



REPRESENTING JAPAN IN MUHAMMAD ALI'S *AR-RIHLATU AL-YĀBĀNIYYATU*: A TRAVEL LITERATURE ANALYSIS BASED ON CARL THOMPSON'S THEORY

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Abstract (10 PT) (Arabic font Sakkal Majalla 12 pt, 1 spasi)

This study discusses the depiction of the Japanese world in Muhammad Ali's *ar-Rihlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* by utilizing Carl Thompson's theory of travel literature. The purpose of this study is to reveal how Japan is depicted from an Arab perspective. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with text analysis techniques on quotations that describe Japanese cities. The results show that Muhammad Ali's depiction of Japan is not only informative and descriptive, but also full of personal judgments that reflect his cultural background, aesthetics, and identity as an Arab writer. Thus, *The novel serves as cultural mediation, demonstrating the dual perspective of admiration and critique through Arab subjectivity*

تجريد

تتناول هذه الدراسة تصوير العالم الياباني في رواية الرحلة اليابانية لمحمد علي، من خلال توظيف نظرية أدب الرحلة لكارل تومسون. وتهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن كيفية تصوير اليابان من منظور عربي. وقد استخدمت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي بأسلوب تحليل النصوص المقتبسة التي تصف المدن اليابانية. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن تصوير محمد علي لليابان لم يكن مجرد تصوير معلوماتي ووصفي، بل كان مليئاً بالتقييمات الشخصية التي تعكس الخلفية الثقافية والجمالية والهوية الذاتية له ككاتب عربي. وبالتالي، فإن هذه الرواية تُعد شكلاً من أشكال الوساطة الثقافية التي تُظهر كيف يتم فهم العالم الأجنبي وانتقاده وتصوره من قبل الرحالة..

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas penggambaran dunia Jepang dalam novel *ar-Rihlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* karya Muhammad Ali dengan memanfaatkan teori sastra perjalanan Carl Thompson. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkap bagaimana Jepang digambarkan dari sudut pandang orang Arab. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik analisis teks terhadap kutipan-kutipan yang menggambarkan kota-kota di Jepang. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggambaran Muhammad Ali terhadap Jepang tidak hanya bersifat informatif dan deskriptif, tetapi juga sarat akan penilaian personal yang mencerminkan latar belakang budaya, estetika, dan identitasnya sebagai penulis Arab. Dengan demikian, novel ini menjadi bentuk mediasi budaya yang memperlihatkan bagaimana dunia asing dipahami, dikritisi, dan dipersepsikan oleh pelancong.

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A. Introduction

Travel is a movement across space, whether on a broad scale, such as a trip across a continent or up a mountain, or on a narrow scale such as a trip to a region, country, or even a neighborhood. Travel is not just a physical movement, but also a process of interacting and negotiating between self and other that arises from movement in space (Thompson 2011:9). The process of interaction and negotiation produces new experiences that contain a lot of factual information about the area visited, both about political, social and cultural conditions (Alwi, 2023: 177). So it can be concluded that travel is a process of interaction and negotiation of the self with others that creates new experiences and factual information about the area visited.

A travel story always reveals real socio-cultural conditions distorted by the author's subjectivity as emotional responses to the people encountered during the journey (Hidayah et al., 2022: 48). During the travel process, travelers often record the story of their journey and describe the areas they visit. These notes produce a narrative of events and encounters that occur during the trip, creating a new account of the world they visit (Husain, 1983:8).

The genre of travel literature has experienced an expansion of meaning, no longer limited to physical adventure stories, but also encompassing intellectual and spiritual exploration. One interesting work to study in this context is Muhammad Ali's *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu*, a work that documents the author's experience of traveling to Japan in the early 20th century. This work was written by an Egyptian intellectual who was in a transitional period, amidst the currents of modernity thought, Islamic renewal, and the urgency of the Arab world in the face of Western and other Eastern advances. In this case, Japan presents itself as a unique "other" because it is an Asian country that has managed to modernize itself without losing its cultural identity. Muhammad Ali in his narrative not only describes Japan, but also reflects deeply on the social, educational, and cultural conditions in the Arab world.

There are several reasons why the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* was chosen as the material object of this study. First, the novel tells the author's journey from Egypt to Japan. Second, the story of the novel is a true story that Muhammad Ali did when he visited Japan so that the story in the novel is a reality. The problem in this study is how the Japan word

is depicted in the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* by Muhammad Ali. How does the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* ("The Journey to Japan") by Muhammad Ali Pasha depict the Japanese world from cultural perspectives—including social life, customs, and values—while simultaneously portraying observations of Japan's modernization and industrialization, embedding the author's philosophical reflections that shape the narrative's image of Japan, and enriching the representation through comparisons between Japan's context and the socio-political conditions in Egypt at the time of writing?

