

Western Tourists, Picture Postcards, and the “Mundanity” of Travel in Japan, 1900–1930s¹

Andrew Elliott

Over the last two decades or so, research into — or research using — picture postcards has boomed, in Japan as elsewhere.² Scholars have examined the postcard’s global expansion as well as particular national and local cases, helping us understand its historical evolution, the key role it has played in mass culture, and its function as a popular medium for modernist artists from the 1920s; in addition, historians have taken up the postcard as historical artifact, a source of information about various places and people over the last century and a half. And also, at the same time, there has been increased attention by museums and archive centres to postcard collections, new temporary exhibitions dedicated to the postcard, and the opening up of digital collections of picture postcards online — these developments have, no doubt, greatly aided academic research into the topic and, in turn, been inspired by it.³

Within collections and research, the postcard has been approached not only as a visual text, that is, a two-dimensional image of a place or people. Rather, in addition, the idea of the postcard as a material object, a physical three-dimensional thing that was produced and handled in various ways, has been a central concern of scholars (cf. Edwards and Hart). Nevertheless, while the practice of writing and sending postcards has been taken up

abstractly, there has been strikingly little attention given to the actual messages written by postcard users.⁴ One reason is that far more postcards were published than ever sent. Also, though there is evidence that tourist collectors sought the “correct cancellation” on the postcards they sent home, those held in museums and archives today, which were typically built from private postcard collections, contain mostly unused and unmailed examples (Rogan 11). Thus, on the one hand, it is simply more difficult to find postcards with messages; and, on the other, attempts to organise extant postcards logically or draw any kind of general conclusion from them is methodologically fraught — how many or how few of the postcards that were bought and sent have survived? What criteria, if any, underpinned the survival of one set of postcards over another? Considering the ephemeral, disposable nature of the postcard, questions like these are almost impossible to answer satisfactorily.

Another reason for the lack of attention to postcard messages, however, is likely the relatively low cultural status commonly accorded to the postcard, especially after the sharp decline in excitement felt towards this new, modern medium that occurred through the second half of the twentieth century. Even today, as renewed attention is given to the picture side of the postcard, the message — while perhaps providing useful identifying details — might still appear too perfunctory or too formulaic to warrant sustained analysis. Yet, as Bjarne Rogan has argued, the fact that “the written messages generally contain very little information,” might itself be grounds for further investigation of the postcard as a social and cultural phenomenon (2).

The relationship between image and message is particularly interesting in the case of the postcard’s role within overseas tourism, especially by

Westerners to the non-Western world. One of the central themes and motivations of modern tourism, as it emerged in Europe in the nineteenth century, was the nostalgic desire to escape modern, industrial society and discover a “whole way of life” in an untouched and exotic paradise (Buzard 7). This fantasy continues to be marketed to consumers on every “travel agent’s rack [or, more likely these days, webpage], promising entry for a short time into an existence far removed from the humdrum of everyday life” (Cooper 144). Where brochures and the like are designed to entice the viewer to make the trip, postcard images, Bob Cooper continues, “confirm the tourist’s attendance in the presence of the Other” (144). This essay, however, takes a different tack. Rather than approaching the postcard solely as a tool of exoticization, it considers how the relationship of postcard messages and images embodies and exemplifies a constitutive tension in modern tourism between ideas of home (familiar/everyday/intimate) and away (strange/unusual/distant). The particular conditions of leisure travel to Japan in the early twentieth century provide a useful case study to explore this tension.

For this analysis, I draw mostly on my personal collection of postcards. These were purchased from postcard sellers and auctions, on- and offline, primarily in Europe and the United States. The postcards were all written and sent by Westerners who were travelling — as far as can be ascertained — for recreational purposes in Japan and, to a lesser degree, colonial territories during the late Meiji (1868–1912), Taishō (1912–1926) and early Shōwa (1925–1989) periods. This long, tumultuous period witnessed vast transformations both in Japan’s relations with European powers and the United States, and concomitantly, Japan’s place and position in the competitive field of international and interimperial politics. Throughout this period,

however, inbound tourism grew at a steady pace, as leisure travellers from Europe, the U.S. and Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and European colonial outposts across Asia, as well as foreign residents in Japan itself, flocked to resorts and sightseeing spots from Hokkaido to Kyushu, Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria. They were encouraged and aided in this by a range of public and private organisations, including the Welcome Society, Japanese Government Railways, South Manchurian Railway, Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK), Japan Tourist Bureau, the Japan Hotel Association, and the Board of Tourist Industry (Kokusai Kankō Kyōkai). Even as international tensions heightened following Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1932, inbound tourist numbers continued to rise, with British and American arrivals peaking, respectively, in 1935 and 1937; and it was only the outbreak of the Pacific War in late 1941 that brought an end to this stream of visitors and the various promotions and services targeting them.⁵ As elsewhere in the world during the same period, picture postcards played a significant role in tourism in Japan: first, as promotions of tourism-related businesses, especially hotels, sightseeing spots, and the nation at large; second, as a means of social performance, that is, practices of buying, writing, and sending postcards home communicated visitors' understanding of the norms and values of tourism, and furthermore, as souvenir, the postcard served to generate narrative, or stories about relations between people and places, and one's presence in the world (Stewart ch. 5; Pyne 115).

In terms of how postcards were used by tourists to Japan, there is perhaps little that immediately distinguishes their practices from that of tourists elsewhere in the world at the same time. Yet, as I argue below, the specific context for postcard production, purchasing, and writing in

Japan suggests the active role played not only by foreign guests but also by Japanese hosts in the shaping of inbound tourist experiences as “mundane.” I employ the term “mundane” here, not in the negative sense of “dull” or “tiresome,” but rather to express how Japan emerges during this period as a travel destination offering familiar, homely services, which seem to express reciprocal understanding and shared values about what constitutes the touristic. Though the tensions between home and away are impossible to fully resolve, nevertheless, tourism in Japan during this period complicates and challenges interpretations of overseas tourism, and the tourist postcard, as a primarily exoticist instrument through which the non-Western world is objectified.

First, the essay reviews the historical development of the picture postcard, including in Japan, and previous research on its usage and significance within tourism. Following that, it introduces, analyses, and discusses a number of postcards from 1900 to the late 1930s.

