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Japanese Tourism to Korea, Circa 1940: The Tension between Tourism Promotion and Assimilation Policies

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In 1940 the Japanese celebrated the 2,600th anniversary of the founding of the imperial dynasty. This history was largely contrived. For example, the supposed first emperor, Jimmu, never existed, and the first 1000 or so years of the 2600-year imperial history is also mythical. But the 2600th anniversary celebrations in 1940 were nonetheless massive and empire-wide.

2600th anniversary poster 1942

I recently published a book, both in English and Japanese editions, about these 2,600th anniversary celebrations and, in a broader sense, about Japan in 1940. Three of the chapters in the book are about what I term "imperial tourism." Contradictory though it may seem, tourism was booming in wartime Japan.

Consider that in 1939, eight years after Japan's creation of Manchukuo and two years after the start of the second China-Japan War, the Mukden (in contemporary Chinese, Shenyang) branch of the Japan Tourism Bureau published a short, inexpensive travel guide to Nanjing, a city then under Japanese military control. Nanjing was touted as a city where beautiful examples of traditional Chinese architecture could be seen.[1] At the time, Nanjing represented an exciting potential travel destination for middle-class Japanese more so than the site of what later would be recognized as an infamous massacre that had occurred less than two years earlier.

At this time, Korea was also a popular tourist destination for Japanese. At the same time in 1940 that representatives of the Government Railways of Korea, an integral part of the Government-General of Korea, were endeavoring to promote tourism, officials in the same colonial bureaucracy were strengthening assimilation policies designed to Japanize Koreans. This latter aspect of Japan's rule over the Korean Peninsula is far better known, indeed infamous, in comparison to the efforts to increase tourism.

But why would a Japanese tourist from the mother country want to visit Korea if it had been rendered into no more than a replica of Japan? One of the main themes in contemporary promotional literature designed to convince Japanese to make Korea a destination for leisure travel was the chance a visit offered to experience a new culture. As far as Korea's tourism world, then dominated by Japanese, was concerned, not only relics of Korea's ancient civilization but also contemporary cultural differences needed to be maintained to ensure that Korea continued to be an interesting tourist destination. Tourism and assimilation are concepts that do not necessarily go together.

The historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki has stressed that "the colonial order needed to produce both similarity and difference in its subjects," and that "assimilation and discrimination, Japanization and exoticization, were different sides of the same colonial coin." Elaborating on imperialism in general, Morris-Suzuki wrote, "The ruling state's urge to exalt and spread the values of its own 'civilization' contended with its desire to maintain the differences that justified unequal access to power."[2]

Imperialism, with its conflicting tendency to demand assimilation and yet maintain differences, and tourism were well suited to each other. The colonial authorities, with their power to codify and to exploit the local tourism resources, could transform the colonies into destinations so convenient to visitors from the mother country that one is tempted to compare them to theme parks.

The powerful police force that Japanese colonial authorities developed in Korea and in the other colonies stood ready to protect tourists from the slightest danger. The colonial authorities' sweeping control rendered the exotic local culture and people almost entirely unthreatening. If it is accurate to portray tourists as typically wanting to "go local" in safe doses only to retreat into their comfort zones whenever necessary, then visiting a colony was close to ideal. This was the case both in Japan's colonies and elsewhere in areas colonized by other countries, at least for visitors from the mother country.

It was critical to the tourism sector that Korea continue to feel, as much as possible, Korean to visitors. It was for this reason that the Government Railways of Korea, beginning in the 1920s and continuing into the 1930s, constructed, at considerable expense, numerous railway stations featuring traditional Korean architectural styles.[3] Elsewhere in the empire, Japanese colonial authorities took steps to ensure that the local terrain lived up to tourists' expectations. For example, urban planners in Taiwan planted palm trees to provide an appropriate "South Seas" ambience.[4]

In her study of urban planning throughout the French Empire, Gwendolyn Wright identified tourism as one of the factors that motivated planners to preserve native enclaves even as they modernized colonial cities ranging from Rabat in Morocco to Saigon in Vietnam. In Morocco, French urban planners constructed picturesque districts that were designed, in a theme park sense, to match visitors' expectations of the Orient.[5]

