

**RE-ENVISIONING JAPAN AS DESTINATION IN 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY VISUAL AND MATERIAL CULTURE**Joanne Bernardi ([joanne.bernardi@rochester.edu](mailto:joanne.bernardi@rochester.edu))

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Today I am here to introduce “Re-envisioning Japan: Japan as Destination in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Visual and Material Culture.” This online archive is the digital component of a larger research project that uses travel, education, and the production and exchange of images and objects as a lens to investigate changing representations of Japan and its place in the world in the first half of the twentieth century. A multimedia resource that makes available a wide range of objects, it allows users to expand their research of Japan in the first half of the twentieth century beyond the limitations of conventional sources. With the exception of the archival film category, all objects on the website belong to my personal collection. A number of these items have not been a priority for collecting institutions until recently, if at all. They encompass a range of things that fall into the general categories of travel, tourism and education: for example, amateur travel films; educational films; postcards; photographs; stereoviews; glass slides; and tourist brochures. The objects and images on this website can reveal a great deal about the individuals that used (or created) them, as well as the cultural, political, and economic systems that produced them. An important function of the website is that ideally, when completed, its architecture will allow for a dynamic community of contributors who will be able to register and contribute content to the archive, creating a community of users forging new paths of inquiry, or providing fresh perspectives on familiar questions.

Japan was an actively promoted tourist destination in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early government and industry intervention in this promotion aimed at enhancing diplomacy, raising Japan's international profile as a modern nation, and encouraging the influx of foreign currency.

My online archive loosely cuts off around 1970, but my main area of interest is the rapid early development of foreign tourism that peaked in the 1930s, only to flicker and finally come to a halt with Pearl Harbor. I include objects from earlier and more recent periods to underscore the ways in which Japan's past informs its present. The objects and images at the heart of this study predominantly denote a U.S. audience, and the focus is on the American (and more generally, the English language) tourist and educational experience of Japan.

My presentation today is divided into the following sections: 1) Introduction (general overview of the project); 2) Project Background; 3) Methodology; 4) Historical Context; and 5) Future Development

## INTRODUCTION

I'll begin by introducing the structure of the website and its current capability. The website is being developed on the Wordpress platform with the assistance of colleagues in the University of Rochester Digital Humanities Center. This is a working prototype, and at present approximately half of my collection, excluding films, has been digitized and uploaded to the website. In total the collection includes over 2000 postcards, about 100 film titles, and 1086 other artifacts.

I never intended to become a collector. In 2000 I began occasionally searching for specific objects that I could use in the (Japanese and film studies) classroom. Perhaps it was a function of the new millennium, but I was increasingly drawn to other things from Japan's 20<sup>th</sup> century past that provided an opportunity to understand that past from a fresh perspective. As motifs emerged I devised working categories in an attempt to construct a meaningful framework for these objects. My decision to turn to digital technology as an experimental form of scholarship presented new opportunities and challenges in framing and shaping the collection in terms of categorization, organization, and description. Rebuilding contexts of the past by connecting the

individual objects in relevant and meaningful ways revealed gaps, and the project's potential for collaborative research. An online archive would make this possible by providing access to the collection and the opportunity for others to share similar research. Best of all, a digital platform would provide flexibility, a virtue because of the project's recuperative nature and the opportunities it presents for ongoing research and collaboration.

The website is divided into 5 generically distinct "exhibits." "Edification and Information" comprises works on general culture, history, and language; missionary and social work-related materials; objects dating from the U.S. occupation of Japan (1945-1952); and U.S. World War II propaganda related to Japan. "Leisure and Entertainment" includes objects (including some postcards) related to advertising, shopping, and Japan's presence at international expositions, exhibitions, and worlds fairs. Photographs, slides, and stereoviews are joined by several genres of literature, including children's literature, magazines; memoirs and travel literature. Japanesque or Japan-inspired sheet music is also included here because it represents an early instance of Japanese influence on twentieth century American popular culture. "Moving Images" defined the twentieth century in an unprecedented way. They are represented on the website by small gauge films (16mm, Regular 8mm, and Super 8mm), ranging from the anonymous amateur travel film to widely circulated educational titles. "Postcards" is divided into seventeen subgenres, ranging from actors, children, cities and sites, and "colonial" to occupation, recreation, war, and women. These categories are only examples of the rich diversity that characterizes this mode of communication. The final exhibit is "Tourism and Travel." The human act of travel generates a wide variety of objects, including brochures, guides, hotel ephemera, maps, and ephemera related to transportation by air, land and sea. This also includes postcards, most notably those of

major shipping lines like Nippon Yusen Kaisha (the NYK Line). Travel Guides are divided into “general” (general guides to Japan the country) and “specific” (guides to specific locations).

