



Turning Japanese

Cathy Yardley

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The Devil Wears Prada meets *Lost in Translation* in this irresistible new novel from *L. A. Woman* author Cathy Yardley

Meet Lisa Falloya, an aspiring half-Japanese, half-Italian American manga artist who follows her bliss by moving to Tokyo to draw the Japanese-style comics she's been reading for years. Leaving behind the comforts of a humdrum desk job and her workaholic fiancée, Lisa has everything planned---right down to a room with a nice Japanese family---but hasn't taken into account that being half-Asian and enthusiastic isn't going to cut it. Faced with an exacting boss and a conniving "big fish" manga author, Lisa risks her wedding, her friends, and her fears for a shot at making it big.

Turning Japanese Details

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From Reader Review Turning Japanese for online ebook

Charlene says

Turning Japanese is a fun, entertaining and quick read. I enjoyed how Lisa (the main character) is able to embrace both her American and Japanese cultures and use her diverse background to acquire a dream career.

The story begins with Lisa winning an internship in Japan for her entry into a manga contest. In the beginning, she hesitates to accept the prize as it requires her to move to Japan for a year and leave her friends and B-school boyfriend behind. After significant nudging from friends and her boyfriend (who just doesn't have time for her), she travels to Japan and begins a new life -- a life of isolation and conflicts. (She shares a room with an out-all night, lack of direction girl and the girl's video game obsessed, spoiled brat of a brother).

As the story progresses, Lisa overcomes her discomfort of a new life, makes new friends, and "bridges" her two cultures together.

Overall, a positive, heart-warming story.

Catrina says

I first picked up this book rather hesitantly. I really wanted to give it a chance, I did. I love me some manga and Japan(I studied abroad there and miss it terribly), and so I really wanted to read it even though I was afraid that the book would not capture Japan correctly and it would piss me off. I was right and wrong. Firstly, as a future teacher of the Japanese language, I have to say: Who edited this? I saw, 2 very ugly spelling mistakes of Japanese words. It's KEITAI not K-TEI (WTF?)and if you are going to make the point of someone yelling in a job interview that they are capable of a job because they are "fluent in kanji and HIRAGANA" (she said HIGANA, barf) maybe you should spell it correctly so they don't look like a moron. Okay, enough ranting about spelling.

The good thing is that Yardley captures pieces of Japan that rang so true. There is nothing like moving to Japan to realize how American you are, seriously. Her descriptions of corporate culture and family dynamics were mostly on point also. And, the best characters in the book are so very Japanese; her overbearing boss Akamatsu-sensei and her roomie, the gal with tons of spare time, Yukari.

But there are serious flaws to her work. I would like to have heard about the manga story she was writing, not just about how hard it was for her to fit in the time to do it. But really, her characters are just so unlikeable. The protagonist is a whiny baby, who luckily grows a backbone (I might have thrown the book out if she didn't), and her supporting characters are just rude. Who's family is so unsupportive of following your dreams? What kind of fiance pushes you away so he can finish business school and then wants you to give up your dream when its convenient? What kind of friend is so unsupportive that they tell you to get your priorities straight when you follow your dream instead of plan a wedding to your jerk fiance? Who would forgive them easily in the end if all this happened? ARGH!

In the end, I can only recommend this to people who a. don't know that much about Japan and would like to, b. are interested in manga but don't want to hear much about the manga story she is writing, or c. want to read a story about a woman who becomes inspired to change her life.

I don't recommend it for people who really want to become mangaka or people who liked living in Japan or people who speak Japanese. (It will probably piss you off too.)

Okay, I'm done ranting. I'm going to go read some manga.

Marie says

Chick lit goes to Japan in this frothy novel about a young woman who wins a one-year internship in Tokyo at a manga publishing company. Many things about this book bothered me...the main character, Lisa, enters and wins a contest to go to Tokyo for a year, but then doesn't want to go until her friends bully her into going. She is half Japanese and is supposedly near-fluent in Japanese, yet she's nearly completely clueless about the culture. (Although later in the book she speaks Japanese with her mom and it is noted that they hardly ever spoke it at home...so how did she become fluent?) She also doesn't seem to like Japanese food and acts as though it's horrible, although most half-Asian people I know grow up on Asian food.