Muhammad Ali's novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* will be examined using Carl Thompson's theory of travel literature. Travel writing or travel literature is a record or result of the encounter between self and other that occurs due to spatial displacement (Thompson, 2011:9). Travel literature is understood as a travel report about the wider world conducted by a stranger in an unfamiliar or unknown place (Thompson, 2011:10). The travel report results in a mediation between the world as it is and the world as described by the author. The mediation consists of world depiction, self-disclosure, and representation of the other. World depiction is something that brings information about the world at large, places, and foreign societies (Thompson, 2011:62). The author's depiction of the world has two directions, namely objective and subjective depiction. Objective portrayal informs everything that is seen or heard as it is. Objective depictions limit the narrative power of the author as subject, but try to limit anecdotal or impressionistic reports (Thompson, 2011:84). Meanwhile, subjective portrayal provides information on the author's self-involvement, emotional responses, and judgment. Objective depiction requires distancing. Whereas subjective depiction requires the writer's involvement (Mashlihatin, 2015:5).

The literature review has been conducted by involving three aspects, namely from the material object, the formal object, and the theory used. As for the material object, there is no study of the depiction of the Japanese world in the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* by Muhammad Ali. Based on the formal object, namely the depiction of the other world of Japan, it has been done by Al-Ramadi (2019), but the novel used comes from a different author. Al-Ramadi's research (2019) used a novel by Ali Ahmad Al Jurjawi, while this research used the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* by Muhammad Ali.

Carl Thompson's travel writing theory centers on the idea that travel writing is not just a record of a journey, but also a process of self-discovery and representation of others. His

theory, outlined in his work, identifies three key concepts: Reporting the World, Revealing the Self, and Representing the Other. (Siti Nur Suci Maulidia, and Moh Zawawi, 2023)

Here's a breakdown of the core concepts; *Reporting the World*: This refers to the objective description of places, people, and experiences encountered during travel. It's about accurately portraying the external world as perceived by the traveler. *Revealing the Self*: This aspect focuses on how the traveler's own identity, experiences, and perspectives shape their account of the journey. It acknowledges that travel writing is not neutral but influenced by the writer's personal background and biases. *Representing the Other*: This concept examines how travelers portray the people they encounter during their journeys, including their cultures, customs, and ways of life. It highlights the potential for travel writing to perpetuate stereotypes or challenge them.

Thompson's theory is frequently used in the study of travel literature to analyze how authors construct their narratives and portray their experiences in different contexts. It helps to understand the complex relationship between the traveler, the places visited, and the people encountered, and how these elements are intertwined in the act of writing.

For example, researchers have used Thompson's theory to analyze novels, short stories, and travelogues to understand how authors utilize these concepts to shape their narratives and convey their messages.

Carl Thompson's Theory has been widely utilized in literary works, both Arabic and Indonesian literary works. Research that utilizes Carl Thompson's travel literary theory on Arabic literary works was conducted by Insani (2022) in the form of a thesis with the research title "The Journey of Arab Literature in Indonesia in the Novel *Rihlatu Jawa Al-Jamilatu* by Sholeh Bin Ali Al-Hamid".

As for Indonesian works, it was conducted by Mashlihatin (2015) with the research title "Novel 99 Cahaya Di Langit Eropa As a Postcolonial Travel Story". In general, the two previous studies mentioned do not have any real similarities, but only in terms of formal objects do they have similarities.

B. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The research consists of three stages, namely data provision, data analysis, and presentation of analysis results. The data provision stage begins with reading and translating the novel *Ar-Rihlatu al-Yābāniyyatu*. Then marking words, phrases, and sentences that contain the

author's depiction of Japan. Furthermore, the data was analyzed using Carl Thompson's theory of travel literature. The analysis serves to reveal the subjectivity or objectivity of world reporting in the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu*. The next stage is data presentation. The results of the data analysis produce a conclusion. The conclusion is a depiction of Japan from the perspective of Arab writers.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative-descriptive study, the researcher adopted Lincoln and Guba's widely recognized criteria—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility, akin to internal validity, was enhanced through prolonged immersion in the text, persistent observation of thematic patterns, and member checking, wherein interpretations were verified by colleagues familiar with Arabic and Japanese literary contexts. Investigator triangulation was implemented by engaging at least one additional researcher in the coding and analytic process to cross-check interpretations and reduce bias.

Dependability, analogous to reliability, was assured by maintaining a detailed audit trail—the researcher transparently documented all methodological decisions, coding schemes, and analytical stages, facilitating reproducibility and coherence. Confirmability was secured through reflexivity, using a researcher's journal to record assumptions and biases, while decision-making processes were made explicit to ensure that findings emerged from data rather than preconceptions. Finally, transferability—comparable to external validity—was addressed by providing thick, contextual descriptions of the historical period, authorial position, and inter-cultural dynamics, enabling readers to assess whether findings may apply to similar literary or historiographic settings.

