

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****AKUNIN'S NOVELS AND THE "JAPANESE CULTURAL CODE"**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to a cross-cultural code in an extensive cycle of works by Boris Akunin about Erast Fandorin. The Japanese cultural code stands out across-cutting, which manifests itself at several levels: firstly, this is the level of characters, secondly, the level of quotes and allusions, and thirdly, the level of world modeling. In the "Fandorin cycle" there is a Japanese character introduced from the fourth novel. In addition, the author constantly emphasizes the dual, semi-Japanese essence of Erast Fandorin himself. Double peace leads to embarrassing situations, constant clashes of dual reading: the fact that "in Japanese" is acceptable turns out to be completely unacceptable in "Russian". Also, many texts mention popular Japanese realities that are firmly entrenched in modern culture - sushi, bonsai, sumo in the absence of the common name for these phenomena. The article analyzes in detail one of the world-modeling categories of Japanese culture in its refraction in Akunin's texts. This is the concept of suicide as a worthy and beautiful death. The book by Grigory Chkhartishvili (real name of Boris Akunin), "Writer and Suicide" analyzes in detail this feature of the "Japanese world" and the differences in attitudes towards suicide in the Western and Eastern worlds. The work of the "Fandorin corps" dedicated to the aesthetics of suicide - "Mistress of Death", shows a Western understanding of the concept – the anti-aesthetics of suicide. The auto-allusions and auto-citation become a tool for the manifestation of the Japanese cultural code.

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1. Introduction

References to Japanese culture occupy a rather important place in the work of B. Akunin. First of all, the writer himself is the author of several dozen translations from Japanese into Russian, deeply knows Japanese traditions and constantly refers to various Japanese authors in his work (Chuprinin, 2001).

The cycle of works, which presents multilevel references to elements of the Japanese semiosphere, is, first of all, an extensive corpus of works “The Adventures of Erast Fandorin” (Akunin, 2000, 2001, 2006). In this cycle, the author uses a number of references to Japanese culture that are present at all levels of text organization. Erast Fandorin is a character in which the Eastern and Western beginnings are combined, and the artistic space of the texts in which he acts as the main character is a field of interaction of the Eastern and Western cultural codes.

2. Problem Statement

B. Akunin’s texts are “permeated” by Japan: there are various semantic connections with the Japanese cultural code in his works. This study examines various levels of organization of a multilayered text, which is a polylogue – a kind of cytone composed of explicit and hidden references to various texts, phenomena of Russian and world culture, as well as mass culture (Sadokova, 2019a; Zherdeva & Savochkina, 2017). The question of the intertextual nature of Akunin’s texts has been studied in detail and considered in studies (Desyatov & Karpukhina, 2019). These works, however, do not raise the question of considering the “cross-cutting” intertextuality – hyper-allusion, a constant cultural code present in every work. On the other hand, there are studies devoted to the Eastern cultural code (Gurevich, & Izotova, 2019; Kazachkova, 2013; Khronopulo, 2016; Pogrebnyaya, 2019, Sadokova, 2019b), which, in turn, do not view the Japanese cultural code as intertext.

3. Research Questions

3.1. The hypothesis of this study is that, in addition to the allusions to other texts, accurate and deformed quotes, widespread in modern postmodern texts, a “pass-through code” can also be distinguished in a fairly representative body of texts, which manifests itself at all levels of text organization.

3.2. In this case, the most interesting way of manifestation of Japanese pass-through intertext is autointertext – Akunin indirectly refers to his scientific research, which comprehensively examines the problem of suicide and pays great attention to suicide in Japanese culture.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research is to examine the pass-through cultural code of Japan in the “Fandorin corps” of B. Akunin's works – its manifestations at various levels of text organization, options for its implementation and various elements of manifestation. Since the writer himself is a specialist in Japanese culture, a translator from Japanese and a researcher of Japanese traditions, this cross-cutting cultural code has many options for implementation on the pages of novels about Erast Fandorin.