I didn't like the sloppy writing: "God damn, I was tired." "I felt better, and worse. Sort of a hodge-podge of emotion, really." "It was a dull pain--like Jerry Maguire said, where you don't feel it now, but you get an inkling of what you're in for in the near future." (JERRY MAGUIRE???) Some of her writing effects, such as repeatedly calling her big suitcase "Godzilla Bag," annoyed me.

One evening when her homestay sister was holding hands with one of her female friends, Lisa comments "It wasn't that Yukari was gay, it was that weird little-girl thing. No one had tried for my hand yet, thankfully. I would've found that weird." In Asia and many other parts of the world, friends of the same gender often hold hands. It's normal. The way the author brought this into the story annoyed me.

Lisa has a hangover one morning, and she had not brought any medicine into Japan with her because "antihistamines were illegal in Japan" and "I did remember not wanting to get arrested for bringing over-the-counter stuff." You don't take antihistamines for a hangover, and this whole paragraph was just plain stupid. What kind of person travels to Japan for a year without taking American medicine?

Lisa is interviewed at a donburi restaurant, and she explains that donburi is meat served over rice in a bowl...but then talks about a press release saying "American simpleton contest winner gets to eat noodles." Rice is not noodles.

The day she arrived home from Japan, her mom offers to make some green tea for her, and she gets nostalgic for it, saying "I could still remember the smell." Of course she could--she had just left Japan!

Lisa supposedly cannot read Japanese very well when she first goes to Japan, and she claims she can just barely get by in speaking Japanese. Yet she is able to speak fluently with her colleagues and host family--even yell in Japanese. After spending 9 months there, she informs a prospective employer that she is fluent in written and spoken Japanese and can translate. This all does not compute.

Add to these problems the fact that Lisa's boyfriend is a narcissistic jerk and her friends are one-dimensional characters, and the fact that the author writes romance novels for Harlequin. Judging from her photo, she appears to be part-Japanese herself.

With all these flaws, you might be wondering why I finished the book. I am interested in most books set in

Japan, after living there myself for 3 years and having met my husband there. This book made me think that I should write a novel about living in Japan myself--at least I would be determined to avoid all these inaccuracies! I kept reading just to see what would happen. Looking back now, though, my time could have been better spent...

Karla says

A story about a hapa woman who wins a manga artist competition and moves to Tokyo for a year-long internship. She constantly uses her "American-ness" to excuse her pushy, blunt attitude to attain her goals, which is annoying. Also, she becomes the unrealistic hero in several instances. The book annoyed me to no end. Very disappointed.

Yvonne Mendez says

This is a cool chick-lit book, I've been to Japan, worked in Japanese companies based in the U.S. and also studied Japanese in University. So it was very nice to read along, remember my times in Tokyo, the food and so on. I think it needed a better job in editing, since some of the italicized Japanese words were incorrectly spelled. The plot was predictable, no big surprises, but it still kept me hooked until the end. Overall I enjoyed the book.

Talking_rain says

This book is gold! It is surprising engaging and poignant in its accuracy of the Japanese work environment and American expectations. True, true gold.

The most hilarious thing is how its underlying arc parallels *Troublesome Minds* by Dave Galanter, a Star Trek novel I finished the day before. Both raise and resolve an interesting issue: Do you have a choice in your future? Is your will your own?

This book, I highly recommend.

Lisa says

I thought this one was going to be a little quirkier, but it was mostly "chick Lit", which I just can't get into.

Beth says

This is sort of the Devil Wears Prada with less angst and drama, set in Japan: Girl takes internship in publishing field with hard to get along with boss, conflict with boyfriend and family ensue.

Italian/Japanese American Lisa hates to travel and dislikes change, but it doesn't stop her from entering a manga drawing contest where the first prize is a one-year internship in Japan with a manga publishing house. At first she just erases pencil lines, then conspires to help another editor and unknown artist to create a comic that is part American, part Japanese - just like her. Culture shock abounds in a myriad of ways: a complicated written language, conflicts with her supervisor and a prima donna manga creator, conflicts with her host family.