The Development of the Postcard

The emergence of the picture postcard as a popular and common means of postal communication across the world was dependent on technological advances in printing and transportation, the strengthening of international society in the form of international organisations and agreements, and new patterns of mobility — tourism and other forms of short-term travel as well as long-term migration. In 1869, the first official postcard (called “correspondence card”) was issued by the Austrian government: one side of the card was reserved for the address and the other side was left blank for the message; postage was prepaid, at a cheaper rate than letters. It was immediately popular, and other governments quickly followed suit:

Great Britain and the North German Confederation (1870), Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Finland, Canada and United Germany (1871), the United States (1874), and elsewhere. At first, postcards were only delivered domestically but the establishment of the General Postal Union (Universal Postal Union, from 1878) by the Treaty of Bern in 1874 put in place regulations for the price, size, and weight of mail, including postcards, sent between member states. At this early point, privately-published postcards were not accepted by post offices and — while some did have illustrations on the front — only the address could be written on the verso. By the end of the century, this had changed: in Great Britain and its empire, for example, it became possible to send postcards printed by private publishers from 1894, while postcards with divided backs were printed from 1902. Finally, with developments in lithographic and collotype printing processes, and the rotary press, it became possible to mass produce postcards with high-quality photoprints on the front. These developments led to the beginning of the so-called “golden age” of the postcard in the first two decades of the twentieth century (Pyne; Woody).

Japan was an active participant in these movements from the start. Official postcards were issued by the government from 1873 with the inauguration of the modern postal system; and Japan joined the General Postal Union in 1877, allowing international post at fixed rates, including picture postcards designed for the export market (though few of these cancelled cards can be found today). These were labelled “Universal Postal Union Postcard” (*Bankoku Yūbin Sōgō Hagaki*) in Chinese characters on the back. In 1900, privately-printed picture postcards — labelled “Postcard” (*Yūbin Hagaki*) — were legalised for the domestic market as well, leading to the establishment of a remarkably large number of postcard publishers

across the Kanto and Kansai regions, with concentrations in Tokyo and Yokohama (Romaskiewicz).⁶ From this point, postcard usage began to rapidly increase, leading to what is now termed the “Japanese postcard boom.” This was triggered by the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) as soldiers at the front took advantage of subsidised military mail to send postcards home and huge numbers of commemorative cards and stamps were produced for public consumption in Japan. From 1907, postcards with a divided back, allowing a message to be written on one-third of the verso, appeared. From 1918, postcards with a half-divided back, akin to the standard picture postcard today, were introduced (Barclay; Hosoma). On the basis of the type of image, the industry categorised picture postcards as follows: “bromide” (*buromaido*) portraits of young female beauties (*bijin*); “collotype” (*korotaiipu*) photoprints, especially of landscape and street scenes; *ishiire* postcards, decorated with tiny sparkling stones; and “design pictures” (*ishō-ga*), postcards showing not a photograph but a picture or illustration, including Western-style oil paintings, watercolours, *Nanga*-style ink paintings, and line drawings. Within these categories, a wide range of different subjects and themes were available to meet all and every consumer taste, from soldiers and battleships to birds and flowers, erotic prints, satirical cartoons, art nouveau-style, mosaics, and collages. With such a wide selection, and affordably priced, the postcard was a massive hit among people from all social classes and, in turn, was a very profitable investment for publishers and sellers (Hosoma 21–26).

The emergence of the postcard in Europe and around the world from the 1870s was not dependent on the synchronous development of international tourism. Postcards quickly became popular for commercial corre-

spondence, as short notes to friends and acquaintances, and as greetings cards for various occasions — any circumstances when a cheap, concise, and non-private form of communication was required, without necessarily expecting a reply. Nevertheless, the arrival of the privately-printed picture postcard, combined with the burgeoning international postage system, meant that the postcard quickly became synonymous with tourism as a distinctly and self-consciously modern practice. In the case of British seaside tourism in particular, illustrated comic postcards were in circulation from the early twentieth-century (Pritchard and Morgan); but generally (and certainly in the case of inbound tourists in Japan), tourist postcards primarily featured sketches or photographs of landscapes, cityscapes, buildings and, sometimes, people seen as culturally distinctive. These postcards were easily available across the expanding tourist world: on steamships, in port cities, at railway stations, hotels, and sightseeing spots.

Theorising the Tourist Postcard

As a means of communication, the tourist postcard was a way to connect the sender (the subject who is “away”) with the recipient (a significant other at “home”). Quickly this became a convention of tourism and, as such, the postcard came to function as a “social placeholder for [...] communicating to the recipient that the sender was obeying the mores and norms of tourism” (Pyne 130). Moreover, however, the choice of image and message, much like the choice of destination and activities, could be used to communicate something about the *type* of tourist one was and, in turn, something about one’s quality of taste, real or desired social and cultural status, and the authenticity of one’s experiences. In this respect, the use of

the postcard within tourism as a means of communication overlaps and intersects with the postcard's function as a souvenir, an object that, in Susan Stewart's words, "distinguishes experience," marking an event (the trip) as original and unique, *unrepeatable* (135).

As Stewart writes, the process of buying, writing, and sending a postcard on site transforms a mass-produced public object into a "private possession," something that — upon receipt — authenticates less the site itself than the writer's personal experiences of it. That is, to function as souvenir, the postcard depends on a material relation to its "'natural' location" — the place beyond everyday lived experience which it depicts and was bought, written, and sent; Stewart notes, for example, "the disappointment we feel in receiving a postcard from the sender's home rather than the depicted sight" (135). But, through its inscription and removal from this location, the "point of authenticity" is displaced from its site of production to the possessor/owner, the tourist who *was (t)here* and who finds in the postcard a means to narrate a valorised experience of the world with themselves at the centre (136).

This idea of the souvenir as a "narrative of the possessor" (and "not a narrative of the object") (Stewart 136) corresponds to prevailing interpretations of the tourist postcard as a distinctly visual medium that encodes fundamentally unequal relations between places and people around the world. Generally speaking, as Satō Kenji (36–37) argues, the postcard exemplifies tourism as an ocular phenomenon, in which "the eye" produces the world as a series of arranged and organised "sights," strange and intriguing but never overwhelming (cf. Adler; Urry and Larson). In the postcard, the world as "sight" is reduced and framed, made "miniature, that which can be enveloped by the body" and "two-dimensional [...] that which can be

appropriated within the privileged view of the individual subject” (Stewart 137–38).

The power of the picture postcard might also be recognised in terms of its production. Postcards for the nineteenth and early twentieth-century international tourist market were overwhelmingly printed by British, German, or U.S. companies, typically from photographs taken by European or American photographers without the permission of those pictured, and then mass produced and shipped around the world.⁷ The captions later attached to these photographs often bore little or no relation to the original context, and might easily be changed. Photographs could also be resized or manipulated in other ways. The images themselves were chosen in order to appeal to Euro-American consumers: people and places were thereby represented in accordance with the expectations of tourists, and postcards often reproduced stereotypical scenes, clothes, and customs. In particular, tourist postcards from this early period that represent non-Western places and people have been said to draw on an exoticist repertoire of images that supported and reproduced colonial hierarchies based on racial or cultural difference (Geary and Webb “Introduction”; Woody). In short, the postcard as exotic object “represents distance appropriated [...] a specimen and a trophy” that affirms the travellers’ conquest of the unknown and return to the safe and familiar bounds of home (Stewart 147).

