

# JAPANESE CULTURE IN MODERN MALAY LITERATURE: EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS OF MALAY WRITERS

*(Budaya Jepun dalam Sastera Melayu Moden: Pengalaman dan Pengamatan Pengarang Melayu)*

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## Abstract

This article aims to examine the beauty of the values still adhered to in Japanese society as traceable in creative works based on the experiences and observations of Malay writers. Values such as beauty, silence, refinement, internal strength and civilized living have been adapted from the ontological transformations and pathetic beauty inherited from the glory days of Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) and Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972). This study draws on the cultural studies theory of Chris Barker. The discussion is centred on the experiences of several Malay writers who have fictionalized their experiences of life in Japan. Muhammad Haji Salleh follows Basho's footsteps and is inspired by

a love for nature and the soul and character of the Japanese, as recorded in his poems in the anthology *Salju Shibuya (The Snows of Shibuya)*, while Arena Wati delves into the national pride and social history of the Japanese and Malays in his novel *Sakura Mengorak Kelopak (The Sakura Sheds its Petals)*, and Abu Yazid Abidin shares the ups and downs of immigrant Malays in Japan in his own novel, *Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo (Frosty Tokyo)*.

Keywords: Japanese culture, modern Malay Literature, Malay writers, experience, observation

### Abstrak

*Makalah ini bertujuan untuk melihat keindahan nilai murni yang diamalkan oleh masyarakat Jepun sebagai gaya hidup yang dapat dikesan menerusi karya kreatif hasil pengamatan dan pengalaman pengarang Melayu. Nilai keindahan, kesunyian, kehalusan, semangat dalaman, kesantunan gaya hidup yang diamalkan merupakan adaptasi daripada unsur transformasi ontologikal dan keindahan patetik yang diwarisi sejak zaman keagungan Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) dan Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972). Penelitian ini disandarkan pada teori kajian budaya yang disarankan oleh Chris Barker. Perbincangan bertunjangkan pengalaman yang pernah dilalui oleh beberapa orang pengarang Melayu yang pernah mengilhamkan pengalaman hidup mereka sewaktu berada di Jepun. Muhammad Haji Salleh mengilhami rasa percintaan alam, jiwa dan budi bangsa Jepun dengan mengikut langkah Basho menerusi puisinya dalam antologi Salju Shibuya, Arena Wati menyelami maruah bangsa, sejarah sosial bangsa Jepun dan Melayu dalam novel Sakura Mengorak Kelopak, dan Abu Yazid Abidin berkongsi rencah hidup orang Melayu di perantauan daerah Jepun dalam Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo.*

*Kata kunci: budaya Jepun, sastera Melayu moden, pengarang Melayu, pengalaman, pengamatan*

## INTRODUCTION

The new millennium has brought great changes to people's lifestyles, and yet Japanese society remains steadfast in maintaining its own identity through the appreciation of traditional values that form the core of its culture. In fact, the Japanese, whose country has been listed among the wealthiest in the world (G8 countries), continue to display an amazing sense of patriotism and national spirit. Values such as beauty, silence, refinement, internal strength and civilized living have been adapted from the ontological transformations

and pathetic beauty inherited from the glory days of Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) and Yasunari Kawabata (1899-1972).

This discussion will delve into and explore the treasure trove of Japanese values. The success of Japan and especially its rebirth has opened the eyes of the whole world. The Malaysian government, in the mid 1980s, took Japan as a model in its “Look East” policy. Industriousness, discipline, hard work, punctuality, and patriotism are augmented by steadfastness and strength, and infused with tradition, especially that which has been influenced by *zen* Buddhist teachings. *Zen* centres on *do* or “the way”. Spirituality is for a person to achieve ontological transformation in order to come to the flash of enlightenment called *satori/bodhi* and return to *ku/sunyata*, which is an absolute or eternal emptiness that is the source or basis for everything in existence. The main focus in various *zen* practices, especially *zazen* or meditation, is towards the effort to at once also focus on one’s external self or level of Buddha-ness which lies buried at the bottom of one’s existence (Suzuki, 1971: 22-26). This, potentially, frees human beings from the fetters of a phenomenological life and conceptual-rational thinking. Spiritually, to be at one with intuitive thinking.

