaluated. He thus identifies Hearn’s love for Japan as parallel to Gaugin’s love for Tahiti (that is, a “civilized” man’s love for the “primitive” society – something Meiji Japanese who strived for the Western recognition vigorously rejected).¹⁵ Instead of rejecting the Orientalist dichotomy of a “civilized” West and a “non-civilized” East, Hirakawa insists that there is nothing wrong with “non-civilized” societies, and that there are many valuable things in them.

Similar arguments are developed by other Hearn scholars. For example, Nishikawa Morio (1993: 267) says that “Hearn was very much doubtful of the European society which arrogantly assumed itself to be [the only true] ‘civilization’, and at the same time insisted on the existence of the valuable history and culture of ‘savage’ societies”. Nishi Masahiko (1993: 180) too says that “what Hearn did a century ago is a job ahead of his time – he abandoned Eurocentrism, and discovered the distinctive, ‘ethnic’ value of non-Western cultures”.

What is distinctive in the discourse of Hearn specialists is their passion for an egalitarian spirit and an eagerness to avoid sounding like political nationalists. Like the popular reception, they too depoliticized Hearn to celebrate Japanese traditions without guilt.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the critical reception of Hearn in Japan, and discussed how Hearn’s name has been mobilized in Japan to promote political and cultural nationalism. Roughly speaking, in prewar Japan, the Hearn reception, either popular or intellectual, celebrated Hearn as a political nationalist, but in postwar Japan, as a backlash against the wartime nationalism, Hearn specialists and the popular reception depoliticized Hearn as a folklorist (cultural nationalist). From around the 1990s, however, the view

14 Hirakawa is consistent in this stance. See especially Hirakawa (2004).

15 Also see Tanabe (1914: 217).

of Hearn as a political nationalist re-emerged among some intellectuals and even in the popular reception.

It is easy to find fault with virtually every exploitation of Hearn's name. As we have seen in this paper, Hearn's reputation partly rests on myths. Yet it is unwise to triumphantly demystify Hearn. For what is revealed in the Hearn reception is not just Hearn but the issue of nationalism and identity. Behind every reception, in fact, lies an earnest attempt to face the identity crisis of modern Japan. The history of the critical reception of Hearn in Japan thus provides a hidden history of culture and nationalism in modern Japan. It is perhaps high time to reinstate the question "why Hearn" in a more fundamental fashion.

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Biographical note

Rie Kido Askew (rieaskew@hotmail.co.jp) teaches Modern Japanese literature at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Oita, Japan. Her research interests include Japanese and English literature, modern thought and history. She received her PhD in literature from the Department of English, Monash University, Australia. Her previous publications include "The Politics of Nostalgia: Museum representations of Lafcadio Hearn in Japan" (*Museum and Society*, 2007) and "Can a 'Maternal' Catholicism be Christianity?: The Issue of Inculturation in Silence" (*Asia Pacific World*, 2014).