

Comment

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As commentator, I would like to pose the following two questions. Firstly, how have images of Japan been represented through nonwritten materials? And secondly, how do these representations relate to the main theme of this symposium, “Nonwritten Materials Memorizing and Documenting Human Culture”?

All three reports by the panelists in this first session deal with how images of Japan have been represented through nonwritten materials in the 19th century. Mr. Harashida explores how Hiroshige depicted Edo, a limited area within Japan, by taking examples from “One-Hundred Famous Views of Edo” and “Kinryūzan Temple, Asakusa”. Hiroshige had recorded how Edo recovered from two huge earthquakes, and presented these records to the people of Edo, who still retained memories of how things were before the earthquakes. Hiroshige had chosen to present these records through special picturesque methods to represent what cannot be expressed in writing.

Mr. Dobson goes on to take up the portrait photographs of the samurai taken by western commercial photographers in the end of the Edo period and up to the early Meiji era, and warns us of the danger of seeing a single homogenous western photographic gaze on Japan. The photographs, which do not require the written word, are often believed to be accurate records of information, but the photographic gaze, intention, or interpretation of their creators, models, and viewers are various and far from homogenous. Mr. Guber reports on the realism of the sketches by the Russian, Mozhaitskiy, who makes recordings through his drawings, as seen through the filters of his own cultural memory of having been raised in Russia.

Through these reports, I would like to explore the differences seen between written materials and nonwritten materials, such as block prints, photographs and sketches, and how these differences relate to memory. Let me give you some examples.

The first example is the block print of the rhinoceros by the German renaissance artist, Albrecht Dürer. As you may know, this super-realistic rhinoceros, which is one of the most famous images in art history, has one fatal mistake that prevents its purpose as a record; the rhinoceros has a horn drawn on its shoulder. As you may be aware, this image is powerfully influential, and the horn on the shoulder often appears in many later drawings of the rhinoceros. People who have actually seen a different type of smooth-skinned rhinoceros depict the smoothness of the animal's skin in their writing, but strangely enough, the articles are accompanied by illustrations of rhinoceros that still have the misshapen horn on its shoulder. In other words, the memory of the nonwritten material has nullified the written records in this case.

Next, I have chosen several similar examples from the depiction of Japanese images, which is the theme

for this session. This illustration is seen in the large-size book on Japan by Arnoldus Montanus in the 17th century. There are several parts in this drawing that show he may have referred to block prints made some time around the Genroku era, but overall this nonwritten material is quite dubious in terms of its correctness. Now, let us look at the next illustration. The artist who painted this illustration obviously referred to the previously mentioned works by Montanus, but surprisingly, this book on Japan was published in England in the mid 19th century. Women's fashion is much more accurately detailed, and the dress or hairstyle of the women is closer to those seen in Japan at the time, which means that information recorded in both written and nonwritten materials had become much more plentiful compared to the 17th century. However, the rickshaw-like vehicle remains mistakenly front-to-back, as is depicted in the drawing by Montanus and the nonwritten tradition remains firm on this point.

The next example shows a gross difference between written and nonwritten materials. This is an illustration seen in a book on Japan, called "Petits Voyages", written by Theodore de Bry in the 17th century. You may wonder how it can be considered a drawing on Japan, but my interpretation is that it is a depiction of the Todaiji Temple. If you look closely, there are two giant figures standing before the central building, one with his mouth closed, the other with his mouth open. These figures must be the famous guardians of Todaiji, in the pose of "A-Un" (the right-hand figure with the mouth open (A), the left-hand figure with the mouth closed (Un)). The deer prancing in the background are additional proof that the drawing is about Nara. In this illustration, the information of written memory has not properly transmitted as a clear image to the nonwritten material, so that the artist had to employ the methods of classical roman art, which was something that he was familiar with.

The final example is the drawing of bathing women by the French painter, Tissot, who flourished in the late 19th century. It is large – more than 2 meters square – and shows the early marks of the provocative Japonism movement. Numerous Japanese details are reproduced accurately. In the center there is a view of the outside scenery, but if you look closely on this part, you will see that it is a scene based heavily on Hiroshige's work, "Kinryuzan Temple, Asakusa", which was mentioned in Mr. Harashida's report. The only difference is in the season, which had originally been winter but has been changed to spring, as can be seen from the cherry-like blossoms. It was probably not the case that the earthquakes did not matter to Tissot, as they did for Hiroshige, but he simply did not know of them in the first place. Furthermore, it was not his intention to make accurate records of Edo. By using the past works of Hiroshige, he succeeded in making a strong generalized impression on Japan through his works of nonwritten materials.

By considering the representations of Japanese imagery in several nonwritten materials, we were able to look into the relationship between nonwritten materials and the memory and records of man's culture, which is the main theme of this symposium. This issue holds a wide array of complex aspects, and offers ample material that may be of great interest for further studies.