Yardley starts out strong with great anecdotes about attending Comic Con and getting lost once in Tokyo, ending up in the red-light district at a love hotel. The initial snarky edginess disappears bit in the day-to-day office grind and repeated conflicts with the family. Supporting characters lack depth, and there is some predictability to the story.

Romance Novel TV says

Review of *Turning Japanese* by Cathy Yardley

4.75 Star

Reviewed by Stacey Agdern

At its core, Chick Lit is a genre of stories about young women and their ups and downs, told in a witty and brilliant first person voice. They are both fun and thought provoking in equal parts. The same goes for the best of shoujo manga. They can be romantic stories, but they're stories of dreamers and fighters, who happen to be young women. So when I got the chance to review a book that promised to mix the two of them, I jumped at the chance.

Cathy Yardley's 'Turning Japanese' is the story of a young woman who gets the chance of a lifetime. Her manga is chosen as the winner of a contest where the prize is an internship at a Japanese manga publisher in Tokyo. Unfortunately, she's never really lived very far away from home before, and believes she is about to become engaged to her long term boyfriend.

But this is a chance of a lifetime, and so she makes the move. And this is where the real story begins. Lisa Falloya's Japanese journey isn't just about manga and the industry that makes it possible. It's about fitting into her own skin, and finding what makes her happy, as opposed to simply filling the needs of those around her, including her friends and her fiancé. It's about her ability to bridge the cultural gaps between the United States and Japan, and how she learns to use her own Japanese and American heritage as an advantage.

Yardley also depicts some of the particular Japanese social issues that have been reported about in recent years; the increased freedom of young women, the strict Japanese corporate social structure and the so called 'lost generation' of hikikomori, those young people who after difficult social experiences, shut themselves inside their homes. This is, for me, the most amazing part of what Chick Lit as a genre does; the idea that at the heart of certain books are much larger issues, just waiting to be explored by those who wish to. For this, and the rest of the story, I raise a cup of sake to Cathy Yardley. Brava.

Tami says

The go-pursue-your-non-English-teacher-career-in-Tokyo concept is the dream of many Japan lovers. Lisa is

half-Japanese, so we don't have the language barrier, but she's still an outsider foreigner. And who doesn't want a fictional insider's view of a manga studio?

Lisa won a manga contest, so this year long internship in Tokyo is a dream come true. But of course, now that she's on the bottom rung of the group, life is not all genki maids and mecha guys. She traces lines all day, nothing that requires any imagination, and not too much skill. Her homestay life with a Japanese family is pretty dismal with an obnoxiously loud shut-in gamer boy and a party till the wee hours teen girl. Sleep is iffy.

But she pulls herself out of her hole of despair, setting out to do an original manga project that puts her at odds with the office talent. She is not letting herself be the nail that gets beaten down- she's carving out her own life, and causing her back-home fiancé to wonder where she's putting her priorities.

Truthfully- I thought this book was going to be crap. I thought it was going to be all dreamy Japan fantasy with no reality and little cultural understanding. It surprised me how well it stood up. I can't say it's in the top 10 Japan-set books of all time, but definitely worth a look.

Aeslis says

I actually... liked this book. I'm completely surprised.

I lived in Japan for five years, so I've experienced a good deal of the culture and mannerisms. Most books in this vein are written by people who have a passing knowledge and warp it around, idealizing some things and weirdifying others. But I actually felt like Yardley knew a good deal about the way the Japanese interact, their business culture, and their friend culture. The characters seemed true-to-life, to me.

Not that Yardley didn't get a whole lot of really simple crap wrong. Japanese phones are *keitai*, not K-tei. People answer the phone *moshi-moshi*, not mushi-mushi. The electronics center of Tokyo is Akihabara, not Shinjuku. Honestly, I'm so confused that Yardley got this stuff wrong when she gets some of the cultural nuances so right.

Because she really did. When main character Lisa, interning in Japan, goes to remind her boss that she'll be going back to America for a week and a half to see her boyfriend's graduation ceremony, my first instinct was, "What? No way, that would never fly." I needn't have worried, though--her boss gives her a realistic, surprised lecture on how she'll never be taken seriously in the company, there's no WAY she should be allowed to go, what is she thinking? While of course constantly reminding her that she's just an intern and won't amount to anything anyway.

