

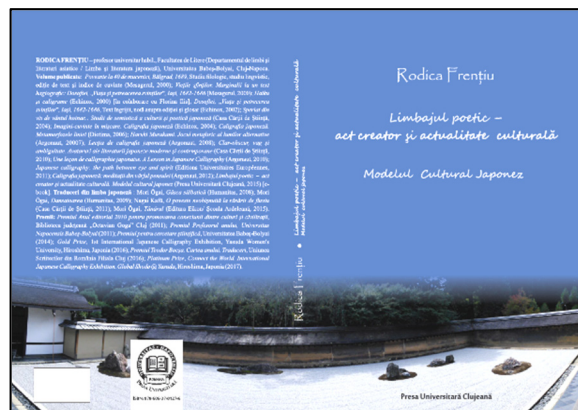
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RODICA FRENȚIU. *Limbajul poetic – act creator și actualitate culturală: modelul cultural japonez [Poetic language – Creative Act and Cultural Actuality: the Japanese Cultural Model]*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană Publishing House, 2017, 250 p.

Poetic Language – Creative Act and Cultural Actuality: the Japanese Cultural Model is a complex work that can be enjoyed by both researchers of Japanese language and culture, as well as readers passionate about Japan. The complexity of the issues addressed and the manner in which these matters have been analysed mark the volume as an important research point for both Japanese language students and researchers from numerous fields.

Rodica Frențiu is prof. univ. dr. habil. at the Faculty of Letters, Japanese Literature and Language Department, Babeș-Bolyai University, director of the Asian Languages and Literature Department, while also being a prestigious researcher in the field of Japanese poetics, spirituality and translation, as well as a calligrapher, master of Japanese calligraphy. Combining the experience and the knowledge gathered throughout her career, Rodica Frențiu manages to offer readers and researchers altogether a clear image of Japan, outlined through a critical approach.

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In *Argument*, the author highlights the role of culture and human activity and underlines the importance of cultural semiotics in understanding and analysing diverse cultural aspects. By

doing so, the author pinpoints her research within the cultural semiotics framework outlined by Tartu School and further developed by the Japanese linguist Yoshihiko Ikegami. The volume, therefore, starts from the premise that *poetic language is the most defining aspect of human semiosis* (p. 14).

The volume consists of three chapters: *Linguistics. Poetics. Cultural semiotics: the “Actuality” of Culture in the Japanese Language/Literature, Poetics and Cultural Semiotics in Exploiting Japanese Advertising Discourse: from Nihonjinron to Kawaiiron, and Cultural Semiotics and the Art of Calligraphy: Japanese Calligraphy – Imago Mundi and Metaphysical Knowledge*. The first two chapters are structured on subchapters, thus facilitating the readers’ understanding of the intricate matters showcased within the volume.

One of the merits of the book is the homogenous manner through which various aspects of Japan are analysed. The author addresses issues of culture, language and literature altogether, the very structure of the volume thus becoming an example of the way in which cultural semiotics is a reference point for this volume. As cultural semiotics promotes unity in the way in which a semiotic system of culture is analysed, rather than indicating the way in which the respective semiotic system is different from other semiotic systems, cultural semiotics, therefore, highlights the common ground between two or more semiotic systems. Rodica Frențiu manages to implement this principle not only on a micro level, through the critical lenses applied to each analysed issue, but also on a macro level, as the volume's structure itself highlights the fact that numerous aspects of Japanese language and culture are interpreted by pinpointing the similarities between them.

The first chapter, *Linguistics. Poetics. Cultural Semiotics: the "Actuality" of Culture in the Japanese Language/ Literature*, is a holistic analysis of Japanese language. The author initially displays the Japanese cultural model, which contains all the other matters debated in the present edition. Japanese literary history is presented as an applied cultural memory, setting the ground for later examining aspects of poetics. Following this, a subchapter dedicated to matters of linguistic analysis investigates interjections, onomatopoeia and Japanese language idioms from the perspective of cultural semiotics.

