

From the Great Southern Land to the Land of the Rising Sun:

Tourism and the Australian-Japan Relationship in the 19th and 20th Centuries

This essay examines the continuities and changes in tourism between Japan and Australia from the 19th century to the present. Both countries have consistently used tourism to reinforce their national self-concept, but the cultural function of tourism has changed with the move from geopolitical competition to diplomatic partnership.

Tourism acts as a propagator of national values: the destination country is often framed as ‘the Other’, which in turn secures and stabilises the cultural identity of the traveller. This essay looks at tourism between Japan and Australia to understand the continuities and changes in the way both nations have constructed each other. What has remained constant is that travel has been a way of defining national difference and similarity, and a way to express anxieties about one’s place in the international community. What has changed is the economic, political and diplomatic backdrop against which this travel has taken place. To appreciate these shifts, this essay divides the relationship between Australia and Japan into two broad historical periods. First, the period of imperial competition in the Pacific during the lead up to World War II. In the 19th century, both Australia and Japan were insular countries that were hesitant about their place in the world¹. Australia had a nascent ‘White Australia’ movement while Meiji Japan heavily restricted foreign entry. Limited by Japanese restrictions on inbound travel² and the tyranny of distance, very few Australians were able to visit Japan. As such, they ‘travelled on paper’ by reading the recounts from scholars or diplomats whose writings reflected the colonial and Orientalist mindset of the time. Later, during the build up to World War II, tourism became one of the only ways for Japan and Australia to connect, but also reflected mounting geopolitical tension. This period will be

¹ For further detail on Anglo-Japanese imperial competition in the Pacific, in which Australia placed a central role, see Heere, Cees. *Empire Ascendant: The British World, Race, and the Rise of Japan, 1894-1914*. Oxford University Press, 2019

² Akira Soshiroda, "Inbound tourism policies in Japan from 1859 to 2003." *Annals of Tourism Research* 32.4 (2005): 1100-1101..

contrasted with the postwar era of globalisation where the expansion of Japan-Australia tourism paralleled the economic movement of capital, goods and services across borders. Travel between both nations for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics symbolised the end of wartime hostilities. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a boom in Japanese tourism to Australia allowed both nations to assert their identity in a globalised world. Although superficially a form of leisure, tourism captures the change and continuity in diplomatic relationships, including how changes in international politics and economics are registered during individual journeys of discovery and exploration.

Late 19th century Australian tourism to Japan was exceptionally rare so most people journeyed there via the descriptions of other people. Newspaper reportage on Japan was typified by Orientalism. An 1882 *Argus* article exoticises Japan as mysterious and unknowable: the author suggests Japan “assumes an appearance of mystery and enchantment” which can be “experienced in no other part of the world”³. By framing Japan as exotic and fantastical, Western civilisation is defined, by contrast, as logical and rationalistic. By contrast, John Carson’s lecture ‘A Trip in Japan’, printed in the *Australasian* in 1889, tries to fit Japanese culture into a more recent Darwinian system of race hierarchy. Despite the fact the lecture is meant to be on Japanese botany, Carson describes the “primitive habits still prevailing amongst the people”⁴. By framing Japan as “primitive”, Carson’s lecture reflects fears of Japan’s advancement as an industrialising non-Western civilisation. When Carson does discuss Japanese produce, he is also highly critical: “Vegetables of all sorts are very poor” and “Fruit, also, is poor, and of little variety”⁵.

³ *The Argus*, “Notes From Japan”. (1882, February 11), p. 4. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1153179>

⁴ John Carson, “Trip In Japan”, *The Australasian* (1889, February 16), p. 21. Retrieved 11 Feb 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1396968434>

⁵ Ibid

Conflating ethnography and botany, Carson's remarks reflect the Victorian race science that sought to rank and systemise different groups. Not all of the sources at the time betrayed such a xenophobic or Orientalist outlook. An 1888 article in the *Age* entitled "Six Weeks in Japan" offers a more sympathetic recount of the author's travels⁶. "Lex" writes about the customs of hospitality in Japan, and emphasises the beauty of a sculptural Buddha that was the "very embodiment of perfect repose"⁷. As opposed to previous sources, these observations notably do not imply superiority of one civilisation over another. This form of cultural engagement is the exception that proves the rule: generally, colonial Australian visions of Japan reinforced Western values, and framed Japan as either unknowable or inferior.