The archival text was subjected to purposive sampling, selecting quotes that explicitly showcase the interplay of objectivity and subjectivity, reflect cultural comparisons, or carry ideological weight. This approach ensured that analyzed excerpts had maximal analytic value given the research objectives.

The selection process continued until thematic saturation was achieved—that is, until additional excerpts no longer offered new analytical insights into the modes of representation in *Ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu*. This criterion upholds content validity: the data set was deemed sufficiently rich once it encompassed the full thematic range relevant to assessing subjective versus objective representations and cultural positions.

This multilayered approach—combining grounded methodological rigor with purposive data selection and saturation—ensures that the findings are both focused and robust. Credibility and confirmability ensure interpretations are faithful to the text and free from excessive researcher imposition. Dependability ensures the process is transparent and repeatable, and transferability allows other scholars to assess the applicability of the study's insights in analogous contexts.

By deliberately choosing quotes that reveal ideological nuances and by analyzing them until saturation, the research balances depth of analysis with methodological integrity. The result is a credible, dependable, and contextually rich exploration of Muhammad Ali's narrative positioning on Japan from an Arab intellectual vantage point.

C. Result and Discussion

The depiction of the world in the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* by Muhammad Ali includes several countries because in his journey he passed through several countries to stop over before heading to Japan which became his final destination. However, this study focuses on the depiction of the world in Japan. The cities visited are Yokohama, Tokyo, Kyoto, Mihara, Nikko, and Iyashima. The following is an objective and subjective depiction of some of these cities in the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* by Muhammad Ali:

1. Objective Depiction of Japan in the novel *ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu*

The quote below is a description of the capital city of Japan, Tokyo. Ali describes Tokyo according to what he sees, here is the quote:

(1)

هي عاصمة تلك البلاد، ويبلغ عدد سكانها ١٨٠٠٠، وهي بلدة قديمة البناء. والتاريخ المعروف لليابان هو من نحو سنة ٥ بعد الميلاد، التي كان فيها ميكادو، وكان بالجهات اليابانية القبلية، وكانوا يحترمونهم كثيراً؛ لأنهم كانوا يزعمون أنه ابن الإله، وأول ديانتهم كانت هي الديانة البوذية، أخذوها من بلاد كوريا

('Ali, 1901:31)

/hiya 'āṣimatu tilka al-bilādi, wa yablughu 'adadu sukānihā 1,800,000, wa hiya baldatun qadīmatun al-binā'i, wa al-tārīkhi al-ma'rūfī li al-Yābāni huwa min naḥwi sanati 5 ba'da al-milādi, allatī kāna fihā Mikādū, wa kāna bi al-jihāt al-yābāniyyati al-qabaliyyati, wa kānū yaḥtaramūnahu kaṭīran li annahum kānū yaz'umūna annahu ibn al ilāh, wa awwalu dīyānātihim kānat hiya al-dīyānatu al buḏiyyati, akhaḏūhā min bilād Kūriyā./

'It is the capital of the country, with a population of 1,800,000. It is an old city in terms of buildings and Japanese history is known to have started around 5 AD, when the Mikado (emperor) began to rule. He was in the tribal areas of Japan, and they respected him greatly because they regarded him as the son of a god. Their first religion was Buddhism, which they took from Korea.'

Although *Ar-Rihlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* offers ostensibly objective descriptions of Tokyo and other Japanese cities—such as population figures, urban layout, and trade—Muhammad Ali's narrative also subtly reinforces the ideological project of Meiji Japan by using European benchmarks as proof of legitimacy, for instance, likening Japanese cities to European capitals as if Western standards must validate their modernity. His admiration reflects early 20th-century Pan-Asianist sentiment: a vision of Asian solidarity opposing Western colonialism, yet harnessed by Japan to assert its leadership role in the region. Meanwhile, his critique of Japanese gardens as less refined than Egyptian counterparts reveals a clash of aesthetic paradigms—favoring formal, symmetrical beauty familiar to Arab-European sensibilities over Japanese ideals like wabi-sabi and harmony with nature. Behind the praised orderliness and modernity, however, lay the realities of Japanese empire: the annexation of Taiwan in 1895, Korea in 1910, and the urban transformations tied to colonial infrastructure. Thus, Ali's travel narrative serves as a space of cultural dialogue that absorbs Japanese modernist prestige while overlooking power hierarchies and colonial legacies masked by the rhetoric of Pan-Asian unity. (Yazici, 2024)

(2)

