'Chasing Japan' through Travel Photographs:
Fashioning the National-Cultural Identity in Japan

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Abstract

This research is concerned with the role of travel photographs in shaping the national-cultural identity of Japan. The photographic medium has been used as tool to manipulate the (self-)imagery of nations. Hence, I suggest that the travel photographs of Japan (re-)produce familiar sights, scenes, symbols, events, practices common to the imaginary of Japan, which helps reinforce and entrench a particular national-cultural identity of Japan in the imaginary. In this research, I have analyzed picture-taking habits in Kōchi and Kyoto prefectures, using fieldwork observation, photo-elicitation and informal interviews to understand engagement with photographic images of Japan. My findings revealed a tendency of travel photographs to lean toward seeking an expected authentic experience of Japan, thus (re-)producing what was already in the visual field. This phenomenon of 'chasing Japan' is valuable in considering how the national-cultural identity of Japan is fashioned through travel photography.

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Introduction

In the present days, photography and digital images have become ubiquitous. The 2020 pandemic has also made this turn toward digitalization sharper; "hybridization" and "digitalization" are now terms that carry the weight of the decade in this race toward ensuring a more connected and more cosmopolitan lifestyle. Photographic images inevitably come to mind since images are produced at an increasingly rapid pace and volume, connecting people, things and locations together more than ever. I would like to emphasize the role of photography in the discourse on identity. The scholarship on the photographic medium has focused on both the Photograph and the Camera (Becker and Dufoix 2007; Benjamin [1931] 1999; Piette 2007; Sontag [1977] 2019) and their roles in informing (self-)identities (Alloula 1986; Edwards and Morton 2016; Low 2003; Pyyry 2015; Strassler 2010, 2019). Yet despite the work on the medium, it remains somewhat elusive by virtue of its versatile nature. That is to say, because the Camera can be used for various reasons and intentions, its influence and impact are numerous. And indeed, photos remain part of our everyday life, seemingly having no intent to recede nor risk disappearing like letter-writing.[1]

In fact, in the context of Japan, one may venture to say that the volume and pace at which photographs are being produced is likely on the rise alongside the Japanese State's concern over overtourism (Agence France-Press 2023; McCurry 2024; McGill and Yamaguchi 2024; Nakamoto 2024; The Mainichi 2023). While an in-depth discussion on overtourism is out-of-scope for this research, it is nevertheless significant to highlight that overcrowding in certain places such as the famous Lawson convenience store in the town of Fujikawaguchiko is due to a popularized landscape: the juxtaposition of the Lawson with Mount Fuji in the background.

Certain aesthetics symbols and practices have become iconic of Japanese "culture," such as the *sakura* (cherry blossom) and *ohanami* (cherry-blossom viewing), rice, tea ceremony, temples and shrines, *kimono*, *matsuri* (festivals), trains, rituals, marriage, and ancestor worship. Spaces and infrastructures in Japan, physical and imaginary, have been created to allow and entrench these practices and symbols both in an attempt to preserve its cultural past (Ivy 1995;

[1] It should not come as a surprise that the art of putting pen to paper has been slowly fading away. In an age where the use of social media and digital (mobile and desktop) applications has been normalized (and rightly so for practical reasons), mailing handwritten letters has become an outdated method. See Andre Ramshaw, "The Dear Departed," *The Calgary Herald*, April 27, 2024.

Robertson 1991; Martinez 2005; Ohnuki-Tierney 1995, 2002; Scheiner 1998; Schnell 2005) and to assert itself against the "West" (Harrison 1999; c.f. Gupta and Ferguson 1992).[2] As such, both Japanese and non-Japanese, local residents and foreign tourists, have come to associate these symbols and practices with what is considered as a character unique to Japan, that is, a disposition specific to Japanese society (Geertz 1973; Martinez 2005; Oguma 2002; Schnell 2005). Bearing this in mind, the history of photography is interesting because it coincides with the formation of the Japanese national identity (i.e. the consolidation of the modern Japanese nation-state).

History of Photography in Japan

"Japan's first encounter with photography was likely in 1843," writes Adachi (2022, 14) and, since then, it has come to constitute Japanese people's everyday life. The imagery of a group of Japanese tourists with their cameras pointed at almost anything they encounter is telling, not because it is stereotypical of the Japanese people, but because it attests to the ubiquity of cameras, smartphones, and photography in Japan. Yet, the term '*shashin*' (写真), which today roughly translates as 'photograph' or 'photography', is not a result of Meiji Japan's (1868-1912) model of 'Westernization'. On the contrary, the term existed prior to the arrival of photography in Japan and meant something more akin to 'realism' (Fukuoka 2010). Imported from China, the term *shashin* was associated with aesthetic evaluation, where fidelity to the visible object—to the seeable—was granted the highest standard. Capturing the *shin* (the truth, the real, the essence) meant a representation free from human imagination or idealization. To use the term *shashin* by Japanese people today is therefore not just to mean 'photography' but it is also to carry the legacy of its historical semantic baggage—the emphasis on reality and, in particular, the equation of the visible/seeable with reality inform the way contemporary photos of Japan are understood and read.