Australian-Japanese tourism in the 1930s reflected the spectre of looming conflict between both nations. In the lead up to World War II, Japan was simultaneously open to showcasing its advancements through tourism, and suspicious of foreigners and their entry⁸. A 1938 *Courier Mail* article describes how the Japanese Board of Tourism invited Australian educators "to travel through the principal parts of Japan, to study the country's educational system, industries, and culture"⁹. This story illustrates Japan's desire to build links with the Western World, especially on tours controlled by its authorities. However, travelling in Japan simultaneously led to suspicion: a 1936 *Evening News* article recounts the story of a retired school teacher who "[was] awakened at midnight by officials just to satisfy them that [he]

⁶ Lex, *The Age*, "Six Weeks In Japan" (1888, February 18), p. 5. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article191206241>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Soshiroda, "Inbound tourism policies in Japan from 1859 to 2003." *Annals of Tourism Research* 32.4 (2005): 1110-1115.

⁹ *The Courier-Mail*, "Teachers To See Japan" (1938, August 13), p. 3. Retrieved June 5, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article40982375>

was not a spy”¹⁰. In their memoirs of travel, Australians visiting Japan mostly evinced paranoia and uncertainty, but also a cautious desire not to disrupt productive economic ties. The White Australia Policy encouraged xenophobia, but there were also fears of Japanese expansionism after its colonial occupation of Manchuria¹¹. In 1937, Mr W. C. Peak recorded his impression of Japan in the *Armidale Express*, writing “many of the Japanese think that Australians are an inferior race of people...[and that] if people from [Australia] wish to talk to the Japanese, they should learn the Japanese language”¹². (Ironically, the article indicates that Peak also held a superior attitude towards Japan!) Although Mr Peak contended that Japanese industrial growth represented “a [military] danger”, he was also convinced that Australia should focus on exploiting the Japanese market because “Japan cannot do without our wool”¹³. In 1936, businessman Mr S. C. Wilson took a more alarmist position in the *Morning Bulletin* that “if Australia does not fill her empty spaces in a few generations... the Japanese will be here”¹⁴. The article states Japan’s occupation of Manchukuo (Manchuria) will not satisfy its need for extra space: “They do not want Manchukuo to live in; it is too cold. They like a warm climate like Australia”¹⁵. The superficiality of this geopolitical analysis reflects the deeply entrenched fears of Japanese invasion. These comments reveal that trade and tourism during this period was largely understood through the lens of the coming war, as commentators weighed economic opportunities against strategic risks.

¹⁰ *The Evening News*, “Spy Fever Mars Travel For Tourist In Japan And Germany”, (10 October 1936), p 2. Retrieved June 5, 2023 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article201214845>.

¹¹ David C Atkinson,. “The white Australia policy, the British empire, and the world.” *Britain and the World* 8.2 (2015): 208-9..

¹² W.C Peak, “Japan And Australia”, *The Armidale Express and New England General Advertiser*, (1937, July 26). p. 8. Retrieved April 13, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article193925423>

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ *Morning Bulletin*, “Tourist's Warning”, (1936, April 2), p. 6. Retrieved April 13, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55573272>

¹⁵ Ibid.

After World War II, the Olympic Games held in Melbourne in 1956 and Tokyo in 1964 not only offered an opportunity for tourism, but an impetus to rebuild the relationship between both nations. This period, therefore, marks the shift from imperial competition towards a globalised market of travel. In the aftermath of the conflict, the Australian public were hostile toward Japan and many argued that Japanese competitors and spectators should not be able to participate in the Melbourne Games. For instance, in a 1950 *Truth* article, ex-prisoners of war threatened to turn the Games into “a blood-bath” if Japanese people were allowed to participate¹⁶. This was matched by the aggressive rhetoric of the Australian Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, who declared that “Australia would have to get a new Immigration Minister before [he] allowed any Japanese to enter Australia”¹⁷. Japan, however, was seeking to symbolically reintegrate into the international community by attending a Games hosted by a wartime opponent. The rhetoric of Japanese officials in the Australian newspapers was reserved and bureaucratic: Masaji Tabata, honorary secretary to the Japanese Olympic Committee commented in *The West Australian* that “the Australian attitude towards Japan was “only natural”, but that “[Australians] will realise that the Japanese youngsters are different from the old-timers”¹⁸. In a subtle rebuke of Calwell’s stance, Mr Tabata also remarked that “...it is wrong to look at sporting matters through a politician’s eyes”¹⁹. As it happened, Japan’s participation in the 1952 Olympics made it all but impossible for Australian authorities to exclude them in 1956, and a small contingent of athletes and spectators travelled from Japan. For Japan, hosting the 1964 Games was particularly important as a redemption opportunity after their wartime aggression. Coverage about travel