ومساحة هذه البلدة من الشمال إلى الجنوب ٨ كيلو متر، وعرضها ٦ ونصف كيلو، ومساحتها التريعية حينئذ تكون ٢٨ ميلا مربعا، وكانت تسمى في الأزمان القديمة : (بيدو)، وكانت عبارة عن ثلاث أو أربع قرى صغيرة متصل بعضها بعض، وفي سنة ١٥٩٠ جاء الشجون توكو جاوا وبني قلعة كبيرة بها ووضع العساكر فيها. وفي سنة ١٨٦٨ قد منعت سلطة الشجونات، وجاء الميكادو إلى هذه العاصمة وسماها توكيو، وهي مقسمة إلى خمسة عشر قسما، وبها نهر عظيم يسمى: (سوميدة)، وعليه خمسة كبار من حديد، وذا النهر أعظم مساعد على نمو التجارة وتسهيل طرقها

('Ali, 1901:32)

Wa masāḥatu hāzihi al-baldatu min al-syamāli ilā al-janūbi 8 kīlū mitr, wa 'arḍuhā 6 wa niṣf kīlū, wa masāḥatuhā al-tarbi' iyyatu ḥīnanzu takūnu 28 māyilan murabba'an. Wa kānat tusammā fī al-azmāni al-qadīmati: (Yīdu), wa kānat 'ibāratu 'an šulāši au arba'i qurā ṣaghīratin muttaṣilun ba'ḍuhā bi ba'ḍin. Wa fī sanati 1590 jā'a as-syujūn Tōkugāwā wa banā qal'atun kabīratun bihā waḍa'a al-'asākiru fihā. Wa fī sanati 1868 qad mun'atu sulṭatu as-syujūnāti, wa jā'a al-Mikādū ilā hāzihi al-'āṣimatu wa sammāhā Tōkyō, wa hīya muqassamatu ilā khamsata 'ashara qasman, wa bihā nahru 'aẓīmu yusammā: (Sumidā), wa 'alaihi khamsatu kibārin min ḥadīdin, wa hāzā an-nahru a'ḍamu musā'id 'alā numū at-tijārati wa tashīlu ṭuruqahā.

'The area of the town from north to south is 8 km, and the width is 6.5 km, so the total area is about 28 square miles. In the past, the town was called "Yedo", and originally it was just three or four small villages connected to each other. In 1590, the Tokugawa Shogunate came, built a large fort there, and stationed troops inside. Then in 1868, the shogunate's power was abolished, and Mikado came to the capital and renamed it Tokyo. The city is divided into 15 wards, and there is a large river called Sumida with five iron bridges over it. This river was a great help in the growth of trade and facilitated its passage.'

In this excerpt, Muhammad Ali gives a fairly detailed description of the city of Tokyo. He mentions that the city stretches about 8 kilometers from north to south and 6.5 kilometers from east to west, for a total area of about 28 square miles. The city now known as Tokyo was once called Yedo, and was originally a combination of three or four small villages connected together. In 1590, the Tokugawa Shogun came and built a large fort in this area, and stationed his troops there. Then, in 1868, the shogunate system was abolished, and the Emperor (Mikado) moved the center of his government to this city and renamed it Tokyo. Ali also notes that Tokyo is divided into fifteen wards, and is fed by a large river called the Sumida, which has five iron bridges. This river is considered to have

played an important role in the growth of trade in the city, as well as facilitating the distribution of goods and services.

After providing an in-depth description of Tokyo as the center of government and a modern city full of history, Muhammad Ali continued his journey to Yokohama. If Tokyo reflects the administrative and historical face of Japan, then Yokohama comes as a representation of Japan's economic progress and openness to the outside world. This port city, only half an hour away from Tokyo, is presented by Ali in a more factual and descriptive tone. He records Yokohama's transformation from a small fishing village to one of Japan's largest ports, as well as an important center of trading activity in its time. The following is an excerpt that describes the city of Yokohama:

(3)

وبعد الظهر قد توجهت إلى يوكوهاما لأجل مقابلة مندوب شركة كوك، وهي على بعد نصف ساعة من توكيو بسير وابلور البر، وكانت في قديم الزمان بلدة صغيرة ليس بها إلا أناس من صيادي السمك، وفتحت أبوابها للتجارة سنة ١٨٥٨، والآن صارت تعد من أكبر موانئ اليابان، ويبلغ عد سكانها الآن ٣٢٠٠٠، وتجارها تشتغل الآن في ٣٥٠ مليون (ين)، وهو يساوي ١٥ قرشا.

