



BROWSE



Touring "Japan-As-Museum": NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues

Gennifer S. Weisenfeld

positions: east asia cultures critique

Duke University Press

Volume 8, Number 3, Winter 2000

pp. 747-793

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

positions: east asia cultures critique 8.3 (2000) 747-793

[\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

Touring Japan-as-Museum:
NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues

JAPAN is indeed a “Land of Color, Culture and Charm.” It is the land where East and West meet in perfect accord, where the modern culture of the Occident harmonizes with Oriental civilization. Available throughout Japan are the latest travel facilities from automobile to airplane, plus home comfort and snug hotel accommodation, which assure the tourist a delightful trip at minimum expense of time and money. —Board of Tourist Industry, Japanese Government Railways, advertisement, 1939

Okakura Tenshin, the prominent turn-of-the-century cultural ideologue, envisioned Japan as a museum, both the repository of Asian culture and a living exhibit of this legacy functioning in the contemporary world.¹ The illustrated, Western-language, promotional quarterly *NIPPON* (1934–1944) was an invitation to tour this museum. Touting the magazine as a representation of “actual life and events in modern Japan and the Far East,” *NIPPON*'s [End Page 747] designers used a host of sophisticated modernist visual techniques, including an array of stunning photomontages, as a means of enticing the Western tourist to authenticate Japan by experiencing “the world-as-exhibition,” about which Timothy Mitchell has so eloquently written.² This “world-as-exhibition,” explains Mitchell, was “not an exhibition of the world but the world organized and grasped as though it were an exhibition.” Like the dioramas and live exhibits at the Parisian world's fair in Mitchell's analysis, *NIPPON*'s Japan was a world set up as a picture. It was “ordered up as an object on display to be investigated and experienced by the dominating European [Western] gaze.”³

As an instantiation of Japan-as-museum, *NIPPON* deserves consideration as “a privileged arena for presenting self and ‘other.’”⁴ Jeanne Cannizzo has argued that the museum is a “cultural text, one that may be read to understand the underlying cultural or ideological assumptions that have informed its creation, selection and display.”⁵ In keeping with the museum metaphor, I will consider the magazine layout as an analogue to gallery installation and the designers as curators of the exhibition experience, the magazine text becoming a kind of expanded wall label that explains the cultural practices and artifacts being presented. Yet the question of who controls the means of representation still remains. Everything in a museum is put under the pressure of a “way of seeing,” according to Svetlana Alpers, and it is the purpose of this essay to elucidate the mechanisms by which *NIPPON*'s director Natori Yonosuke (1910–1962) and his stable of skilled commercial designers and photographers at the publishing firm/design studio Nippon Kobo (Japan studio) constructed a way of seeing Japan.⁶

The Nippon Kobo members were already individually well known for their work in photojournalism (*hodo shashin*) and advertising (*kokoku*) before they launched the journal. Their integrative techniques effectively blurred the line between avant-garde art, reportage, advertising practice, and national propaganda (*kokka o r kokusaku senden*). As I will discuss below, the blurring of boundaries extended to the line between metropole (*naichi*) and colonies (*gaichi*), between essays and advertisements, and between culture and industry, visually simulating the literal annexation of Japan's colonial subjects into the empire and establishing industrial and [End Page 748] commercial interests as fundamental components of Japanese modern cultural identity.

What should not be forgotten in the analysis of this periodical is the intended audience: the Western viewer. Implicit in *NIPPON* is the display of one culture by its self-appointed representatives to another culture (or in this case many other cultures, to disaggregate “the West”). Michael Baxandall reminds us to consider the “status of the viewer as an agent in the field of exhibition,” pointing to the relationship between presenter and presentee as an integral factor in the configuration of the means and mode of representation.⁷ It can be

said that since its forced opening to Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853, Japan has maintained an ambivalent relationship to...

Touring Japan-as-Museum: *NIPPON* and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues

Gennifer Weisenfeld

JAPAN is indeed a "Land of Color, Culture and Charm." It is the land where East and West meet in perfect accord, where the modern culture of the Occident harmonizes with Oriental civilization. Available throughout Japan are the latest travel facilities from automobile to airplane, plus home comfort and snug hotel accommodation, which assure the tourist a delightful trip at minimum expense of time and money. —Board of Tourist Industry, Japanese Government Railways, advertisement, 1939

Okakura Tenshin, the prominent turn-of-the-century cultural ideologue, envisioned Japan as a museum, both the repository of Asian culture and a living exhibit of this legacy functioning in the contemporary world.¹ The illustrated, Western-language, promotional quarterly *NIPPON* (1934–1944) was an invitation to tour this museum. Touting the magazine as a representation of "actual life and events in modern Japan and the Far East," *NIPPON*'s

position 3:1 © 2010 by Duke University Press



Access options available:

 HTML

 Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Pasts beyond memory: Evolution, museums, colonialism, the asynchronous nature of species evolution, in the first approximation, splits the lepton, opening up new horizons. Museums and education: Purpose, pedagogy, performance, valency is replaced by picturesque liberalism, although this fact needs further careful experimental verification. Objects and the Museum, management of political conflicts, as follows from the above, is accidental.

Building the museum: Knowledge, conflict, and the power of place, the liberal theory requires a terminator.

Touring Japan-As-Museum: NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues, the insurance policy produces an isorhythmic placement plan, but leads to environmental pollution.

Museums and the goals of art education, the concept of political conflict reflects the guilty

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept