

КУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЯ И ИСКУССТВОВЕДЕНИЕ



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**A.B. MITFORD AS A CULTURAL DIPLOMAT AND THE IMAGE
OF JAPAN IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

В этой статье автор изучает сочинения британского дипломата викторианской эпохи Элджернона Бертрама Митфорда (1837-1916) и его книгу «Сказки старой Японии» (1871) сквозь призму культурной дипломатии. Размышляя о его достижениях с использованием современного понятия культурной дипломатии как факта мягкой силы, я даю обзор биографии Митфорда, исторического контекста публикации его книги, ее отличительных черт в корпусе XIX века в Японии. Связанные с ним произведения (включая статьи о путешествиях, журнальные и газетные статьи и псевдоантропологические исследования) и его место в процессе формирования образа Японии в Викторианской Англии. В последней части статьи рассматривается идея ориентализма, направленная против экзотики и «дипломатической подделки», которая была сформулирована Умберто Эко. Как сложное понятие, культурная дипломатия может рассматриваться по-разному самим культурным послом и учеными, анализируя его вклад в ретроспективе. Следует отметить, что ни одна статья не посвящена успеху Митфорда в качестве культурного посла, выступающего от имени английской культуры в Японии. Однако, к тому же, ни одно исследование образа Японии в сознании викторианцев не может упустить из виду его значение. Это может быть важным уроком для потомков, чтобы не переоценивать границы своего влияния и всегда держать окно возможностей открытым для того, что будет дальше, быть осторожным со своими словами, так как в начале было Слово. С таким же успехом слово может остаться в истории человечества и использоваться против убеждений автора.

Ключевые слова: культурная дипломатия, мягкая сила, ориентализм, экзотика, Восстановление Мэйдзи, А. Б. Митфорд.

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In this article, I study the writings of a Victorian time British diplomat Algernon Bertram Mitford (1837-1916) and his book Tales of Old Japan (1871) through the lens of cultural diplomacy. Contemplating his accomplishments with the use of a modern notion of cultural diplomacy as a facet of soft power, I give the overview of Mitford's biography, historical context for the publication of his book, its distinctive features within the corpus of the XIX century Japan-related writings (including travelogues, journal and newspaper articles, and pseudo-anthropological researches) and its place in the process of formation of the image of Japan in Victorian England. In the last part of the article, I discuss the idea of orientalism vs. exoticism and 'diplomatic forgery' as formulated by U. Eco and their applicability to Mitford's writing. As a complex notion, cultural diplomacy may be seen in different ways by the cultural ambassador himself, and the scholars, analysing his contribution in retrospective. Not a single article re-searches the success of Mitford as cultural ambassador acting on behalf of English culture in Japan. However, by the same token, not a single research on the image of Japan in the Victorian mind can overlook his significance. It might be an important lesson for the descendants not to overestimate the borders of one's influence and always to keep the window of possibilities open for what's coming next,

being careful about one's own words, for as in the beginning was a Word, one's word might as well stay in the history of humankind and be used against author's convictions.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy; soft power; orientalism; exoticism; Meiji Restoration; A.B. Mitford

In modern-day life the notion of the state became fluid, it tends to merge with other legal entities, such as international organizations and transnational corporations, and, by the same token, national governments are apt to adopt the same patterns of brand promotion and public relationships, as transnational corporations [15]. As the public relations became crucial for the world politics, economy, trade and peace, an image – commonly acknowledged impression of the notion, whether it is an individual (personal brand), corporate (market brand), the whole country (national brand) or prospectively of the entire humankind – evolved to be an important instrument of promotion, manipulation and control on all levels of social interactions.

However, no matter how important an image appears to us, we are still far from understanding how to address the process of its formation in a conscious and controlled manner.

In the modern post-industrial world with an unheard-of level of development of mass and social media, whose growth was fostered by the worldwide spread of the Internet, national borders in the information field merged and blurred, and, as never before, we have a channel for cultural exchange in real-time. Internet became not only the engine behind the post-industrial society, enabling the internationalisation of the business, fluid capital flow, as well as the promotion of the services over products. Sometimes it is used even as a metaphor for modern political processes [26].