In the case of Japan, exotic postcard images were commonly published and were popular with correspondents and collectors alike, as Ellen Handy (1998) has shown in regards to postcards produced in the U.S. for armchair travellers and in Japan for foreign visitors. Geisha and other “beauties” (young female models, typically dressed in kimono), parasols, rickshaws (a

modern invention coded “traditional”), cherry blossoms, wisteria, cryptomeria, Mount Fuji, thatched-roof tea houses, castles, temples, shrines — all these were obviously marketable subjects for Western consumers, and helped promote an image of Japan as a place to escape the modern, the industrial, and the Western.

Nevertheless, attention to the production of postcards for the tourist market *within Japan* reveals significant differences from conditions in other regions of the non-Western world. In contrast to Africa, India, Indo-China, and China, Japan was able to “limit the number of European issues circulating in [the] country” as a result of its “strong domestic industry” and, I would add, independent trade policy and non-colonial status (Woody 42). In regards to the types of images that were printed in Japan for the tourist market, commercial considerations inevitably played a role: popular images that met the expectations of inbound tourists, and could therefore be easily sold, were often selected. In this respect, visitors’ needs and demands guided production. At the same time, however, a central and active role in the selection and production of postcards was played by locals, in decisions to use postcards for marketing campaigns (e.g. hotels), participating as subjects in photographs, taking photographs and creating illustrations, manipulating images (e.g. cropping and hand-tinting), as well as printing, distribution, and sales. Furthermore, it was not only Westerners but also Japanese who consumed these postcards, buying and sending them on their own leisure trips, and for postcard exchanges with other collectors.⁸ Arguably then, the particular conditions of production complicate, in the case of Japan, simple demarcations between “local postcards” and “those produced for international tourism and collectors’ markets” (Geary and Webb 2).

A more complex reading of Japan tourist postcards might also emerge through attention, on the one hand, to the types of postcards actually written and sent by tourists from Japan, as opposed to the full range of those published and collected, and, on the other hand, to the messages written by these tourists as well as the printed images and captions. To this task, the rest of the essay turns.

Analysing Tourist Postcards from Japan: Tourism as Embodied Practice

Examining the picture postcards actually written and sent by tourists from Japan can further our understanding of how Western visitors saw Japan, providing an important corollary to published travelogues, which were written with a large, public readership in mind, and popular souvenirs from the early to mid-Meiji period, such as photographs and photograph albums (cf. Hockley). Also, it helps direct attention to tourism as an embodied practice, that is, an analysis of tourism in terms not only of the tourist gaze but the tourist body more generally — the tourist that bought the card, and sat down and wrote it, in addition to the image depicted on its front. Even if, as Hosoma (44–46) suggests, the tourist postcard’s announcement of one’s presence at a particular time and place is made somewhat ghostly by the gap in time between writing and reception, it is towards the physical body and not the disembodied eye that the inscription typically gestures: not “I saw this” so much as “I am here” (or “my room,” as in figure 1).

The picture postcards selected for this essay are — based on the surviving archive — reasonably representative of the general tenor of tourist postcards sent from Japan from 1900 to the 1930s but, as noted, it is

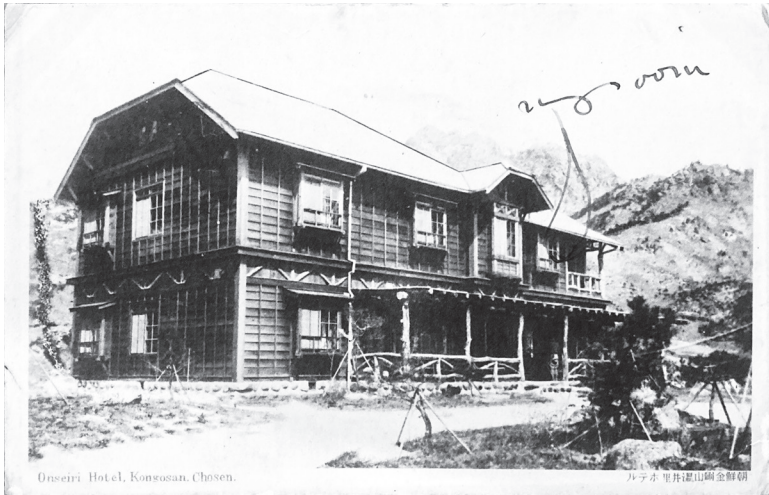


Fig. 1. Postcard labelled "Onseiri Hotel, Kongosan, Chosen." "My room" handwritten on the verso. No date. Published by South Manchurian Railway Company. Personal Collection.

impossible to know how the selection has been moulded by conditions of reception, collection and sale up to and including the present day. Furthermore, it is typically difficult to make judgments about the sender, including where they live and where are from, or why they are in Japan and why they are travelling; that said, in most cases, the recreational or leisure motivations of the writer may be inferred from the message. This is not to say, however, that all the writers were "globetrotters": there are postcards sent by foreign residents on holiday somewhere in Japan, to friends and colleagues inside and outside the country; Western visitors from other parts of Asia, or further afield, sent postcards on trips that likely, in some cases, combined business and pleasure. Yet such distinctions, while important, will be not used to exclude postcards from analysis here.

The selection includes about 70 picture postcards. The earliest that can be dated are from 1900, the year that privately-published postcards were allowed to be sent in Japan. These are typically labelled in French and Japanese on the verso: “Union Postale Universelle, Carte Postale, *Bankoku Yūbin Sōgō Hagaki*.” In principle, such postcards were published for the export market and could be sent internationally before the law changed, but I have not yet found any such picture postcards stamped earlier than 1900. One postcard, sent on 13 April 1900 from Kobe to Anhalt, Germany is a rare example of a “Yūbin Hagaki” — the new privately-published postcard for domestic postage — that was used by a foreign correspondent from Japan at this early period. Generally speaking, tourist postcards labelled *yūbin hagaki* become common from around 1906. The final postcard from the period before the Pacific War, captioned “The Harbour of Yokohama” and sent while en route to Japan, is stamped 6 January 1941. Recreational travellers from the U.S. continued to enter Japan until shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, but Mary Elizabeth’s message to friends in California acknowledges the difficulties increasingly facing the tourist in a world at war: “Dear Betty, Have changed my plans. England impossible right now. If [?] will let me out, will go on around. Maharahas [sic. Maharajas] do not interest me much, and Japan has many famous, wonderful things to see.”