Ah, Japan. So many mixed messages and expectations!

Misti says

I liked this book waaaaay more than I thought I would. I thought this would be a little summer stop-gap of reading that wasn't really romance based but covered a story based in an industry I find interesting (manga in Japan). But I was really pleasantly surprised by how much deeper this book went.

This is really a story about change and becoming someone new and what it means to the people around you.

The protagonist of the story is a shy, quiet woman named Lisa. She's on the track to marrying her boyfriend, she's firmly entrenched and comfortable in a go-nowhere job at a semi-conductor plant. Her friends have been there for her since they were little kids.

When she wins an internship in Japan as part of a promotion, she moves there at the behest of her boyfriend and friends and starts transforming into a new person.

There's a lot at play here for what could be misinterpreted as a summer beach book. There's a lot of office politics, discussions about what marriage should mean to each partner and whether becoming part of a couple implies that one person should give up their dreams for the other. There's also a HUGE theme throughout the book about the roles women play in deference to the men in their lives and what it means to have women in the workplace. In a lot of ways, this book would have fit right in to an American setting if the time was changed to 1970 or 1980.

The author's writing style isn't anything fancy, but gets the job done. And frankly, I flew through this book like it was a Harry Potter wannabe. I read the whole thing in 4 hours flat. Maybe 4 and a half.

Eric says

Anyone who wants to become a manga artist knows the score. First they have to move to Tokyo (perhaps the most expensive city in the world), learn to read and write Japanese (perhaps the most difficult language in the world), live in an apartment the size of a closet, draw twenty pages of comics per week, never sleep, and eat natto for the rest of their life. Despite these road bumps, millions of kids around the world continue to dream the mangaka dream. God bless 'em.

And so it is with Lisa Falloya, an American artist who wins a year-long internship with a Japanese publisher called Sansoro. She arrives in Tokyo and is immediately put to work erasing pencil marks from manga pages. Ah! The glamorous life! Things get worse before they get better for the peppy intern. Along the way she bumps heads with a hikikomori, a kogal, a salaryman, and all sorts of exotic creatures. Most interesting (to me) are the scenes in the Sansoro editorial department. Recommended for everyone who works in the manga industry. You'll feel the pain.

Amanda says

There were a few moments that were frankly unbelievable to me - a rabid manga reader doesn't know about white day? really? - but enjoyable, quick read. Too tidy of an ending for my tastes, as well.

Lindsay Heller says

I'll be honest. I did not want to read this book. A co-worker gave it to me, as she sometimes does for reasons that I don't know. Just looking at the cover made me want to roll my eyes. It's pink and there's a little anime girl hanging out on the bottom with bubble hearts. I was pretty sure that it wasn't for me. But, since I haven't read a single one of the books she's ever given me (I still intend to!) I thought I should probably pick it up. It's chick lit, I couldn't possibly take that long. So, you can imagine my surprise when I discovered that this was actually a great book. There's not all that consequential in the subject matter or plot, but the message was a good one, the writing good, and the characters top notch.

The horridly titled 'Turning Japanese' is about Japanese-Italian-American Lisa Falloya, a simple girl from Groverton, NY who works at some sort of industrial plant, has a boyfriend who's busy all the time, and the same best friends from high school. Suffice it to say she's set in her ways. But then Lisa wins an internship at a Japanese manga company. Soon Lisa has relocated to the other side of the world where she comes up against culture shock so fierce that she's not sure she'll last the week. But then again, no one ever said changing your life was easy. Lisa learns that there's a fine balance between

Lisa's experiences in Japan were really fun to read. I've never been to Japan myself, but my sister has and I've heard a few stories, it's both funny and fascinating at the same time. Starting fresh in a new place is something that holds appeal for me and with such extremes between Japanese and American culture the change is just that much different. I think that Yardley managed these parts of the book, or, I mean, pretty much the whole book, without managing to be insulting. There were characters that really got on my nerves, but they were handled well enough that in the end I had no problems with them.

Basically, this book was far better than I could have ever expected. Well worth a read.