A particular aesthetics of Japanese literature places importance on the achievement of ontological transformation and enlightenment (*satori*). According to this aesthetics, a beautiful work is one that is the creative expression of someone who has been able to free himself from a phenomenological orientation in life and has obtained enlightenment. Such an artist has been able to return to the basis of his existence which, in fact, has never been separated from the eternal *ku* (absolute emptiness). It is this fact that Basho attempts to explore which brings together his *haikus* with *zen*, thus bringing this poetic form to its zenith. At the hands of Basho, the *haiku* becomes a pure art form in which can be heard the sweet singing of the free self and which contains the possibility of a joy-bringing ontological experience (Md. Salleh, 1994:5). After his training and meditation, coupled with his series of travels to all corners of Japan, Basho produced many more amazing *haikus* and travel writings that established him as the great Japanese poet par excellence. One of Basho’s best-known *haikus*, written around the year 1680, is about a crow (1994:203):

*Karee da ni*  
*Karasu no tomari keri*  
*Aki no kure*

On a withered branch  
there a crow has settled down  
autumn evening

This short and objective poem highlights the deep and effective intuition of the poet. The poem is a beautiful and pathetic depiction of a figure—the crow—perched on a dry branch at the end of a day against the backdrop of the autumn season. The issue here is the effect or feeling of isolation (*sabi*) and sadness because of the temporality that accompanies the occupation of a high position. Similarly, Kawabata is equally sensitive to his tradition and culture. Similar to those of Basho, Kawabata's works have an effect of beauty. Ten years before committing suicide, Kawabata produced a novel titled *Beauty and Sadness* which draws particular attention to the question of beauty and sadness.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE WRITERS AND CHOICE OF WORKS**

This study focuses on three well-respected local writers who have spent some time in Japan. Muhammad Haji Salleh once stated that:

*sejak tahun 1970, saya berulang-alik ke Jepun untuk menghadiri seminar, memenuhi undangan rasmi daripada badan-badan dan universiti dan di samping itu merebut peluang menikmati suatu budaya yang amat unik.*

since 1970, I have travelled several times to Japan for seminars, and on official invitations by certain bodies and universities, and at the same time have taken the opportunity to appreciate this very unique culture.

(2004:ix)

He further explains:

*keghairahan saya terhadap Jepun digerakkan juga oleh kursus-kursus sastera Jepun dalam terjemahan Inggeris dan Indonesia yang saya ikuti dan seterusnya pembacaan peribadi.*

my fevered interest in Japan was also spurred by courses that I had taken on Japanese literature translated into English and Indonesian, as well as my own personal reading.

(2004:ix)

However, the climax of his experiences was his stay in Japan between 1999 and 2000, when he was made a fellow at the University of Kyoto. During this time, he began to travel through Japan. Muhammad Haji Salleh's invaluable experience of life in Japan is recorded in his poems published in the anthology *Salju Shibuya (The Snows of Shibuya)* (2004).

Muhammad Dahlan Abdul Biang, better known by his *nom de plume* Arena Wati, is a seasoned writer with a myriad of ideas, as well as an artist capable of discussing the thought, philosophy and aspirations of his people, as is evident through many of his works. In his major work, *Trilogy Arena Wati (Arena Wati's Trilogy)*, he has captured his experiences in Japan. One of the novels in this trilogy, titled *Sakura Mengorak Kelopak (The Sakura Sheds its Petals)* was published in 1987. The writer began making notes on events and experiences in 1974, when he was made Research Officer and acting Head of the Planning and Research Department at the Sabah Foundation, a post he held for 12 years. He was awarded a fellowship to conduct research in the United States, the Netherlands and Japan from August 1983 to January 1984. Part of his research was carried out at the University of Kyoto in Japan. This opportunity was fully utilized by him, and his view of the world greatly expanded, making him a Malay writer with a global and universal vision. Based on his experiences in Kyoto, he produced three novels that presented a view of the United States, the Netherlands and Japan from the angle of a Malay person. In *Sakura Mengorak Kelopak* (1987), Arena Wati uncovers a few aspects of the Japanese value system. He also narrates changes taking place in this value system leading to the emancipation of women in Japan.