Both Japanese and non-Japanese are involved in the fashioning of this identity. Correspondingly, an exploration of photography in Japan is relevant and significant as it would allow a more inclusive approach to understanding the medium's contingent historical development

[2] The term "culture" is between quotation marks in this case because, as Robertson (1997) remarked, "[t]he contents of both culture and tradition shift continuously with the passage of time" (98), as such, quotation marks are to mark the ambiguity of the term given its ongoing production and transformation. See Jennifer Robertson, "Empire of Nostalgia: Rethinking 'Internationalization' in Japan Today," *Theory, Culture & Society* 14, no.4 (1997): 97-122. The same applies to quotation marks around the term "Japan" and "West," which are to indicate the unstable identities of the names as well as to emphasize the imaginative and historical dimensions surrounding them. See Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995). These terms will generally not be marked hereafter.

and its role in the shaping the Japanese national-cultural identity. Of relevance is Odo and Sheehan's (2021) work, which accurately highlights how the development of the medium in Japan coincided with nation-state building. Although the medium was introduced in 1843, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that it reached some sort of renown with the opening of new treaty ports and increasing foreign residence in Japan (Odo and Sheehan 2021). The first photography studios were mostly opened and owned by foreign merchants and/or photographers who in turn trained Japanese enthusiasts like Ukai Gyokusen, who became one of the first and most known Japanese photographers of early Japanese photography (Bennett 2006; Odo and Sheehan 2021). Concurrently, new state institutions also adopted the medium as a regular tool within their operations.

Starting in 1870s, photography as a tool for surveillance and control was adopted similarly by the state government in its imperial efforts in Okinawa (Ryukyu Kingdom), Hokkaido (Ezo) and Ogasawara Islands (Bonin Islands) (Odo and Sheehan 2021). By the turn of the 20th century, photography studios in Japan were mostly run by Japanese photographers who managed to cater to both tourists and the upper-class clientele. The market was increasingly seeking photographic formats like *cartes de visite*, postcards, and portraitures. Moreover, with Japan's increasing imperial and colonial ambitions from the late 19th century onwards, the use of the medium became more prominent as manifested by a large archive of propaganda albums, postcards and prints (Odo and Sheehan 2021). In this way, the development of the medium of photography in Japan has been intertwined with nation-state building and, more precisely, with imperial and colonial endeavours. From this perspective, since its introduction, photography has been conceptualized as a tool, and photographs as a means to an end. Exploring the photographs produced for the lucrative tourist market, another perspective emerges, wherefrom photography has been conceptualized differently and where photos of Japan served another purpose.

Wakita (2009) explores photographs of Japanese produced in the late 19th and early 20th century and aims to understand the relationship between photographers and the emerging national sentiments in Japan. Problematizing the use of photography in that period, the main argument of these studies focuses on the exoticization and objectification of the culture, society and population

of these places. Part of this discourse was directed specifically to the Orient[3] (i.e. Orientalism) which posits it as "almost a European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences," (Said 1979, 1) whereby the existence of the 'West' (Occident) relies on the definition of the 'East' (Orient), thus making them interdependent and mutually sustaining. In contrast, working against the extensive literature on Orientalism that is centered on the East/West discourse, Adachi (2022) demonstrates how photographs from Meiji Japan (1868-1912), while they indeed exoticize some aspects of Japanese society, reveal other aspects that are beyond the imaginary. Although photographs of landscape and the everyday can be read in a way that romanticize 'Old Japan', they can also illustrate Japan's industrial progress by revealing elements of cultural and technological development in transportation and engineering (14-15). As such, souvenir photographs of the time serve complex purposes which were contingent on the intentions and desires of both the Japanese makers and European buyers (15).

Similarly, Gartlan (2009) examines the cooperation and cross-cultural exchange fostered by the contribution of Samuel Cocking (1845-1914), an Anglo-Australian merchant, to the photographic community during the same period. Working against studies that divide foreign photographers from their Japanese counterparts, Gartlan (2009) highlights the considerable contribution of Cocking in the development of photography in Japan as well as the cross-cultural exchange between foreign and Japanese photographers that stemmed from mutual fascination with new technologies and scientific advancement. As such, Gartlan's (2009) work is an attempt to read photography's historical development outside of the framework posited by postcolonial theory which is skeptical of the inclusion of Europeans, and which fails to consider the contribution and the positive impacts of said cross-cultural exchange in the formation of a photographic community in Meiji Japan (146). The work of Cocking shaped and informed today's photographic community in Japan.

From the later years of the Meiji period, Japan saw itself entering the colonial enterprise, using colonial science as part of the process. Low (2003) examines the use of photography as a

[3] A vague term in itself, but within the rhetoric of East/West, the Orient ranges from Northern Africa (see Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986)) to the Middle East to South Asia to Southeast Asia to East Asia and to Polynesia (for example see Miriam Kahn, *Tahiti beyond the Postcard: Power, Place, and Everyday Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011)).

tool incorporated within colonial science, paying attention to the colonization of Manchukuo (Manchuria). Given the socio-political context of the time, Japanese photography was expanding into journalism and scientific research, bringing forward the evidential nature of photos. Low (2003) argues that by making Manchukuo visible it became appropriable. He shows that panoramic landscape photographs, snapshots of the countryside, towns, and houses devoid of people both instilled a sense of nationalistic euphoria among the Japanese public by their ability to deliver a visual experience of the new territories and a sense of continuous advance of Japanese control overseas (Low 2003). The camera was, thus, not only used to frame Manchukuo in the imagination but also to frame Japan and Japanese identity through the emphasis on the cultural difference portrayed and represented (Low 2003, 109-113). It is in this way that the Japanese empire made use of the camera to objectify and create an identity for Manchukuo.