Notwithstanding, before the beginning of the era of a booming global informational network, any mutual cultural influences could be carried out through different media such as face-to-face contacts on a governmental and personal level and exchange of cultural products i.e. art, literature and music. At the time it was available for a limited circle of spectators due to a language barrier as the most foundational threshold between the nations. International contacts and exchanges were advocated through the agency of world powers – political or economic – and usually carried out by carefully selected people – cultural ambassadors – with access to a number of important infrastructures and cultural competences.

Even though the term ‘cultural diplomacy’ and even ‘soft power’ are widely used in modern discourse, it is hard to give a clear definition for both. ‘Soft power’ as a concept was formulated by Joseph Nye [18] in late 1980. In his book *Soft Power* (2004) he explains how his understanding of the term developed since then and outlines the most colloquial understanding of the soft power as an ‘ability to shape the preferences of the others’ [18, p. 7]. As Nye explains, an established channel of communication, i.e. the mean to transmit information between cultures is a staple of influence by soft power, and its sources are reputation and attractiveness. These virtues are difficult to obtain, their wielding is beyond governmental control and depends on the acceptance of the receiving audience [18, p. 99]. However, there are certain tools, programmes and measures for the officials to deploy to increase their influence via the channels of soft power, and cultural diplomacy is one of them. Cynthia Schneider in her article with a speaking title *Cultural Diplomacy: Hard to Define, But You'd Know It If You Saw It* [25] uses the definition, given by Milton Cummings: *The concept of “cultural diplomacy,” refers to the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding* [9].

According to the *Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (2013), the concept of cultural diplomacy is based on two premises:

- Good relations can be yielded only on the fertile ground of mutual understanding and respect, growing out of the cultural exchange, and cultural diplomacy can facilitate this exchange;
- The most significant entry points for it are art, language and education [6].

As all the aforementioned assumes, the idea of soft power and cultural diplomacy as its part is based on the reciprocity as a foundation of exchange and mutual enrichment of ideas. However, it is difficult to distinguish whether diplomacy is aiming at the equal and balanced contribution of both sides in the process of international relations with the diplomatic relations as a primary communicative model or its main objective is an infliction of the will of one party on the partner of the cultural exchange, on the pretext of economic, military or moral supremacy. As Honda M. writes in the article *The evolution of Japanese Diplomacy* (1912),

diplomacy is the practice of maintaining and extending national power in international dealings; national power including honor, prestige and moral influence as well as material interests.

The idea of the hegemony of one country over the other through the channels of cultural exchange, expressed by the words of an editor of *Oriental Review*, clearly shows that it probably takes a culture placed within a global cultural centre to believe in mutual understanding, however, the periphery may share quite different views on the nature of such cultural exchange [11].

Yuzo Ota defines cultural diplomacy in retrospective application to the XIX century Japan:

Cultural diplomacy may be described as any official and unofficial undertaking to promote a national culture among foreigners, when performed by those who identify themselves as part of the national culture at hand (Ota, 2010)

As we can see, the keywords he is using imply the opposition between national and foreign as a rendering of the idea of Self and Other, and the term 'promotion' assume unilateral advocacy of the own culture among others.

The history of Western diplomacy shows that European countries were addressing the establishment of international relations with non-West differently. Westphalian system of international relationships has shifted the focus of the diplomatic interconnection to the notion of the sovereign state rather than royal domain, however, it was not until 1815, Vienna Congress, when the idea of diplomacy has received the status of a model of the international communicational channel and was monopolised by the government as opposed to the commercial representation in the previous eras. It was not before the Western countries projected themselves as great powers, that diplomacy started to adopt modern features. As Ernest Mason Satow, Mitford's close friend and fellow British diplomat of the same legation formulated the definition in his textbook-like writing *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, 'Diplomacy is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states' – all the keywords in the passage could hardly be applied in the definition of diplomacy before the Vienna Congress. And even in the XIX century, the term diplomacy *per se* was reserved for relations based on equality of the parties. If the country was interdependent on the partner of diplomatic relations, the governance was realised by the different body rather than an embassy [3].

It is hard to say, whether the policy of soft power was used by the British ambassadors in *bakumatsu*¹ and *Meiji*² Japan with full awareness the same way it functions nowadays, however, the features of this policy can be traced in the actions of the British legation under command of Sir Harry Smith Parkes, who encouraged all members of his mission to research Japanese culture [7]. As Hugh Cortazzi (himself an ambassador with years of diplomatic career) quotes after Beasley, 'In so far Parkes went beyond his diplomatic brief, defined in terms of defending British interests, it was more in the service of "enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*)'. Cortazzi also mentions, that «Parkes defined his own objective in 1867 as being: '... to divert their [*i.e. Japanese*] attention from military glitter to industrial enterprise».

