

Posudek vedoucího diplomové práce

Název: The Confrontation between Japanese & American Worlds / Sřet Japonských a Amerických světů

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Obecné shrnutí

The challenges of Ladislav's work are manifold and immediately apparent. Because today, after the many twists and turns critique has taken, sciences that consciously engage other worlds, whether human or non-human, tend to conceptually and linguistically operate through recursion and self-displacement. That is, they have no stable, seemingly neutral ground from which the world is thought, written, performed. Composing a text then becomes a balancing act between remaining comprehensive for a causal, but interested outsider and constant shifts in what is being stated.

I think that Ladislav managed to tackle this demanding task very well, even though I would have put a different stress on the material chosen here and there. This is hardly a criticism, as of course, when it comes to performative reframings of knowledge, the point is not how they relate to a world out there (as representationalism has been shown to be necessarily incoherent), but what new possibilities for conceptual and imageric thought can be created in choosing the empirical material well.

All further criticism should be taken on the background of this acknowledgment: the author of this bachelor's thesis shows remarkable skill in bringing together a wide variety of relevant sources (both theoretical and more straightforwardly empirical), applying them in order to restructure more conventional research to fit this emerging (non-)paradigm, is able to think independently, creatively and to construct a text that creates many connections to other lines of inquiry, including contemporary issues through which historical encounters between worlds continue to reverberate. My comments on the following pages will hopefully add some constructive criticism so that Ladislav's thinking can become more focused and better articulated in the future.

1) **Struktura argumentace.**

Je výklad srozumitelný? Je na každém místě zřejmé, co chce autor říci a proč to říká právě nyní? Je práce přehledně členěna a splňuje cíl, který si autor vytknul?

The thesis is structured so as to prepare the theoretical ground for later explorations, make links between fields evident and continuously (re)situate the position advanced in the course of writing. The latter is precisely a textual articulation of the “continuous flow of change” alluded to in the conclusion. Contexts are manifold, endless even, so Ladislav attempts to situate the research within the framework of religious studies and all the baggage the term entails. This is the first chapter and includes a discussion of the relation of colonialism and the category religion, and necessarily immediately the question of the nature-culture dyad that has been tirelessly critiqued and shown to be contingent in fields such as anthropology, science technology studies STS or media theory. The scope of the summary of the problematic is prudent and important, given that religious studies lags far behind when it comes to acknowledging these shifts. Ladislav concisely established relations between these discourses and the crisis of religion within religious studies, which has been put forth on materials drawn from Japan – the term religion evidently does not map easily onto the world, and East Asian

realities are foremost in demonstrating this lack. While religious studies has been caught in a circle when it comes to dealing with this issue, the other fields, being actively constructivist and ontologically pragmatic offer a conceptual infrastructure that shows there is a path on not just an epistemological blind alley of constant self-reflexive critique that disregards the performative dimension of concepts, regardless of their putative truth-value.

This brings the reader to the second chapter, where Ladislav lays out a way to deal with these conundrums, following the proposition put forth by the Ontological Turn that there are not many points of view on one world, but rather many worlds as such. Because, among other things, languages and concepts co-constitute words, i.e. they are not representational (referring to a world out there untouched by language), but active components of construction, through which both the thesis and this review become apparent as actants in their own. This step is indeed necessary, because the encounter between (a scientifically constructed) historical Japan and America is precisely an encounter between radically divergent worlds, where some things interact and others don't, at least not directly, but these encounters reverberate in multiple, incommensurable ways in these worlds. Later, Ladislav will show how the two realities dealt with these encounters, how they changed and also why some aspects have not changed. It is here too, that the discussion of Capitalism and Christian cosmology comes into full view, as the so-called secular world, in the ways it perpetuates itself while disregarding the other comes to be seen as a very specific cosmology that radically differs from the Japanese one. The abundant examples then play a dual role: on the one hand, they are often negative, in that they show how common preconceived notions are flat out wrong (without stating simple correct views, which wouldn't make sense for that would bring us back into representationalism and the question of truth out-there); on the other, they establish a web of references that makes it possible for a difference in worlds to (conceptually) appear. We might not be able to experience this difference, being immersed in the flux of worlds, but we are able to conceive them and experiment with comparisons. Examples here and throughout the text demonstrate how thoroughly embedded even in seemingly tangential or unrelated fields cosmologies perpetuate themselves. So, while I myself would have taken other examples, all of those appearing here make sense.

