

Guest Editor's Introduction

Imperial Japan and Colonial Sensibility: Affect, Object, Embodiment

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These articles grew out of presentations at a symposium held at the University of California, Los Angeles in December 2007. The event had originally been planned by Miriam Silverberg, but ill health forced Miriam to retire and abandon the project. Her colleagues and students gathered and presented papers on the theme she had proposed. Miriam's original proposal described the idea this way: "colonial sensibility encompasses the more ephemeral aspects of colonialism—its affect and aesthetics, fantasies and reminiscences, along with its manifestations in material culture, and its embodied representation and self-representation. Moreover, this sensibility—dictated by colonial relations of power socially, geographically, and historically—has continually been reformulated."¹ The capacious word *sensibility* presented us all a challenge since it remained for us to determine its boundaries, to give it theoretical weight, and to demonstrate its value in

understanding colonialism. In evoking sense and emotion, Miriam's proposed theme demanded that we pursue the workings of colonialism in the interstices of history, beyond the public record.

More than a generation of Taiwanese, Koreans, Japanese, South Sea islanders, and others grew up under various forms of Japanese colonial rule. In the traces of these people's lives lies a social and cultural history of the everyday that until recently remained almost completely unwritten, having been subsumed to postcolonial narratives of the nation and agendas of national and international politics. Mark Peattie and Ramon Myers's essay collection *The Japanese Colonial Empire*, published in 1984, initiated the project in English-language scholarship of recovering the history of the Japanese empire as a lived space. Peattie's seminal essay in this collection, "Japanese Attitudes toward Colonialism," considered meanings of the colonial empire in individual thought and belief.² In showing something of the range of Japanese opinion on questions of ethnic difference and assimilation, this essay provided a foundation for approaching Japanese colonialism in terms other than those of political economy. Path breaking as Peattie's essay was, however, the way it framed the problem had serious limits. Not only did it situate colonialism somewhere outside the lives of the Japanese whose attitudes were examined, but it limited its attention to intellectual responses, which were treated as discursive and disembodied.

Subsequently, a body of new writing, including two essay collections on "colonial modernity," has reshaped the historiography of colonialism to incorporate the micro-politics of imperial rule into analysis of the social and cultural forms of modernity.³ This new generation of research has moved study of the empire considerably closer to lived experience. The essays in *Formations of Colonial Modernity*, edited by Tani Barlow, and in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, share an agenda of countering nationalist historiographies with a more pluralistic history of modernity within the context of Japanese hegemony. Antonio Gramsci implicitly grounds many of these essays, which focus on groups and institutions whose histories complicate the dichotomy of oppressors and resisters. Still, most of the sites and actors in these studies are in some capacity either official or scholarly.⁴

Since the late 1990s, studies of colonial literature, art, anthropology, and

other fields have greatly enriched the historical picture and the range of theoretical possibilities for interpreting cultural dimensions of the Japanese empire. Studies of Taiwanese fiction, including the work of Faye Kleeman, Kimberly Kono, and others, have shown how literature exposed tensions and failures in the official project of cultural assimilation.⁵ Studies by Kim Brandt and Yuko Kikuchi of folk art as a transnational aesthetic and political project have shown how constructions of Korean tradition became part of a Japanese colonialist discourse of cultural authenticity.⁶ Taylor Atkins's study of perceptions of Korea in colonial scholarship and popular culture and Robert Tierney's study of Japanese literary fantasies of South Seas "savagery" both show the colonized other as an object not only of oppression but of desire.⁷ A number of studies of Japanese colonial anthropology have shown the imbrication of this field as it emerged in the policies and ideologies of imperialism, and even in marketing to colonial tourists.⁸ Leo Ching's wide-ranging study of colonial identities and postcolonial discourses of identity in Taiwan brought new depth to understandings of the politics of colonial subjectivity.⁹ Over a decade of interdisciplinary work has thus illuminated an array of problems of identity and discourse, at elite and popular levels, recognizing the entanglement of perceptions, self-perceptions, and gazes returned in ways far more complex than had been apprehended in previous treatments of the empire.¹⁰

As far as social and cultural analyses to date have brought us toward understanding colonialism and its legacies, it seems incontestable that we still have an inadequate grasp of what it felt like to inhabit the empire as colonist or as colonized subject—or in any number of more complex interstitial subjectivities. And more important than the simple question of *what* it was like, we need to explore *how* colonialism shaped the affective worlds of people within it. Conceptualizing colonial sensibility demands that we move beyond the security of social theory and seek to understand colonial experience at once in psychological terms and within the envelope of physical sensation.