Postcard images, their messages, and ink stamps show that the postcards were sent from a variety of places across Honshu and beyond. But port cities such as Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama, tourist centres like Kyoto and Nikko, and resorts towns like Miyanoshita (Hakone) predominate. The former, due to their function as treaty ports until 1899, had the largest foreign communities in Japan and were the most important ports of

call for passenger ships. Kyoto and Nikko had been popular destinations for Western travellers from the early Meiji period, and continued to be listed in guidebooks and the like as “must-see” sites for all visitors with the time to leave port. Miyanoshita quickly built up a reputation during the Meiji period as the best summering resort in Japan, with many foreign residents building second houses there; but also, due to its views of Mount Fuji and well-regarded accommodation, especially the Fujiya Hotel, it drew many short-term visitors as well.

In addition, postcards were sent from Keijō (present-day Seoul) and Dalian (Jp. Ryōjun or Dairen) in the “new territories” on the continent, both of which were increasingly popular stopovers on journeys to Japan by rail from the north, or to and from north China. Others were posted at the next destination or en route, for example, from Hanoi and Honolulu. Many postcards obviously travelled by ship — indeed, as Woody (40) explains, the international shipping network played a fundamental role in the global expansion of the postcard: it was used to distribute postcards around the world, before and after purchase; also, passenger ships were an important point of sale for tourist postcards, and shipping companies used postcards for marketing. In addition, in the case of post from the Japanese empire to Europe, rail connections became increasingly important in the 1910s to 1930s. Postcards labelled “via Siberia” travelled from either Tsuruga to Vladivostok or from Shimonoseki or Moji to Pusan or Dalian before being carried into Europe on the Trans-Siberian Railway. On one early card, sent to Potsdam in July 1908, the writer adds an exclamation mark at the end of “Via Siberia!” It is impossible, of course, to know for sure what he or she hoped to express with this, but we might infer a certain thrill at the thought of the exciting overland journey, only recently reopened after the

Russo-Japanese War, that this postcard would soon make.

The destinations of postcards are, inevitably, much more diverse. In France: Arles, Cruas, Marseilles, Marvejols, Meursault, Nancy, Olivet, Oullins, Paris, Remiremont. In Germany: Bad Wildungen, Bernburg, Hamburg, Lustadt, Münster, Oldenburg, Potsdam, Zerbst. In Great Britain: Glamorgan, Glasgow, London. In Italy: Brindisi, Florence, Salerno, Sardinia. In Switzerland: Basel, Clarens, Davos. In the United States: Baltimore, Harrison and West Liberty in Iowa, Hemet, Pasadena, and Santa Barbara in California, Kokomo (Indiana), Malden (Massachusetts). Also: Barcelona, Brussels, Cairo, Guimarães, The Hague, Maribor, Shanghai, Yekaterinburg.

Over this thirty or so year period, the print quality and colouring of postcards improves but there is a remarkable commonality in the types of images depicted. A few of the earliest cards in the collection contain what we might term “traditional” figures, typically women wearing elaborate kimono or, in addition, men in happi coats or workwear (figure 2).

Such photographs appear staged, whether inside a studio or natural setting, and bear a close resemblance to the category of souvenir photographs known as “types,” which were popular in Yokohama and other treaty ports in the period before picture postcards (and portable cameras) appeared on the scene.⁹ Yet these are exceptions. Rather than portraits, the vast majority of images are photographs of landscapes and streetscapes. Some of these are places of interest to sightseers — the steps and torii gate of Shōkonsha in Nagasaki, the corner tower of Nijo castle in Kyoto — but their representation cannot easily be categorised as exoticist, especially if compared to the Japan postcards published in Europe and the U.S. during the same period. For example, a postcard sent to The Hague around 1940 depicts “the grand temple-gate of Zojoji Temple in Shiba Park,” one of the

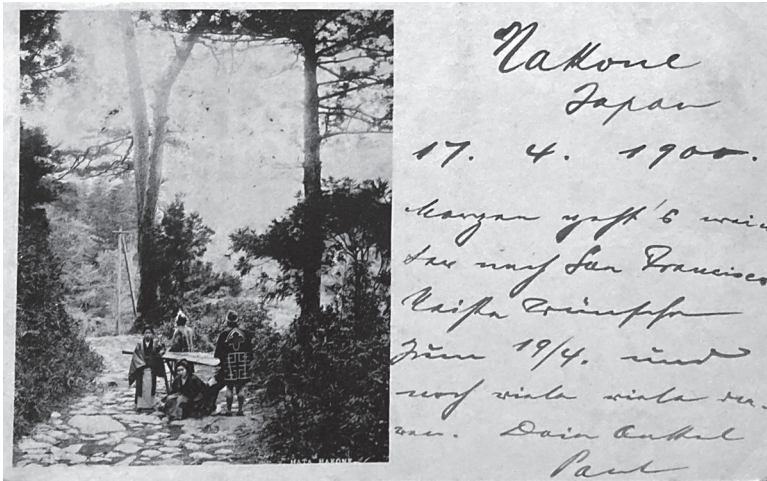


Fig. 2. Postcard labelled "Hata Hakone." Sent from Miyanoshta to Münster. Dated 17 April 1900. Printed in Japan. Personal Collection.



The grand temple-gate of Zojoji Temple at Shiba Park.

内山寺上増内園公芝(京東大)

Fig. 3. Postcard labelled "The grand temple-gate of Zojoji Temple at Shiba Park." Sent from somewhere in Japan to The Hague. Dated 21 April 1940. Printed in Japan. Personal Collection.



Fig. 4. Postcard labelled "The Oriental Hotel, Kobe, Japan." Sent from Yokohama to Paris, via America. Posted on 22 April 1904. Printed in Japan. Personal Collection.

most popular tourist attractions in Tokyo from the Meiji period, with a tram, telegraph wires, and a diverse range of figures (none in kimono) captured mid-motion in the frame (figure 3).