Muhammad Haji Salleh and Arena Wati are not the only ones with such experiences. Abu Yazid Abidin, better known as Wijaya Mala, and known for his gentle, calm, and humble demeanour, has gone down in the history of Malay literature as one of the writers belonging to ASAS 50 but never as one of its leaders as much as one of its activists. Between 1967 and 1968, he was given the opportunity to take a course at the International Students Institute (ISI) in Tokyo, Japan. However, he did not produce the novel he was researching while in Japan. According to him (1981:631), "*Untuk berjaya menghasilkan karya yang baik dan bernilai, kesungguhan dan ketelitian adalah faktor penting.*" ("To succeed in producing a good work, tenacity and attention to detail are important factors."). However, not all his novels record personal experiences. *Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo (Frosty Tokyo)* is clearly not based on his experiences studying in Tokyo. Instead, it records an important event in the history of Japan. In *Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo*, he smoothly and effectively

depicts impactful events because he indeed feels that he “is in the midst” of Japanese society, whose language he also has access to. The ease with which he “infiltrates” this society can be seen as a personal ability that is rarely found among most people when they are abroad. Based on the experiences and commitment of these three writers, this study focuses on three relevant and significant works to discuss the Japanese lifestyle as depicted in novels.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS FROM A CULTURAL STUDIES PERSPECTIVE**

The discussion in the present article draws on Chris Barker’s (2003) Cultural Studies theory. This theory is relevant to be used here as it enables a more critical look at the sociocultural aspects of Japanese society. This theory has been employed by anthropologists and sociologists to study and gain an understanding of the culture of a certain society. Cultural Studies emerged as a theory in the 1950s and by the 1970s developed at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, Great Britain, which, in its early days, focused on the cultures of industrialized societies. Generally, Cultural Studies theory covers all areas that are linked to society and culture, ideology, art, anthropology, communication and popular culture.

According to the Cultural Studies theory proposed by Chris Barker, a cultural study would not be complete if it did not include the practices, symbolism, language and customs that are part of the culture of a society. Bearing this in mind, one can look at Muhammad Haji Salleh’s anthology titled *Salju Shibuya*, which the writer dedicates to the late Shigeo Nishimura, who is said to have been a poetic genius. In poems recorded over three seasons—summer, winter and spring—Muhammad Haji Salleh recounts his travels to the northern islands to discover the nature, soul and manners of the Japanese people as he traces the steps of Basho. Muhammad Haji Salleh divides the poem into three sections according to three journeys that he undertook:

Journey I – The journey of over a thousand kilometres to discover the Ainu culture, on the rocky shore of the Pacific ocean, in Hokkaido; a visit to the people of Ryukyu who are different from the majority of the people in central Japan, and their culture that is touched by the language of the still Ocean.

Journey II – the journey to the gardens of Ginkakuji and Kinkakuji, and historic Mount Hiei; meditating in the clouds in Ohara, and visiting Kyoto, where ancient culture meets the industrial culture of today.

Journey III – Muhammad Haji Salleh’s journey into his inner self, in which his urban mechanism remains functioning but his existence floats in a different and yet special environment.

In these three journeys, Muhammad Haji Salleh successfully records the experiences of his travels and his feelings towards nature and humanity gathered in the gardens of the land of the cherry blossom, and influenced by the actions and words of a people called the *Nihonjin*. Beauty, as explored by Muhammad Haji Salleh:

Page 11      ... *ke negeri yang menghargai kerja*  
... to the country that appreciates hard work

Page 14      ... *pendatang berteman*  
*Bangsa sopan*  
*yang bangga-hormat*  
*dan percaya-usaha,*  
*kerana kudrat bermakna wujud.*

... immigrants together  
With a courteous people  
proud-respectful  
and trusting-working  
because energy is being.

Page 16      *aku sanjung bangsa ini*  
*Yang memuliakan manusia*  
*Di sini tamadun berbuah budi.*

I respect these people  
Who honour others  
Here civilization breeds courtesy.

Muhammad Haji Salleh observes that the Japanese learn much from their history to the extent that they were able to rise again after attaining wisdom (2004:17). They became victors within one century even after emerging as the losers of World War II. They take pride in working and have an open mind as they cross international borders.

