

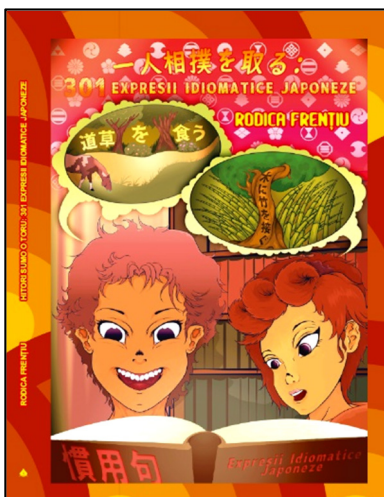
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RODICA FRENȚIU, 一人相撲を取る : 301 Expresii idiomatice japoneze, [一人相撲を取る : 301 Japanese Idiomatic Expressions] Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2018; 116 p.

Hitori sumo o toru: 301 Expresii idiomatice japoneze is the most recent volume authored by Rodica Frențiu, a comparative study between Japanese and Romanian idioms. This publication is a celebration of an academic career of more than two decades and marks the 20th anniversary of the Japanese Language and Literature major at the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

The author, Rodica Frențiu, is an essayist, poet, translator, master calligrapher and, last but not least, a university professor, who expresses her interest in the Japanese language, literature and culture through didactic and research activities, materialized in works such as: *Haiku și caligrame, Haruki Murakami. Jocul metaforic al lumilor alternative, Clar-obscur, vag și ambiguitate. Avataruri ale literaturii japoneze moderne și contemporane, Limbajul poetic – act creator și actualitate culturală. Modelul cultural japonez* to name only a few of the most well-known titles.

There is a saying that one should not judge a book by its cover but, in this case, it is only appropriate to do so. The



cover of this volume, illustrated in collaboration with Tudor-Marian Dîmbean, a former Japanese major student, offers a sneak peek of the more than 301 idioms analysed in the 116 pages of the book. The three incentives offered by the cover are: *michi kusa o kuu* (to eat grass on the road or “to dawdle”, the Romanian equivalent is ‘a tăia frunză la câini’ – p. 47), *ki ni take o tsugu* (to graft a bamboo in a tree or informally known as “square peg”, the Romanian equivalent is ‘ca nuca în perete’ – p. 42) and *hitori sumo o toru* (to do sumo by oneself or “to burn the candle at both ends”, the Romanian equivalent is ‘a se strădui de unul singur’ – p. 85), the idiom that titles this volume.

The volume is organized in 6 chapters, beginning with an argument and a short presentation of the structure the book follows. Just as the author herself confesses in the *Argument* (or the introduction of her work), the book is addressed to those who are interested in the Japanese culture and language. In the chapter called *Expresiile idiomatice [慣用句]* în ‘actualitate’ culturală (engl.: “The

idiomatic expressions of nowadays culture”), the author creates a theoretical framework of the research, where she reminds the reader of names such as Aristotel, Humboldt and Eugenio Coșeriu. Considered to be creative acts through language, the author proposes the interpretation of Japanese idioms as “linguistic expressions of human experience” (p. 16). These subjective manifestations are closely related to the cultural context in which they have appeared, with the impossibility of deciphering them being discussed and proved in the story *koan-ului Zen* (The Story of Koan Zen) without which the idiom *doro o kaburu* (to throw dirt on ones head) would be meaningless (p. 82).

There are more than 300 idiomatic phrases in Japanese (which are explained and equated with Romanian idioms in the next four chapters of the volume) which demonstrate, yet again, the way in which the traditions of speakers of a linguistic community materialise in speech. They are categorised according to the main area of interest they gravitate towards. It is interesting to notice not only the differences but also the similarities that arise between the Japanese and Romanian expressions because, despite the geographical distance, sometimes the perception and interpretations of the world intersect. Chapter 3 titled *Expresiile idiomatice și cunoașterea enciclopedică* (“Idiomatic expressions and encyclopaedic knowledge”) posits two lists: one focused on the natural universe and one on the human universe. The expressions are alphabetically arranged, offering the original version, the Romanian equivalent and also a literal translation. I believe that such presentational structure of the idioms makes the book easily digestible, both by those who have studied the Japanese language and culture and also by those who are simply curious.

Chapter 4 *Expresiile idiomatice ca texte culturale* (“Idiomatic expressions as cultural texts”) expands on the list of Japanese idioms, with a focus on their cultural contextualisation. Japan is renowned for its rich tea culture which makes it easy to understand the abundance of cultural references such as *ocha o nigosu*. Literally translated as “to unsettle the tea”, the semantic sense is easily understandable. However, from a pragmatic viewpoint, the meaning reveals itself only to those who read the explanations offered by the author as well. The list is completed by three haikus attributed to famous shoguns: Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu. The poems are part of a Zen parable that illustrated the character traits of the three leaders, who find different solutions for the *cookoo* who just won’t sing.

Chapter 5 *Proverbe și zicători* [諺] (“Proverbs and sayings”) carries on the lesson about the Japanese culture, mentality and spirituality. We find references to Japanese mythology, such as *kappa*, we discover the importance of the seasons in their mentality and it confirms the fact that *asa oki wa san mon no toku* (“the early bird catches the worm”) which means that waking up early is a handy virtue (p. 99).

The final chapter *Maxime și cugețări din patru kanji* [四字熟語] (“Maxims and thoughts from four kanjis”) provides insight into Japanese idioms made up of only four Chinese characters. The meaning of each individual ideogram does not play a crucial role in the discovering of the significance of the whole linguistics unit. Full of mystery and often originating in myths and fairy tales, they reveal themselves only to the connoisseurs. Nevertheless, the author found the appropriate Romanian equivalents: *ichi go ichi e*,

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translated as “orice întâlnire este unică” (eng.: “each encounter is unique” or lit.: “one time, one encounter”). (p.111).

This study of idioms proposed by Rodica Frentiu, who uses a corpus in Japanese analysed in equivalence with expressions in Romanian, is unique in the Romanian linguistic and cultural domain. Accessible to all who want to discover the “Japanese mystery”, reading this book is a necessary exercise, especially for the those students specialising in Japanese, but not only, being a profound research in the

cultural substrates which reflect themselves in the usage of language. The Japanese culture, and above all the Japanese language represent a permanent challenge for those who dared take on an adventurous journey- ever so full of satisfactions- of discovering the mysteries of the Japanese land. Rodica Frentiu’s book is an invitation to discovery, knowledge and understanding of the cultural manifestations expressed through language, which I am happy to have accepted.

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