5. Research Methods

The texts of the “Fandorin corpus” are examined through the prism of their intertextuality: fragments of texts containing cross-cultural references are highlighted, various levels of text organization are considered in relation to the significantly strong position of the Japanese cultural code and its interaction with autointertext.

6. Findings

1. The issue of cross-cultural interaction between East and West in texts about Erast Fandorin, the Japanese cultural code is considered in a number of works devoted to the writer’s work (Tsyplakov, 2001):

Androgyny, duality is the main property that Chkhartishvili-Akunin values in literature. And he himself becomes the same androgynous, or, if you will, a mediator, subjecting Western romanticism to a rigorous test by the philosophy of the East. But vice versa as well! The philosophy of the East in his work is forced to reckon with Western thoroughness and boring thoughtfulness. Chkhartishvili proclaims this “east-westerness” as a definite milestone in the literary process. (p. 162)

Japan is constantly featured in the novels of the “Fandorin Corps”, starting with the third novel, *Leviathan*, which tells how Erast Petrovich Fandorin sails to Yokohama: after the tragic death of his bride Elizabeth, described in the novel *Azazel*, and participation in hostilities in the Balkans, described in the novel “*Turkish Gambit*”, he asks to be sent to serve somewhere far from Russia and is sent to the Russian Embassy in Japan. Fandorin’s journey to Japan is reflected in the novel *Leviathan*, which takes place in 1878. And “*Death of Achilles*” describes the events of 1882, when Fandorin had already returned from Japan. Thus, until the release of the novel “*The Diamond Chariot*”, in the second volume of which the events that took place with Fandorin in Japan unfold, the reader remains unaware of what happened to the detective during the “Japanese” period of his life.

At the same time, the most important character of the Fandorin Corps appears in “*Death of Achilles*”, – a loyal vassal, valet Masahiro Shibata, a Japanese man who throughout all subsequent texts will appear in detective stories. The first appearance of Masa on the pages of texts about Fandorin is described as follows (Akunin, 2000):

The last to come down from the carriage was a short, bow-legged Asian with a solid build with an extremely important thick-cheeked face. He was dressed in green livery, which matched very poorly with wooden strappy sandals and a flowered paper fan that hung from a silk cord around his neck. The short man was holding a quadrangular lacquered pot in his hands, in which a tiny pine tree grew, as if transported to the Moscow railway station straight from the kingdom of the Lilliputians (Chapter 1, para. 2).

2. The motive of incongruity and inappropriateness constantly accompanies all references to Japanese culture in the “Fandorin corps”. As noted by Kazachkova (2013):

Akunin often clashes the Asian and European worldviews to create a comic effect. There are many episodes in the cycle where Masa, following the etiquette and rules of decency of his country, puts himself or his master in an awkward position, and thanks to this the reader will learn something new about the rules of behavior and norms of what is acceptable in Asian culture of that time. (p. 128)

This inappropriateness, constantly described by the author, is often mentioned when describing the everyday habits of Fandorin and Masa himself – Anisy Tyulpanov, the hero of the novellas “The Jack of Spades”, “Decorator” and the story “Scarpey Baskakovs” are very impressed by the various types of physical exercises done by his boss, the manner of swimming in icy water, exotic food and other “Japanese” habits. The same leitmotif of irrelevance accompanies the contact of the Japanese and Russian worlds, described in the novel “The Diamond Chariot”: Fandorin, who arrived in Japan, is repeatedly surprised by the various strange habits and customs of the Japanese around him. The clash of East and West becomes a kind of instrument for playing with the reader: “The Japanese scholar Chkhartishvili is playing a double game, asking the reader to choose the most acceptable cultural code: Western or Eastern” (Sorokin, 2011, p. 265). The same situations played out in the texts of the “Fandorin corps”, can be read in two dimensions: “Western” and “Eastern”. Japan, thus, appears as a country of alien, incredible traditions, so amazing and monstrous that it is extremely difficult for a Russian person to get used to them and understand them. This was also played out at the first appearance in the “Fandorin corps” of the Japanese hero: on the ship “Leviathan” in the novel of the same name, the Japanese hero is suspected of murder, absolutely not understanding the true motivation of his actions: he is ashamed to admit that he, a representative of the samurai class, receives medical education and cheats on their parents.