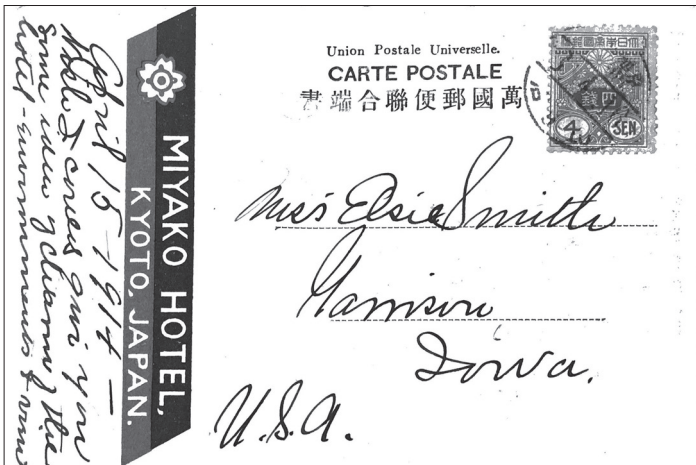
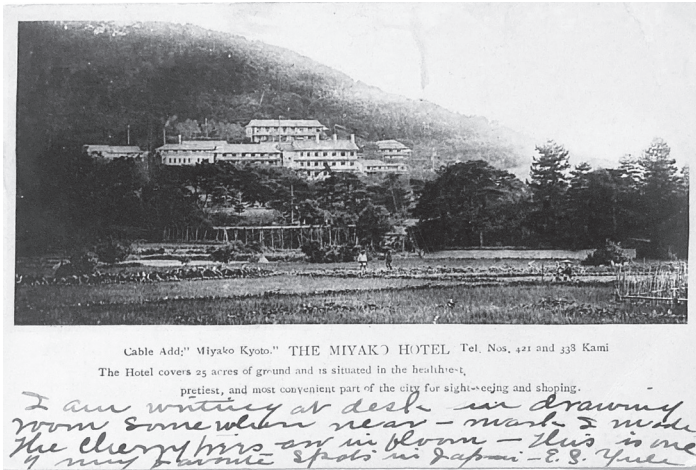
Snapshot-type images like this became possible only with advancements in camera lenses but again, when compared to popular images of other non-Western countries being published outside Japan (cf. images in Geary and Webb, eds.), the contrast is striking, suggesting that factors other than technology were also at work.

The most common images, however, are not sightseeing spots, but photos of tourist accommodation, especially Western-style hotels. These are shot as panoramas of the whole hotel and immediate surroundings, including outer walls, main gates, and/or gardens where appropriate. In the case of hotels in striking natural settings, fields or mountain backdrops

are shown. In the case of urban hotels, the street outside is often pictured, including, often, a neat line of rickshaws waiting for customers but also valorised features of a modern city like paved streets, post boxes, and telegraph wires (figure 4).

In both cases, though, the most prominent object is the hotel itself, which features as an imposing symbol of Westernised modernity offering familiar standards of relaxation, luxury, comfort, and pleasure. The Yaami Hotel (Kyoto), the Nagasaki Hotel, the Fujiya Hotel (Miyanoshita, Hakone), the Kanaya Hotel (Nikko), the Miyako Hotel (Kyoto), the Oriental Hotel (Kobe), the Club Hotel (Yokohama), the Hakone Hotel, the Karuizawa Hotel, the Kyoto Hotel, the Imperial Hotel (Tokyo), the Mikado Hotel (Miyajima) — these (and no doubt many other) of the big hotels in port cities and resorts catering to Western tourists produced their own postcards for sale, presumably on site, to their guests. These functioned as advertising and, over time, became increasingly elaborate in the information given and their overall design. By 1914, for example, the Miyako Hotel was imprinting a coloured banner and logo on the verso of its cards, and including telegram codes, telephone numbers, and advertising copy on the front: “The Hotel covers 25 acres of ground and is situated in the healthiest, pretiest [sic.], and most convenient part of the city for sight-seeing and shopping [sic.]” (figures 5 and 6).

Yet, arguably, the postcard also worked for these hotels as more than a marketing device, more even than a way to generate extra income through the sale of merchandise. Rather, through the postcard, the hotel communicated its understanding of the rites of modern tourism to guests and, thereby, played a role in shaping a reciprocal host-guest relationship between proprietors, staff, and guests seen to be founded on shared prac-



Figs. 5 and 6. Verso (above) and recto (below) of Miyako Hotel postcard. Sent from somewhere in Japan to Harrison, Iowa. Posted on 16 April 1914. Printed in Japan. Personal Collection. The message reads "[?] give you some idea of charms of the hotel — environments + view. I am writing at desk in drawing room somewhere near — [?] the cherry trees are in bloom — this is me in my favorite spots in Japan — E. S. Yule."

tices and ideas. Hotels provided postcards depicting the hotel for purchase on site. Guests bought these postcards then wrote them, often in the hotel, making reference to their place of accommodation in the message. This was an effective means of international advertising for the hotel but — thinking back to Susan Stewart’s analysis of the souvenir — we might also argue that, though participation in the practices of postcard, the hotel was able to perform an active role in the generation of tourist narrative about the trip as “distinguish[ed] experience.” This is not to suggest that the hotel somehow displaced the tourist as subject but rather that a space was opened up for a narration of experience that was mutually beneficial to both the “possessor” of the souvenir and its “object” (Stewart 135-136).

I will return to this point, for which it is necessary to discuss what tourists wrote on these hotel postcards, soon. Before that, let us turn from the postcard images to a review of the messages more generally. A key observation would be, overall, how little reference is made to sightseeing spots or tours. A rare postcard, in this regard, is one depicting the Fujiya Hotel, sent to Yves Refoulé in Olivet, Loiret in May 1914, which describes the experiences of the writer in some detail:

We are spending a few days in the middle of the mountains. There are nice walks close to Fujiyama. I hope they’re as interesting as the ones we made at the monasteries of Koyasan. There, I slept in Japanese monasteries where the monks were very friendly.

More common are postcards such as the following. Otto, writing from Yokohama to his parents and brothers in Oldenburg, northwest Germany, in June 1900 discusses souvenir shopping and a trip into the countryside,

and gives basic details about his itinerary and the weather:

I send you my best regards from the final port of my trip to East Asia. We arrived happily on the 9th of this month. The weather is marvellous here. The ship's deck is completely full of traders and I have already bargained hard for everything. On Sunday we made a wonderful trip into the mountains, and visited temples and so on. It was the first Sunday since Easter.