The next part, chapters three and four, presents descriptions relating to concepts and imageries elaborated above of the two worlds as they encountered each other, while at times reminding the reader that these worlds too have been developing. It is here that the materialist method becomes perhaps most apparent, when e.g. the language situation in Japan is explained as a combination of socio-political infrastructural conditions without denying the force of language and concepts in feeding back into such circuits, historically and today through Ladislav's work itself.

Chapter four ably reframes Bellah's classic work on civil religion into the paradigms employed here. What becomes apparent is how the modern state, and the American state above all with it's all too explicit Christian parts, is anything but neutral, but perpetuates variants of Christian worlds. And, even more importantly, how this veritable cosmology of deification of the modern state and its symbols continue to wreak global havoc on anything deemed too different to be exploited by capitalist means, and how the implicit presuppositions determine much of what passes as science today, reterritorializing it's emancipatory promises into little more than henchmen of (neo)colonialism and white supremacy. Amid all of this, Ladislav manages to keep a clear head and show the reader different translations that had been happening between worlds as new ones were being inadvertently forged. It is his earlier reference to the work of Nick Land that proves most essential: modern Western capitalism and philosophy is a practice that effectively staves off any other, that does all it can to remain (ideally) unchanged, even as (materially) changes are intensified. This is the onto-practical problem of greatest ethical import that the researchers referenced in the thesis try to solve. How do we, as scientists, create

theories that enable feedback that leads radical and necessary change in our conceptual edifices? Otherwise, we will only live in fantasy worlds that will eventually come crashing down on us, as the material world changes too far to be ever grasped again by cultural practices. From not only the writings of Ladislav, it seems evident that the more open, fluid, non-essentialist cosmologies of the so-called East are, whatever other shortcomings, more adaptive to change on a complex entanglement of levels and not merely symbolic libations here and there.

Chapter 5 finally brings the reader to the historical encounter, now that two different and changing cosmologies have been constructed against which these meetings can be framed. Here, the multiplicity of the previous chapter is kept, so that Tokugawa to Meiji Japan is being shown a more than one and less than many, and different effects are traced, especially those straightforwardly related to nature-culture discussions. It is apparent that much of what was going on in the last century would have been unthinkable without the West (both in terms of material and conceptual effects), while making it also clear, that this emerging Japan is a unique combination of traditions and forces, an adaptation, a change. When it comes to images of the West as made by historical Japanese, Ladislav makes much difference evident, including the absence of a modern concept of Nature as shown in travelogues (passages that remind of the power of texts to construct worlds and shape attention) and embassy descriptions of what was their "other". It becomes apparent that even what science, at least one that claims a simple authority over the world/truth, is flexible, can be made to fit different regimes and agendas, all the while keeping an underlying truth-effect that other modes of doing the world don't.

The next chapter traces a parallel effects of the encounter on the United States, which, as mentioned by Land, operates as a cosmology aimed at keeping itself, its putative underlying idea of an essence (however much it may in actuality change) stable. Of course, Nature looms large here, as the go-to argument about what is truly part of the world in face of evidence to the contrary. The very adaptive reality of post-encounter Japan contrasts strongly, and it is clear that the United States can keep up this way of doing the world thanks to their military powers and the general history of Western (neo)colonialism that forged a world where some very privileged people can act as if they were not part of it. This is also apparent in the anxieties Americans experience when the world works differently from what their conventions say, by way of which a clear link to the most general issues of today can be made.

The style of the thesis is such that one is immediately aware to not operate within a representational paradigm, where the issue is one of true or untrue representation, but a world where every act of representation is also an act of creation (in the here and now) and as such changes that which it purports to represent. Writings that take these necessary effects into account are then more about how worlds are made, and the method of comparison, where two differing worlds are being written in their mutual encounter and change, make it possible to grasp very subtle complexities of how realities are being made and unmade, that otherwise would get lost. Ladislav manages to communicate all of this in the short span of a bachelor's thesis.

However, it is and always was a topic far in excess of the limits proposed by the format, and I would want to read more and more thoroughly on all I reiterated above. Hence, despite being admirable as both a thesis and an effort of a bachelor's student, this small proviso has to be stated.

