

Mori Ōgai's "Maihime" and *Vita Sexualis* read as German-Japanese Eclectic Hybridity

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Mori Ōgai's famous novella *The Dancing Girl* (*Maihime*, 1890) forms a German-Japanese parable of Meiji modernisation, when Japan was, in the end, mostly modelled after the conservative Prussian Empire. *The Dancing Girl* and *Vita Sexualis* (1909) represent first modern works of Japanese literature in the traditions of the autobiographical novel and of the German *Bildungsroman* in the late nineteenth century. The most famous piece out of Mori Ōgai's so-called German trilogy, *The Dancing Girl*, tells a forbidden love-story that was written after the author's visit to Germany (1884–1888) as a researcher in military medicine, when Prussia was particularly strong in medical and military matters.

The protagonist's love for the 'dancing girl'-character called Ellis in Bismarck's Prussia became an idol of Japanese individualism, stemmed from the contact with Western personal freedom. His decision to abandon his pregnant lover to join his governmental duty back in Japan was seen as a victory of East Asian dogma (Yoda Tomiko); paralleled in the establishment of the Meiji Constitution from 1890, which was modeled after the one of Prussia. The writer's personal background strongly coincides with the Meiji elites' focus on Prussia, next to England and France. This proceeds within a holistic consideration of Meiji modernisation as formative of a unique Franco-Anglo-German-Japanese modernisation, conceptualised for East Asia as 'adaptive comparative' (Sowon Park) after the dominant political thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi. This coincidence of literary fiction and historical reality hence turns Ōgai into an embodiment of the German-Japanese heart to the transnational Japanese-Western 'eclectic hybridity'. Impacted by his journey to Bismarck's 1880s-Prussia, Ōgai in succession became one of the most important figures of modern Japan as a writer, medical researcher and political figure.

The background of this eclecticism, on the level of literature, is formed of persisting classic Japanese traditions, of medieval and ancient nature. Notably eroticism and a reflection on the ethics of love dominate Mori Ōgai's novel *Vita Sexualis*. This semi-autobiographical *Bildungsroman* resonates with the sanctioned legacy of Edo Japan's liberated (hetero- and homo-)sexual culture, crossing the taboos of the pleasure district Yoshiwara and male boarding schools' dormitories. This unsanctioned erotic culture still derives from a distinct Shinto Buddhist tradition of commercial sexuality, often associated with geisha, that can also be found in *shunga* in Fine Arts and *yomihon/ninjobon* in literature from the Edo period – as analysed in Junko Saeki's cultural theory *Ai to sei no bunkashi*. At the same time, in Meiji, the new ideal of platonic individual love as antagonism to traditional customs of arranged marriages arose from the newly imported Western Christian tradition. This approach analyses the

autoe(r)xoticising self-narration in this autofictional novel about Japan's passage from an early modern self-isolated animistic culture to an accomplished modern nation of its own (Komori Yōchi) in the pioneer works of modern Japan's erotic *art de lettres*, also influenced by the key autobiographical novel *Confessions* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, likewise taboo-breaking and censored in its days in late 18th century.