E. B. Hunting, in a postcard sent to Baltimore in October 1903, writes of the “numerous” temples and “beautiful” mountains around the Kanaya Hotel in Nikko: “a delightful spot 5 hours from Yokohama.” Again, the weather (“[it is] quite cool while Yokohama was warm”) and travel plans (“Its [?] about a month since we sailed and we have done a lot”) are noted. Similarly, in April 1914, on a card depicting Kyoto’s Miyako Hotel but stamped in Nara, Metz writes to his or her mother in Paris: “You have no idea of the beauty of this place. When I arrive in Vladivostok I will tell you all about the trip, tomorrow we’re leaving for Niko [sic.], which is the Nice of Japan. 1000 kisses.” Also staying at the Miyako Hotel during the same month, E. S. Yule tells Miss Elsie Smith, in Harrison, Iowa that “the cherry trees are in bloom — this is me in my favorite spot in Japan” (figure 5).

Yet even brief animated references to sightseeing like these are exceptional. As a result, the topics covered — as well as the style in which they are written — tend to be quite mundane. As shown in the above examples as well, customary expressions of good wishes or inquiries after well-being, reports on the weather, and the health of the writer pre-

dominate. On the weather: "We have had very bad weather!" (n.p., n.d.); "Wish the weather was a little warmer" (sent to Malden MA, 9/12/1908); "The weather is incredibly changeable after all. Today, it is chilly, but dry" (sent to Bad Wildungen, 20/3/1910); "If you know how cool Kar. [Karuizawa] is it would keep you cool to think about it" (sent to Kobe, 7/8/1922). On health: "I had a very bad crossing and was ill all the time" (sent to Brussels, 20/11/1909); "I am doing fine, but I have a runny nose" (sent to Bad Wildungen, 20/3/1910); "My health, thanks to God, is better and I feel great now, though I haven't gained much weight yet" (sent to Yekaterinburg, 15/10/1915). In greeting: "Give your little brother a kiss for me" (n.p., n.d.); "Wherever I can find beer, I join in drinking a [?]" (sent to Neuenfelde, 23/2/1903); "Hope you are enjoying Paris" (n.p., 18/7/1907); "Give my best wishes to father and mother, too" (sent to Neuenfelde, 20/3/1903); "On our travel through Japan, we send you very many greetings" (sent to The Hague, 16/3/1918); "Thou Innocent One, I hope the fates are dealing kindly with you and that Kobe's heat hasn't proved your ruin [...] How goes the swimming & tennis?" (sent to Kobe, 7/8/1922); and, simply, "Amities [Greetings]" (sent to Paris, 30/4/1908).

In particular, however, writers discuss their itineraries — where they have been, where they are, and where they are going. Again, these reports tend to be rather perfunctory, with few expressions of thrill or wonder: "I am just going to Yokohama" (n.p., n.d.); "Our journey next takes us to Hong Kong and I will not fail to send you some cards from there as well" (sent to Bernburg, 26/11/1900); "We arrived in Kobe at 4 o'clock this evening but we are not staying there because at 10 o'clock we have to leave" (sent to Ardeche, 25/11/1903); "Leave today for Nagasaki via Inland Sea. Will write you from there" (9/12/1908); "I leave tomorrow at midday

by boat to Shanghai" (sent to Malden MA, 21/11/1909); "I will stay [in Kyoto] until tomorrow evening, March 20 1910, when I take the night express train to Yokohama. From there I will also visit Tokyo and Nikko" (sent to Bad Wildungen, 20/3/1910); "I'm still here in Japan, but in a week I plan to go back to China" (sent to Yekaterinburg, 16/10/1917); "We are only staying in this port [Yokohama] a few hours and not much time to look around" (sent to somewhere in Scotland, 21/5/1929).

As these quotations show, postcard writers might be said to focus less on describing what they have seen — the "must-see" sightseeing spots — than on positioning themselves in time and space, in regards to the recipient reading "at home" as well as, more explicitly, in terms of Japan and other points on their travels. In some cases, the picture alone communicate this, as when a writer to Guimarães, Portugal notes simply "A hug from Nalasco" underneath a photographic print of the Miyako Hotel (15/10/1903). In some cases, the message does not match the image: Harriet, in a postcard also depicting the Miyako Hotel, writes only four words to Mrs Leona Hager in Kokomo, Indiana: "On the 'Inland Sea'" (14 July 1909). In many other cases, though, the message and the image support each other directly.

Hotels, especially, are employed in this way, functioning as valorised settings for the articulation of a writer's presence in a particular place at a particular time — a site of "distinguish[ed] experience" (Stewart 135). As noted above, many of the postcard analysed here depict hotels, and were presumably published by hotels and bought by guests on site at the hotels. In postcard messages too, hotels often feature. Occasionally, writers are extremely complementary (and none, of the postcards in this collection, are critical): "[The Oriental Hotel in Kobe] is a very splendid hotel. Second only

to India" (sent to Malden MA, 9/12/1908). But more often, the hotel is invoked simply as a sign of being in Japan: "Fujiya Hotel is right up on the mountain. We got off at Kodzu [Kozu] on the main line about 50 minutes run from Yokohama" (sent to somewhere in Glamorganshire, written 6/2/1906); "Dear Mother, I have arrived at the [Miyako] hotel where we stopped at" (sent to Paris, 30/4/1904); "[the Kanaya Hotel, w]here I passed the summer holidays" (n.p., written 1/12/1904); "I am staying here for the summer studying the language. The picture to the left shows the [Karuizawa] hotel and Asama San, Japan's largest active volcano" (sent to Basel, 18/7/1907); "Since yesterday, I am back in beautiful Kyoto and am residing in the above [Miyako] hotel" (sent to Potsdam, 16/7/1908). In many cases, the writer's physical presence in the hotel is touched upon lightly but, as with the example given in figure 1, the somatic experience of staying in the hotel is more explicitly evoked in postcards that identify the room where the writer sleeps. Or, the postcard shown in figure 5 from the Miyako Hotel, where the writer inscribed his message: "[?] give you some idea of charms of the hotel [...] I am writing at desk in drawing room" (sent to Harrison, Iowa, 16/4/1914).

As these examples demonstrate, in their choice of messages, tourists generally eschew an exoticist representation of Japan as strange or different, and express little in the way of wonder or excitement about the experience of being far away from "home." Instead, they opt for formulaic and repetitive statements about the weather, health, location, and basic itineraries, given in a neutral register. Read as a whole, the picture of travel in Japan that emerges is a relatively mundane one: Japan as a place of ordinary, everyday, normal experience; Japan as somewhere (culturally) close, coeval, part of — to invoke *mundane's* original meaning — the same

earthly world as the traveller. How might we understand this mode of representation, which seems to diverge so radically from the foundational escapist and nostalgic drives of tourism? And, furthermore, how might we postulate its effects, both in regards to the self-identification and marketing strategies of inbound tourist providers, and the role of the industry in the production and circulation of images of Japan across the globe at the time?