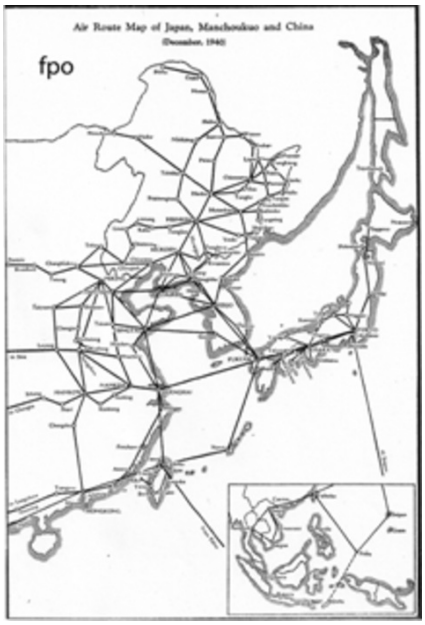
It was not long after Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 that the Government Railways of Korea, in collaboration with the branch of the Japan Tourism Bureau (JTB) that was established in Korea in 1912, began marketing Korea as a tourist destination, both to Japanese and to Westerners. Tourism posters distributed by the Government Railways promoted the peninsula's must-see destination, the Diamond Mountains (in Korean, Geumgangsan; in Japanese, Kongōsan), which had been a pilgrimage site for Korean scholar officials long before Japan's intervention.

In the late 1930s, the Government Railways of Korea and the Korea branch of the JTB stepped up their efforts to promote Korea as a

tourist destination. For example, between 1936 and 1940, the Government Railways as well as private movie companies released tourism promotion films with titles such as "Keijō [Seoul]," "Korea's Kongōsan," "A Trip to Korea," and "Korea's Four Seasons: Winter Travel," and "Touring Korea's Hot Springs."[6] Japanese colonists developed hot springs resorts throughout the empire.

As with tourism in Japan proper, the development of intra-empire tourism grew in conjunction with the expansion of a modern transportation infrastructure. In Korea's case, not only the commercial but also the military implications of the transportation infrastructure were especially apparent.

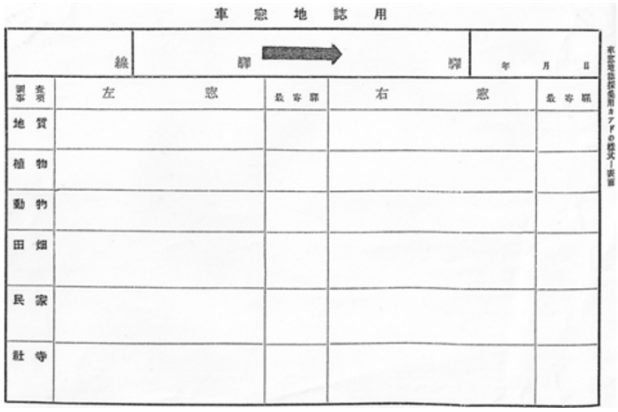
For individuals who could afford to travel to Korea by plane, by 1940 daily service was available between Tokyo and Seoul, via Fukuoka, with a flying time of less than six hours. The chart below shows the extent to which Japan's commercial air routes integrated the empire by 1940.[7]



The next fastest means of traveling to Korea was by express train and steam ferry that made it possible to reach Seoul from Tokyo in thirty-six hours, including the steamship connections.

By 1940, the railway system within Korea was extensive, allowing tourists to travel conveniently around the peninsula as well as to reach Northeast China quickly. Enough Japanese went to Northeast China via Pusan without stopping over in Korea that in 1940 Japan's premier tourist magazine *Kankō* published an article titled "Sightseeing Korea from the Train Window" to help sightseers make the best use of their train trip through Korea.

Included in the article were two handy charts that window tourists could use to record their sightings and impressions of geological features, plants, animals, fields and rice paddies, housing, shrines and temples, customs, traditions, souvenirs, things for sale at stations, and dialects. Reproduced below is one of the two charts.



車窓地誌用

線　駅 → 駅　年　月　日

要素	左窓	乗客印	右窓	乗客印
地質				
植物				
動物				
田畑				
民家				
社寺				

One cannot help but wonder how the typical Japanese tourist who did not speak or understand Korean would have been able to discern different Korean dialects, presumably during layovers at stations or by listening in on conversations involving middle-class Korean passengers sharing the trains. Nonetheless, the chart provides additional evidence that the attraction of the colonies was the opportunity to experience something new and different.

One of many reminders of the symbiosis of light and dark that characterized wartime Japan was that the same railways and steamships that Japanese tourists employed on leisure trips to Korea were used to transport Korean forced laborers to Japan proper and to other parts of the empire. This was also true for the so-called comfort women, the euphemism used to describe the young women who were taken from Korea and elsewhere to serve as sexual slaves for the Imperial Military.