('Ali, 1901:35)

Wa ba'da az-zuhru qad tuwajjahtu ilā Yūkūhāmā li-ajli muqābilati mandūba syarikatu Kūkk, wa hiya 'alā ba'di nişfi sātīn min Tōkyō bi-sayri wā abūru al-barra, wa kānat fī qadīmi al-zamāni baldatun ṣaghīratun laisa bihā illā anāsin min ṣayyādī al-samaki, wa futiḥat abwābuhā li at-tijārati sanat 1858, wa al-ān ṣārat tu'addu min akbari mawānī' al-Yābāni, wa yablughu 'adad sukānihā al-ān 32,000, wa tijāratuhā tasytaghilu al-ān fī 350 milyūn (yen), wa huwa yusāwī 15 qirshan./

'After Zuhr time, I went to Yokohama to meet with a representative of the Cook Company. The city is a half-hour train ride away from Tokyo. Once upon a time, Yokohama was just a small town inhabited only by fishermen. The city opened its doors to trade in 1858. Now, it has become one of the largest ports in Japan, with a population of 32,000 people. The value of trade there now reaches 350 million yen, which is equivalent to 15 qirsh (cents).'

The quote above shows that Ali describes the city of Yokohama objectively, based on his direct observations in the field. He describes Yokohama as a city that was once just a small fishing village, but has rapidly developed into one of the busiest ports and major trading centers in Japan. By presenting data on population and trade volume, Ali presents Yokohama not just as a transit point, but as a symbol of Japan's openness to the outside world.

In addition to Tokyo and Yokohama, Ali also visited and described the city of Kyoto. He noted that Kyoto is not much different from the previous two cities in terms of order and city governance. Despite being the former capital of Japan, Kyoto still shows the characteristics of modern Japan, which is orderly but still holds on to its cultural heritage. In his description, Ali not only pays attention to the physical aspects of the city, but also pays attention to the social and cultural dynamics of Japanese society more broadly. The following is an excerpt:

(4)

وكيوتو هي بلدة كسائر البلاد اليابانية، وجميع أهلا متعودون على الأشغال من حادثة سنهم حتى أن الأطفال الصغار يعودونهم على حمل الأثقال وجر العربات؛ لأجل أن تقوى. أعضاؤهم، وتنمو قوتهم، ويتعودوا من حادثة سنهم على تحمل المشاق والمتاعب، ومن النادر هناك أن يرى الإنسان رجلا فاقد البصر، أو يجد شخصا مقعدا، ولكن الأمراض الجلدية. منتشرة عندهم خصوصا القراع، وفي اليوم التالي لذلك اليوم قد ابتداء المطر بشدة، وحيث إنه من المعتاد في البلاد اليابانية لما يجيء المطر يستمر أشهراً متتابعة مطراً. خفيفاً، وتشتد رطوبة الجو؛ فبعد زيارة كل المعابد والبساتين والدكاكين ورؤية كل ما يلزم الاطلاع عليه من المتاحف وغيرها قد عزمنا على السفر في غروب اليوم الثاني.

('Ali, 1901:58)

Wa Kyōtō hiya baldatun kasā'iri al-bilādu al-Yābāniyyatu, wa jamī'u ahluhā muta'awwidūna 'ala al-ashghāl min ḥadāsihi sinnihim, ḥattā an al-atfāla al-ṣighāra yu'awwudūnahum 'alā ḥamli al-aṣqāl wa jarri al-'arabāti li-ajli an taqwā a'ḍā'uhum, wa tanamū quwwatuhum, wa yata'awwadū min ḥadāṣati sinnihim 'alā taḥammul al-mashāqqi wa al-matā'ibi. And min al-nādiri hunāka an yarā al-insānu rajulan fāqidu al-baṣari, aw yajidu syakhṣan muq'adan,

walākin al-amrāḍu al-jildīyyah muntasyiratu 'indahum khuṣūṣan al-qurā'a. Wa fī al-yaumi at-tālī li-ḡālika al-yauma qad ibtada'a al-maṭar bi-syiddatin, wa ḡaiṣu innahu min al-mu'tādi fī al-bilādi al-Yābāniyyati lammā yajī'u al-maṭaru yastamirru asyḡuran mutatābi'atu maṭaran khafīfan, wa tasytaddu ruṡubat al-jau; fa-ba'da ziyāratun kulli al-mu'ābidu wa al-basātīnu wa al-dakākīnu wa ru'yatu kulli mā yalzamu al-iṡlā'u 'alaihi min al-matāḡifi wa ḡhairihā, qad 'azamnā 'alā al-safari fī ḡhurūbi al-yaumin al-ṣānī./

'Kyoto is a city like any other in Japan. All its residents are used to working from an early age. Even young children are trained to carry heavy loads and pull carts so that their limbs become strong and their energy develops. They are accustomed from childhood to endure hardship and hard work. Rarely does one see a blind person or come across a crippled person. However, skin diseases are common among them, especially ringworm. On the day after that, it began to rain heavily. In Japan, it is customary that when rain falls, it will continue for months as light rain, and the humidity of the air becomes very high. After visiting all the temples, parks, shops, and seeing all there is to see from museums and others, we decided to travel at sunset on the second day.'