In contrast, Provoke—a radical artistic group in the 1960s in Japan—was able to reconfigure "the threshold between the visible and invisible, utterable and unutterable, the representable and unrepresentable" (Kim 2016, 242) by conceptualizing paper in terms of its capacity rather than its limit. By experimenting with the physical materiality of paper, Provoke aimed at disrupting and contesting the normative visual grammar and conventional rules of photography set by the rising mass media and state government in postwar Japan (Kim 2016). Consequently, as illustrated by this short overview of the development of the medium in Japan, photography and photographic images require attention because they allow us to grapple the contingency of histories and to question assumptions and preconceived notions of identity and culture—of the standardized and normative.

Objective, Relevance, Motivation

The objective of this research is to understand how the Japanese national-cultural identity is perpetually imagined into being (Anderson [1983] 2016) through the production and circulation of photographic images. The focus of this research will, thus, be on the relationship between photographic images of Japan and the Japanese national-cultural identity. The latter being understood as *Japanese-ness.* It is important to note, however, that this research does not wish to reinforce the idea of Japanese culture and Japanese identity as essential or unique as presented in the literature called *Nihonjinron* and *Nihonhon* (Befu 1993). On the contrary, *Japanese-ness* and photographic images of Japan should be understood as results of a particular set of configurations

(i.e. social practices, ideological and historical configurations); they are unique only insofar as they are distinct from others, which is a statement applicable to any culture. I use the term "national-cultural" identity to emphasize the role of state actors in the formation of this identity (Ivy 1995, 3-4). This research is, therefore, concerned with how the discourse on the Japanese (*Nihonjinron*) has influenced the way pictures of Japan are taken; pictures which have been incorporated into the public sphere and that are being continuously reproduced. However, it is not to say that the Japanese national-cultural identity is a myth, rather, it is to understand how various aspects of Japanese life have been used to render the Japanese identity as not only essential but also mythical, and how this is being (re)-produced and (re-)articulated via photography by both Japanese and non-Japanese.

Departing from a body of work centered around the role of the state in the fashioning of the Japanese national-cultural identity (Benedict [1946] 2005; Garon 1998; Harootunian 1988; Ivy 1995: Oguma 2002), my research question is twofold: (1) how do travel photographs of Japan shape the Japanese national-cultural identity nowadays, and (2) what are Japanese and non-Japanese trying to capture when they engage in photographic activity while travelling in Japan?

The relevance of this research lies in its ability to allow us to think more deeply about the effects of photographic images and the medium of photography—a practice that our contemporary selves have often taken for granted—in relation to the imagined Japan and the Japanese national-cultural identity. This, in turn, is significant as it will compel us to be aware of the role we play on a daily basis in the (re-)production of particular narratives and of our complicity in perpetuating particular narratives. Hence, this research is an attempt to explore the (re-)production of and circulation of particular images of Japan, and how they perpetuate a limited perception of Japan. Hinting at the tension between representation and represented, this research will allow for a better understanding of the current projection of the Japanese self (and the non-Japanese self). Representations are informed by and informing lived and imagined realities, and therefore, it becomes important to understand the dynamic between them and how representations revolve around specific narratives (Kahn 2011; Pinney 2003). While photographs are sometimes considered to be objective, this research will explore how their (re-)production and circulation can create a space in which and through which other narratives and imaginaries can emerge, and how

photographic images themselves are vehicles of those emerging narratives (Edwards and Morton 2016; Strassler 2019; Tsinhnahjinnie 2003).

The desire to focus on photographic images stems from having myself been exposed to them, perhaps from an early age, but more so since high school, when I started using social media more and more. My exposure was mainly through images circulating on Tumblr. With years of consuming, even passively, images of Japan and South Korea, and with the opportunity to work in Japan for three years, I noticed that my own pictures were, if not identical, very similar to those I had seen in the past and that I was regularly and continuously seeking images from social media (Tumblr, Instagram, Facebook), official websites and personal blogs, brochures and pamphlets. Visual data, and especially photographic images, have become tremendously ubiquitous; we are bombarded and constantly surrounded by visual data. Therefore, more intimately, this research arises from an inclination to reflect on the impacts of my own photographic images. What are the consequences of the images I have produced? What are my photographs? How are they to be understood and read? What was I trying to capture? Was I replicating a particular aesthetic, images I have seen, or even, reproducing something within the awareness of it?

My initial reflection led me to think about the danger of 'chasing Japan', that is, the naive act of (re-)producing and circulating familiar images of Japan, resulting from a desire to experience an authentic experience of Japanese society. Without reflexivity, I may have been reproducing the dominant narratives and histories that fuel the current scheme of inclusion/exclusion—how images matter in a larger context (Strassler 2010)—but there is also a sense in which I run the risk objectifying spaces, places, practices, and peoples by turning them into commodities wherein, as William Kelly (1990) suggests, some people are caught between having a past and being the embodiment of a past (as cited in Schnell 2005, 213). In short, what sparked this project was this realization of how influenced I was and how little control I had over my own photographic (consumerist and productive) habits and the discomfort and dissatisfaction derived from my own pictures.