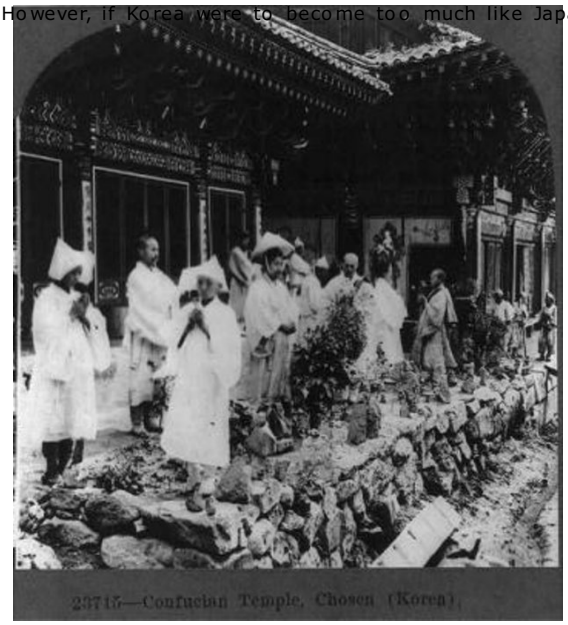
Statistics on prewar Japanese tourism to Korea are spotty but confirm that tens of thousands of visitors from Japan proper made the trip annually by the late 1930s. In their account of their travels through Korea and Manchuria sponsored by the Ministry of Colonial Affairs, the writers Toyoda Saburo, Nitta Jun (1904–), and Inoue Tomoichirō (1909–) described Seoul in October 1941 as crawling with mainlanders (naichijin, or Japanese from Japan proper).

These three writers took the bus tour of Seoul that I analyze stop-by-stop in Chapter Four of my book, but which is touched upon only in abbreviated form here. Toyoda was particularly impressed with what during the Joseon Dynasty had been the royal Confucian Academy and the National Confucian Shrine. The architecture of the complex exhibited distinctive Korean elements, and he wrote favorably of it as impressing him as authentically Korean in style.[8]

This site was also representative of a shared East Asian heritage of Confucianism that Japan, as the self-proclaimed leader of Asia, sought to preserve and to co-opt. What the historian Joshua Fogel has termed the "Confucian pilgrim" was one subset of the many Japanese who traveled to the Asian continent during the imperial era. Many Japanese travelers were interested in the same continental Confucian heritage sites that had been visited by the East Asian literati for centuries before the modern period. The Japanese authorities employed Confucianism both to define the family-state headed by the emperor and to place the colonies and the colonized in their proper place in the imperial hierarchy. Confucian tourism was conveniently regime affirming. Many Japanese Confucian pilgrims returned home from the continent convinced, in the words of Fogel, that "only the Japanese were still loyal to the original Confucius."[9]

Contemporary guidebooks and travelogues provide glimpses into some of the activities that Japanese tourists could pursue during their stay. The guidebook "Sightseeing in Keijō [Seoul]" provided detailed information on thirty hotels and Japanese-style inns, and recommended twelve Japanese restaurants. There was also a theater that specialized in Japanese drama. Most tourists from Japan likely found it reassuring to navigate Korea without having to interact, except by choice instead of out of necessity, with Koreans or Korean culture in any significant way.

However, if Korea were to become too much like Japan, it would lose the very cultural differences that many tourists liked to observe and perhaps experience in safe doses. For example, the writer Toyoda took in a Korean drama during his stay, and described how the theater was sold out for that night's performance. The Chōsenkan (Korea House) advertised in travel guides that it was the place to shop for souvenirs and Korean specialties. Mitsukoshi and the four other department stores in Keijō also offered a wide range of local products of interest to tourists.



Worship at a Confucian Temple, Keijo, 1919

One photo studio near the Keijo¯ (Seoul) Train Station stressed, in an advertisement in "Sightseeing in Keijō" directed at Japanese tourists interested in having commemorative photos of their trip taken, that it had many styles and sizes of Korean and Manchu clothes on hand. Reproduced below are the cover of this guidebook and then the advertisement.