The above excerpt describes the city of Kyoto in a descriptive and quite in-depth manner, showing the author's direct observation of the lives of the local people. Ali highlights the strong work ethic of Kyoto residents, where from an early age children are accustomed to hard work, such as carrying heavy loads and pulling carts, in order to strengthen their physique and build resilience to life's hardships. This reflects the culture of hard work that was deeply embedded in Japanese society at that time. Ali also noted the health conditions of the people, emphasizing that it was rare to find blind or crippled people, but skin diseases such as ringworm were quite common. In addition to the social and health aspects, Ali also notes the typical weather conditions in Japan, namely light rain that lasts for long periods of time and causes high humidity in the air. Through these descriptions, Ali also provides insight into the work culture, social conditions and physical environment that shape the character of the city. His descriptions are objective and

informative, showing attention to detail as well as admiration for the resilience of the Japanese people.

2. Depiction of Japanese Subjective in the novel *Ar-Riḥlatu Al-Yābāniyyatu*

During his travels in Japan, Muhammad Ali not only shared his observations objectively, but also affixed subjective views based on his background, experience and frame of mind as a Muslim intellectual from the Arab world. He did not simply record what appeared on the surface, but also related the social and cultural phenomena he witnessed to the conditions of Arab society at that time. His personal experience became a reflective lens in seeing Japan as an Asian nation that was able to rise and modernize itself without abandoning its cultural roots. This attitude can be seen in the following quote:

(5)

وهي بلدة جميلة تشبیه عواصم أوروبا لكثرة وجود الفرنجة فيها حتى يخيل لنازل بها أنه بأشهر
عواصم أوروبا

('Ali, 1901:35)

Wa hiya baldatun jamīlatun tushbihu 'awāṣima Ūrubbā likathrati wujūdi al-faranjahi fihā ḥattā yukhayyalu li al-nāzili bihā annahu bi-ashhari 'awāṣimi Ūrubbā.

'And it is a beautiful city, similar to the capital of Europe because of the number of Europeans (Franks) there, so that one who lives in it thinks that he is in one of the most famous capitals of Europe.'

In the novel *Ar-Riḥlah al-Yābāniyyah*, Ali not only presents an objective description of Japanese cities, but also inserts his subjective impressions and judgments. This is evident in the depiction of cities such as Yokohama and Tokyo. In the quotation that states that the city "resembles the great capitals of Europe" to the point that "one who sees it thinks he is in the most famous capitals of Europe", it can be seen that Ali compares his visual experience in Japan with references to great European cities that he has visited or knows about before. This statement reflects his personal admiration for the modernity and beauty of Japanese cities, especially in terms of architecture and urban planning, which he believes are on par with the standards of developed European cities. This depiction is subjective as it involves personal amazement and comparison, rather than a mere factual description. This subjectivity enriches the travel narrative, as it presents an emotional and reflective

point of view, giving a distinctive color to the descriptions of cities such as Yokohama and Tokyo.

Not only admiring Japanese architecture that is on par with Europe, Ali noticed some Japanese culture that has similarities with Arab culture. One of them is the eating culture of Japanese and Arab society. The similarity is seen in the quote below:

(6)

مع سعة الحجرة ونظافتها، وبمجرد وصولنا إلى هذه الحجرة وجلسنا فيها قد أتت عدة نساء، وأحضرن أمام كل واحد منا خواناً صغيراً؛ لأجل وضع الأكل عليه، فجلسنا على هذه المقاعد متربعين كالعادة العربية.

('Ali, 1901:40)

/ Ma'a si'atu al-ḥujrati wa nazāfatuhā, wa bimujarradin wuṣūlinā ilā hāzihi al-ḥujrati wa julūsinā fihā, qad atat 'iddatu nisā'in, wa aḥḍarna amāma kulli wāḥidin minnā khuwānan ṣaghīran; li-ajli waḍ'i al-akli 'alaihi, fa jalasnā 'alā hāzihi al-maqā'idi mutarabba'ini ka al-'ādati al-'Arabiyyati./

'As the room was spacious and clean, as soon as we arrived and sat down in it, there came some women who brought each of us a small table to put food on. So we sat down on them cross-legged, as is the custom of the Arabs.'

This quote shows Ali's subjective portrayal which is reflected in the way he compares the local Japanese customs with his native Arab culture. While describing the spacious, clean room and the arrival of women serving food on small tables (خوان), Ali highlights the cozy and organized atmosphere. However, what is interesting is how he emphasizes their sitting "cross-legged as is the Arab custom." This is a form of personal reflection that shows that Ali views the experience through his own cultural lens. He not only records what happened, but also relates it to his identity and background. This depiction is subjective because Ali's personal experiences and perceptions shape his narrative. He seems to emphasize that despite being in a foreign land, there are elements that feel familiar or at least comparable to his own traditions. This enriches the travel narrative as it shows the

process of cultural interaction and how a foreign observer understands a new place through a familiar frame of reference.