In the early twentieth century, though the sending of postcards from one's holiday destination was a relatively new custom, conventions were quickly established about the appropriate type of images and messages. In order to "communicate to the recipient that the sender was obeying the mores and norms of tourism," most tourists simply followed these conventions, irrespective of whether they were visiting Yokohama, Yellowstone, or Yarmouth (Pyne 130). Nevertheless, just as the choice of travel destination, modes of transport, or accommodation signalled a traveller's real or assumed social status, so an emphasis on the mundanity of travel might also have worked, demonstrating not only a traveller's wealth but also their cosmopolitanism. Arguably, this was especially the case for a destination such as Japan. Although travel to Japan increasingly came within the realms of possibility for middle-class Europeans and Americans during the 1920s and 1930s, the length and cost of the journey meant it was out of reach for most. Suggesting in a postcard, addressed to friends and family at home, that such a trip was in some way ordinary surely testified to one's credentials as a frequent traveller, unfazed and unruffled wherever they might happen to land.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the burgeoning Japanese tourism industry, how might the mundanity of the postcard worked? In these cards at least, Japan does not feature as a subject of tourism in the

sense that Akai Shōji delineates in *Ryokō no modanizumu*, that is, there are no obvious illustrations of Japanese as tourists, though increasingly the tourist industry in Japan was targeting domestic over inbound travellers.¹⁰ Indeed, following Stewart, these cards clearly demonstrate how the souvenir transforms a public event (i.e. the hotel) into a narrative of a private experience (i.e. the room where I stayed) in which the “possessor,” the writer in this case, is the protagonist. Nevertheless, the hotels pictured on the verso of cards, and the hotels where tourists wrote these cards, were not simply passive objects for the visual or other pleasure of visitors. Rather, for the Western-style hotels that developed from the mid-Meiji period, mundanity — in the sense delineated above — provided a useful tool for the marketing and provision of services to their (ostensibly) primary market of tourists from the West. This history is beyond the scope of this paper but, generally, tourists wanted facilities and service styles that matched “international” standards, with familiar patterns of bedding, food, staff interactions, and so on. Hotel managers, as well as tourism bureaucrats from Japan Tourist Bureau and the Board of Tourist Industry, were well aware of this, seeking to reform and market the tourism service industry as a provider of familiar comforts rather than exotic curiosities.¹¹ Practically speaking, these postcards worked to further the business and sociocultural objectives of these hotels: advertising them to their target clientele, positioning them as key destinations on tourist itineraries of Japan, and underlining their credentials as sites of modern leisure experiences. Yet also, more than that, the very mundanity of these postcards arguably helped in the production and global circulation of images of Japan (host) as an equal to the West (guest) on the basis of shared understandings and shared practices of tourism.

Conclusion: Tourist Postcards and National Policy

Peter O'Conner and Aaron M. Cohen have argued that there was "close but informal cooperation between the state and private business in design, production and distribution of the Japanese picture postcard [...] picture postcard publishers keenly anticipated the requirements of the State, as well as what would work in the marketplace" (55). In terms of picture postcards designed for the inbound tourist market, the display of "patriotic credentials" (55) that O'Conner and Cohen identify is not obviously evident. Still, as the above analysis of postcards bought and sent by tourists in Japan suggests, tourist postcard were often in alignment with national goals, not simply in the marketing of Japan as an attractive place to visit per se, but in the production of images of Japan as a site of modern recreational travel, particular yet equal to tourist destinations in Europe and North America.

Although largely outside the immediate scope of this paper, the contrast with picture postcards of Japan that were published overseas is striking in this regard. Generally speaking, these postcards were more likely to feature posed, studio portraits of women and children in clothing, and performing tasks, which fit abiding stereotypes of the country and people, even if they did not necessarily feature Japanese models.

As in figure 7, such postcards often had general captions, which referenced Japan or a Japanese type rather than a specific place or person: "Japon," "Japanese Priest," "Japanese Peasant," "Tea House Girls, Japan." Tourist postcards produced by foreign publishers also differed, often, from postcards produced in Japan, as in a Pacific Mail Steamship Company postcard sent from Honolulu to West Liberty, Iowa in 1913 (figure 8), which



Fig. 7. Postcard labelled "Fair Young Japan." Sent from Penarth to Cardiff on 14 January 1907. Printed in Britain by M. Ettlinger. Personal Collection.

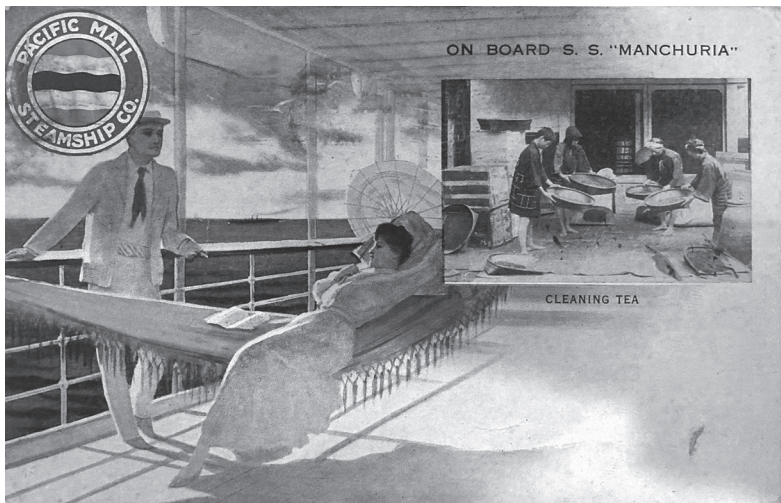


Fig. 8. Postcard labelled "On Board S.S. 'Manchuria'." Sent from Honolulu to West Liberty, Iowa on 2 July 1913. Printed in U.S. Personal Collection.