The history of usage offers three ways in which "sensibility" might serve in analyzing experiences of colonialism.¹¹ The first of these is the word's oldest and most literal sense: as the capacity to apprehend something through the physical senses, or the capacity of a thing to be sensed. The radically

empiricist view, rooted in the ideas of John Locke, would claim that sensory perception is the source of all knowledge.¹² But just as it varies among individuals, to the extent that every individual lives in a particular physical space and social milieu, sensibility as the capacity to perceive and form ideas has particular contextual features.¹³ How then, the question becomes, do the sensory stimuli of the colonial environment shape the consciousness of the colonial subject? Intellectual inquiry in all fields has inherited the legacy of Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel, who regarded only the visual and aural as categories of sensory experience worthy of philosophical consideration.¹⁴ If it is to encompass the full range of colonial experience, clearly a study of colonial sensibility must bring to bear a broader understanding of aesthetics than this constricted classical conception. Like the work of French historian Alain Corbin on European modernity, our history must also account for the olfactory, the gustatory, and the tactile.¹⁵ This also means bringing in the powerful components of the erotic and the unconscious, whose roles were denied in Locke's empiricism.

In English philosophical and literary traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term *sensibility* developed a special sense as a refined and privileged way of feeling. Some writers have spoken of a "cult of sensibility" because of the concept's strong association with the evangelical movement in Britain and the United States and because those who possessed sensibility were believed to have closer commerce with the divine owing to their more acute and delicate emotional constitution.¹⁶ This was envisioned by many as the special province of women. In its evangelical form, sensibility implied not only a way of feeling but a feminine mission—a mission to raise the moral character of the home and, by extension, of society as a whole through pious application in maintenance of the domestic sphere.¹⁷ As Rosemary Marangoly George has shown, this role was potentially enhanced in the colonial context, in which the colonist housewife enjoyed an authority that she could believe was an extension of imperial authority as well.¹⁸

Sensibility may also be conceived in the terms used by modern scholars who have sought to theorize individual sensation and emotion in relation to formations of the social. One thinks, for example, of Raymond Williams's "structure of feeling" and Pierre Bourdieu's habitus, both of which have conceptual affinities to sensibility. Williams chose the phrase "structure of

feeling” in order to stake out a middle ground between the material base and spiritual or ideological superstructure in Marxism, something historical yet “deeply embedded” in individual minds and irreducible to the material conditions of production.¹⁹ Yet by treating this structure as readable by the critic in its totality, Williams’s conception falls back on something perilously close to the idealist notion of *zeitgeist*. Bourdieu’s *habitus*, a set of “structured and structuring dispositions” that are learned consciously and unconsciously, appears more malleable.²⁰ But the emphasis in Bourdieu on the inculcation of ethnic or class patterns limits the possibilities for individuals to invent themselves. In the modern colonial milieu especially, we should expect to find social positions and dispositions being worked out—albeit under often brutal racial and political constraints—rather than already given by an established class system.²¹

We thus need something more dynamic and flexible than either Williams or Bourdieu has offered, and arguably, sensibility provides it. The Japanese word *kansei* (感性), whose connotations overlap with those of sensibility, has advantages, since it is less freighted with literary and theoretical baggage from an anglophone context. Colonial sensibility as *kansei* can be conceived as a matrix of bodily expressions of the experience of inhabiting a colonial society and, at the same time, as a matrix of affects, unspoken assumptions, and often-unconscious behaviors that are *generative* of colonial relationships.

Mark Driscoll begins the project with an essay on the psycho-erotic operations of colonialism. Colonialism itself emerges here as a psychopathology, and the March First Movement that was the high point of Korean anti-colonial resistance becomes, for the colonizers, a form of affective disturbance demanding the repressive work of fantasy. Rather than depict the March First Movement as a mass of Koreans of both sexes marching against Japanese rule and put down with brutal violence, Japanese journalists in the *Keijō nippō* recast the event as the “rescue” of Korean women and misguided youth from evil ethno-nationalists. This distortion depended on imagining the general Korean population as desiring their Japanese rulers. The psychoanalytic perspective then allows Driscoll to connect the public politics of these press responses to the Korean protests to a private politics of sex that is adumbrated in reportage from the Korean demimonde by the self-described “journalist in drag” Ishimori Sei’ichi. Although Ishimori

adopts subaltern roles and writes of liaisons that seem to threaten colonial ethnic and gender hierarchies, his writing in the end operates by the same logic as the Japanese newspaper's response to the political mobilization of March First. It uses fantasy to supplant the threat of hostile Koreans with "eroticized replacements." This work of fantasy goes on at the subtlest levels of language, as Driscoll's interpretation of the passive-causative verb form in Ishimori's reports reveals.