There is only one conclusion to be drawn from this ad: some Japanese tourists liked to dress in Manchu or Korean costume for their commemorative photos. The specter of Japanese tourists playfully dressing up as Koreans for an amusing commemorative photo of their travels symbolizes the disparity in power between the colonizers and the colonized. The most notorious feature of the intensified assimilation policies in 1940 was the order issued on 11 February, the holiday National Foundation Day that celebrated Emperor Jimmu's establishment of the imperial dynasty, that all Koreans Japanize their names within six months. While Koreans were suffering this indignity, which struck at the heart of their identity, Japanese tourists were free to play dress up in the native costume. Dark and light often coexisted in close proximity for the 105 million imperial subjects.

Policies of assimilation in the name of national unity produced diverse responses, not always negative, throughout the empire. For example, for the 929 representatives of the former estate of outcastes who gathered at the National Foundation Meeting Hall in Kashihara (Nara Prefecture) in December 1940, the prevailing rhetoric about the need for 105 million imperial subjects to join together (kokumin ga ittai to natte) according to the spirit of the founding of the nation in order to prosecute the war on the continent seemed to hold promise for a more thorough integration into mainstream Japanese society. These representatives of individuals in Japan proper who were racially indistinguishable from Japanese but still stigmatized, according to their lineage, suggested myriad ways to promote "conciliation" (yūwa). These included a proposal from the Yamaguchi Prefecture delegation to change National Foundation Day, that most imperial of holidays, to "Countrymen Conciliation Day" (Kokumin yūwa no hi).[10]

Just as the areas in which Japanese authorities demanded that Koreans Japanize themselves went beyond names, the pleasures available to tourists in Korea were not limited to dressing up in the native costume. The pocket guide "Sightseeing in Keijō" also recommended four Korean restaurants where Japanese guests would feel comfortable. In their travelogue, the writers Toyoda and Nitta provided a detailed description of their visit to a refined Korean restaurant in Seoul for dinner and entertainment by kisaeng, who sang for them the Korean folk song "Arirang" then popular not only in Korea but in Japan as well.

Experiencing the local cuisine and entertainment was important to many Japanese tourists to Korea, and establishments catered to their desire for an "authentically" Korean experience. Later in their travelogue, Toyoda and Nitta also wrote of eating at the best Korean yakiniku (grilled meat) restaurant in Pyongyang. This is one example of how visits to the colonies introduced Japanese to foods that later would be incorporated into the Japanese culinary mainstream, a process that has been described by the historian Katarzyna Cwiertka. Today most Japanese do not identify yakiniku as an exotic, foreign food.[11]

A late 1939 issue of tourism promotion magazine *Kankō chōsen* [Touring Korea] included an illustrated roundtable discussion featuring Ikegami Shūho (1874–1944), Nagata Shunsui (1889–1940), Yamakawa Shūhō (1898–1944), Yazawa Gengetsu (1886–1952), and Kawase Hasui (1883– 1957).[12] These were five artists who had been invited by the Government Railways of Korea to visit Korea to produce pictorial representations of its tourist attractions for widespread distribution. In many ways, their discussion spoke to the challenge that the rapid modernization and Japanization of Korea presented to the tourism sector. On more than one occasion during the roundtable discussion, the moderators, employees of the Government Railways of Korea, prodded the artists to give examples that would help readers understand what made Korea attractively different from the mother country.

A tall Japanese and short Korean child join efforts in a three-legged race, their unity the path to achieving a great world civilization.

Although Yazawa, who was making his second visit to Korea, praised the improved road system, he seemed far more interested in distinctive aspects of Korea such as the architecture and the pervasive white clothing worn by commoners. Ikegami noted that the focus of many of his sketches had been Korea's many beautiful temples. Yazawa also expressed delight at having seen temples everywhere he visited that evidenced what he concluded, apparently without the slightest scholarly investigation, was a style of architecture that, unlike that of Japan, had gone unchanged for centuries and centuries. The artists took delight in the landscape of the countryside, which, in contrast to the cities, seemed so untouched by modernity.

When one of the moderators asked for comments about souvenirs, Yazawa seemed to speak for everyone with his ringing endorsement of traditional crafts including pottery, lacquerware, fans, and paper. The artists clearly relished traditional Korea. There was a similar pattern involving Western visitors to Japan. Throughout the modern period many a Western tourist devoted considerable efforts to finding the "true Japan" while deploring modernity's corrosive effects on the country's "authentic" traditions.