In conclusion, by offering my own summary of the structure, I hope to have shown the intricacies and sensibility of how the argument is constructed, even as I am certain to have missed some of the connections made. The promises made by the title were thus more than fulfilled.

2) Formální úroveň.

Pracuje autor koherentně se zkratkami, syntaxí bibliografických odkazů, přepisy cizích slov apod.? Užívá správně poznámek pod čarou? Nedopouští se pravopisných chyb a jazykových neobratností?

This citation style is somewhat idiosyncratic yet mostly consistent. There are occasional typos (e.g. Viveiors on p. 7), mistakes (in general a lack or excess of the article “the” and commas), inconsistent use of quotation marks (sometimes even Czech ones appear) as well as some sentences that could be rewritten for clarity or are inelegantly formulated. On the other hand, a very sophisticated choice of words and language in general demonstrating that Ladislav has acquired fluency in contemporary post-disciplinary discourses make up for these shortcomings, especially given this is a bachelor's thesis. Other small mistakes include writing *ibidem* (instead of *idem*, consistently) and when citing sources that have appeared before, citing them in full and not, as is common, in an abbreviated version.

Furthermore, perhaps a numbering of the chapters could be prudent in the future. As it stands, this was not an impediment to following the entangled argument.

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3) Práce s prameny.

Pracuje autor průhledným způsobem se sekundárními prameny? Využívá primární prameny a pracuje s pramennými jazyky všude tam, kde je to na místě? Pracuje s prameny metodicky správně?

It is important to note that the conceptual traditions Ladislav engages, break down the difference between primary and secondary sources, something he shows awareness of in the first pages. Thus the distinction even as when it comes to bibliography is of limited use. Whenever a specifically Japanese concept, whether historical or more contemporary, is used, it is listed in English transcription. This makes sense, insofar as it destabilizes the arrogation of hegemony by the Western conceptual discourse and renders it evident that 'other' concepts have their own force to shape the world, whether in the historical one described, or the current academic one co-formed.

Ladislav references a wide variety of sources, at times on the surface far away from the topic at hand. However, all of which make sense here, because the topic of encounters and translations is always already one where all kinds of encounters/translations enter into circulation, and the comparison machine produces different outcomes based on which forms of translations enter into it. And, especially given that decolonial thought and conceptual tools have been most developed in Latin American research, the intense presence of thinkers from that part of the world makes much sense and opens new avenues for dealing with the problem of 'Asia as Method'.

As to why Ladislav chose to list different types of sources (books, articles, online) into separate categories, which is rather uncommon in humanities, is a mystery to me. I assume there are some practical advantages to it.

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4) Vlastní přínos.

Je práce pouze mechanickým kompilátem, nebo autor své primární i sekundární prameny přetavuje v nějaký nový, organický celek a vnáší do tématu nějaký vlastní pohled?

As is clear from my above writings, the work is highly original in all aspects, and to me manages to demonstrate that Ladislav not only copies surface conventions, but actually understands what is at stake in the discourses engaged, within and without academic research.

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5) Obecný přesah práce.

Je práce způsobem zpracování tématu zajímavá i pro toho, kdo se sám danou problematikou nezabývá?

The work is immensely inspiring, certainly for someone who engages related theories and topics. As far as I know, there has no similar work been done in the field of Japanese(-American) studies. It can be noticed that many of the sources employed by Ladislav are built on contemporary problematics (unsurprising given the focus of Science and Technology Studies STS that loom large) and their application to historical material has not yet gained much traction. The examples used have an impact in many related and even unrelated fields, and Ladislav even manages to make the impact of such research on religious studies (or perhaps rather cosmotechnological studies) very present. Furthermore, his writing style is very pleasant to read and quietly sophisticated. At the very least, even readers uneducated in any of the fields actualized here will take away snippets and fragments that might yet inspire them in their own work, or open up some of the more difficult theoretical resources utilized in the thesis.

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Celkové hodnocení:

Taking into account its mostly formal shortcomings, I heartily recommend this impressively researched, argued and (methodologically and politically) actual thesis for defense and by assigning it 35/40 points evaluate the thesis as *excellent*.

V Praze, dne 25/8/2021