Methodology

This research is based on a multi-sited fieldwork in Kōchi Prefecture and Kyoto Prefecture, where, through participant observation and informal interviews, the aim was to observe instances of entanglement between the dichotomies of the Japanese national-cultural identity: countryside-

cities, past-present/future, tradition-modernity (Robertson 1991, 1997). The purpose of such observations was to understand how photographic images are read and made sense of through their encounter and making. Participant observation in both Kōchi and Kyoto were done at multiple touristic locations to grasp how these spaces have been designed for travellers and how they exude the 'authentic' that is sought. These locations' popularity range on a wide spectrum; some sites were almost free of visitors, offering a quiet respite, other sites were bustling, pointing to the dense and frenetic pace of contemporary tourism.

At one end of the spectrum, some of the more touristic locations in Kyoto are Fushimi Inari, Kiyomizu-dera, Ginkakuji and Kinkakuji, and Kibune Shrine for instance. On the other hand, in Kōchi, these sites tend to be fewer in number. Participant observation in Kōchi was focused on these locations primarily: Chikurinji Temple, Makino Botanical Garden, Shikoku Karst, Ioki Cave, around Tosa District and Motoyama District, and around Niyodo River and Ochi Town. In Kyoto, I was able to visit more locations for two main reasons: (1) there are more places to visit, and (2) many of these places are concentrated within the city and, thus, easily accessible from the city centre.

First, one method that was used was informal interviews with interlocutors who had been living in Japan or had been travelling at the time this research was conducted. My interlocutors can be divided into two groups: those from Japan and those from overseas. With an understanding that despite their different experience of Japan, both groups nevertheless create images that contribute to the making of the Japanese national-cultural identity. Informal interviews aimed to provide this research with a broader understanding of the making and coming into being of the Japanese national-cultural identity, and to understand individuals' thoughts and on this idea of being stuck in embodying a past (Schnell 2013, 213). In Ivy's (1995) work, the Japanese state held a crucial role in the production of this cultural identity via promotional campaigns and marketing strategies. As such, the ethnonationalist perspective dominates the visual field and uses photographic images to impregnate and produce a sense of nostalgia onto the common imaginary. Yet, Ivy's analysis is limited to the role of the state.

Using my connections as a JET alumna,[4] I was able to find research interlocutors among current JETs and engage with them through either (or both) informal interviews and photo-walks. Photo-walks as a method was peculiar as I could not manage take fieldnotes at the same time as taking photos and be present in the moment with the interlocutors who were observing and photographing. Rather, I rely on my memory, my recordings and my own photos to bring back fragments of observations. As a consequence, photographic images taken during photo-walks are incredibly potent records that serve as a visual notebook in place of fieldnotes (Morton 2018; Pyyry 2015). The places visited on photo-walks with research interlocutors were all decided by them—I had let them plan the itinerary in advance, not wishing to impose myself on the one hand, and hoping to be able to notice something out of their choices, on the other. This decision to let the research interlocutors select the location of their photo-walks encouraged them to explore and immerse themselves in the environment (the places they chose) and the act of photography (Pyyry 2015). Overall, they chose places I had never been before. Travelling alongside my interlocutors and partaking in the experience of being a visitor allowed for a further understanding of their interaction and expectations with specific places and the medium of photography. Knowledge accumulates through both observation and the relationship to movement; Ingold (as cited in Pyyry 2015) refers to this as 'knowing as we go', where knowledge accumulates and comes out along walking and on the paths of observation (Pyyry 2015). Hence, photo-walks are a method through which thinking happens, where thoughts and reflection can give space for lines of inquiry and ideas to emerge.

Secondly, participant observation was conducted in the form of tracking photographic images of Japan presented to a wide audience. The purpose of this kind of observation is to get a better sense of the type of images present in the visual field and those absent from it, which in turn will allow for a deeper understanding of the visual ecology in Japan. Places of interest for this kind of observation were public spaces like train stations and tourist information kiosks. Through fieldwork, I was able to collect a good number of brochures, pamphlets, guides and maps from information kiosks and visitor centres. Not unlike prints and posters, these are made into commodities like postcards. 'Chasing Japan' is thus a phenomenon that is intensified by all the

[4] My position as alumna comes from my three-year stay in Kōchi City, Japan (2017-2020) through the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, which is a cooperation programme that Japan has to promote cross-cultural exchange by granting teaching and translation work to foreigners. See https://jetprogramme.ca/.

physical and digital materials put out for the public, and further exacerbated through places like tourist kiosks and centres where travellers are almost being showed how to experience Japan. Moreover, observation at multiple sites in both Kōchi and Kyoto revealed patterns of picture-taking in famous touristic locations such as Chikurinji.

A technique that proved to be useful and insightful was photo-elicitation. Mohr (2016) writes that "in the face of any photo, the spectator projects something of her or himself. The image is like a springboard" (20). Photo-elicitation, as alluded to by Mohr, can be a method to learn more deeply about interlocutors' ways of seeing (i.e. ways of reading images) and associated habits. This method, writes Harper (2002), "mines deeper shafts into the human consciousness than words-alone interviews. It is in part due to how remembering is enlarged by photographs and partly due to the quality of the photograph itself" (22-23). This ability of photo-elicitation to prompt engagement and evoke ideas and thoughts anchored in memories is the main reason it was used. One thing I hoped to get from this exercise was to be able to understand some of the markers of Japanese national-cultural identity along with raising the question of the invisible. Since photography is highly centered on what can be seen, this begs the question of what part(s) of Japanese national-cultural identity remain non-visible (Harper 2002).

