

Visual Cultures of Japanese Imperialism



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Under pressure of cultural colonization from the West and expanding an imperialist force and cultural colonizer within Asia, Japan occupied a unique space on the international landscape in the years from the beginning of the Meiji Period to the Pacific War. This special issue of positions examines the integral role that visual culture

played both in representing and constituting this imperial reality. The articles, contributed by scholars in the fields of art history, cultural history, and Japanese literature, address the interactions between Japan, the West, and the rest of Asia. One essay examines, for instance, the way the Japanese tourism industry courted Westerners and, another, how women of the Meiji elite reinforced Japan's imperialist claims by co-opting Western consumerism and orientalism as they decorated their homes. Turning to Japan's position within Asia, one article argues that Japanese collectors buttressed the imperial project by marketing Korean pottery as the product of a backwards people in need of guardianship, and another considers the Japanese government's similarly paternalistic construction of the aboriginal people. But, typical of this collection, this last article is not content simply to describe the influence exerted by the colonizer; it argues that after subjugating aboriginal people, Japanese colonizers began to recognize 'barbarity' in their own midst. Costumes, architecture, tourism propaganda, pottery, and a host of other sources provide the raw materials for "Visual Cultures of Japanese Imperialism", and the incisive essays built from these sources promise to revolutionize our understanding of the visual culture(s) of imperialism.

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