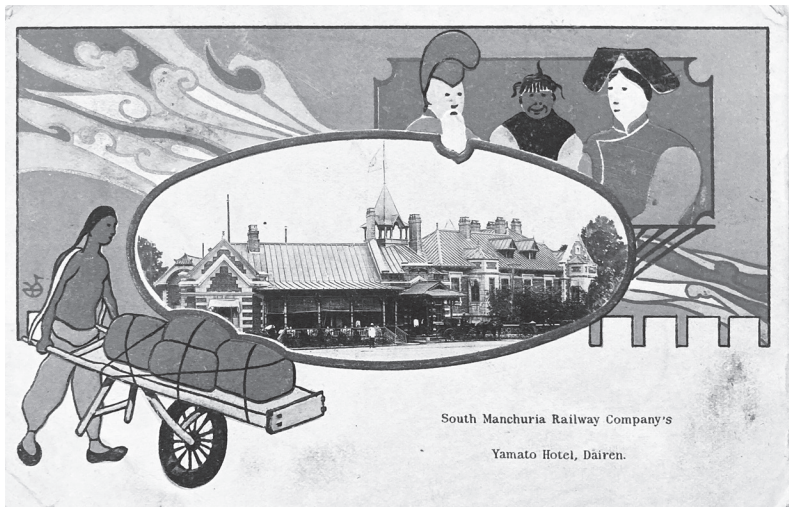


Fig. 9. Postcard labelled “South Manchuria Railway Company’s Yamato Hotel, Dairen.” Sent to Marvejols on 24 April 1909. Printed in Dalian, Kwantung Leased Territory. Personal Collection.

juxtaposes the white, Western modern tourist subject, relaxing on the deck of the S.S. Manchuria, with Japan as tourist object, traditionally dressed and involved in the old-world labour of “Cleaning Tea” by hand.

Most interestingly perhaps, a similar design aesthetic and similar dichotomy is evident in postcards produced by the South Manchurian Railway Company (figure 9) and Government Railway in Taiwan, illustrating how different principles were at work in official promotions of colonial territories as tourists destinations, which depicted a stark contrast between state-ran services like the modern Yamato Hotels and exotic tourist sites/sights of Manchurian customs, people, and places.¹²

In representing Japan as an active participant in global tourist networks and practices, picture postcards played an important role in positioning Japan as a modern power on the international stage. Leisure, if not as

resonant or urgent as gunships, factories, railways, and telegraph, was an important criteria of modernity at the beginning of the twentieth century and inbound tourism, in particular, was an effective means of performing and displaying accomplishments in this field firsthand to visitors from the West. This was a process, I suggest, not only of large-scale infrastructural reforms. Both consciously and unconsciously, it also involved the formation of a shared community of tourist practitioners.

Although much work still remains to be done to develop a full understanding of the range of picture postcards produced for this market in Japan, and bought and sent by tourists, the postcards analysed in this essay reveal remarkable similarities in their subject matter and concerns, irrespective of language or country. This transnational and cosmopolitan group of travellers was, of course, relatively wealthy; yet, it did not necessarily equate to Thorstein Veblen's leisure class. Rather, it was members of the urban, professional middle classes newly forming in connected societies across the world, including Japan, that became the largest and most significant participants in international tourism after the turn of the century.¹³ This class identity can be gleaned from the shared interests and rhetoric of postcard writers but, as I have tried to suggest above, it also existed on the side of tourism hosts in Japan as well, among the hotel owners and other industry workers who provided services like picture postcards that visitors desired and expected.

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tion (Circa 1895 to 1915)." *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards*, edited by Christraud M. Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998, pp. 13–45.

Notes

- 1 This research depended upon a great many friends and colleagues, who helped transcribe (or transliterate) and translate into English postcards written in Italian, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. I would like to give particular thanks to the following people, all of whom so kindly volunteered their time: Elena Babikov, Marco Candeias, Maria Lucia Correa, Ivan Diaz Sancho, Isabel Fassbender, Christoph Gerle, Hannah Hallett, and Nordine Lafdal. Any errors that remain are my own responsibility. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Doshisha Women's College, who supported my 2020–2021 research leave at SOAS University of London, during which I carried out part of the research used in this essay.
- 2 For example, Christraud M. Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb, eds., *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards* (1998); Kenji Satō, "Postcards in Japan: A Historical Survey of a Forgotten Culture" (2002); Honma Hiromichi, *Ehagaki no jidai* (2006); the MIT Visualizing Cultures unit on "Asia Rising: Japanese Postcards of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905)" (2008); David Prochaska and Jordan Mendelson, eds., *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity* (2010); and Lydia Pyne, *Postcards: The Rise and Fall of the World's First Social Network* (2021).
- 3 For example, the 2013 special exhibition on "Ehagaki: sono media-sei to kiroku-sei", organised by Wakayama Kishū Keizai-shi Bunka-shi Kenkyū-jō; the East Asia Image Collection (EAIC) at Lafayette College, edited by Paul D. Barclay; the New York Public Library's Holiday Postcards section of its digital collection; and the Postcard Museum (Ehagaki Shiryōkan) in Kobe, which opened in 2004.
- 4 Two recent exceptions are Alison Rowley, *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard 1880–1922* (2013), and Ann Wilson, *The Picture Postcard: A New Window into Edwardian Ireland* (2021).
- 5 Records by the prewar Board of Tourist Industry and postwar Tourism Office in the Ministry of Transport show that 7,293 British citizens entered Japan in 1935 and 10,077 Americans in 1937. Based on data for other years

published by the Board, it can be assumed that around half these entrants came with tourism as their main objective. For information on inbound tourism during this period, see Andrew Elliott, "'Orient Calls': Anglophone Travel Writing and Tourism as Propaganda during the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941" (2019); and Nakamura Hiroshi, "Senzen ni okeru kokusai kankō (gaikyaku yūchi) seisaku" (2006).

6 Although, as Hosoma Hiromichi (19-21) notes, hand-illustrated postcards, especially New Year nengajō cards, were circulating already before 1900.

7 As Howard Woody (42) explains, across Africa, postcards by German publishers were the most commonly available, except in British colonies that also stocked postcards from British colonies and in the British protectorate of Egypt, where postcards from other European publishers were on sale; in the case of Asia, scenes of the Near East were dominated by postcards published in Europe, scenes of British India and adjacent territories by British and German publishers, scenes of Indochina by French publishers, and scenes of China by German, British, and French publishers.

8 The topic of international postcard exchanges is outside the scope of this paper but a selection of the postcards in my collection were sent by collectors in Japan to collectors in Europe.

9 These postcards may indeed use "Yokohama shashin" that had previously circulated in a different form. In the collection that Ellen Handy studies, she finds that early photographs were not recycled later as postcards, suggesting a break in tourist images of Japan, but these examples reveal that some overlap might have occurred in the case of cards produced in Japan (92).

10 For analysis of hotel postcards in which Japanese *tourists* are pictured, see Andrew Elliott, "Kankō no manazashi, Kankō noshintai: 1872 nen-1906 nen no Kyōto Maruyama ni okeru, hoteru, saitoshiingu, gaikyaku o meguru shiron" (2021).

11 For more details, see Elliott, "Hospitality and the Shaping of the Tourist(ic) in Modern Japan, 1890-1940" (forthcoming).

12 See Gao Yuan, "'Futatsu no kindai' no konseki" (2002).

13 See Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *The Global Bourgeoisie* (2019).