Eufemia of Kudriaffsky and the 1873 Vienna World's Fair

Eufemia [or Euphemia] of Kudriaffsky, 1873 addressed four lectures concerning “a small, hitherto little known island to the east of China” to an audience of young women enrolled in a training institution that would allow them to enter gainful occupation. The carefully educated only daughter of a renowned constructor started to earn her livelihood as governess after the early death of her parents. Endowed with a great sense of aesthetics and an equally great love for nature, she took up watercolour painting later in life and became well known for her flower paintings and various literary and journalistic efforts.

Little is known about the incentive behind her sudden interest in Japan. What we do know is that she dedicated the published booklet containing her four lectures to “my talented pupil Tei Watanabe, wife of First Secretary of the Japanese Legation in Vienna, Hiromoto Watanabe”. This connection to the budding Japanese diplomatic circle in Vienna may well have given her confidence to lecture about Japan at a time when, in the wake of the 1873 Vienna World's Fair, public interest in “things Japanese” was at a its height.

In my paper I shall take a closer look at the kind of knowledge regarding Japan that was disseminated in these lectures: What kind of knowledge was deemed appropriate for the young indigent women in pursuit of an appropriate training – or for their mentors? Which sources were tapped, which previous knowledge was forgotten or disregarded? Which aspects of Japanese culture were presented, which were neglected? The particular appeal of this booklet lies in its unspectacular nature: written not by an expert on Japan but by an educator, presented not to a learned audience but to ordinary women aspiring to a reasonable degree of general knowledge, it serves to catch the public mood immediately after the World Fair in an exemplary fashion.

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