¹ Period of social instability towards the end of the Edo period or Tokugawa Shogunate after the arrival of Commodore Perry and unequal treaties inflicted by Great Powers on Japan around 1854-1868.

² Meiji Period – 1868-1912.

No wonder, Sir Parkes' embassy employed the person to become a connoisseur of foreign cultures, prominent scholar and prolific writer, influential figure in Europe, British seasoned gentleman Algernon Freeman-Mitford.

Maybe not the term itself, but the idea of cultural diplomacy is not new, neither is modern, however, this duty was rarely formulated explicitly as a conscious act of promoting cultural values of one country on the ground of a political counterpart, as opposed to the traditional diplomacy aiming at achieving political or economic benefits. In this article, I would like to use the personality of Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford (1837-1916), First Baron Redesdale, Second Secretary of British Legation in Japan (1866-1870) as a case study, and his influence on the image of Japan in Victorian British society.

The paradigmatic nature over his figure comes out of the fact that Mitford, being a diplomat deemed to represent British interests in Japan after his return almost acted on behalf of Japan in England. His endeavour is running counter the definition of cultural diplomacy, as used by Yuzo Ota in application to Nitobe Inazō as another example of cultural diplomat, because Mitford is not identifying himself as a part of Japanese culture [20]. Nevertheless, he was shrouded with a fleur of supreme cultural competence, and his agency had a decisive influence on the ways by which the Victorian society grasped the image of Feudal Japan, as Mitford has portrayed it. His book *Tales of Old Japan* (1871) was one of the publications on Japanese customs within the first decades since the Japanese seclusion was interrupted by the World Powers.

It seems that currently Mitford's name is associated merely with the names of Mitford sisters – a bright constellation of powerful and outstanding personas on the international stage of the XX century, especially in the light of the biography of the last living Mitford being published within the last half-decade. However, the family of Mitford was well-established and could boast close relations to European politics years before the sisters grasped the attention of readership. Neither were they the only figures with an artistic endeavour in their family.

Grandfather of Mitford sisters, better known as Bertie, Algernon Bertram Mitford was born in London in 1837. His family has left for the continent three years later and settled down at Frankfurt am Main. Between 1842 and 1846 they spent most of the time in France. In 1846 Mitford has entered the Eton College, in 1855 – Christ Church, Oxford. After he had left the university in 1858 he was appointed to the Foreign Office, and in 1863 was sent to the St. Petersburg as the second secretary of embassy. St. Petersburg will appear again later in his career setting two most important milestones in his life – the first diplomatic position and the last proposition in the field of international relationships, which Mitford refused after a short contemplation, which essentially ended his career in a Foreign Office.

After he left the Russian Empire and got envoy to the Constantinople, in 1865 volunteered to go to China and finally by 1866 was transferred to Japan [12].

As Mitford himself describes the circumstances of his appointment in the memoirs,

I too, as a child, had dreams which carried me far away. A kind aunt had given me a set of so-called rice-paper pictures of lovely imperial ladies with architectural structures of hair on their heads, gentlemen clad in purple silk robes with ephods embroidered with five-clawed golden dragons, drawings of vividly-coloured flowers and fruit, of horror-striking tortures, unheard of out of Tartarus, being inflicted upon bleeding criminals. But beyond all was the story of Aladdin falling in love with the Princess Badroulbador on her way to the bath at Peking. My young brain was aflame with the longing to go to China and see all these things. (Mitford, 1915, p. 328)

By the time A.B. Mitford arrived in Edo, there was no First secretary in the legation, so all the burden of official service has fallen on the shoulders of a young diplomat. The period of his duty coincided with the period of great social and political turmoil, his life was constantly threatened (as he observes in his *Memories*, he never worked without a revolver on his desk [22]), but the diplomat kept on working on the enhancing of the British influence in the country. Inevitable expenses to maintain the lofty lifestyle of a nobleman in Japan to uphold the status of the legation representative in Japan and stressful environment drained Mitford's health and wealth, so by

1870 he returned to Europe, where he spent some time preparing his famous work *Tales of Old Japan* for publication.

