Reviews

Edward King


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The 2008 centenary of Japanese immigration into Brazil provoked a reflection on Japanese cultural contributions within the nation. Rather than a commemoration of history, however, the celebrations looked as much to the future as to the past. Edward King proposes that Brazilian cultural production for the centenary reflects a contemporary tension between Brazilian Japanese culture and globalized Japanese culture, the former founded on assimilation—and yet perpetual difference—in a peripheral country, and the latter on a digital, technological mobility, wherein Japanese culture has been privileged as uniquely adaptive to virtual networks. In other words, Japanese culture in Brazil is seen as both particular and global, past and future, all of which complicates contemporary Orientalism. In the case of Brazil, the promise of futurity in globalized Japanese culture seems to replace the shameful history of slavery while offering a new narrative that constructs national history, partially from Orientalist tropes of connections with nature and mysteriousness. As King points out, this older Orientalist temporality—which he exposes in each of the texts and documents he studies—collides with the vision of an Oriental(ist) technological future present in twenty-first-century cultural production, in Brazil as well as in the United States and elsewhere. It is this tension that provokes King’s study of virtual Orientalism, which is the persistent incorporation of Orientalism into digital culture even as said culture claims its dissolution. This issue pertains particularly to Brazil, where its own status as former colony and current periphery additionally alters traditional Orientalism for nationalistic purposes.

The first two chapters examine comic books commercially produced during the centenary. Chapter One summarizes two manga-style comics, *O vento do Oriente* and *O catador de batatas e o filho da costureira*, both published in 2008. Both are fairly didactic, according to King, proposing to undo Orientalist stereotypes and yet using other Orientalist tropes to do so. In particular, both travel into the past to uncover an element of Japanese tradition within modern Brazil, leading to unsurprisingly idealistic nationalist discourses on race. This is particularly apparent in the second comic, in which an unappreciated *mestiço* and a Japanese immigrant flee the country for the city and the promise of a new future. Both comics take up the conflict between the portrayal of the Japanese as both model citizens and perpetual immigrants, but neither resolves it. Instead, they rely on the sense of movement built into the manga style as well as references to other media (films, art, videogames) to suggest a transnational mobility that plays into Brazil’s desires for modernity. Chapter Two reinforces this argument with a study of *Turma da Mônica Jovem*, in which the creators and artists propose to the reader that he or she plays a collaborative role in the comic, through side comments, notes, and