Furthermore, Ali's subjectivity is also seen when he visits the city of Nikko and describes the city. He said that Nikko has a similar feel to Switzerland. Here is the quote:

(7)

ولما وصلنا إلى المحطة وجدنا عليها نحو ٢٠٠ ركشة عربيات يجرها الرجال، فركبنا في واحدة منها وتوجهنا إلى الفندق، وكان مرورنا بشارع طويل، وفي جهتيه دكاكين فيها مصنوعات البلدة، وخلف كل دكان بيت صاحبه؛ لأن أغلب اليابانيين من أهل الحرف والصنائع، وهيئة هذا البلد تشبه بلاد سويسرا ('Ali, 1901:41)

Wa lammā waṣalnā ilā al-maḥaṭṭati, wajadnā 'alaihā naḥwa 200 riksyah 'arabāti yajurruhā al-rijālu, fa rakibnā fī wāḥidatin minhā wa tawajjahnā ilā al-funduq, wa kāna murūrunā bi-syāri' in ṭawīlin, wa fī jihataihī dakākīna fihā maṣnū'āti al-baladati, wa khalfu kullu dukkānin baitu ṣāhibihī; li'anna aḡlabu al-Yābāniyyatu min ahli al-ḥiraf wa al-ṣanā'i', wa hī'atu hāzā al-baladu tusybiḥu bilādu Suwaysrā./

'And when we got to the station, we saw about 200 rickshaws pulled by men. We got on one of them and headed for the hotel. We passed through a long street, on both sides of which were shops selling the city's handicrafts. Behind each shop is the owner's house, as most Japanese are craftsmen and hand laborers. And the shape (or townscape) of the place resembles that of Switzerland.'

This quote shows how Ali uses a subjective approach in describing the atmosphere of the city he visits. He not only notes visual facts such as the large number of becak (around 200) pulled by men and the rows of handicraft shops along the streets, but also interjects his own judgment by stating that "the shape of the city resembles that of Switzerland." This comparison reflects Ali's aesthetic perception and experience of having previously known or visited Switzerland, and uses it as a benchmark in assessing the beauty and orderliness of Japanese cities. Ali also shows his admiration for the work ethic of the Japanese people, mentioning that most of them are craftsmen and hand laborers—an appreciation of the skills and self-reliance of the local population. As such, these depictions are not entirely objective

as they are influenced by the author's experiences, cultural background and personal preferences. This subjectivity gives color to the travel narrative, as it shows how Ali interprets Japan not only as a foreign place, but also as a space to be compared, remembered, and even admired through his individual perspective.

Ali also shows his subjectivity when he visits Sakata. There, he discusses gardens that are not as large as those in Egypt. Below is an excerpt:

(8)

وهذا البستان كبير وفيه شجر كثير، ولما مشيت فيه ولم أجد شيئاً من حسن صنعته مما يلزم أن يكون في البساتين الشهيرة؛ عرفت أنهم ليس لهم دراية بإيجاد بساتين من العدم، وجعلها على أحسن ما يكون من النظام، بل غاية ما في إمكانهم أنهم ينتخبون محلاً فيه أشجار طبيعية ليكون بستاناً، ثم يضعون فيه من الأشجار ما شاءوا بدون ملاحظة. ترتيب في الوضع، أو إتقان في الصنع، وأغلب بساتينهم صغيرة ليست بقدر بساتين الجيزة، ولا تساوي بساتين سراي الزعفران، ولا تضاهي بساتين البرنس حسين باشا كامل الموجود بالجيزة، وحيث إن بساتينهم صغيرة فإنها تسقى غالباً بالأمطار، ولا تحتاج إلى كثير من الخدمة، والذي يحسن منظرها هو أن كل واحد منها يوجد بداخله نهر صغير صناعي.

('Ali, 1901:48)