In his essay on the struggle over the racist term *yobo* in Korea, Todd Henry writes of "colonial sensibilities" that function in some measure like Bourdieu's habitus. The "affective racism" he describes, premised on the chimera of an assimilation always held just beyond reach, focuses attention on colloquial language and behavior as markers of difference. At one level, this is a problem much like the problem of deeply rooted differences of class culture that Bourdieu charts in *Distinction* since, however much moral reformers and idealistic colonial bureaucrats may have wished that elite Japanese habits could be inculcated in adults or simply imposed upon them, colloquial language and behavior are in reality shaped largely by unconscious acquisition and not readily reprogrammed. But at the same time, in a manner that recalls the libidinal economy of antagonism and fantasy in Mark Driscoll's essay, the textual discourse of "yoboization" draws on a language of desire as well as one of discipline, since the Japanese pejorative neologism *yobo* appropriates the Korean term of endearment *yŏbo*. This sets up the colonizer's displacement in which the insult becomes, in Henry's words, only "*contingently* pejorative," and Korean subjects are regarded as themselves to blame for failing to make the Japanese colonizer love them more. Thus in the debate between Japanese and Korean intellectuals over use of the word, the issue of colonial sensibility as a pattern of habits and dispositions intersects with colonial sensibility as a realm of erotic investment. Like "drag journalist" Ishimori, the "popular ethnographers" doing much of the ideological work in this story style themselves as intrepid reporters exposing the underside of Korean life, while in fact they are fashioning a space of racist fantasy.

In my own essay, which looks at the use of chairs and the relations between colonists and servants in private life, the emphasis is again on sensibility as a loose correlative of habitus. But by focusing on one specific

embodied act, that of sitting, and positing that colonial sensibilities were both performed and learned through posture, I am also loosening the strictures of Bourdieu's rigid framework and pushing sensibility back toward the simpler early idea of impressions acquired through the senses. This is not in order to escape the problem of ideology by claiming in bodily practice a pre-ideological realm of experience and apperception but instead to make more visible the ways that ideology is performed in the absence of written texts. The terrain of practice without texts is rougher and provides fewer signposts, as Michel de Certeau observed, but our tools for its exploration need not be fundamentally different.²² The ideological subject comes to inhabit her or his subject identity through a myriad unconscious acts as much as through conscious articulations of thought and belief. At the same time, since the photographs that provide a crucial source for this history of practice must be seen as the sites of an intensely conscious encounter between the objectification of the lens and physical self-expression of the sitting subject rather than as simple windows on people's behavior, I am telling a history of colonial self-representations as much as one of colonial habits.

Helen Lee's essay deals with the cultivation of a young Japanese woman's self-consciousness as a part of the imperial project. The "sensibility" explored here, in an intensely self-scrutinizing diary, comes closest to the concept in its literary form, and we see suggestions that twentieth-century Japan's emperor cult was itself a kind of "cult of sensibility." Initiated to the cult through inspirational speeches at a girls' school and the missionary work of teaching Korean children, Lee's protagonist Asano Shigeko experiences a form of religious rapture in her own moral awakening and her desire for intimacy with the sacred power of the empire. Her diary seems to function as a device to stir up heightened emotion in herself. Its rapturous excess must in turn have been what made the diary useful as a propaganda text after her death. And much as evangelicalism in nineteenth-century England helped invent a new moral role for women as the "light of the home," the imperial cult into which Asano is drawn fashions for her the new identity of "daughter of the empire"—an identity similarly ennobled with moral purpose. As Lee observes, this role made Asano "directly mobilizable," defining her by her moral mission for the empire rather than her subordination in particular household relationships.

Thus we have moved a step away from the administrators and the scientists, the Gramscian organic intellectuals of colonialism, and toward more fluid and fragile subject positions within it: the colonist schoolteacher, the undercover journalist, the racist popular ethnographer and the assimilationist writer from the colonized elite, the colonial housewife and her indigent maid. Focusing on affect and the senses directs our attention toward hitherto unexamined historical figures and aspects of life within the empire. Yet at the same time, we must guard against the danger that exclusive attention to sensibility, which privileges the private and nuanced, may wind up obscuring the violence of colonial rule and the hegemonic forces emanating from the metropolitan center. Our aim has thus been not only to elucidate sensibilities but to articulate the relationship between colonial sensibility and colonial relations of power. As with any conceptual language, the real question in the end is how the concept of “sensibility” allows us to see and say new things about colonialism.