Thus, one of the variants of manifestation of the pass-through cultural code of Japan is duality, which constantly manifests itself as an alternative code for reading the situation. The protagonist of the Fandorin Corps, Erast Petrovich Fandorin, is such a “field of collision” between the East and West.

Staying in Japan transformed Fandorin into an extraordinary person endowed with almost supernatural powers. Three “pre-Japanese” novels – “Azazel”, “Turkish Gambit” and “Leviathan” mention Fandorin’s exceptional intelligence and his unique ability to win in any game of chance. Returning from Japan, Fandorin mastered the unique art of the “creeping” clan of the shinobi, which allowed him to move almost silently, jump from unprecedented heights, perform inconceivable somersaults, etc. (Akunin, 2000):

Sideways, the young man perched on a narrow cornice, his foot rested on the bust of one caryatid, his hand grabbed the strong neck of the other. Turned a little and froze, that is, according to the science of the Japanese ninja, “creeping”, turned into stone, water, grass. He dissolved into the landscape. (Chapter 4, para 117)

“The Diamond Chariot” describes the murders committed by the shinobi, when a person kills with one touch of a finger, not even noticeable to the victim.

Erast Petrovich Fandorin turns out to be a hero in which the East and the West, two opposite and attracting traditions, are combined (Sorokin, 2011):

The main character is the integration (or interweaving) of two cultural and historical traditions: western (European) and eastern, in the orbit of which the Akunin components are involved. The image of Fandorin in this regard is a demonstration of the East-West problem: the existence of diametrically opposite polar principles in a person. (p. 264)

3. The Japanese cultural code is also the key to playing with the reader. The author does not call the names accepted today to some of the phenomena of Japanese culture, already known to the modern reader under borrowed names – so, in the passage above, “tiny pine” is the art of bonsai known today in Russia. This strategy continues in many texts. For example, in the story “From the Life of Slivers” from the cycle “Jade Rosary”, a widespread in modern Russia Japanese dish of sushi is called rice balls (in other texts this name is also used). There is a mention of sumo wrestling in the story “Before the End of the World”, and it is also not called by the usual name: “And in the country of Japan there is such a fight. The fat men are fighting. Everyone is like a ball. They come out on the circle and push their bellies. The one who shoves craftily wins” (Akunin, 2006, p. 413). Akunin (2006) deliberately delimits “that” Japan, a world alien and incomprehensible to a Russian at the end of the 19th century, from modern Japan, which has partially penetrated into popular culture. In addition, the deliberate non-naming of Japanese cultural phenomena is an instrument of a kind of game with the reader. The pleasure of Boris Akunin’s texts is associated with the effect of familiarity. The author creates his works from precedent texts well known to the reader (for example, Russian classics), following this logic, we can say that he also creates his hero from “iconic”, easily readable characters, archetypes, cultural and historical types that are not violate the intellectual comfort of the reader. The reader gets pleasure from the text (remember the pleasure from the texts of Roland Barthes), seeing the well-known archetypal images of a dandy, a gentleman, etc. More broadly, any thinking person thinks not only about themselves, about other people, but also about where they live, about the intersection of East and West, which turns out to be the work of Boris Akunin and the hero himself.

References to Japanese heroes, Japanese food, and customs include the Japanese cultural code at the level of character system and narrative details. A more interesting and profound manifestation of the pass-through intertext of Japan is the appeal to the world-modeling categories of the Japanese world, formed through autointertext. According to Akunin himself, more precisely – Grigory Chkhartishvili (2007), who is the author of the popular science research “The Writer and Suicide”, – the fundamental category of the Japanese world, the Japanese perception of life is the aesthetics of death:

Here is the Japanese logical chain:

“Death is the most beautiful thing in human life.

