

Tourism in Japan

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Tourism in Japan

An Ethno-Semiotic Analysis

Arthur Asa Berger

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of three of my favourite professors at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where I studied between 1950 and 1954: Ian MacIver, Ray Ethan Torrey and Maxwell Henry Goldberg.

Contents

Acknowledgements	xi
Foreword	xiii
Preface	xvii
Part 1: Japan as a Tourist Destination	1
1 Japan as a Tourist Destination: An Analytic Perspective	3
Statistics about Japan	3
Statistics on Japanese Family Income and Expenditures	5
Defining Tourism	5
Popular Kinds of Tourism in Japan	7
The Imagined Japan, the 'Real' Japan and the Remembered Japan	10
Guidebook Perspectives on Japan	13
Japanese National Character	17
John Gunther and Stereotypes of the Japanese	21
Some Tours of Japan	24
A Suggested Itinerary of Japan	26
The Japan National Tourist Organization's Japan	28
Uses and Gratifications of Tourism in Japan	29
Conclusions	32
2 Japan and the Tourism Industry	35
Statistics on World Tourism	35
What Americans Do When They Visit Japan	40
Activities of Japanese Tourists in Foreign Countries	41
Japanese Tourists in Bali	42
Conclusions	43
3 Japan on the Internet	45
Googling Japan	45
'Japan Tourism' on Google	47
Japan on YouTube	48
Conclusions	48

Part 2: Semiotic Japan	51
4 Semiotic Japan	53
Introduction	53
A Brief Note on Semiotic Theory	53
Codes	56
Sumo Wrestlers	57
Geishas	61
The Geisha and the Salaryman	68
The Japanese Flag	69
School Uniforms and Hikikomori: Japan's Hermit Youth	71
Japanese Baseball	77
Rock Gardens (<i>kare sansui</i>)	79
Sanja Matsuri Festival in Asakusa	81
Manga (Japanese Comic Books)	85
High-Tech Toilets	93
Vending Machines	96
7-Eleven Convenience Stores	98
<i>Pachinko</i>	99
Gift Giving in Japan	103
100 Yen Stores	108
Department Stores (<i>Hyakkaten</i> or <i>Departōs</i>)	109
The Tokyo Subway Map	112
Fugu and Blue-finned Tuna: Fish Madness in Japan	115
Bento Boxes	117
Conclusions on Japanese Icons and Daily Life	118
5 Tourism and Cultural Change in Japan	121
Classical Theories of Social Change	122
Kinds of Tourists and Cultural Change	124
Sources of Cultural Change	125
Tourism's Cultural Impact on Japan	129
The Place of this Book in the Cultural Tourism Series	130
6 Coda: A Return to Japan	132
Our First Encounters with Helpful Japanese Persons	132
The Sanja Matsuri Festival in Asakusa	133
Lost in the Shimbashi Subway Station	135
Expect To Be Lost Many Times in Japan	135
Travelling by Long-Distance Buses in Japan	136
Takayama Adventures	137
Kanazawa	139

Last Day in Kanazawa	140
More on Food Courts in Department Stores	140
An Aside on Japanese Supermarkets	142
On to Kyoto	142
Teaching Japanese Students about American Humour	144
Visits to Himeji and Nara	147
The United States and Japan: A Study in Polarities	150
References	152
Index	155

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I obtained a great deal of useful information about Japan from more than a dozen books I consulted, each offering somewhat different suggestions about places to go to and things that tourists visiting Japan can do. I also read a number of what might be called 'a year in Japan travel memoirs' such as Bruce S. Feiler's *Learning to Bow: Inside the Heart of Japan*, Gary Katzenstein's *Funny Business: An Outsider's Year in Japan* and Cathy N. Davidson's *36 Views of Mount Fuji*. I read Alex Kerr's highly critical study, *Lost Japan*, and a journal by Donald Richie, *The Japanese Journals 1947–2004*, which covered almost 60 years of his writings, meetings and matings with people in the arts (and many others as well) in Japan. These books provided me with personal experiences the authors had and insights they could offer about their time in Japan, and helped me gain a more complex picture of Japanese culture and society.

I found much interesting material in Edwin O. Reischauer and Marius B. Jansen's *The Japanese Today: Change and Continuity* and Edward Seidensticker's *Tokyo Rising: The City Since the Great Earthquake*. I also found Patrick Smith's critique of Reischauer's work, *Japan: A Reinterpretation*, often to be quite compelling and Takie Sugiyama Lebra and William P. Lebra's (1986) edited volume, *Japanese Culture and Behavior: Selected Readings (Revised Edition)*, to have a number of useful articles in it. I have used quotations from various books and articles on Japan at the beginning of chapters and in various places in my chapters when they are relevant. They provide fascinating insights into Japanese society. Japan has developed a unique, distinctive and prodigiously complex and difficult to understand culture. These quotations help us gain perspectives on Japan that are very useful.