Some books, brochures, pamphlets, guides and magazines feature a red “Read More” button in the lower right hand corner that allows users to explore select inside content. Red “Item Info” buttons, also in the lower right hand corner of some objects, bring up a page of information that goes beyond the basic metadata that accompanies each object. I have a 1 ½ minute clip of the website in action that I’d like to share with you to illustrate these functions, as well as the general website layout. [Quicktime]

## BACKGROUND

Explaining my motives in developing this website is helpful in understanding its purpose. Its origins stem from my background in Japanese studies and Film and Media studies. I had been working in silent cinema, an area of film history defined by loss, particularly for Japan. Lacking the familiarity and sense of immediacy provided by a cinematic image of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan, I pursued a better understanding of the life and landscape of that time and place through other material means. I also hoped this would lead to a keener appreciation of Japan’s profile as a player in the increasingly complex cultural, social, and political networks of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the start I was less interested in “superlative collecting” than in exploring a sampling of the variety of objects that I encountered. I began with early postcards, which I was initially drawn to as visual records of place, especially the urban landscapes most likely to have been captured on film. But I found that postcards are also reminders of personal relationships between the east and west as well as Japan’s earliest presence overseas at European and American world’s fairs and expositions. They also provide a glimpse of Japan’s rising presence in the international world order as well as a views of an imaginary Japan on foreign land, such as

this Japanese village at Massachusetts Wonderland Amusement Park, advertised elsewhere as a 15 minute tour of the Flowery Kingdom, complete with its own “Mt. Geisha.” The collection gradually grew to encompass other media: photographs, stereo views, tourist brochures and guide books, objects of non-Japanese origin that featured representations of Japan, and various magazines, books, and assorted publications, all traces of some individual’s interest in or voyage to Japan.

My growing interest in material culture coincided with another aspect of my experience researching silent cinema, an increasing awareness of the materiality of film as an object and the significance of its mutable nature. I began to add films about Japan to my collection, mostly amateur travel films shot by foreign tourists and educational films from the 1950s to the 1980s about Japanese life and culture. I set aside a sabbatical year for formal education in film archiving and preservation (at the George Eastman House), and I learned how to inspect a film print to better understand its history—its origins and use. After learning how to handle archival film, I was able to work with archival amateur and educational films that often fall under the category of “orphan works.” These are films lacking copyright or curatorial protection that are often inaccessible for research because they might have only preliminary, if any, documentation. By this point tourism and education were emerging as dominant motifs of the project. There are critical intersections between education, tourism and film in the 1920s and 1930s. One of these, for example, is the coincidence between the introduction of Tourist class accommodation on Pacific liners in 1930, and the increasing affordability of small format movie cameras. Companies that produced these cameras were quick to take advantage of this: film processing machines for 16mm film were installed on around-the-world cruise ships just a short time after Kodak and Bell & Howell started marketing hand-held “user-friendly” 16mm cameras to the

general public. The growing popularity of amateur travel films reflected the rise of popular tourism.

## METHODOLOGY

I soon realized that just as my film research was focused on travel and educational films, my personal collection was comprised of objects generated by travel- and education-related activities. The natural kinship between these two activities emerged as the connective tissue for my online archive. Educational items tend to be of American or British origin. Most of the tourist material originates in Japan. They complement each other in useful ways. I used the term “Tourist Japan” as a working title for the project early in its development, linking the armchair traveler reading about Japan with the traveler who physically moves through space. Hence, I define “tourism” as temporally limited travel, both actual (physically experiential) and virtual (educational, informational). “Tourist” and “tourism” are all-too-often thought of as disparaging terms, signifying passive, shallow consumers and consumption. I agree with others who regard them as valuable words because they are flexible and inclusive. The rise of 20<sup>th</sup> century tourism is central to understanding 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural flow and cultural identity; the tourist perspective is personal, opening up possibilities for a multiplicity of narrative perspectives.

There is a considerable amount of scholarship on American and European foreign travelers in Japan during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This research provides valuable insight to Japan’s role as an active participant in its self-representation to the West, as well as the origins during this period of “many enduring images” of Japan. This scholarship also reveals that these so-called “Globetrotters,” for the most part, were more interested in a romanticized image of Japan that met their expectations rather than Japan’s contemporary landscape. I’m interested in how 20<sup>th</sup> century tourists were different. Carol Traynor Williams and others regard the

“tourist” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with favor compared to the more detached and often solitary 19<sup>th</sup> century “traveler.” Paula Amad takes this concept one step further, describing 20<sup>th</sup> century tourism as a democratized, feminized version of the privileged 19<sup>th</sup> century male traveler. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tourism and tourist culture help illuminate endless ideas, problems, and questions about the relationship between modernization processes and identity formation, involving how culture itself travels as well as travel to other countries. Patterns in representations (recurrent iconography, coded images) can link cultural objects generated by tourism with evolving concepts of nationalism and cultural identity. This is especially true for Japan, where the government became involved in tourism early on and controlled it to a unique degree. This state intervention prompts questions about tourism’s role in Japan’s campaign for western and international recognition. How does tourism reflect the landscape of imperial Japan? How does tourist culture reveal changing concepts of urban space, rural culture, industry, geography, as well as military and political authority at both the national level and beyond?