¹⁶ *Truth*, “ “Blood-Bath” If Japs In Olympics ” (1950, January 15), p. 2. Retrieved April 17, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article203242941>

¹⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, “Jap Stand On 1956 Olympics”, (1949, November 23), p. 3. Retrieved April 17, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article248162714>

¹⁸ *The West Australian*, “Japan's Hopes For 1956 Olympic Games” (1949, December 16), p. 24. Retrieved April 17, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47817879>

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

to those Games reflects the stark change in Australian attitudes towards Japan. A 1964 *Australian Women's Weekly* article "Olympics fever— and all aboard for Tokyo" observed that "an estimated 8000 [Australians] will converge on Japan by air and sea... [and] spend small fortunes"²⁰ and that majority of Australian tourists had "been saving since the 1956 Melbourne Games". The Australian excitement starkly contrasts with the scepticism and hostility of the 1950s, and reflects a new trajectory in the relationship between both nations.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a boom in Japanese tourism to Australia expressed the anxieties and opportunities faced by both countries during an age of globalisation²¹. In 1982, the *Canberra Times* reported on the arrival at the Gundaroo Pub of a group of Japanese tourists "gripped by Aussie spirit", emphasising the friendliness between the Australian hosts and Japanese tourists²². The fact the *Canberra Times* wrote an article about Japanese tourism at all reflects its rarity! By 1997, Japanese tourism to Australia would peak at 814,000, a 10-fold increase in 15 years²³. Japanese tourism to Australia reflects, in microcosm, the nature of the shrinking world as lower airfares enable people to see different cultures. Tourism, however, also became a way to emphasise what remains distinctive about nations in an era of homogenisation, and to reflect on the consequences of fast-paced economic change. Tellingly, in the aforementioned *Canberra Times* article, the Japanese tourists praise Australia

²⁰ Cynthia Robinson, "Olympics fever— and all aboard for Tokyo", *The Australian Women's Weekly*, (1964, September 30), Retrieved 17 Apr 2023

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47808095>

²¹For discussion of Australia and Japan's political agreements after World War II see Alan Rix, *The Australia-Japan political alignment: 1952 to the present* (Routledge, 2013).

²² Julieanne Basham, "Japanese gripped by Aussie spirit" (1982, January 9). *The Canberra Times*, p. 17. Retrieved February 5, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article126870647>

²³*Japan Times*, "Japanese tourists down on Down Under" (February, 8th, 2007), Retrieved 6th of April, 2023.

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2007/02/08/national/japanese-tourists-down-on-down-under/>

as a place of tradition and natural beauty²⁴. This demonstrates the concerns Japanese citizens had about their own country as it re-industrialised after the war.

As Japanese tourism and investment increased, some Australians became hostile to the influx of Japanese tourists. This shows how a residual sense of competition and threat still exists in the era of globalised integration. A 1989 *Canberra Times* article, “A Call to Monitor the Japanese”, detailed a proposal to ban Japanese tourists from the Australia War Memorial after one Japanese man unfurled an Imperial war-time flag²⁵. This absurd generalisation about the entire Japanese population from a single incident reveals how moral panics around Japanese tourism were related to the memory of World War II²⁶. A 1988 *Canberra Times* article entitled “‘Racist’ row on Gold Coast”²⁷ reported on abuse faced by Japanese tourists and a protest against their presence on the Gold Coast. The violence and discrimination stemmed from a resurgence of “invasion” rhetoric in the public sphere in response to Australia’s economic modernisation and globalisation. Australia’s economy was now shifting away from protectionism towards free trade, with reduced tariffs and a floated Australian dollar. As Japanese tourism grew, so did racist paranoia and violence. In another article, “Warning signs on the Japanese ‘honeymoon’”²⁸ business leaders “condemned the anti-foreign investment crusaders as ill-informed”²⁹. The article stated that the majority of Australia’s foreign direct

²⁴ The connection between Japanese reindustrialisation and the emphasis on natural beauty in tourism destinations is discussed in Carolin Funck, and Malcolm Cooper’s *Japanese tourism: Spaces, places and structures*. Berghahn Books, 2022.