I also want to thank Professor Sachiko Kitazume and Professor Goh Abe for arranging a lecture on humour at Kinki University in Osaka and

for working valiantly to translate some of the ideas I dealt with in my lecture to the students to whom I lectured. My lecture was on visual humour and it was quite a challenge to explain the humour in *Peanuts*, *Krazy Kat* and other comic strips and cartoons to Japanese students. I am very grateful to Professor Abe for writing the Foreword to this book. I also want to thank Mariko Watanabe for allowing me to use a selection from an e-mail message she sent to people who took tours with her in Japan. A friend of mine who toured with her sent me her e-mail. A special word of thanks to Lucy Corne for letting me use her splendid photograph of a sumo wrestling match.

I am grateful to the editors of this series, Michael D. Robinson and Alison Phipps, for accepting my book for their series on tourism and cultural change, and to Sarah Williams, my editor at Channel View Publications, for her efforts on my behalf. Cultural change is, you will see, the subtext of this book.

Finally, I would like to thank the people of Japan, who received us so graciously, and the many others who helped us on the numerous occasions when we were lost and trying to find our way to some subway or train station, temple, department store or other destination in various cities of Japan. We never needed help in finding any 7-Eleven stores because they are everywhere.

Foreword

Arthur Asa Berger's book *Tourism in Japan: An Ethno-Semiotic Analysis*, one of a series of books published by Channel View Publications on tourism and cultural change around the world, reflects his ethno-semiotic approach to the subject. He collected his data as both a traveller and a fieldworker. For Berger, 'cultures are composed of a wide variety of codes or ways of behaving, rules that are passed on from generation to generation that affect human relationships. They are directives, often quite specific, that often function below our levels of awareness'.

His objects of analysis are aspects of Japanese cultures that tourists frequently encounter such as the Japanese flag, Japanese school children in their uniforms, Japanese baseball, Zen rock gardens, geishas, the Sanja Matsuri festival in Asakusa, department stores, manga, the Tokyo subway system map and sumo wrestlers. Berger aptly points out that underneath these cultural elements, in the case of school children who become hermits (the Hikikomori), are 'enormous unresolved social and cultural problems in Japan'. We Japanese have not yet found the solutions to this problem and others like it.

If I were asked to write a book on American culture and tourism, I would have focused on what I have observed in the United States since my first initiation into the American culture in 1969 as a foreign student. I remained there for more than eight years as a graduate student. I would have written about American baseball, American football, the west, the NY subway, various kinds of ethnic festivals, department stores in big cities and guns. For Americans, these phenomena are things they tend to take for granted; the average American does not believe they have any social or cultural significance at all. Japanese tourists in America might find them interesting but, generally speaking, would not recognize their cultural significance.

One example of interest involves his discussion of high-tech toilets. His analysis of the hidden meanings of these toilets suggests that they reflect, among other things, Japanese perfectionism and attitudes towards bodily waste. He also deals with topics such as the ubiquitous 7-Eleven convenience stores, along with *Pachinko* (an amusement particularly well suited

to the Japanese temperament), gift giving and 100 yen stores. As a Japanese person, I am quite sure that 100 yen stores seem very strange to many tourists from overseas. We Japanese welcome such stores as a place where we can buy a variety of daily goods for about a dollar.

Berger continually asks his readers to consider the hidden meanings of the topics he discusses. As he writes, 'I have offered, in my analysis, insights into the hidden significance of any number of different icons of Japanese everyday life and culture that I believe will enrich and enhance the insights tourists gain from their visits to Japan'. In his chapter 'Tourism and Culture Change', he points out that a subtext of his book is the way in which Japanese society and culture have evolved over the years, suggesting that tourists are 'agents of social and cultural change'. I quite agree with this point of view and believe that tourists have been agents of cultural change in Japan, although we Japanese may not always recognize the dimensions of these changes and how these changes have come about.

At the end of the book, he offers a personal narrative of his journeys in Japan. We Japanese can read this chapter as his attempt, as a tourist, to find a way of adapting to, as well as interpreting, Japanese society and culture. The chapter can be used as an example of how to record differences and similarities between Japan and the United States and changes that have taken place in Japanese society and culture in recent decades. In Japan, Berger's book might very well be used as a text for Japanese high school and college students who are interested not only in the cultural differences but also in the similarities between Japan and the United States.

Goh Abe

Old Japan is dead and gone, and Young Japan reigns in its stead ... The steam-whistle, the newspaper, the voting-paper, the pillar-post at every street corner and even in remote villages, the clerk shop or bank or public office hastily summoned from our side to answer the ring of the telephone bell replacing the palanquin, the iron-clad replacing the war-junk, – these and a thousand other startling changes testify that Japan is transported ten thousand miles away from her former moorings ... Nevertheless ... it is abundantly clear to those who have dived beneath the surface of the modern Japanese upheaval that more of the past has been retained than has been let go ... It is that the national character persists intact, manufacturing no change in essentials. Circumstances have deflected it into new channels, that is all. (Chamberlain, 1905/2007)

The natural beauty of Tohoku (Tohoku is a northern area of Japan) was enchanting, but the towns and villages proved a little disappointing. I could not help recognizing that the old Japan I have long sought has been rapidly disappearing. Westernization and urbanization are taking its toll on the life-style of even the most remote locations in Japan. (Mariko Watanabe, e-mail message)