The photo-elicitation exercise was conducted only after I had come back from the field; I needed to develop my film rolls and take the time to carefully select photos from my fieldwork archive that none of my interlocutors had seen. Participation to the exercise was on voluntary basis and nine of the twelve participants agreed to it. By providing a selection of images with no context, no textual support, interlocutors were invited to comment on them. Some of the research interlocutors decided to comment using keywords, others used full sentences, writing two or three lines. I decided not to provide strict or many instructions since photo-elicitation relies on intuition and spontaneity. Responses were amassed by means of an online survey, making collection easier. My hope, with this exercise, was to be able to reach my interlocutors' reading of photographic images of Japan, revealing their habits in ways of seeing. To avoid influencing their answers, I did not reveal that these were photos taken by me, nor that they were the first to see them. After the completion of the survey and an initial review of the responses, post-elicitation interviews were scheduled for questions and clarification. In addition, some of my interlocutors also wished to elaborate verbally on the answers they provided. Hence, unlike the kind of strict elicitation used

by Mohr (2016), I fashioned the exercise to fit not just this research but also the overall idea of doing anthropology. As Ingold (2013) states, doing anthropology is a process of opening rather than closing, and anthropologists should aim to learn *with* rather than *from* the people they work with (11). As such, through online meetings scheduled after the elicitation exercise, my research interlocutors and I were able to learn from each other and deepen our grasp on the medium of photography and notions related to the Japanese national-cultural identity, at times leaving me unsettled from by own pre-conceived assumptions.

Additionally, throughout this research, photographic images were used to establish and maintain relationships with my research interlocutors; the sharing of images on cellphones facilitated the conversation and supported allusion during the informal interviews. In addition, the sharing of images taken on the field helped maintain relationships with interlocutors. Therefore, this research has approached photographic images as ethnographic materials and not simply supplements to notes and textual data (Kefala and Dey 2024). Photographs produced prior and during fieldwork are used for more than just their ability to document; they are used for visual engagement. In line with this, visual vignettes have been included in this thesis to illustrate the ethnographic character of photographic images and the accompanied reflection which will provide an opening and act as anchor for the chapter to follow. The objective of these vignettes is to provide space for the reader to engage with the visual data, offering an additional role to images within this research.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The use and circulation of photographs has been inextricably linked to place-making in Japan, whereby technology and infrastructure have facilitated the development of cities in Japan. As previously mentioned, images of 'Old Japan' serve beyond their ability to exoticize the past and the present; photos taken during the Meiji period are testimonials to the increasing rate of global exchange through their documentation of technologies and innovations (Adachi 2022). But tourism and the interest in origins became "a truly national, pervasive, mass phenomenon only in the postwar era (1960s) (Ivy 1995, 30). Robertson (1991) has written extensively on the production of spaces and the concept of *furusato-zukuri* ('old village-making' or 'native place-making'). This concept derives from the term *furusato* ('old village' or also commonly translated as 'hometown'). In her work, she argues that it is conceptualized as a political project (Roberson 1991, 6). *Furusato-*

zukuri implies a newness of the old (27). The irony between 'new' and 'old' (26) reflects the aspects of Japanese culture and social life that are "negotiable symbolic constructs continuously reinvented in the present—and in the case of *furusato*, through the agency of nostalgia" (33). While the rhetoric of *furusato* sustains itself on the basis that the Japanese countryside is a space where traditions have been preserved—as if modernity did not reach nor affected it—*furusato-zukuri* projects, transforms and renders the countryside into a commodity to be consumed (Kahn 2011; Robertson 1991). This objectification and commodification of space—and by extension, peoples and cultural practices—go hand in hand with projects of development and modernization in Japan, that is to say, with 'internationalization'[5] (Robertson 1991).

The process of place-making is explored and explained by Ivy (1995) who employs state-sponsored campaigns in her analysis of national anxieties provoked by modernity in the context of Japan. Discover Japan (1970s) and Exotic Japan (1980s) are the examples she employs in her analysis to illustrate the presence of national economic and political agenda. In addition, the more recent campaign geared toward boosting the economy in prospect of the 2020/21 Tokyo Olympic Games, Cool Japan (2010s) should be included to offer a current and more accurate outlook on state involvement (Kimura and Harris 2020), as well as Go To Travel campaign of 2020 intended to support domestic travels (Ogawa 2020) but was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting after the Expo '70, Discover Japan was a campaign plan that emerged from the anticipated domestic travel slump post-Expo (36). And indeed, the Expo was the event that prompted and boosted the railway networks in Japan, where "one of every two Japanese visited the Osaka exposition, using the *shinkansen* (the so-called bullet train), expanded local railway lines, and the improved national highway network" (Ivy 1995, 36). According to Ivy (1995), the building of infrastructure further stimulated the movement of individuals across a wider geographical space. Train stations and trains in Japan are public spaces where Japanese locals and non-Japanese travellers spend a lot of time. Hence, infrastructures such as railways and train stations translate into easier and faster travels, making the *furusato* more easily accessible than before (Ivy 1995; Robertson 1991). Furthermore, development projects carefully ensure that tourist centres, parks, public restrooms, signs, panels, and benches among other things are put in place specifically to