Next, the study concentrates on Arena Wati’s novel *Sakura Mengorak Kelopak*. This novel is about the Japanese maintaining their cultural traditions even though they have achieved great advances in science, technology and

communication. Traditional practices in fact form the core of their progress. Even in this digital age and surrounded by sophisticated gadgetry, tradition, Shinto beliefs and the teachings of Confucius and Buddha still govern their everyday lives. Being a foreigner, the writer immediately encounters the culture that influences their lives the moment he sets foot in the land of the cherry blossom. Using all his creative abilities, Arena Wati describes the finer aspects of Japanese culture, especially the culture of Kyoto. Arena Wati shows, for example, how the culture of punctuality and keeping to time is paramount to the Japanese (2003:151):

*“... jangan anggap kami work-addict,” ucap seorang profesor kepada seorang tetamunya dari luar negara. Ini ditambah lagi bila Kenji menambah “Memang kami tidak cukup masa. Dan pusat ini ditutup hari Ahad. Oleh sebab itu walaupun loceng berbunyi setengah hari Sabtu, tapi kami gunakan hari Sabtu itu sehingga jam sebelas malam juga”.*

“... do not think we are work addicts,” said the professor to his guest from overseas. Kenji added to this, “We really don’t have enough time. And this centre is closed on Sundays. That’s why even though the bell rings at mid-day on Saturdays, we use the whole Saturday until eleven at night as well”.

The paragraph above shows that such a situation is not considered out of the ordinary by Japanese society. The zeal of the Japanese for hard work has its roots in one of the teachings of Confucius called “*Konjo*”. “*Konjo-ga-arui*” (to possess *konjo*) means that one has the zeal to fight, willingness, determination, perseverance and courage. Someone possessing “*Konjo*” will do his job and is willing to face whatever obstacles he encounters. The Japanese see obstacles as a challenge to increase one’s effort to succeed. “*Konjo*” also includes extra effort other than expertise and experience to make one a better worker. This is what makes the Japanese so intent on working hard in order to increase productivity and bring about results that one can be proud of. This excerpt also shows that Japanese employees tend to work until 10 p.m. and will use about thirty minutes to an hour to plan the next work day. This shows that the Japanese manage their work very systematically. Based on the experience of the writer himself, it can be seen that even a private tutor would make impressive preparations for work. Even in the Japanese education system, a lot of importance is given to homework as a form of intensive training.



In this novel, Arena Wati also depicts the system of address in Japanese families. The Japanese place a lot of importance on honorific suffixes. For adults, the suffix “san” is combined with the name of the person (“Michiko-san”). The suffix “san” is used for both men and women. Michiko, who is still considered a small child by her father, is referred to as “Michiko-chan”. Family relationships follow a strict hierarchy. The authority and influence of parents remains strong in Japanese families today.

Arena Wati also traces the ways in which the Japanese fulfil responsibilities with full dedication. Such feelings of responsibility are held by all, so much so that even a porter maintains such feelings (2003:69). Responsibility is considered a moral duty and is one of the most important concepts in Confucian teachings, known as “*giri*” (duty). This concept is very highly valued in the development of humankind as it preserves and eases social relationships. It includes relationships between boss and worker, parent and child, husband and wife, and brother and sister. “*Giri*” also includes caring about someone who has provided help in the past. For example, a boss will feel indebted and will offer due remuneration. To this end, “*giri wahatsu*” is awarded at suitable ceremonies. Apart from “*giri*”, the concept “*ninjo*” (human feeling) is another element of dualism that is still practiced in Japanese society.

The novel *Sakura Mengorak Kelopak* depicts Japanese traditions concerning marriage (2003:77). Arena Wati shows that a bride must be chosen very carefully. Her character must be free from all blemishes. Especially in the olden days, a marriage will only take place if consent has been obtained from all sides. According to Monyoshu Noh-Shozoku (1969:150), in writing about marriage in the 7th and 8th centuries, a well-known poet of ancient Japan once described Japanese men and women as dancing together in the spring. This shows that they were happily married to the partners of their own choice. They were also reportedly not in need of a matchmaker to arrange their marriage for them.