The examples that illustrate the theoretical framework are oftentimes

highlighted by depicting them in a cultural or literary context. To exemplify this, we would like to draw attention to the explanation of the idiomatic expression *doro o kaburu* that is provided through a *koan* from the book *The Golden Pavilion*, written by Yukio Mishima. Further deepening the link between linguistics and literature, the fourth subchapter contains an analysis of well-known Japanese literary texts, such as *The Tale of Genji*, *haiku* poems, or the Japanese authors' Kawabata and Murakami search for the "perfect word" or the "perfect phrase".

Within this chapter, the author highlights issues related to translating from the Japanese language. Because this subject is addressed after analysing literary works, the reader is gradually introduced to the matter, facilitating their understanding process. In the sixth subchapter, the author approaches visual poetry, setting the ground for the last chapter, where Japanese calligraphy is analysed. The last part of the chapter deals with *chūshingura*, a concept that might be unfamiliar to the readers, but the author manages to explain the basics of it, as well as go in-depth with the way in which this concept is revamped in Gheorghe Băgulescu's *Suflet japonez*.

The second chapter, *Poetics and Cultural Semiotics in Exploiting Japanese Advertising Discourse: from Nihonjinron to Kawaiiron*, focuses on the advertising discourse, particularly on the differences between *Nihonjinron* – a theoretical perspective that highlights the uniqueness of Japanese culture –, and *Kawaiiron* – an advertising discourse that focuses on everything that is cute, which is why this direction is often accused of being su-

perfidial. The author draws attention to the fact that *advertising discourse sets certain rules of cultural communication*, showing the way in which Japanese culture is reflected in advertising as well as the manner in which advertising itself can become a cultural trendsetter. This idea is supported by analysing articles from the *Wa Raku* (和楽) magazine in order to show the way in which *Nihon-jinron* and *Kawaiiron* harmoniously coexist, rather than exclude the existence of the other. This approach corresponds to the cultural semiotics framework, highlighting the common ground between two semiotic systems and serves as an indirect explanation of the way in which Japanese culture is a balanced combination of tradition and modernity, of past and present.

The last chapter of the volume, *Cultural Semiotics and the Art of Calligraphy: Japanese Calligraphy – Imago Mundi and Metaphysical Knowledge*, deals with the topic of Japanese calligraphy – *shodō* (書道). In order to circumscribe the concept of *shodō* within the Japanese cultural framework, Rodica Frențiu defines Japanese calligraphy and the concept of image, ultimately presenting calligraphy as a linguistic image (p. 218). The author identifies two registers of the image within *shodō*, a *visual image*, closely linked to intuition, and a *verbal image*, linked to an abstract analysis function.

The theoretical description is illustrated through calligrams created by the author herself, which grants the volume an element of novelty and uniqueness. An example which proves the craftsmanship of the author, not only in the field of linguistics, but also in the

artistic field, is the heart sutra fragment over which the character *mu* (無), which means "nothing", "void", has been written (p. 226). The theme of the void is a recurring motif within the volume, as the author views the issue from several perspectives. In the first chapter, *haiku* is presented as an "empty" poem, which is why this type of poem accepts and validates any given interpretation.

The interdisciplinarity and the interdependence of the chapters makes the volume a captivating lecture, in which the disputed elements are presented through their relationship with other cultural and linguistic aspects. For this reason, mentions of Japanese calligraphy can be noticed throughout the book, starting with the first chapter, when *haiku* is presented as a visual expression similar to the pictograms and ideograms through which it is written, namely a *painting made of words* (p. 64).

Throughout the volume, the author emphasises and analyses ideas and concepts that belong to cultural semiotics, always relating these concepts to the theme currently debated in the chapter. This technique is an indirect reflection of the cultural semiotics' idea of unity, supported by examples related to Japanese culture, literature or language. The correlation of the points discussed to the Zen philosophy and religion, one of the greatest influences on Japanese art, anchors the volume within Japanese spirituality, showcasing the deep layers of the Japanese way of thinking.

Through the previously mentioned particularities, the book *Poetic Language – Creative Act and Cultural Actuality: the Japanese Cultural Model*

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becomes a delightful and practical lecture for a large audience, from Japanese studies specialists to various categories of readers who are passionate about the Japanese language or culture. Ultimately

using the author's own calligraphic works as an example for the theoretical framework accentuates the uniqueness of the volume and skilfully illustrates Rodica Frențiu's ideas and expertise.

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