[5] The term 'internationalization' has less to do with the non-Japanese world than with the relationship between Tokyo and the cities, and Tokyo and the towns. In other words, it refers to the "discourse within Japan on nation-ness…" (See Jennifer Robertson, "Empire of Nostalgia: Rethinking 'Internationalization' in Japan Today," *Theory, Culture & Society* 14, no.4 (1997): 97-122.)

accommodate the increase in tourism (Kahn 2011; Schnell 2005). In addition, school field trips and national holidays are events and times where travel has been fostered and encouraged. These are also times that helped solidify particular sights, landscapes and places of Japan, creating new *meisho* (noted places), like the practice of school trips which dates back to the Meiji period (Ivy 1995, 32-33).

This research will focus on 'travel photographs', which is conceptualized as a contemporary version of 'souvenir photographs'. Souvenir photographs refer to photographs of 'Old Japan'. These were commercially distributed goods oftentimes produced in studios and dedicated to both the national and international market. Working with the idea that photographs are inherently nostalgic objects; theirs is an ability to displace temporally (Ivy 1995; Sontag [1977] 2019; Tsinhnahjinnie 2003). Indeed, to take a photo is to displace temporally the object of the photo, to relegate an experience, a thing, an event to the past. It is for this reason that the camera has been associated with death: death as in the fear of cameras (i.e. when cameras were first introduced to societies and peoples, many feared of its abilities (Wright 2004)).

More significant is Strassler's (2010) conception of the photographic medium. For her, photographic images have a formative role in the consolidation of an imagined community and a people's subjectivity (Strassler 2010). Hence, photography is conceptualized as a technological tool, through which social entities, like a nation, become "visible and graspable" (Strassler 2010, 4). In the context of this research, it becomes relevant to view travel photographs as a technological tool through which that Japanese national-cultural identity is made visible, graspable and recognizable.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore place-making through ethnographic visuals, linking to these national campaigns, promoting particular spaces over others, turning them into tourism 'hot spots' while others remain quasi-unknown. Photography will be brought into the discussion via an analysis of the notion of 'souvenir photographs', thus bringing the theme of travel to the forefront of the discussion. Both causes and consequences of the current visual culture of Japan, travel and tourism are henceforth considered to be systems that enables the further (re-)production of familiar images of Japan. In sum, the first chapter focuses on the relationship between travel, place-making, and photography. How are photos created, when are they created and for what purpose are they created? What is the relationship between these photos and the place

they portray? What is their role in the process of place-making? The circular rhetoric between photo-taking and place-making is what sustains the tourism industry.

The second chapter of this thesis will explore the relationship between nostalgic sentiments and Japanese aesthetic notions. With the increasing pace of the development of the metropoles, the tourist campaigns Discover Japan and Exotic Japan, the countryside has been re-discovered, exoticized and rendered "as both a desirable Japanese-style *lebensraum*[6] and a landscape of nostalgia" (Robertson 1997, 99). As will be seen, aesthetic notions play a key role in the Japanese nostalgic sentiments, especially for representing, evoking and embodying places, practices, and the spirit and character of the past. These sites are what Ivy (1995) calls 'vanishing', which she defines as "something passing away, gone but not quite, suspended between presence and absence, located at a point that both is and is not here in the repetitive process of *absenting*" (21, original emphasis). Drawing from Freud's concept of the 'uncanny', the 'vanishing' refers to a "place out of place" (23) and in Freud's word, the "uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (as cited in Ivy 1995, 107). As such, the 'vanishing' reveals a fostered obsession with nostalgia, with sites of authenticity, and with the pre-modern and the past. Furthermore, Japanese aesthetic notions have been associated in the common imagination with authenticity, the pre-modern and the past. Bringing forward scholarship on Japanese notions of aesthetics and its historical association to authenticity, to the pre-modern and to the past in the common imagination, this chapter will attempt to show how these aesthetic notions translate onto familiar photographs of Japan and how they dictate photographic habits. All in all, the second chapter tackles the Japanese notion of wabi sabi and nostalgia, leading to a discussion on the souvenir and travel photographs. The travel photograph focuses heavily on landscape of a 'distant past' or a 'distant place', on nostalgic tints, leaning towards analogue photography and evoking images of 'Old Japan'—a nostalgic mood. It is not unlike the postcard picture.

While the second chapter considers iconic views of Japan, chapter three will further explore the meaning of symbols in familiar travel photographs. Tradition, as written by Schnell (2005), "is

[6] The German term '*lebensraum*', most associated with Nazi Germany, refers to a spatial territory necessary for national existence. In this sense, it appears that with the use of this term, Roberson is drawing on the idea that the Japanese countryside is a necessary spatial area for the national existence and purpose, that is, for asserting and preserving a particular national-cultural identity.

a matter of reconciling past with present through the mediation of value-laden symbols, thereby rationalizing a favored agenda" (202). Some of these symbols include for instance Mount Fuji, the cherry blossom, rice fields, trains, etc., with the juxtaposition of two or more of these enhancing the nostalgic and authentic effects. The works of Ohnuki-Tierney (1993, 2002) are particularly helpful in this instance as she explores both the *sakura* (cherry blossom) and rice, which are considered to be major part of not just Japanese life but also as embodiment of a Japanese essence.

