

Review / Reseña

Tinajero, Araceli. *Historia cultural de los hispanohablantes en Japón*. Bayside: Escribana Books. 2019.

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Historia cultural de los hispanohablantes en Japón (2019) offers a comprehensive view of the contemporary cultural panorama of the Hispanic and Latin American presence in Japan. Araceli Tinajero's book is the result of thorough and in-depth fieldwork research that compiles valuable materials and documentation tracing the rich and multifaceted cultural presence of Hispanic communities in Japanese cities over the past three decades. A valuable contribution to the field of Trans-Pacific studies, this work combines useful historical data, journalistic sources, interviews, thorough bibliographic research, and other elements of literary and cultural analysis. One of the most remarkable features of this volume is the ambitious scope it covers, which extends to the fields of literature, media, music, and other popular culture manifestations. As it covers a wide panorama and provides interesting information without relying heavily on conceptual or theoretical tools of interpretation, this publication can be read both by specialist and the general audience.

As Tinajero points out in the introduction, *Historia cultural* dialogues with previous books such as Cid Lucas' *Japón y la península ibérica. Cinco siglos de encuentros* (2011) and Fernando García's *Japón y Occidente* (1990). This volume, however, differs in scope from the works mentioned above, as well as from many other publications that study the numerous and complex connections between Japan and the Hispanic and Latin

American world. Chronologically, Tinajero focuses on contemporary transcultural encounters dating back, mainly, to the 1990s. In this sense, it advances and gives continuity to the efforts of previous historical research. In terms of the object of her study, *Historia cultural* moves beyond the Iberian Peninsula and seeks to include a wider spectrum encompassing both Latin America and Spain. The book follows the waves of immigrants that moved to Japan thanks to the “Ley de Extranjería y Reconocimiento de los Refugiados” that allowed second- and third- generation descendants of Japanese people living abroad to return to Japan as permanent residents (15). This event is Tinajero’s point of departure; her interest in this particular period is motivated by her own personal circumstances. After living for a brief period in Nagoya in the 80s, the author returned to Japan in 2009 to find a country that had dramatically changed. During the 90s the Hispanic population had become much more numerous and an abundance of publications, radio shows, and music in Spanish had become available. Moved by curiosity to learn about the history of these cultural and social changes, she attempted to find books and studies on the topic. To her surprise, only isolated monographic studies dealing with very specific areas were available—which are dutifully listed in the bibliography of the book. However, there was not a comprehensive historical account. *Historia cultural* is an attempt to fill that void and to trace the cultural history of the Spanish speakers who have settled and lived in Japan over the past three decades (16).

Tinajero’s investigation is an ambitious study that brings together a vast array of literary materials, records of numerous and varied cultural productions, statistical data, interviews, images, and historical observations. They are carefully organized into four areas/chapters: 1) a review of the main Hispanic intellectual figures in Japan; 2) a brief history of Hispanic media and publications; 3) an overview of the recent history of Hispano-American music, dance, and festivals; 4) and a brief account of contemporary Hispanic writers and libraries in Japan.

In Chapter 1, the author provides a panoramic study of the presence of Spanish-speaking intellectuals living in Japan who have actively bridged the two cultural spheres. Tinajero starts by defining the notion of “intellectual” that drives her research. She understands this as a flexible term that covers a wide range of practices and interests. In her view, not only academics, scholars, writers, or translators should be categorized as intellectuals. This term can also be applied to journalists, teachers, cultural activists, and other people loosely connected to the world of culture and education. Although a more rigorous definition of this concept—a matter of multiple

discussions and critiques that has been theorized by Gramsci, Sartre, Bourdieu, and Zaid, to name only a few points of reference—might have been helpful, the definition offered in this chapter is works for the purposes of this book. The author offers a careful enumeration of the most prominent writers, translators, and cultural promoters of Hispanic culture in Japan. The efforts of Montserrat Watkins are highlighted: she is recognized both as one of the most prominent translators of Japanese literature into Spanish and as a promoter of the works of Hispanic authors in Japan. Other protagonists of these literary dialogues are also mentioned, and their contributions are carefully enumerated and commented upon. This is the case of Elena Gallego Andrada's translations and anthologies of Japanese literature in Spanish, as well as Gregory Zambrano's translations of Spanish-speaking writers in Japan. The journalistic publications of the Mexican Silvia Lidia González and the Peruvian Juan Alberto Matsumoto are also included in her review. Lastly, Tinajero mentions the contributions of other cultural activists who have worked on television shows, documentaries, and journalistic writings dealing with numerous and broad aspects of Hispano-Japanese intercultural dialogues.