The most beautiful form of death is suicide.

The most beautiful of suicides is hara-kiri”. (p. 136)

In the “Japanese world”, in contrast to the “European”, death is perceived not as a terrifying event, which they prefer not to think about, according to the principle “while we are, there is no death, it will come – we will not be”, but as a kind of culmination of life, including aesthetic. Hence, there is a well-founded

logic – not the death that a person does not control is beautiful (from an illness, an accident, when he does not own his own body and cannot take care of the beauty of the perception of his corpse after death), but the one that he controls completely and utterly – that is, suicide.

In this regard, an interesting work dedicated to suicides is the novel “The Mistress of Death”, which tells about the “suicide club”, a group of people who consistently commit suicide. It is curious that their manner of passing away is furnished “in Japanese” in relation to death rituals: all members of the suicide circle are poets, they leave suicide notes in the form of poems dedicated to death, which, according to Chkhartishvili’s description of “Japanese suicide” (2007, p. 136), is part of the ritual – the samurai on the eve of hara-kiri leaves the farewell hokku, restrained, without unnecessary emotions and affectations. The semantic connection between the two books – “The Mistress of Death”, first published in 2001, and “The Writer and Suicide”, published in 1999, is seen through the citation of the same hokku: it is indicated in “The Writer and Suicide”, when describing the hara-kiri ritual. Chkhartishvili (2007) writes:

Sit down at the lacquer table and write the farewell three-verse. ... A poem should not be a poetic masterpiece, today there is no time for vanity. Something simple, calm and courageous, without affectation:

A life

Just a dream

Seen in a dream (pp. 132-133).

The same hokku is quoted by Erast Petrovich, speaking with Masha-Kolombina, while the poem was written with some change, but since it is quoted by Masha from memory, we can assume that she introduced these distortions: “It turns out that I don't know anything. Who I am, why I live and in general – what life is. Genji once quoted an ancient Japanese man who said, “Life is a dream seen in a dream” (Akunin, 2001, p. 148). Hokku plays with the title of Calderon's play “Life is a Dream” and appeals to the parable of the sage Chuang Tzu, who saw a butterfly that dreams that she is a sage in a dream.

The text of “The Mistress of Death” also directly echoes the feature of Japanese culture declared by Akunin (2001) – the aestheticization of physiology, the perception of all the details of death, including a ripped stomach, falling out intestines, etc., as aesthetically beautiful. In the novel, one of the heroes, a doctor by education, writes a poem that glorifies the physiological aesthetics of suicide:

When a sharp scalpel cuts

The abdominal cavity of a young lady.

That swallowed a hundred needles

Can't stand the love drama

You don't know whether to cry or laugh

From feeling strange trembling:

So the human stomach

Looks like a wet hedgehog.

When you open the skull

Of Junker, who.

Having visited the brothel for the first time,
The speedy judgment executed on himself,
You will find among the dead porridge
What you were looking for. Wonderful view:
A piece of lead in the hillock
Shines dull like pearls (p. 20).

In the book “The Writer and Suicide” Chkhartishvili (2007) quotes the story “Patriotism” by Yukio Mishima, translated by himself:

When the lieutenant brought the blade to the right side of the abdomen, the blade was already quite shallow, and the blade, slippery with blood and fat, almost came out of the wound. Nausea suddenly rose in his throat, and the lieutenant growled hoarsely. The pain became even more unbearable from the spasms, the edges of the incision parted, and from there the insides crawled out, as if the stomach was also vomiting. The guts did not care about the torment of their master. Healthy, shiny, they cheerfully slipped out into the wild. The lieutenant's head fell, his shoulders heaved heavily, his eyes narrowed, turning into slits, a string of saliva hung from his mouth. The epaulettes of the uniform flashed like gold. (pp. 133-134)

Analyzing this fragment of the text, Chkhartishvili notes that there is nothing beautiful in the described picture in the European categories of aesthetics and perception of beauty and ugliness: epaulettes are beautiful, and intestines are ugly. For the Japanese, in contrast to the European, the body, its physiological, inner part is beautiful.