²⁵ *The Canberra Times*, “Call to monitor Japanese” (1989, February 27), p. 10. Retrieved February 5, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120913397>

²⁶ For discussion on how the Australian media furthered and resisted anti-Japanese sentiment see Ian McArthur, “Media portrayal of the cultural relationship between Australia and Japan.” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 60.4 (2006): 574-589.

²⁷ *The Canberra Times*, “‘Racist’ row on Gold Coast” (1988, June 4), p. 9. Retrieved February 5, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article101986657>

²⁸ *The Canberra Times* “Warning signs on the Japanese ‘honeymoon’”(1989, January 8), p. 20. Retrieved February 5, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120903095>

²⁹ Ibid.

investment (at the time) was from America and the UK, but that Australia also needed Japanese investment to ease the current account deficit blowout. Nippon Steel Corporation director Toyohiko Ohno said that Australia needed to adopt more of an “international sense”³⁰, echoing the sentiments of tourism leaders that urged Australia to exploit Japan’s wealth and growth. Tourism from the end of the 20th century to today has become a context for Australia to explore anxieties relating to its changing national image, diplomatic relationships and role in the global economy.

Tourist experiences are some of the richest chapters in the stories of our lives, but they also tell a bigger story about what binds us together. We could historicise Australia’s relationship with Japan purely through political documents: speeches by leaders, diplomatic cables, battle maps, and treaty documents. But these texts are often polarising and simplifying, revealing a static conception of the other nation that is overwhelmingly positive or negative. The cultural texts that tell the history of tourism offer us a more nuanced perspective, a sense of how these relationships influence everyday life, of the rich continuities and changes in the national identities of two very different nations. In particular, they speak to the dynamic role of travel in the history of Japanese-Australian relationships, as we shifted from being in competing imperial systems to part of an ever-changing global economy.

(1996 words)

³⁰ Ibid.

ANNOTATIONS

SOURCE ONE

The Australasian “A Trip In Japan.”, (16 February, 1889) p. 21. , Retrieved 11 Feb 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article139696843>

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The 1889 newspaper article “A Trip In Japan” in *The Australasian* discusses the observations of Australian botanist John Carson about his trip to Japan, presented to the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria. In my essay, I referenced this source for two purposes: to demonstrate the way that many Australians “travelled on paper” by reading the correspondence of others, and to explore how many of these tourism memoirs sought to place Japan within a Victorian racial hierarchy. Despite being a respected scholar, Carson exhibited discriminatory biases towards Japanese culture. This, however, made the source useful in demonstrating the way that Australian travellers to Japan in the 19th century applied pseudoscientific racial theories.

SOURCE TWO

The Australian Women's Weekly "Olympics fever— and all aboard for Tokyo" (30 September 1964), p 4. Retrieved 17 Apr 2023 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47808095>.

The 1964 *Australian Women's Weekly* article “Olympics fever--- and all aboard for Tokyo” details the excitement and travel itineraries of Australians attending the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games. In my essay, the enthusiasm expressed in this article acts as a foil to the xenophobia and hostility from earlier sources on the 1956 Melbourne Games. Although it should be acknowledged that the *Women's Weekly* is limited in perspective due to the upbeat mass-appeal nature of their regular content, this source captures the change in Australian discourse around Japan and its progression from the hostility of World War II. Overall, it serves as a colourful microcosm of the thawing relationships between Australia and Japan, and the way tourism linked both nations in the emerging age of globalisation.

SOURCE THREE

The Canberra Times “Warning signs on the Japanese 'honeymoon'”(1989, January 8), p. 20. Retrieved February 5, 2023, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120903095>

The 1989 *Canberra Times* article, “Warning signs on the Japanese ‘honeymoon’”, communicates the concerns of Australian business leaders on the economic consequences of rampant racism against Japanese tourists. In my essay, the source was used to reflect the impact of lingering xenophobia on Australia’s attempt to pursue globalisation. The *Canberra Times* is a reputable newspaper which means this source has a high degree of reliability. This

source is particularly useful because it testifies to the continuity of prejudice in Australia, but also the changing attitudes of mainstream media, which was, by this point, calling out racism and bigotry.

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<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2007/02/08/national/japanese-tourists-down-on-down-under/>

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