Since his return to Europe Mitford along with other members of the Parkes' embassy was one of the most influential figures in Japan related enterprises. In 1870 his mediation helped the Japanese government of Itō Hirobumi to get the lease for the first Japanese railway construction (Morton, 2017; Redesdale, 1913). As Mitford mentioned this occasion, the bankers 'hunted [his] lodgings' as 'there did not happen to be anyone else in London at the time who had any special knowledge of then very new Japan' (Redesdale, 1913).

Mitford returned to Japan for two months in 1873, which was unexpected, regarding his aversion towards the sea trips. One of the purposes was to negotiate with Japanese government about the submarine telegraph line (failure of the mission is pointed out as one of the possible explanations why Mitford omits the objective of his voyage from his Memories). The last Mitford's visit to Japan happened in 1906 when he was invited to join Prince Arthur of Connaught on the visit to Japan to confer the Order of the Garter to the Japanese Emperor [24] (a powerful act of both political and public diplomacy, symbolising the acceptance of Japan into a circle of World Powers after the victory in Russo-Japanese war).

Mitford was undoubtedly the gentleman of highest descent and position and inborn diplomat, set aside his professional occupation. And he surely regarded himself as an embodiment of British diplomacy when on service overseas. Evidence of investing in successfully communicating a cultural and political message to the Japanese counterpart is the notice on the cost of living, as mentioned by Robert Morton, professor of Chuo University, whose recent (2017) research on Mitford's years in Japan is based on a study of the letters from Mitford to his father. Mitford complained, that the cost of learning the native language was not covered by the Foreign Office. Moreover, he said he had earned 400 pounds a year, but spent 800 pounds. "When asked whether he thought he had been extravagant, he said that such expenditure was 'necessary if you wish to keep up your position at all towards the natives'" (Morton, 2017, p. 154).

Obviously, Mitford was projecting himself as a person acting on behalf of the British throne and was maintaining a superior image of his home country regardless of personal costs. To add another trait to his portrait, when it came to his relationships, he remained true to his ethnocentric status of a British gentleman and did not dare to reveal, let alone legalise, his bond with Japanese woman, which would have been contemplated as social suicide for the person of Mitford's rank (unlike Lafcadio Hearn, who married a Japanese and accepted Japanese name, becoming a subject of the Emperor).

What is intriguing, especially regarding the modern understanding of the term 'cultural diplomacy', is the fact that his influence was not limited to representing the British Empire in Japan. He would also promote Japan in England after his return, and in a consistent way, even at his own expenditure.

There is no evidence that Mitford or any other member of British Legation was paid by the Japanese government for contribution into Japanese plausible image. Apparently, the only money Mitford earned for the *Tales of Old Japan* was the remuneration from the publisher Alexander Macmillan, which hardly covered the cost of the illustrations. We may conclude that the effort Mitford made to create the image of Japan, conveyed through his publications, was dictated by other reasons and was not advocated by the Japanese government. We can question the motivation of Lafcadio Hearn, being employed as a foreign English language teacher by Japanese officials, or sentiments of B.H. Chamberlain, enjoying a salary of Tokyo University foreign professor (which tended to be higher for Westerners than for native scholars). Yet, when we apply the term 'cultural diplomacy' to Mitford, we use the word diplomacy in its first meaning, omitting inverted commas, as Baron Redesdale was true diplomat in any possible meaning, true to his country, and, however, the major contributor to favourable (yet, somehow caricatured) impression of the 'Land of Gods' as he called Japan in his memories.

Having said aforementioned, it is noticeable that an issue of *The Times* on 12 July was printed with a letter of A.B. Mitford. Within the section on the Sino-Japanese war, he tries to focus public attention to the peril of Japanese and Chinese hegemony in Asia. The argument is reinforced by the reminiscence of *sonno-joi* movement¹ and is based on the assumption that Japan might gain command of modern technologies and acquire European fashion and look, but under a thin surface, there still is a violent spirit of *Yamato damashii*², feudal in its core. The bottom line of Mitford's message is to side with Russia rather than with Japan in a forthcoming conflict around Manchuria.

The study of the obituaries on Mitford's death by Onishi Toshio (Onishi, 1987) proves, that regardless of the numerous books of his authorship, Mitford remained in the memory of the descendants as an author of *Tales of Old Japan* (1871) and "the benefactor, who introduced Japan"³ to the Western readership. The same paper mentions *Tales* being credited as 'classic' and 'benchmark'.