The long period of time during which Japan was isolated from the outside world provided leaders with the impetus to strive for modernity. In the beginning, children’s education depended greatly on their social status. Girls were only exposed to non-academic education aimed at producing women with excellent feminine qualities. Great attention should be paid to the following excerpt (2003:153):

*Hanya darah dan nyawa perempuan itu saja yang dapat membasuh kotoran dari muka seluruh lelaki Dai Nihon.*

Only blood and the lives of women could wash the stains from the faces of the men of all of *Dai Nihon*

In Dorothy Robins-Mowry's study titled *The Hidden Sun: Women of Modern Japan* (1983:24), she explains that women during the feudal Tokugawa period (1600-1868) did not have any power in government. Their position in society was only that of tools to strengthen or increasing the family. Girls during this time also rarely received basic education. They were taught to become perfect women according to tradition, such as how to beautify the home and themselves, how to care of themselves during pregnancy, as well as female customs (Lebra, 1976:12). During the Tokugawa period, women, depended wholly on men. Before marriage, they depended on their fathers and after that their husbands, and later their sons (Iwao, 1993:5; Lebra, 1976:12). Women needed to know how to carry themselves and adapt to the needs of men. The rights of men and women at the time were very different. For example, in case of a divorce, men would usually win. This was because at the time there existed no divorce court. Divorced women at the time were highly stigmatized and ostracized from the mainstream even if they remarried men of high rank.

Arena Wati also points out similarities with Malay society which places much importance on not causing another to lose face. For example, the Japanese believe it is important to take into consideration the points of view of other people and avoid hurting the feelings of others by not expressing one's own opinion directly (2003:86). This can be seen on pages 114 and 283. The following is Arena Wati's description:

*Malu itu sendiri barangkali mempunyai kriteria yang berlainan dengan malu yang ada pada bangsamu, atau yang ada pada bangsa Barat umpamanya. Itu tergantung pada nilai masing-masing, menurut norma masing-masing. Mereka betul-betul menjaga air muka orang yang hidup dan juga nenek moyang mereka. Seperti kata Michiko kepada Atan (Atainosan), "...dan bagi kami di sini, memegangnya dengan dua tujuan. Pertama, untuk menjaga maruah atau air muka roh nenek moyang kami, kedua untuk menjaga maruah atau air muka yang hidup, lingkungan keluarga, lingkungan jiran atau Tonarigamai dan seterusnya masyarakat." Ini ada kena mengena dengan konsep malu itu sendiri. Menjadi satu pantang larang kepada masyarakat Jepun memalu atau menjatuhkan air muka seseorang di khalayak ramai.*

Shame itself could have different criteria that in your society or in Western society. It depends on the values and norms of each. They really take pains to

make sure that neither a living person nor their ancestors lose face. As Michiko explained to Atan (Atainosan), "...and for us here, we hold on to it for two reasons. Firstly, to protect the honour or the face of our ancestors and secondly that of the living—our family members, neighbours, or Tonarigamai, and the rest of society." This is linked to the concept of shame itself. It is a taboo for the Japanese to shame someone, or to cause them to lose face in public.

The Japanese are also depicted as people who place great importance on shame (2003:117), because the concept of shame is also an important concept in Confucian teachings. Shame is a core concept in the Japanese mentality. For the people of feudal Japan, for example, to be shamed in public was a precursor for death.

Arena Wati also depicts the women of Kyoto to be more refined than the women of Tokyo. This could be an analogy showing that Tokyo is a metropolitan area. Arena Wati depicts this as follows (2003:xx):

*"Saleha sudah tinggal di negeri Barat dan ini baru pulang dari Jepun, bagaimana rasanya? Dapat kau bandingkan?" Tanya Jasmin "Tentu baik Jepun, mama. Orangnyanya lemah lembut, terutama wanitanya," Jane meningskah.*

"Saleha, you have lived in the West and just returned from Japan, how does it feel? Can you compare?" asked Jasmin. "Of course Japan is better, mum. The people there are so gentle, especially the women," Jane interjected.

Arena Wati's observations and experiences inform the reader that the patriarchal system remains strong within society and within the family. The patriarchal system which was practised in the past also tied a married woman completely to her husband's family. The lifestyles and traditions involving women during the Tokugawa period greatly influenced the lives of Japanese women, in that married women would stop working and concentrate fully on the household, especially on the upbringing of children. The raising of children is the responsibility of the women in Japan, according to handed-down traditions (Shinotsuka, 1989). The position of women in Japanese society is said to be based on two philosophical principles, that is Confucian principles and those of the basic feudal samurai class, in which gentleness combines with bravery and courage.

Arena Wati also shows "Japaneseness" as meaning adaptability to situations (2003:14). For example, the Japanese are highly disciplined where saving electricity is concerned; they will not turn on the air conditioner

if the temperature is below 20 degrees Celsius, and the use of a heater at temperatures over 19 degrees is also not permitted.

