

Amanda Kennell (University of Hawai'i Press, 2023)

ALICE IN JAPANESE WONDERLANDS: TRANSLATION, ADAPTATION, MEDIATION

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Kennell's monograph offers cutting-edge insight into the global cultural phenomenon and obsession within Japanese culture and its media with "Alice in Wonderland." Seeing numerous Alice in Wonderland-themed items and artifacts—a boutique hotel, stationery, manga, video games, art installation, film and more—one might presume that these *Alice* in Japanese culture and media are from Lewis Carroll's texts. Yet, Kennell reminds her readers that Carroll, in fact, never wrote a book titled *Alice in Wonderland*. He wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871) (3). Kennell observes: "Alice in Wonderland' denotes not a book or collection of books but an entire world, complete with settings, characters, histories, physics, logics, and so on. This world is recognizable to many, though most cannot identify" the different versions of Carroll's text (6), and Kennell calls this the "obvious and opaque" "essence of Alice in Wonderland" observed in the contemporary Japanese media environment (7).

The project's objectives are set out to question "how is Alice visible everywhere in Japan without being fully seen?" (21). One of the most significant and original contributions of this book is its critical framework for analyzing the cultural phenomenon of "Alice in Wonderland" in Japan's media mix environment. Drawing from Eiji Ōstuka's theoretical use of the word "*sekai*" [world], Kennell explains "Alice in Wonderland" in Japan through the lens of media mix production: "a form of industrial synergy wherein companies create a fictional world with the goal of

instantiating it in multiple, noncompeting media within a relatively short period of time so that each iteration advertises all of the others" (10).

This project is potentially targeting the following scholars as its audience: First, scholars who are interested in Japanese receptions of English literature, including researchers on Charles Dickens, Emily Bronte or L. M. Montgomery, as many of their works and translations are indeed popular in Japan, though not translated as prolifically as the Alice books. Second, scholars in Japanese studies will benefit from Kennell's media mix framework; as Kennell rightly point out, global circulation and the popularity of Japanese media, including manga, video games, films and animation are a common research topic. For such work, this project will be an illuminating reference point, and may also serve as useful teaching material for university students at a range of levels in relation to Japanese media and cultural analysis.

This book is divided into six chapters, and in Chapter 1, Kennell's core theoretical argument pertains to Alice's liminality: Alice's changes in body size, and shifting worlds, have been discussed and debated among various scholars. Kennell argues: "Alice's liminality not only enables but actively encourages its reproduction in the contemporary Japanese media environment. The media mix production process in Japan today is based on two principles: production in multiple, and connections between those multiple works and their shared worlds. Alice's liminality allows it to function as a bridge between different works and worlds, and consumers are able to follow this connection with surprisingly little overt direction"

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(36). Alice's liminality is in this book exemplified and explored specifically in the concept of the silhouette, as "[s]ilhouettes are recordings of shadows, [...]: they exist, and that existence can be proved by the naked eye, yet they have no physical substance and therefore cannot be grasped," (37) a pattern for Alice that Kennell argues has enabled her and her worlds to transcend media across time in Japanese culture.

Chapters 2 and 3 explore this trope of the silhouette. Chapter 2, titled "Ryūnosuke Akutagawa in the Shadow of Early Alice Translations," introduces Akutagawa's translation of Alice, and radically discusses Akutagawa's *Kappa* as an adaptation of Alice, through his use of silhouettes. As Akutagawa's death anniversary is called *Kappa-ki* [Kappa Day], the shadow of the kappa not only denotes his work of that name, but further evokes the entirety of his *oeuvre*. This chapter discusses how the translation of Alice written by Akutagawa and Kikuchi Kan significantly contributed to shaping the landscape of Alice in Japan, particularly in "centering Alice's imagery on a (kappa) silhouette" (73). Chapter 3 expands on these ideas of the silhouette and Alice's liminality, as it examines the looking-glass in contemporary fine artist Yayoi Kusama's work, with a focus on installations that she named "infinity mirror rooms" (74ff.).

In Chapter 4, "A Profusion of Alices through Manga for Girls and Boys." Kennell connects Masuko Honda's argument on "fluttering, or oscillating back and forth over borders, [as] a technique used to subtly transgress gendered societal norms" (37) to the ways the presence of Alice has been obscured in contemporary culture. She examines how the Alice manga boom in the 1980s accelerated the media mix production system in Japanese media industries, along with discussion of later works such as Bisco Hatori's

Ouran High School Host Club and Jun Mochizuki's *Pandora Hearts*.

In Chapter 5, "Detecting Alice on Page, Screen, and Street," Kennell explores why the mystery genre has been compatible with Alice, and flourished alongside adaptations of Alice in Japan. Kennell is particularly insightful in her effort to trace the ways that the 1980s were a fruitful era for media mixes of Alice in Japan's culture industry (138). In that context, along with aligning Alice with the history of Japan's detective genre, Kennell discusses how Alice's liminality enabled the creation of various forms of media from fiction to film, TV programs, clothing, manga, animation, CDs, restaurants and magazines. The book concludes this discussion of liminality through examining the recent Netflix series, *Alice in Borderland*, which was transnationally collaborated and coproduced.

This is an ambitious and well-executed monograph. The author's knowledge and insight, particularly in theorising the shape-shifting nature of Alice and her world is highly engaging, and applicable across other cultural phenomena. As this work compares visual cultures of Alice across national contexts, it might fruitfully be brought into connection with children's literature scholarship, such as theories around the relationships between text and image in children's literature (e.g., major works by Maria Nikolajeva, Perry Nodelman), or to other work that has explored the cultural crossings of children's literature (e.g., Lauren Tosi and Peter Hunt on Alice and Pinocchio). While the book, thus, does not primarily situate itself within existing work on children's literature and its afterlives, it is nonetheless a significant contribution to the field of Japanese literature and culture, and provides new insights into interpreting transnational cultural phenomena.