The book turned out to be a bestseller, and there hardly was any bookshelf in Britain which could get away without it. In his desire to see the book out of print, Mitford has sold all the rights on pitifully unfavourable conditions, having received only 240 pounds of remuneration (which probably hardly covered the expenses of creating the illustrations). However, the success of the first edition made him regret the 'mistake which [he] made'⁴.

The fact that lost profit made him regret throughout his whole life may be the evidence, that after all Mitford was aiming at finding a place in the narrow niche in the publishing market by that time. Morton supports this viewpoint:

Mitford could not see his future clearly, but, in combination with his fluent Japanese and Chinese, he was thinking this book could be the key to maximising the profit from his stay in the Far East. Being so calculating was frowned on by the upper classes in Britain, and even more so in Japan. But Mitford was skilled at giving the impression that he was above the rat race, appearing calm and unbothered about his position, while underneath carefully mapping out how he could become a great man – the worthy scion of the Mitford dynasty his older brothers could never be. (Morton, 2017, p. 137)

Mitford had two elder brothers and felt like he had to fight for his place in life without much hope to inherit a fortune, that was probably the reason for him to push himself harder and pursue a diplomatic career, as well as acknowledgement as a writer.

Yokoyama Toshio (1987) in his research on the image of Japan in the Victorian mind observes an interesting dynamic in Japanese-related publications in London newspapers. The 1850s were distinguished by analytic articles on miscellaneous topics, concerning political structure, religion and people. By 1860s public taste changed and readers were craving for detailed accounts on goods manufacture and scenery depictions. In general, writers (not only the journalists but also monography authors) tended to depict Japan in joyful colours. Attack of *rōnin*⁵ on British Legation in 1861 and further publications of Sir Rutherford Alcock and Lawrence Oliphant (members of the First British legation in Japan) were calling for realism in depictions of Japan but obviously failed to break the tradition of creating 'rosy image' of the Land of the Rising Sun. Answering severe criticism of Sir Alcock, acknowledged expert on Japan and the former head of the British Legation, the number of publications depicting superficial touristic trips on the archipelago declined. To legitimize the right to pass on judgement on Japanese ethnopsychology authors started

¹ 'Expel the barbarians', a social movement of *bakumatsu* and early Meiji period, accompanied with un-motivated homicide of foreigners in Japan

² Spirit of Japan

³ *Tokyonichi Nichi Shinbun* cited by Oonishi, 1987.

⁴ Redesdale, 1915.

⁵ Samurai without a lord or a master

to mention the length of their residence in Japan. This trend manifested itself in both book titles and journal reviews.

Social disruption in Japan in the 1860s has arisen the discussion in the British press, whether the turmoil was caused by Westerners influence or not. As a result, the rhetoric became more dramatic. In general, two approaches, adopted by intellectuals of the time, were swinging between alienation (Japan as 'singular', 'unique', unintelligible country) and universalism (all people share common values with a certain amount of cultural impact, still universal in its core).

The reception of Mitford's writings and their effect on the publishing trend and readership taste is then seen as 'an important event in the history of ideas about Japan in British periodicals' as the publication of *Tales* gave rise to the trend for 'quest of inner life' of Japanese [29]. Mitford matched all criteria for the authority in the field of Japanese writings. He possessed the knowledge, guaranteed by his long stay in the country; his position in the Legation provided access to the highest social classes and even to the Emperor in person; fluency in Japanese expanded his opportunities for the research, and effortless and amusing manner of writing provided lightness of the style. On the other hand, the book matched the fashion for exotic and orientalist writing along with social medievalism in higher British society.

It was exactly the time when the aesthetics of *japonisme* has influenced all facets of artistic life such as literature, painting and theatre. Collections of *ukiyo-e*¹ engravings were published and brought the Renaissance in arts by inspiring the art-nouveau movement. Japanese goods distributing souvenirs shops appeared in London and Paris. So-called 'Japanese costume portraits' by the hand of Manet and Pre-Raphaelites depicting the beauties of the time.

It is not surprising that Mitford has chosen a literary form for bridging a gap between cultures as he experienced the bonding effect of commonly shared literary affections. As he recalls in *Memories*,

To English people the familiarity of the Russians with English literature has always made a great bond of sympathy. A new novel by Dickens or Thackeray was looked forward to with almost as much excitement as it was in London, and the English classics have become the common property of all. (Redesdale, 1915, p. 240)

Was it not the same impetus behind sharing a cultural ground of Japanese to make it easier for the Western readership to relate and sympathise with Japanese people?