My online archive can help answer such questions. For example, it is clear from guide books, tourist brochures and magazines issued by the Japanese government that it determined the earliest tourist sites and itineraries for foreign travelers; some of these itineraries, along with postcards, manifest Japan’s imperial landscape by showcasing Japanese institutional infrastructure along with the local customs and attractions of occupied territories. Amateur travel films reflect personal history as alternative histories, often revealing greater interest in people and everyday life (the vernacular landscape of the everyday) than in designated monuments or sites. On the other hand, early postcards feature such tropes as new bridges, monuments, department stores, banks and even travel agency offices in Japan and the colonies.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Writing the history of foreign tourism to Japan in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not the focus of my project, but some knowledge about this history provides context that is critical to many of the objects on my website. I can only touch on this briefly here, to the extent that this background helps clarify my focus on the American tourist experience. Research on 20<sup>th</sup> century foreign tourism to Japan identifies two characteristics that make the development of tourism infrastructure in Japan unique. The first is, as I mentioned earlier, the relatively early government involvement in developing that infrastructure, beginning with the establishment of the Japan Tourist Bureau in 1912. The second can be seen as a natural extension of Japan's investment in the diplomatic and economic benefits of foreign tourism: that is, a focus on meeting the needs of Western tourists. As David Leheny points out, "the whole idea of tourism, travel, types of service and types of attractions were, from an early date, based on a Western norm."

Two items from my collection reflect these traits. The focus on accommodating the foreign traveler is apparent in this small booklet, *Japan Tourist Bureau: Its Aims and Activities*, which was published by the Japan Travel Bureau in 1916 in both English and Japanese. The booklet describes the Bureau's origins and rationale. Incentive to form the Japan Travel Bureau was sparked by a trip to Switzerland by its founding member, Dr. S. Hirai, who admired Swiss skill in taking the business of organized travel seriously. The Bureau's membership list here is primarily composed of representatives from the major steamship companies, railways, hotels, and select merchants. According to Dr. Hirai, who is quoted at length, "both from a diplomatic and a commercial point of view the problem of the foreign tourist is an important one, and particularly for us who are connected with the communications, hotels, or shops. At present, however, there is no perfect organization for introducing the beauties of Japan or the knowledge

of things Japanese to foreign visitors.” Promoting the comfort of foreign tourists is listed as one of the Bureau’s objectives, along with familiarizing foreigners with Japanese scenery and customs.

This brochure, “Changing and Unchangeable Japan,” is undated, but references in the text lead me to believe it dates from around 1937. It was issued by the Board of Tourist Industry, created by the government as part of the Japanese Government Railways. It reveals the extent to which foreign tourism has transformed Japan as a tourist destination in just two decades. The text exemplifies rhetoric common to English language tourism promotion during the 1930s, attributing Japan’s unique charm to its ability to embody “the best, the cleanest, the refinement, glamour and romance of the Orient” along with a “judicious choice of Western civilization.” Japan is presented as a “two-hemisphere attraction.” The reader is reassured by the promise of “modern ships,” “punctual, clean and speedy trains,” hotels that rival the best in the West, modern restaurants featuring Western style food prepared by foreign-trained cooks, the most efficient taxi service, good motor roads and air transport companies that “will offer you as safe, as comfortable an air trip as anywhere.” But such reassurances are followed by the guarantee that tourists can still find “the picturesque land which you admired in Japanese prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige,” adding, “so much of Japan’s classical beauty has remained unspoilt by modern inventions and the machine age.”

I believe this pamphlet was published in 1937 because of a telling (if vague) reference to “the recent regrettable affair in China, which Japan deploras more than any country involved.” Readers are assured that tourism in Japan is completely unaffected. “Potential Visitor, please believe that TOURISM IN JAPAN IS AS USUAL! Nothing has changed. You may get to the country with as much ease as before . . . All appears normal. Peace reigns everywhere.” This

reference foreshadows even later statements in English-language articles and ads that distanced Japan from military turmoil in the Pacific region while actively promoting it as a tourist destination. Examples can be found in the Japan Tourism Bureau's official publication *The Tourist* as late as 1940. After Pearl Harbor, the prewar tourism bureaucracy was completely dismantled. Foreign tourism's transformation is played out in *The Tourist's* pages as the Japan Tourist Bureau becomes "Tōa Kotsu Kōsha" (The Greater East Asian Travel Public Corp.). English-language articles continue to appear, but their nationalistic content makes the magazine's intended readership increasingly unclear.

#### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

I recently received funds from the University of Rochester to complete two important steps in the process of building the website: first, recording the sheet music, and second, digitizing the films in my collection. We continue to work on framework development in order to bring the website to the point that it is fully interactive, including a means for community engagement. Additional plans for technical steps to complete the dynamic presentation of objects include, for example: a spatial tool for researchers to create historic travel itineraries; new content based on enhanced media presentation of fragile objects such as travel guides and maps; and tools to extend research capability. The project will ultimately include a digital publication that will ideally draw on a systematic examination of the website as a research resource and its community in action, benefitting from the interpretation and contextualization that such interaction makes possible.

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