The third chapter will also link the role of photography and photographic images to nationalism and ideology. As Azoulay puts it, "no photograph stands outside of ideology" (as cited in Abu Hatoum 2017, 23). The relationship of aesthetics and semiotics with ideology is key here as these symbols are constantly being (re-)produced and circulated, turning them into familiar images. This process of repetition and excess is at the core of this chapter. Working with Alloula's (1986) concept of 'counterfeit realism' and Hochberg's (1995) 'limiting-images', chapter three will highlight the limits of Japan's mainstream visual field. The symbolism of *sakura* and rice comes through the countless photographs of cherry-blossoms in spring and the rice fields in spring-summer. Photographic images involve not simply representing but also constructing (Canal 2004). Thus, 'counterfeit realism' is relevant to discuss a reinforced and entrenched imagination of reality. Used to discuss the colonial gaze from postcards of Algerian women, 'counterfeit realism' is the process by which the represented is distorted through the whole endeavour of photography, a process where representation is made more real than the real through the excessive use of props, signs of authenticity, and in the context of this research, the redundancy of certain aspects of Japanese culture, signs and sights,

The third chapter is rather an attempt to demonstrate the relationship between the travel photograph produced and Japan in the imaginary (i.e. the Japanese national-cultural identity). By "Japan in the imaginary" I do not mean to say that this identity is unreal, on the contrary, it is a reality that is more real than the real (Alloula 1986). It refers, as a matter, to the common perception of Japan and Japanese society, the Japan experience as a whole. One of Sontag's essays in *On Photography* ([1977] 2019) is dedicated to the concept of 'image-world', which refers to representations of a place, of a world, or a thing take precedence, take over and become *the* reality, and in the process, turning everything into object of consumption (a thing to buy, an experience to be had, etc.). This may partly be why tourists are so overcome by the need to take pictures. These

photos become proof that it happened. *I was there, I did this, I've done it, I tried this, I experience that, I saw that too. See? (And now I can cross it out of my bucket list.)* The narratives that emerge from travel storytelling reinforce and entrench the myth of Japan, especially since it is supported by the national narrative and by visual materials.

"Cameras define reality in the two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images," writes Sontag ([1977] 2019, 194). Resistance from individuals or groups like Provoke, who made use of photography to contest the dominant narratives of the 1960s, may come in many forms. While this research is interested with images of the masses, image influenced and informed by mass media, government agencies, and the tourism industry, images that are common, mainstream and familiar, and for that reason are prevalent, typical and maybe even boring and plain, may nonetheless be a different but pervasive way of resistance against something else. The images described above appear, at least on the surface, to be about memory, about immortalizing the present for the future. Yet, their persistence in the current visual ecology in and of Japan is what gives them away. I have asked myself, why do these images repeatedly come up? Why are they constantly and continuously being (re-)produced and shared? And the answer has precisely to do with the repetitiveness and redundancy of these photographs. They portray and represent (literally and symbolically) spaces that are necessary. As the world becomes increasingly more interconnected and as the awareness of our similarities is emphasized more and more, there is a stronger need to differentiate ourselves from others (Sahlins 1999). In other words, there is a stronger need to attribute and assign uniqueness, a distinctive trait to societies, therefore resulting in something like a "Japanese character" or "Japanese-ness" captured and evoked within iconic travel photographs of scenic views and (re-)articulated via the medium of photography by both Japanese and non-Japanese.

Chapter 1: Place-Making and the Souvenir Photograph

Photography has become more and more well entrenched in our daily lives, becoming increasingly part of our surroundings in forms like physical and e-posters, large advertisements banners and digital ads, original images collected in "albums" on our smartphones that turned into metadata once posted and re-posted, the family album, identification pictures, photobooks, magazines, newspapers, etc. Images (photographic and non-photographic) have, thus, colonized our vision. The generations following the post-war period grew up in a world where the Camera—and by extension, Photography and the Image—took on an overwhelming omnipresence. Alongside technological advances that allowed the production of better-quality photographs, digitalization and the creation of ever smaller devices was also the proliferation of digital literacy since the early 2000s, resulting in rising blogs and websites, digital platforms and spaces where anyone can participate in the generation, consumption and proliferation of visual (meta)data. This excess, this overproduction of visual data of Japan has, unlike argued by Susan Sontag ([1977] 2019), not dulled my interest in Japan society but in a way reinforced. A photo (fig. 4) taken by Eri, one of the participants with whom I went on a photo-walk, made me question the social norms of photography. I wondered, do most people have the tendency to take pictures once they enter a space they believe to be photographable? What dictates or distinguishes such a place? What are people—myself included—trying to capture? Why do people feel this urge, need, necessity to take pictures? What is at stake here?