The heroes of the “Mistress of Death” pass away one by one, obeying the “sign” of Death, which they are looking forward to. At the same time, there is absolutely no aesthetics in their deaths – the description of the bodies found after the suicide is emphatically disgusting (Akunin, 2001):

Nikisha is lying on the floor. There is a blue furrow on the neck, the eyes are bulging, the tongue is all huge, swollen, it does not fit in the mouth. And the smell is monstrous! Petya shook, clapping his teeth. (p. 30)

The same anti-aesthetic is found in the description of the death of the girl-medium Ophelia (Akunin, 2001):

The attendant pulled off a dirty gray sheet with sickening spots, and I saw a thin body stretched out on a narrow, galvanized table, a pointed face, a familiar numb half-smile on bloodless lips. Ophelia was lying completely naked; her thin collarbones, ribs, sharp thighs showed through the bluish skin; hands were clenched into tiny fists. At the first moment, the corpse seemed to me like a plucked chicken. (p. 57)

The deaths of the heroes of “Mistress of Death” contrast with the aesthetically beautiful death of the heroine of “The Diamond Chariot”, Midori, the lover of Erast Petrovich. Throughout many works, it is mentioned that Fandorin is haunted by an eerie and beautiful picture – a half-burned, half-whole woman's face. At the same time, the reader learns from “The Diamond Chariot” that this picture is a false aestheticization of death: Midori was not dead, but faked her death at the direction of her father. Also, members of the “suicide club” turn out to be false suicides: Fandorin argues that they were deliberately subjected to psychological pressure and brought to death. It was not death “in Japanese” – a voluntary death under the full control of the subject.

Aesthetization of the physiological aspect of death is also presented in “Decorator”: the diaries of the protagonist, Jack the Ripper, who moved to Russia, are overflowing with praises of the bodies and internal organs that he has opened, which, however, is again perceived as alien, monstrous and unpleasant for perception.

In the corpus of texts about Erast Fandorin, there is also a stylization of a Japanese play: the novel “The Whole World is Theater” mentions a play composed by Erast Petrovich for the “Kovcheg” Theater. The play is called “Two Comets in a Starless Sky,” and it tells the story of the love of a geisha and a ninja shinobi, who commit double suicide at the end. Geisha Izumi makes a “female hara-kiri”, also described in “The Writer and Suicide” – plunges a dagger into her throat. This fragment contrasts with the anti-aesthetic descriptions of suicide from the “suicide club” in “Mistress of Death”.

7. Conclusion

1. The Japanese pass-through cultural code of the corpus of texts about Erast Fandorin has several levels of manifestation. The first, the most obvious, is the mention of various phenomena of Japanese culture, the appearance of Japanese heroes in the text, and the choice of Japan as the scene. In this case, the incongruity, inappropriateness of the eastern from the point of view of the western and vice versa, the western from the point of view of the eastern is always mentioned.

2. The mention of Japanese realities – the common images of Japan (sushi, sake, ikebana, sumo, bonsai, etc.) – acts as a tool for playing with the reader: the author does not name this phenomenon directly in the text, and the reader is asked to guess which of the popular “landmarks” of Japan we are talking in this case.

3. Finally, a reference to one of the basic world-modeling categories of the Japanese world is manifested - the aestheticization of death through autoallusions and autocitation. Akunin-Chkhartishvili brings the Japanese philosophy of suicide to the texts that mention suicide and suicide using explicit and implicit references to his research “The Writer and Suicide”.

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