Notes

1. Miriam Silverberg, workshop invitation, spring 2006, “(Japanese) Colonial Sensibility: Affect, Object, Embodiment,’—a workshop sponsored by the UCLA Center for Japanese Studies to be held at UCLA on Monday, April 10.” The symposium was held December 7–8, 2007, under the title “Imperial Japan and Colonial Sensibility: Affect, Object, Embodiment.”
2. Mark Peattie, “Japanese Attitudes toward Colonialism, 1895–1945,” in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945*, ed. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 80–127.
3. The theoretical move represented by the term *colonial modernity* raises new challenges. Historian Narita Ryūichi has remarked that many historians in Japan reject it because of its potential utility in apologies for Japanese imperialism. This may reflect a stronger sense of obligation on the part of scholars of colonialism working in Japan to keep the issue of their own nation’s responsibility for the suffering of colonial subjects prominent and unambiguous. Narita Ryūichi, “East Asia, Empire, Historical Consciousness” (remarks at the Modern Japan Forum, Harvard University, October 23, 2010).
4. Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
5. Faye Yuan Kleeman, *Under an Imperial Sun: Japanese Colonial Literature of Taiwan and the*

- South* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003); Kimberly Tae Kono, *Romance, Family, and Nation in Japanese Colonial Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).
6. Lisbeth Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Yuko Kikuchi, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).
 7. E. Taylor Atkins, *Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Robert Tierney, *Tropics of Savagery: The Culture of Japanese Empire in Comparative Frame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
 8. See Jan van Bremen and Akitoshi Shimizu, eds., *Anthropology and Colonialism in Asia and the Pacific* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1999); Oguma Eiji, *A Genealogy of "Japanese" Self-Images*, trans. David Askev (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2002); Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Becoming Japanese: Imperial Expansion and Identity Crises in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy, 1900–1930*, ed. Sharon Minichiello (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), 157–80; Paul Barclay, "Peddling Postcards and Selling Empire: Image-Making in Taiwan under Japanese Colonial Rule," *Japanese Studies* 30, no. 1 (2010): 81–110.
 9. Leo T. S. Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
 10. The works mentioned here are admittedly a somewhat arbitrary list, and there is much else, including the work of the contributors to this issue. Recent books by Takashi Fujitani and Jun Uchida have expanded our understanding of the affective experience of empire for Japanese settlers in Korea, for Koreans in the Japanese military, and for Japanese in the US military. See *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) and *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). See also Uchida's article, "A Sentimental Journey: Mapping the Interior Frontier of Japanese Settlers in Colonial Korea," *Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 3 (2011), 706–29. This article was based on Uchida's presentation at the University of California, Los Angeles conference held in 2007 from which the essays presented here also derive.
 11. For a history of the word, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 280–83. I have also drawn on Daniel Wickberg, "What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007): 661–84. Wickberg offers a useful review of the relevant literature for historians.
 12. The locus classicus is Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, first published in 1690.
 13. See G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3–9. Barker-Benfield discusses the

development of “sensational psychology” from Isaac Newton’s theory of visual perception through Locke’s tabula rasa, and the medical study of the nervous system and the brain as “sensorium.”

14. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 33.
15. See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor in the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Corbin, *Time, Desire, and Horror: Toward a History of the Senses* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1995).
16. See Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 258–79.
17. Catherine Hall, “The Sweet Delights of Home,” in *A History of Private Life IV: From the Fires of the Revolution to the Great War*, ed. Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 50–64. See also Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Classes, 1780–1850* (New York: Routledge, 2002). For a study of how British missionaries imposed these evangelical roles and beliefs on Africans both female and male, see Nancy Rose Hunt, “Colonial Fairy Tales and the Knife and Fork Doctrine in the Heart of Africa,” in *African Encounters with Domesticity*, ed. Karen Tranberg Hansen (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 143–71.
18. Rosemary Marangoly George, “Homes in the Empire, Empires in the Home,” *Cultural Critique* 26 (Winter, 1993–94): 95–127.
19. For Williams’s fullest formulation, see *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); for discussion of the development of this concept in Williams’s thought, see John Higgins, *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism, and Cultural Materialism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 37–45. The phrase “deeply embedded” is Williams quoted in Higgins, *Raymond Williams*, 43.
20. For discussions of habitus, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 169–75; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78–87.
21. This is one of the implications of Ann Laura Stoler’s work on the creation of colonial racial and cultural categories. See Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
22. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 61.