Although Ikegami, Nagata, Yamakawa, Yazawa, and Kawase were enthralled with traditional Korea, their opinions about Korean food were not so uniformly positive. Yamakawa commented that he had thought that he could eat anything only to be proven wrong by Korean food, a sentiment Ikegami immediately seconded. It seemed at one point that all of the artists had been overwhelmed by the degree of spice. At that point the moderators, who resided in Korea, chimed in with positive appraisals of Korean specialties such as kalbi (barbecued beef ribs). Then Nagata frankly contrasted the authentic taste of the food he had just enjoyed at a Korean restaurant with the Japanized and thus disappointing "Korean" food he had eaten at the restaurant to which representatives of the Government Railways had escorted him earlier.

Although these articulate artists cannot be said to represent average Japanese tourists, clearly for them what made Korea an interesting destination was what they interpreted as authentically Korean. The point of publishing the text of the roundtable discussion was to advertise the specificity of Korea, what made it different from Japan and thus of interest to prospective travelers. At the same time, the modern comfort and safety with which it was possible for Japanese tourists to experience authentic Korea was a theme ever present in the promotional literature.

Colonial policies were designed to maintain enough differences to justify the unequal power and economic relationships, but it so happened that the different lifestyle of the "natives" made them a tourist attraction. The desire to maintain, at some level, these differences in order to promote leisure travel put the tourism world in Korea, which included part of the government bureaucracy, at odds with policies designed to achieve rapid Japanization of Koreans.

The point here is not to minimize the extent to which the assimilation policies were obnoxious to many Koreans. Rather it is to stress that there was something of an undercurrent on the Japanese side, including within the colonial bureaucracy, working against wholesale assimilation. What motivated those opposed to the negation of precisely what made Korea distinctive was not necessarily the goodness of their hearts, but rather that wholesale Japanization of the Korean Peninsula did not serve their interests. But it was an important undercurrent nonetheless.

Although today the following rarely plays out in a formalized colonial setting as it did in the past (although the differences between advanced countries and less advanced countries remain similar in many ways), there remains a tension between the homogenizing effects of modernity on the one hand, and the desire of both nation-states and localities within nation-states to maintain (or invent) distinctive identities on the other hand. This tension remains a central challenge to efforts to those who seek to promote tourism. Tourists, for their part, want to see something distinctively different (and all the better if it is "primitive," although primitive is becoming an increasingly rare commodity in the twenty-first century; poverty remains all too common, however) from their home environments, but at the end of the day the comforting familiarity of the Hilton is undeniably attractive for many.

This essay is excerpted from Chapter Four of *Imperial Japan at its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary* (Cornell University Press, September 2010).

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Articles on related themes:

- Tessa Morris-Suzuki, To the Diamond Mountains: A Hundred Year Journey Through China and Korea, 1910-2010
- Tze M. Loo, Shuri Castle's Other History: Architecture and Empire in Okinawa

• Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Remembering the Unfinished Conflict: Museums and the Contested Memory of the Korean War

• Geoffrey Gunn, Angkor and Beyond: the Asian tourism phenomenon

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Notes

[1] Japan Tsūrisuto Byūrō, *Nankin* (Hōten, 1939).

[2] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Becoming Japanese: Imperial Expansion and Identity Crises in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Japan's Competing Modernities*, ed. Sharon A. Minichiello (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 159–61.

[3] Ahn Changmo, "Colonial Tourism in 1930s' Korean Architecture," Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture, vol. 7 (2004): 13–25. Todd Henry kindly brought this essay to my attention.

[4] See Jeremy Taylor, "Colonial Takao: The Making of a Southern Metropolis," *Urban History* 31, no. 1 (2004): 48–71, esp. 55–56.

[5] Gwendolyn Wright, The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[6] Nihon kankō jigyō kenkyū sho, *Nihon kankō nenkan* (1941), 291–94.

[7] *Tōyō nenkan* [Far East Yearbook], 1941.

[8] Inoue Tomoichirō, Toyoda Saburō, Nitta Jun, and Takematsu Yoshiaki, *Manshū tabi nikki* (Akashi shobō, 1941), 34-35.

[9] Joshua A. Fogel, *The Cultural Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), 116.

[10] Zenkoku yū wa dantai rengō taikai, *Zenkoku yūwa dantai rengō taikai yōkō* (Kashihara-shi, 1940), 10.

[11] Katarzyna Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006). Particularly relevant is her chapter "The Culinary Consequences of Japanese Imperialism."

[12] "Gogahakunihantō no inshōo kiku zadankai," *Kankō* chōsen1, no.2 (August1939):46–53.

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