Wa hāzā al-bustānu kabīrun wa fīhi syajjarun kašīrun, wa lammā masyaitu fīhi wa lam ajidu shayinan min ḥusni ṣun'atīhi mimma yalzamu an yakūna fī al-basātīni as-syahiri; 'arāftu annahum laisa lahum dirāyati bi-ijādīn basātīnin min al-'adami, wa ja'alihā 'alā aḥsani mā yakūn min an-nizāmi, bal ghāyatu mā fī imkānihim annahum yantakhibūna maḥallan fīhi ashjāri ṭabī'īyyati li-yakūna bustānan, summa yaḍa'ūna fīhi min al-asyjāri mā shā'ū bidūna mulāḥazati tartibu fī al-waḍ'i, au itqān fī al-ṣun'i, wa aghlabu basātīnihim ṣaghīratin laisat bi qadri basātīni al-Jīzati, wa lā tusāwī bustānu sarā al-Za'farān, wa lā tuḍāhī bustānu al-Barans Ḥusain Bāshā Kāmil al-maujūd bi al-Jīzati, wa ḥaiṣu inna basātīnahum ṣaghīratun fa-innahā tusqā ghālīban bi al-amṭāri, wa lā taḥtāju ilā kašīrin min al-khidmati, wa alladhī yuḥassinu manẓarahā huwa anna kulla wāḥidin minhā yūjad bidākhilihi nahru ṣaghīrin ṣinā'i./

'And this garden is large, and has many trees. But when I walked in it, I found nothing of the beauty of design that famous gardens should have. I realized that they had no

skill in creating gardens from scratch and arranging them in a beautiful system. All they did was choose a location that already had natural trees to make into a garden, and then add other trees as they pleased, without regard for placement or beauty of design. Most of their gardens are small, not as big as the gardens in Giza, not comparable to the Za'farān Palace Gardens, and not comparable to the Prince Hussein Pasha Kamil Gardens in Giza. Since their gardens are small, they are usually only watered by rainwater, and do not require much maintenance.'

This quote strongly reflects Ali's subjective, critical view of Japanese gardens. Although he acknowledges the large size and abundance of trees in the gardens, Ali considers that they do not show the beauty of design or landscaping skills that he expects from a famous garden. He compared the Japanese garden to Egyptian gardens, such as the Giza Gardens, the Za'farān Palace Gardens, and the Prince Hussein Pasha Kamil Gardens, which he found superior in terms of design and maintenance. This suggests the aesthetic standards he brings with him from his own culture and experiences, as well as a tendency to judge things by size and complexity of design. Ali also implies that Japanese gardens are more natural than planned, which he considers a shortcoming. This assessment shows strong subjectivity, as he is not simply observing, but judging and comparing based on his personal preferences. Thus, this quote shows how experience and cultural background can influence a traveler's perception of an unfamiliar environment.

Although *Ar-Riḥlatu al-Yābāniyyatu* initially appears as a factual travelogue describing Tokyo and other Japanese cities, Muhammad Ali's narrative must be read not merely as ethnographic observation but as participation in the ideological project of Meiji-era Japan, marked by *bunmei kaika* ("civilization and enlightenment") and *fukoku kyōhei* ("rich country, strong military"), whose modernization drive aimed to secure Western recognition and global parity. His comparisons of Japanese urban modernity to European capitals functioned less as neutral commentary than as validation of Japan's adoption of Western aesthetics and institutional norms. Similarly, the Yokohama he admired was not an apolitical site of commerce but a treaty port whose prosperity depended on extraterritorial concessions and silk exports—a structural feature of Japan's coerced insertion into global markets. Ali's aesthetic judgments—such as deeming Japanese gardens as inferior to Egyptian ones—reveal a cultural bias that overlooks Japanese

principles like wabi-sabi, thereby upholding Arab-European standards of monumental beauty. Simultaneously, his apparent admiration resonates with early 20th-century Pan-Asianism in the Arab-Muslim intellectual sphere, where Japan's rise was interpreted as a beacon for non-Western modernity, even though such solidarity-effacing narratives often elided Japan's own imperialism, evidenced by its annexation of Taiwan (1895) and Korea (1910) and assimilation policies against Ainu and Ryūkyū peoples. Thus, Ali's travelogue occupies an ambivalent position: it both mirrors the aspirations of anti-colonial solidarity and naturalizes Japan's state-driven modernity, obscuring power dynamics and hierarchies that shaped the landscapes he documented.

D. Conclusion

This study not only illuminates non-Western travel narratives, but also offers an interpretive paradigm that liberates Eastern perspectives from the framework of Western dominance. By positioning *Ar-Riḥlah al-Yābāniyyah* as a site of dialogue—rather than a passive subject—the construction of representations of 'the other' is actively repositioned, enabling us to understand the interaction between the Arab world and Japan as equal and mutually formative, free from Western hegemony."

These findings imply that travel literature studies should embrace locally contextual approaches and post-colonial theories developed from a Global South perspective. For future research, it is recommended to explore representational practices in similar works from both the Arab world and other parts of Asia—such as comparing Japanese representations in Arabic texts with those by Asian authors who traveled to the Arab world or Europe. Additionally, employing Edward Said's concept of imagined geographies (which examines how spaces are constructed through discourse) and Saad Albazei's framework of cultural hegemony and epistemological negotiation (which emphasizes struggle over knowledge production and the migration of concepts) can enrich our understanding of how cultural representations are both formed and contested.

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