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Title of Research:

“Creating Empire: The Representation of Japan’s Colonies at Expositions”

Purpose of Research:

If late nineteenth-century Europe was characterized as modern with the emergence of spectacular visual cultures, the same period in Japan saw the constitution of the concept of nation and empire in a modern sense. My project investigates the international expositions as an encounter of these two different phenomena. With the expansion of modernity, spectacles such as expositions, panoramas and dioramas, emerged as a major component of the nineteenth-century Western culture. World’s Fairs, in particular, became main sites where everything was transformed into spectacle. However, it would be a mistake to consider Worlds’ Fairs as a mere collection of visual cultures of all the nations: the practices of international expositions, by making other cultures the objects of visual curiosities, were designed to visualize Western centrality and universality. World’s Fairs therefore, as a part of imperial cultures and by re-organizing all of the objects according to Western knowledge system, embodied a situation where everything came under the Western gaze. On the other hand, Japan, especially in its effort to revise the unequal treaty imposed by the West, perceived World’s Fairs as sites where it could prove its civilization to be equivalent with that of the West. Furthermore, for Japan, World’s Fairs and domestic expositions were an ideal stage to conceptualize its national image. However, it was only by accepting the Western exhibitionary techniques as universal rules that it could construct its national image at expositions. Moreover, under the Western regime of visibility, Japan’s position as empire on a par with those of Europe could only be conceptualized by incorporating its Asian colonies. Hence, my research explores expositions as spaces where the desire of state, colonialrelations, and new exhibitionary techniques intersected. Specifically, I explore the way in which Japan constituted its national identity through visual representations of its colonial pavilion as well as through its colonial engagement in the form of photographs, maps and architectural environments.

Content/Methodology of Research:

I analyze four major exhibitions in which Japan participated and held: the 1893 Chicago Worlds’ Fair, the 1910 Japan-British exhibition in London, the 1915 Tokyo Taisho

Exposition, and lastly the 1940 Chosun Colonial Exposition in Seoul. At the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, Japan presented its national image by conforming to the universal rule of classification and categorization system, which were imposed by the West; and simultaneously by transcending the Western knowledge system. Furthermore, at the 1910 Japan-British exhibition, the Japanese section incorporated what was called the 'Palace of the Orient,' which included representations of Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria. The Korean pavilion, in particular, was very problematic since the treaty concerning the annexation of Korea to Japan was ratified at the height of the Exhibition, and moreover, there were strong protests against annexation in Korea. Korean pavilion therefore was mobilized to solidify Japan's image as Asian empire and to demonstrate its equivalence with European empires. The 1915 Tokyo Taisho Exposition marked the emergence of Japan as a full fledged colonial power, showing off its successes and accomplishments through its colonial pavilions. Japan's positioning of the colonies as its 'Other(s)' by displaying expanded images of the colonial people demonstrated Japan as a dominant power in East Asia. Furthermore, the 1940 Chosun Colonial Exposition was held in the middle of the Pacific War. By representing Korea as a member of the Greater East Asia at the Exposition, Japan desperately sought to create the ideal and collaborated vision for an Asian Empire, defined in opposition to the Western Empire. The temporal scope covered by this project, 1893-1940, signifies the broader history of Japan's engagement with Asia or discourses on Asia, ranging from Okakura Tenshin's Asianism to Pan-Asianism during the war time period. In doing so, this project examines the ways in which Japan represented, visualized, and mobilized Asian nations under Western, self-defined universality in order to constitute its national imagery.

Despite the growing interest in Japan's engagement with Worlds' Fairs, there is scant literature on Japan's representation of its colonies at expositions. Much of the existing scholarship on Japan's expositions follows a few set paths of inquiry: the collection and display of traditional Japanese art; the portrayal of Japan as an exotic 'Other'; or the documentary and historiographical account of Japan's participation in Worlds' Fairs. The social and political issues behind Japanese expositions, specifically their colonial relations, have been largely ignored despite the recent attention to the role of exposition in the construction of imperial power. Significantly, scholarship over the last two decades on museums and expositions has contributed to inquiries on the social and ideological contexts of exhibitions and museums. Research in colonial studies, in particular, has further questioned how the cultural politics of imperialist power is represented at world fairs. However, these perspectives have failed to see asymmetry pertaining the negotiations between the colonizer and colonized, and have focused, instead, on how imperial powers merely misrepresented their colonies.

While the problems of these perspectives lie in their reading of expositions as a mere

reflection of reality, neglecting the dynamic relationship between exhibitions and the world, it should be noted that recent scholarship on exhibitions has suggested new angles. Timothy Mitchell, among other scholars, has investigated how reality itself can be an effect of representation, focusing on the performativity of exposition. My project builds on this position. I argue that Japanese imperial identity was not only shaped by Japan's own achievement, but also constructed and articulated by the dynamic relations between its colonies and the West within the global order.

Conclusion/Observation

Thanks to the generous funding from the **The Matsushita International Foundation**, I was able to trip to Tokyo and do my field research, which led to quite dramatic changes in my dissertation. During my stay in Japan, I focused on specifically two archives: Tokyo National University Libraries and "Gaiko Shiryo kan Shozo (Japanese Foreign Ministry archives)."

At Tokyo National University Libraries, I looked thoroughly through catalogues and official documents published by Japanese government for international exhibitions. The abundant resources available at the Tokyo National University Libraries, the Central Library in particular, such as the official catalogues and official report both for the Chicago Columbian Exposition and the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition, made it an ideal place to work with the idea of how Japan attempted to stage its national identity in the world. More specifically, the official catalogue for the Chicago World's Exposition helped me comprehend how the Japanese government sought to utilize the site of World's Fair as a tool of cultural diplomacy. Moreover, I paid a particular attention to how the designs and aesthetic structure of Hooden-sha attempted to represent Japan's national identity as 'Asian Empire.'

At "Gaikyo Shiryo Kan," I was able to look through "Eikyo Rondon ni okeru Nichi-Ei hakurankai kaisetsu no ikken". This was a great discovery for me partly because the Shiryo kan was the only place where the documents can be consulted by the public. The documents were the official correspondences between the Japanese commissioner and the British organizer. These particular documents including letters and faxes between Japan and Britain refined my research and provided me with more particular and detailed information on how the exhibition itself was conceptualized from the beginning and developed throughout the course of the exhibition. Specifically, these correspondences helped me understand how these two parts perceived the exhibition itself differently and how the differences were re-adjusted and mediated.