
Jeffrey Angles, Western Michigan University

“Translating Yokohama: Self-Representation in Early Meiji Translations of Jules Verne”

Abstract: In 1878, Kawashima Chūnosuke began publishing Shinsetsu: Hachi-jūnikkann sekai isshu, a translation of Jules Verne’s 1873 novel Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours. This book was important for several reasons. First, it was first translation of a French literary work done directly from the source. Second, it sparked a huge boom in translations of Verne’s novels. Third, it played an important role showing Japanese readers the world beyond their shores, and fourth, it positioned Japan within a larger hierarchy of nations, suggesting to Japanese readers where they ranked in terms of world civilization. Verne had never been to Japan and culled most of his information from outside sources, but he also embellished, creating a vision of Japan that sometimes diverged from reality. All of the novel’s scenes take place in Yokohama, so one might say that for Verne, Yokohama was an imagined place, a microcosm represented all of Japan. Yokohama, however, was also a real city—the same one where Kawashima lived so it is not surprising that in translating the book, he corrected many of Verne’s descriptions. As this paper argues, however, Kawashima’s reworkings do not stop at correcting erroneous descriptions of place. There is also an ideological, nationalistic agenda at work as Kawashima attempts to position Japan advantageously vis-à-vis other nations mentioned in the text. These modifications in turn reflect larger and currents circulating in immediate post-Restoration Japanese society, as Japan began to insist upon a dominant and increasingly aggressive role on the East Asian stage.

Seth Jacobowitz, San Francisco State University

“Imagining Brazil in a World Away: Reading and Reception of Ishikawa Tatsuzo’s Sogo (Salt of the Earth) in 1930’s Japan”

Abstract: Beginning with the historic voyage of the Kasato Maru from Kobe to the port of Santos in 1908, transoceanic passage subsidized by Japan and/or Brazil brought over a quarter of a million Japanese immigrants to Brazil in the early twentieth century. It is possible to reconstruct to some extent how Brazil was represented in the prewar, imperial Japanese imagination from the emigration campaigns sponsored by the government and privatized corporations such as the Kaigai Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha (KKKK). Yet there was perhaps nothing in popular literature or journalism that represented better the perils and rewards of leaving the homeland for a world away in tropical South America than two works by Ishikawa Tatsuzo: his travelogue Saikin Nanbei Oraiki (Recent Travels Through South America, 1931) and his novel Sobo (Salt of the Earth, 1935). In contrast to the contemporary assumption that the Japanese immigrants were simply agricultural laborers and hence outside the discourse of a primarily urban modernity or modernism, this paper seeks to explore 1) how Ishikawa’s writings represented Japanese immigrants’ lives in Brazil; and 2) how his works were received by the Japanese reading public. Indeed, the decision to award the first Akutagawa Prize for Literature to Salt of the Earth was in part based upon the novel’s narratological negotiation of these contexts. My ongoing research for this paper is to situate Ishikawa’s writings in the larger context of official and unofficial Japanese discourses on Brazil in the 1930s and 1940s.

Alisa Freedman, University of Oregon

“Sesame Street’s Place in Japan: Marketing Multicultural New York in Tokyo”

Abstract: Sesame Street, the longest running and most popular children’s program in world television history has failed to gain a large fan base in Japan because of notions of place. Since 1969, Sesame Street has taught socialization skills, pioneered programming formats, and developed marketing strategies and cross-media promotion. Sesame Street has aired in English in 120 countries; over thirty countries have developed localized versions. Japan’s NHK public television broadcast Sesame Street from 1971 to 2004 to teach English to secondary-school students. In 2004, Sesame Street was moved to the commercial TV Tokyo network and was localized. Muppets were added to appeal to younger children and their parents. Yet the program was cancelled in 2007. Tokyo’s Sesame Place amusement park closed in 2006. A key to Sesame Street’s worldwide success has been advancing liberal agendas while tapping consumer desires for idealized American childhood. This is clear in its vision of New York as a quintessentially American yet global city. When New York was erased from Japanese Sesame Street, the program could not compete in a commercial landscape dominated by children’s media set in Japan. Sesame Street characters, however, became more successful when removed from their original context. I investigate the cultural and consumerist politics of Sesame Street, its significance in Japanese television and literature, and the image of America it represents. As a corollary, I examine depictions of Japanese childhood in Big Bird In Japan, broadcast in 1989 during a time of economic tension between Japan and the United States.

Jonathan Abel, Pennsylvania State University

“Gulliver in Japan in Gulliver’s in Japan”

Abstract: Gulliver’s Kingdom at Fuji theme park performs (with complete lack of ironic self-posturing) a truth of the vanquished nation state – that Japan is nothing more than a Lilliput in comparison to the ever-diminishing European empires. But the theme park is not mimetic to some vanished real of the past nor to some distant real place, but to a fiction. This realization and translation of Jonathan Swift’s fiction belies the already virtualized space of world civilization. Verne had never been to Japan and culled most of his information from outside sources, but he also embellished, creating a vision of Japan that sometimes diverged from reality. All of the novel’s scenes take place in Yokohama, so one might say that for Verne, Yokohama was an imagined place, a microcosm represented all of Japan. Yokohama, however, was also a real city—the same one where Kawashima lived so it is not surprising that in translating the book, he corrected many of Verne’s descriptions. As this paper argues, however, Kawashima’s reworkings do not stop at correcting erroneous descriptions of place. There is also an ideological, nationalistic agenda at work as Kawashima attempts to position Japan advantageously vis-à-vis other nations mentioned in the text. These modifications in turn reflect larger and currents circulating in immediate post-Restoration Japanese society, as Japan began to insist upon a dominant and increasingly aggressive role on the East Asian stage.