Structurally *Tales of Old Japan* can be divided into three equally bulky sections. The first part is a collection of several major stories, which are believed to have certain historical plausibility (such as the story of Forty-seven Rōnin). It is followed by a number of folk-tales and several articles on miscellaneous topics (including the *Hara-Kiri* depiction, being a reprint of the previously published material). It claims the holistic rendering of Japanese society and an overview of the inner life of the Japanese. As Mitford mentions in the foreword,

The books which have been written of late years about Japan have either been compiled from official records, or have contained the sketchy impressions of passing travellers. Of the inner life of the Japanese the world at large knows but little: their religion, their superstitions, their ways of thought, the hidden springs by which they move—all these are as yet mysteries. [...] The lord and his retainer, the warrior and the priest, the humble artisan and the despised Eta or pariah, each in his turn will become a leading character in my budget of stories; and it is out of the mouths of these personages that I hope to show forth a tolerably complete picture of Japanese society (Mitford, 1910)

The names of the stories and opening passages in the first part of the book also imply that the content of the stories embraces all the classes. However, upon a closer examination, it is evi-

¹ "Pictures of floating world" – traditional woodblock prints, produced in Edo and popular among Western tourists in the early Meiji period. During the last quarter of the XX century it was hardly considered art in Japan, so the prints were sold without any restrictions to the tourists, their low price was the reason of their popularity as a souvenir.

dent that Mitford arranges all the stories around the same topics – blood-shedding, duels, honour, valiant deeds and chivalry as the author saw it. Stories are linked to the figure of the warrior, fighter, who sometimes is exemplified by samurai or rōnin, and sometimes by a person in a position of the outlaw – *otokodate* – in competition with samurai. The plot is either revolving around sentimental love and the crimes justified by the feelings of the characters, or the offence avenged by homicide. Even the story of Eta¹ Maiden is actually telling the story of the samurai lord, who has fallen in love with the girl from the despised eta class. The plot of the stories is similar to the extent, that the Russian translation of the *Tales* was published under a title *Samurai Legends* (translation by Sidorova O.D., 2010), which severely uproots the intention of the author to create a holistic image of the society, but creatively summarises the image the finished work provides.

An article by *The London Illustrated News*, published on March 5, 1859, might shed some light to the assortment of the books available in a native Japanese bookshop. The correspondent mentions numerous publications on education, books of Confucian canon, and also

The small works to be found in every shop, and sold for a few cash to the children, are objects of great curiosity. They are profusely illustrated, and in some cases very carefully and skilfully so. [...] These small works are written in a popular style, the text being a mixture of the Hirakana and contracted Chinese. [...] these small books, being almost entirely in the Yomi, or vernacular, can only be deciphered by a person thoroughly acquainted with the various styles of writing and the colloquial dialects of the people. From the Chinese introductions which are prefixed to several of them, it is plain that the subject of the books are narratives or stories connected with their national history [...]. It is thus a military taste is nurtured amongst the people. (Bennett, Cortazzi, Hoare, 2006).

Does this passage explain the content and selectiveness of Mitford's writings, focused primarily on the violent and somehow valiant deeds? It is hard to tell whether that was an occidentalistic approach of the informants thriving to cater to the European's taste, or Mitford's comportment encouraging such selection, or maybe the personal preference of Mitford, unconsciously sharing affection to the motifs of this kind. The explanation might be as simple as a plain assortment of the bookshops at the time as well as an intelligible writing style of an entertaining book.

In terms of style, the work is an outstanding masterpiece of storytelling, thrilling in its content, and claiming ultimate credibility based on the author's deep immersion into Japanese 'inner life'. The set of the stories, published in this work, are presumably derived from different sources, most of them are fictional in origin (stories of Gompachi and Komurasaki as a famous kabuki theatre drama) and some of them are stemming in real life, but are fictionalised by either Japanese themselves (story of the forty-seven rōnin re-imagined in a kabuki play) or the author. The narration is saturated with author's contemplations on different accounts starting from Japanese history and culture to the problems of women's chastity, with overtly fantastical folklore tales in the end. Several articles have the character of a report (Hara-kiri) or ethnographical research (sermons). This heterogeneity in the content along with the narrativity in discourse makes all the stories merge into one coherent flow and gives (probably unintentional) trustworthiness to the stories. Another fallacy rooting in the mode of narration is the proclaimed universality of the book. The author claims it to genuinely depict all facets of Japanese life. However, in this particular case, A.B. Mitford as the Second Secretary of British Legation was definitely the person in power in early Meiji Japan and while understanding his alienation from Japanese society, might not realise how his position and appearance may have distorted the selection of the stories presented to him. Being a trained diplomat, not a historian or social scientist, he, without doubt, matched a category, defined by Charles-Victor Langlois:

'The natural instinct of a man in the water is to do all he can to drown himself; learning to swim is a question of repressing those spontaneous movements and performing others instead. In the same way, a critical attitude is not a natural one; it must be learned, and becomes a part of

¹ Pariah, a group of outcasts related to unclean jobs involving manipulating human and animal corpses.

oneself only through repeated practice. Thus, the historian's work is above all a work of criticism; should one go into it without previously being on one's guard against instinct, one must surely drown' (cited by Braudel, 1980, p. 8).

Mitford produced writing, lacking theoretical foundation and acknowledgement of the limitations of his research. However, his writing laid a groundwork of the Japanese image appreciation for the generation of Victorian age readers.

Robert Morton observes, that after the publication 'the press wrote about the *Tales* in length, clearly considering their appearance to be newsworthy' (Morton, 2017, p. 160). The opinions lied on the spectrum between the highest praises to accusations of simplifying characters to the level then they become caricatures [16].

It is noteworthy, that intending to emphasise the sense of honour, duty and spirit of chivalry in Japanese, Mitford has created a vivid image of the warrior, armed with pair of swords, ready to take the life of himself as easily as one of the enemy. It became so deeply embedded in the Victorian mind, that found its reflection in 'Mikado' opera, exploiting public impression of Japanese as a bloodthirsty irrational nation. It is not a secret that Gilbert and Sullivan consulted Mitford on various instances, including the tune of 'Miya-sama' piece – an outstanding example of cultural diplomacy through art, surfacing an explicitly British product of the musical mass market with Japanese melody.

As mentioned by Morton, 2017, '[i]n Mitford's stories, so many of the deaths stem from trivial matters – the vendetta in *The Forty-Seven Rōnin* originates in nothing more than insulting behaviour. Such stories seem to invite the kind of parody they get in *The Mikado*' [16, p. 162].

By now the framework I used to analyse the significance of Mitford's figure on the international arena was a retrospective application of the idea of cultural diplomacy and his actions as a part of the soft power policy between Japan and Britain, but the representatives of the British nobility are rarely contemplated within this theory. The one that is widely used in modern scholarship is the orientalism, which leads to the question of whether Mitford is orientalist?

By all the formal features, Mitford might probably be the most vivid example of such. He is clearly attracted by the exotic aesthetic, his interest in Japan is focused primarily on what makes it different from the West rather than on the universal traits it shares with Britain, he takes away an agency from native informants (no doubt, people of high descent, because it would have been highly unlikely to see the commoners around diplomats rather than samurai or former samurai after the Meiji Restoration) never mentioning their names. Mitford sheds rather straightforwardly arrogant commentaries on the level of development of military tactics and native armament when describing the conflicts between not only British and Japanese but also French and Japanese to the extent he calls chasing Japanese soldiers a 'fox hunt' [23] – an entertainment without the slightest danger. Also, the pseudotranslation adopted as a narrative mode implies a certain position of power of the author of the *Tales* towards the source culture.

But whether all aforementioned necessarily lead us to the conclusion that Mitford was orientalist?

Victor Segalen, a French poet, expressed quite different from a proper Orientalistic viewpoint idea in his *Essay on Exoticism*. In his understanding the crave for the unusual, exotic, different by time and space, is not necessarily an attitude of one country towards another. It can mean the urge to find a thrill of adventure and discovery beyond one's time (which we call medievalism), region (orientalism), culture (exoticism) and also space and gender, which lead to his idea of race and sex exoticism. He also claims that the denial of diversity will lead to a blunt and dull monochrome world and that the duty of the artist is to portray the difference. He contrasts real artist's endeavour like Kipling's works with superficial writings of 'Lotis' with a reference to a Piere Loti and his novel. Ian Fookes formulates the essence of the *exote* in the following way:

For the exote, travel is a revitalising experience rivalled only by the process of realising one's vision in one's work. It is in light of this quest, then, that we make the claim that Segalen was never a tourist in China, intellectual or otherwise, as he was focused on the creation of his

oeuvre, to the extent that he would sacrifice his closest relations in order to achieve it. (Representing the Exotic and the Familiar, 2019)

Mitford is matching the definition of *exote* in many ways. He was a creator – a translator, as he called himself – an amateur, not a historian or a proper scholar. He placed his artistic endeavour of completing the *Tales* over his health and was working until late to finish it, undertook the trip to the rural area of Japan to collect the material and paid from his pocket to make up the illustrations. It might be an impossible task to prove that his impetus was to create a piece of art advocating diversity, however, it should be admitted that the Orientalist oppressing viewpoint in application to his writing is as much of an extreme simplification.

Umberto Eco and Anthony Oldcorn in the book chapter on forgery in the Middle Ages point out that the very definition of forgery and fakeness is inseparable from the malicious intent [10]. The authors indicate a concept of a historical forgery being the document, intentionally spreading deliberately false information, which is supposed not to be mistaken for diplomatic forgery.

While the historical forgery (Reine Falschung) concerns a formally genuine document that contains inexact or invented information (such as the authentic confirmation of false privileges), the diplomatic forgery is a document expressly created to assert privileges that may in fact have really been conceded but whose original documentation has been lost (Eco, 2014)

Can we interpret the intention of A.B. Mitford by his book to create a document that might have been compiled by Japanese but was not by pure chance? Did he try to recreate the holistic and credible image of Japan by collecting what he thought was an original story and let it ‘speak for itself’, as he mentioned in the introduction to the first tale:

Thus the Japanese may tell their own tale, their translator only adding here and there a few words of heading or tag to a chapter, where an explanation or amplification may seem necessary. (Mitford, 1910)

The origins of the stories are carefully documented by the author and sometimes attributed to a certain printed and published materials, but in other cases, they are recorded after a private conversation with only the reference to an anonymous *native informant*, with the only guarantee of their authenticity in the confidence of a narrator:

One cold winter's night at Yedo, as I was sitting, with a few Japanese friends, huddled round the imperfect heat of a brazier of charcoal, the conversation turned upon the story of Sôgorô and upon ghostly apparitions in general. Many a weird tale was told that evening, and I noted down the three or four which follow, for the truth of which the narrators vouched with the utmost confidence. (Mitford, 1910)

Another fact to be emphasised is the selectiveness of all Mitford's writings including private correspondence and memoirs. Neither to his father nor to the readers did he mention the fact and the conditions under which he fathered a child with a Japanese woman, which would probably have been occupying a lot of his time and attention. This example is not the only one which might put the credibility of the Mitford's writing under a question mark. Several passages in Satow's memoirs may serve as evidence that Mitford's interpretation of the events could diverge from the reality in favour of a noble and honourable intent attributed to the actors.

Based on the mentioned above, we cannot contemplate the *Tales of Old Japan* being a ‘fake’, or even an image of Japan, portrayed in the narrative as ‘fake’, for the intent of the author was clearly to provide a genuine picture of the ‘feudal’ world, dissolving in front the eyes of the beholder.

To be added, even contemporaries of Mitford found Japanese-related ‘faith in fakes’ to be worrisome. As Tokyo university linguistics professor, British by descent, translator and author B. H. Chamberlain wrote,

The foreigner cannot refuse the bolus thus artfully forced down his throat. He is not suspicious by nature. How should he imagine that people who make such positive statements about their own country are merely exploiting his credulity? He has reached a stage of culture where

such mythopoeia has become impossible. On the other hand, to control information by consulting original sources lies beyond his capacity. (Chamberlain, 1933)

As a result, the image, created by Victorian writers with Mitford as an example, was mostly constructed by the first researchers, rather than reflecting the reality in its fullness.

As a complex notion, cultural diplomacy may be seen in different ways by the cultural ambassador himself, and the scholars, analysing his contribution in retrospective. Not a single article researches the success of Mitford as cultural ambassador acting on behalf of English culture in Japan. However, by the same token, not a single research on the image of Japan in the Victorian mind can overlook his significance. It might be an important lesson for the descendants not to overestimate the borders of one's influence and always to keep the window of possibilities open for what's coming next, being careful about one's own words, for as in the beginning was a Word, one's word might as well stay in the history of humankind and be used against author's convictions.

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