Chapter 2 deals with media publications such as journals, cultural magazines, radio shows, and the flourishing of Hispanic cultural institutions. This section provides a historical account of the mediatic presence of Spanish speakers in Japan. Tinajero's main contribution is the detailed account of the numerous associations, publications, venues, and activities that transformed the panorama of the Hispanic communities living in the main cities of the archipelago. Though mainly descriptive, this section traces the evolving sense of community that was slowly building amongst the different groups of Spanish speakers who migrated during the past few decades. The author recounts the story of the principal institutions and the protagonists of these social changes, as well as the events that marked these historical transformations. Tinajero pays attention both to widely distributed publications—such as *International Press*—and to smaller magazines that are of interest of local communities, such as *Kiodai Magazine*, *Revista Wakaranai*, *Kantō*, among many others. The thorough review of amateur radio stations in Spanish and the slow conquest of broadcasting spaces in major venues follows a similar historical approach. Tinajero highlights two crucial elements that contributed to the creation of these media outlets. The first one was the need to link communities of Spanish speakers living in Japan and to open channels of communication with their home communities abroad. Secondly, after the earthquakes of 1995, there was a critical need to create effective ways to transmit urgent information

to the thousands of Spanish-speaking migrants who were unable to understand the information conveyed to the general population.

In Chapter 3 the reader will find a detailed account of the different practices of cultural syncretism that blend Hispanic and Japanese cultural practices. It offers a general overview of how some of the most iconic Spanish and Latin American musical rhythms and dances have been received and creatively transformed in Japan. It briefly traces the travels of Flamenco, Salsa, Tango, and Son Cubano from the places where they originate to their acclimatization in Japan. The purpose of Tinajero's work is to give recognition and visibility to the actors and spaces that during the past decades have kept these cultural dialogues alive. She provides a list and a description of the most prominent music centers and dance schools created and sponsored by locals and Hispanics. She observes how these dialogues are able to produce fusions of great complexity and interest, such as the "flamenco zen" *Hana*, an adaptation of a VII Japanese legend to the beats and music of flamenco, or the Japanese-inspired tango lyrics "A lo Megata" written by Luis Alposta. The last subsection of this chapter details the various ways in which Hispanic communities have claimed spaces of celebration for their own festivities and sites of visibility and recognition.

The final chapter goes back to the presence of literature, writers, and books in Spanish in Japan through an analysis of recent publications by two Hispanic authors who thematized their experience of living in Japan. Following Alberto Olmos, Tinajero seeks to question the representation of Japan from the perspective of a migrant who narrates from his direct experience: "¿Cómo se narra desde el Japón? ¿Cómo se interpreta Japón desde dentro? ¿difiere mucho la literatura escrita por escritores que han vivido en Japón y aquellos que lo conocen solo a través de libros?" (230). Through the analysis of José Pazó's novel *Banteki* (2015) and Alberto Olmos' *Trenes hacia Tokio* (2006), Tinajero underscores five defining topics of Spanish-speaking writers living in Japan: the city, isolation, dramas of migration, the difficulties in finding a job, and also the world of technology (232). More than an in-depth critical analysis, her reading strives to pinpoint the defining lines of literary works written in-between places, which invites future researchers to carry out more comprehensive interpretations. Zooming out from the exercise of textual analysis, a closing section to the chapter offers a review of the libraries and institutions that provide reading materials in Spanish to these communities. Municipal organizations, private initiatives, and places such as the Instituto Cervantes are included, as well as brief reports on the most commonly borrowed items of their collections. The inclusion of this information is intended to

give a general idea of the reading habits of Spanish-speaking people living in Japan, as well as of their interest in the various manifestations of Hispanic culture.

In sum, *Historia cultural* is an ambitious and valuable publication that complements and extends the contributions of Araceli Tinajero to the field of Trans-Pacific studies. Her previous book, *Orientalismo en el modernismo hispanoamericano* (2003), was pioneering in the study of Hispanic orientalism in the literatures of Latin America and opened interesting lines of investigation and inquiry. In 2014, Tinajero edited the volume *Orientalisms of the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian World*, which geographically and historically expanded her contributions on orientalist literary representations. *Historia cultural* differs in methods and scope from her previous publications, but it shares with them the innovative drive to create new and fruitful lines of inquiry and research. It must be mentioned that while it does not engage in rich conceptual or theoretical discussions, it does provide significant, valuable materials that will be of great help to scholars in Latin/Hispanic-Asian cultural dialogues, particularly in the area of Japan.