Were Japanese society to leave behind its Eastern values, it would lose the touch with its traditions that form the root of its civilization (2003:147). The traditional elements that symbolize Japanese identity remain till this day. It is the special nature of Japanese civilization that it remains valued in the current of present-day globalization. Similar to the period of Tokugawa rule, the period of the Meiji rulers also saw much importance being placed on the family as a basic unit in government. Japanese society at the time placed great importance on the family, which was considered to be not only a structure of power or domestic system but rather a domestic group with its own management body. Arena Wati also confirms what Malaysians have heard all along about the work ethic of the Japanese, that is, that the Japanese are serious about punctuality. To save time, they prefer to have coffee in the office lounge than to go to the canteen.

Arena Wati's novel also shows that the Japanese place much importance on the appreciation of art and history, as well as nature and religious objects (2003:192). The Japanese consider visits to castles, temples, mountains, forests and the beach as something that is an absolute must at least once in a lifetime. It is to them akin to a pilgrimage. Thus, it is not surprising that Japanese schoolchildren in their last year of primary school are required to go on a trip to Nara, a place that is well known for its *jinja* (temples) and its historical artefacts.

Arena Wati also succeeds in depicting the culture of courtesy and politeness in Japanese society (Arena Wati, 234):

*... bas padat dan wanita muda ini sabar berdiri, bersesak-sesak, dan selalu mendahulukan orang tua kalau ada kerusi kosong. Dan seorang wanita sebayanya yang turun di Nishijin Kaikan, Imadegawa Dori berdiri dari kerusinya turun dan mengangguk kepada wanita muda yang sangat menarik perhatiannya. Tapi pakaiannya yang asing dan sikap sopan halus wanita muda ini, menyebabkan wanita yang turun mengangguk hormat kepadanya dan menawarkan kerusinya*

... the bus was full and the young woman continued to stand patiently, squeezing and giving preference to the elderly. And a woman of the same age who got off at Nishijin Kaikan, Imadegawa Dori stood up and nodded at the young woman who had attracted her attention. But the young woman's foreign-looking clothes and her good manners made the women who was getting off give her a nod of respect and offer her seat as well"

This is part of the lifestyle and practice among the Japanese who are extremely polite and concerned with harmony.

In *Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo*, Abu Yazid Abidin or Wijaya Mala takes readers on a journey into the spirit, culture and people of the land of the rising sun. This novel was produced while the writer was taking a course at the International Studies Institute in Tokyo. Set against the challenging backdrop of the city, the writer introduces Asan as a character who is not at peace with himself due to his failed marriage to Manis, but who is able to find love again with Yoko. Asan finds himself in the throes of a love filled with strangeness, enmity and finality with Yoshiko. However, this love affair ends when they realize that their different cultures and traditions form a great barrier between them. However, through this novel, the writer is able to convey the refined nature and beauty of the Japanese lifestyle especially in the city.

In the Japanese social system as explained by Abu Yazid (1990:10), it is the custom that they will pour the drink for their friend while the friend next to them will pour their drink. There will not be anyone at a dinner party pouring their own drink.

Abu Yazid (1990:14) emphasizes that the Japanese also show appreciation of their cultural history through their clothing. Women's kimonos, for example, have undergone some modifications. The formerly long and wide kimonos have given way to very attractive versions. Traditionally, mothers would teach their daughters the art of wearing kimonos. Kimonos were only worn at events and special occasions such as weddings and convocation ceremonies. The image of the Japanese geisha is known the world over. The writer shows that the geishas still hold fast to their traditions (1990). Such as when Yoshiko expresses her embarrassment, "Hazukashii... (*malu*)" ["Hazukashii... (shame)"] when Asan fondles the folds between her *obi* to feel for her soft waist. Usually geishas are dressed in kimonos and they perform guest relations duties similar to that available in entertainment clubs the world over. However, Japanese geishas have their own unique characteristics in that they are trained from young to be professional entertainers. They are trained in singing, dancing, and entertaining guests; they are taught how to walk, talk, and laugh. In short, geishas are there to entertain men who wish to leave their work stress behind.

The writer's experiences in Japan are also conveyed through depictions of Asan as he lives in Japan and gets to understand that Japanese women are taught from a very young age not to feel jealous, especially towards men (1990:57). For the Japanese, jealousy is not only a weakness but also

the worst characteristic for a woman to possess. To them, jealousy can be, considered to be “*Tsun-o-dasu*” or “the devil with horns”. From a young age, Japanese women consider that a woman’s aim in life is to be an accepted wife and respected mother.

In *Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo*, the writer can be seen as attempting to depict Tokyo as a city in which moral values are cast aside. One of the factors for this is most likely that Tokyo is exposed to international influences. Still, the Japanese are able to maintain high moral standards as they are a lofty civilization with strong traditions. For example, the Japanese consider it a grave faux pas to make another person wait. Therefore, to express regret at making others wait for them they will say “*omatase shimashita*”. This can be seen in the following excerpt (1990:92):

*Yoko mengikut kelaziman menyampaikan ucapan beradap, “O-matase-shimashita”. Tetapi Asan berkata, “Tak mengapa dia menunggu sekejap saja.”*

Yoko uttered the customary polite apology, “*O-matase-shimashita*”. But Asan said, “It’s all right, he only waited a short while.”

Here, “*omatase shimashita*” means “I am sorry for inconveniencing you to wait for me”. “*Gomen ne*” (I’m sorry) is always at the tip of their tongues. Yoko, as a guest liaison, is always quick to say “*Gomen ne*” by way of apology (1990:83 & 151). In *Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo*, the writer also shows that the Japanese have a culture of expressing their thanks. This is evident in the writer’s depiction of the following situation (1990:112):

*Dia menarik nafas panjang, bangun tidak bersemangat. Kemudian pergi membayar wang makan di kaunter. Pelayan-pelayan genit pakai baju kebaya dan berkain batik mengucap terima kasih. Tukang wang di kaunter mengucap terima kasih, mereka mengamalkan satu tradisi, selaras dengan nilai kebudayaan mereka.*

He drew a long breath and stood up without much energy. He went to the counter to pay for his food. The petite waitresses wearing baju kebaya and batik sarongs said thank you to him. The cashier at the counter said thank you. It was a tradition they practised, in line with the values of their culture.

Through his character, Asan, the writer also informs readers as to the attitudes of restaurant staff who feel it is their duty to give the best service. The writer also shows that waitresses in Japan need to be world class, with

at least a Lower Secondary education, or a certificate in a waitressing course; they also need to take a course on culture and beauty. From the writer's point of view, most waitresses are refined and careful, none are illiterate, moody or coarse (1990:131).

The novel *Sejuk-sejuk Tokyo* also shows the polite nature of Japanese women, whether in youth or as adults, or even as wives. As wives, for example, it is said that typically "Japanese women, once married, are very loyal. It is tradition that a wife must be a mother. They respect themselves but they are aware of their status as wives, they work hard and are willing to die for the benefit of their household. This surely shows there is not external influence" (1990:138). According to Japanese tradition, it is big faux pas for a schoolgirl to smoke. This is because the Japanese hold fast to customs and traditions that have formed the core of the progress of their country from long ago until now. The writer depicts the courteous nature of adult Japanese women as follows (1990:172):

*... tapi di samping kecantikan, perempuan Jepun bangga dengan sopan santun. Walau ada yang jahat dan kasar, tapi sopan santun masih unggul.*

... apart from beauty, Japanese women are proud of being courteous. There are wicked and vulgar women but courtesy is still the most important thing.

## CONCLUSION

This article explores three different creations by Malay writers inspired by experiences in Japan while living there, in three different eras. The expressions of their feelings and the experiences they gained are all different, and are presented in different ways, and yet have a similar message. The Japanese traditions are too strong to be totally effaced from Japanese identity. The Cultural Studies theory which encompasses the relationship between writer, text and reader reveals that the Japanese lifestyle is very much influenced by factors such as social class, ethnicity, gender, ideology, power and politics. The experiences dealt with by these three writers have a very big impact because the events and stories that are presented are based on the writers' experiences. Therefore, each issue concerning Japanese culture that is focused upon seems immediate and convincing. Based on the function of Cultural Studies, the analysis that can be made here shows that there is great value in literary works, as they have their own aesthetics, are intellectual and spiritual in nature, and are more than mere writings.

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(Translated by Tanja Jonid)