The photos this research is interested in are travel photos whose production resides at the intersection between travel and photography. From the fieldwork interviews and from scheduling photo-walks, when asked about photography, my interlocutors would intuitively turn to travel. It was as if both went hand-in-hand. All the photo-walks conducted in this research involved travelling to one or multiple sites. At this point, it becomes then necessary to define "travel". Travelling implies a destination and a place of return. Without one or the other, one would be wandering (rather than travelling). Thus, regardless of distance, a person can be considered travelling if they depart from a location, undertake a journey to a destination or multiple destinations or a purpose, and have a place of return. For example, many people in Japan undertake day trips on weekends given the limited number of holidays such as the one I went on with Eri, Aoi and Emi. Another kind of travel is more akin to Evan's travels in specific locations. His was a journey with a purpose. Longer trips are the typical tourist experience to other cities. Therefore,

the duration of such a journey varies. It could range from a couple of hours to months or years. Hence, travelling ranges from day trips to month-long journeys.

In this chapter, I will start by giving an overview and explaining the history of photography in Japan. This will serve as to give context to this research which will help situate the souvenir photograph historically. Then I will define what is meant by 'souvenir photograph' and 'travel photograph' emphasizing consumerism, place-making, memories and experience, all aspect of photography. The analysis will concentrate on three points: (1) photos of Japan on Tumblr, drawing from my own archive; (2) photo-walks with interlocutors during fieldwork; and (3) two series of photos I took in the field. This chapter will attempt to examine the context in which individuals often use photography, answering the question of when and where. By exploring the particular type of photo that is the souvenir photograph, I argue that they have played a major role in embedding an idea of Japan within the popular imaginary of Japan.

Japan's Photo-history

Photography's development in Japan has been inextricably linked to the development of the country. "At the same time that photography was being introduced to Japan, the country was experiencing a period of fundamental political, social, and economic convulsions to be followed by rapid reform and modernization" (Bennett 2006, 17). Indeed, more and more research have been conducted on the history of photography in Japan. The literature tends to agree on certain moments, such as the first introduction of daguerreotypes cameras via exchange ports in Nagasaki, but it also diverges especially when it concerns debates on the role of particular Japanese and non-Japanese photographers and their influence in the overall development of photography in Japan. Furthermore, an additional point of contention is the author of specific photographs. Due to the lack of proper records, it is difficult to determine the exact date a photograph was taken and the photographer. Historians have had to rely on less evident factors like the photographic object, where it was found (also based themselves on family history), the style used and type of equipment that might have produced it.

The first daguerreotype camera was introduced in Japan through the Dutch trading settlement on Deshima Island in 1848 during the Edo Period (1603–1868) also known as the Tokugawa Shogunate. The Dutch trading settlement on Deshima Island was in fact the only remaining trading port since Japan has been officially isolated in 1839. Bennett (2006) writes that

the advent of photography in Japan was a result of the action of Ueno Shunnojo, a Japanese merchant, whose son, Ueno Hikoma will become one of Japan's early professional photographers. The first camera, together with photographic chemicals and equipment, was sold to Shimazu Nariakira, lord of the Satsuma domain, who began photographic experiences the following year. However, it was not until 1857 that amateur photographers in Japan produced tangible results, at least no photograph dating earlier than this date has survived (Bennett 2006, 24). The decade of the 1850s seems to have been, as Himeno (2003) calls it, the dawn of photography in Japan.

By the 1860s, there was an increasing interest in Japan as the domestic political atmosphere seemed tensed with anti-Tokugawa forces in open revolt. The way Bennett presents the second chapter of his book and naming it "1860s Western Studios Dominate" reinforces the power structure inherent to the West-East paradigm. Yet, while reading this chapter, in which sections are divided by photographer (both non-Japanese and Japanese), it seemed to me that the title is misleading because it paints an inaccurate picture. Indeed, non-Japanese photographers that visited Japan in the later 1850s and through the 1860s were learning as much about photography itself as they were teaching it to people who will become the first Japanese professional photographers. While there might have been a teacher-student (or master-apprentice) dynamic, the endeavor was one of discovery and exchange as noted in Gartlan's (2009) work which focuses on bridging the gap between foreign and indigenous actors in 19th century Japan. His analysis on the role that Samuel Cocking, "a key importer, distributor, manufacturer, and promoter of photography" (Gartlan 2009) demonstrates the cross-cultural friendships that ensued from shared interests in photography.

The exchange interest and exchange between early photographers and studio owners in Japan allowed for the development of Japanese-owned studios to emerge in towns further away from treat ports. This in turn permitted the spread of the practice and a surge in local demand. For example, Fraser's (2009) research on the Tomoshige Archive provides insights into studio practices. Through an examination of records, her research reveals much on communication, resources, record-keeping and the social dynamic of commercial photography catered to the local residents (Fraser 2009). Photographs taken from the 1850s until the Meiji Period were composed of portraits, panoramic landscapes, frames of part of towns and villages, geisha photos. These were not necessarily monumental places, but they represented picturesque locations, especially for the

Western audience. I would argue that the travel photographs developed from these old photographs of Japan, taken by both Japanese and non-Japanese photographs such as Ueno Hikoma, Shimooka Renjo, Ukai Gyokusen, Uchida Kuichi, Kusakabe Kimbei, Felice (Felix) Beato, William Saunders, Wilhelm Burger, Charles Leander Weed and many others (Bennett 2006; Gartlan 2009; Lacoste 2010; Leleu 2020).

These early professional photographers "immortalised typical scenes that corresponded to Westerners' fantasised, picturesque image of Japan" (Berrod 2021). Iconic photos of famous attractions such as temples and shrines are not only a result of visual representations at the core of publicity by the Japan National Tourism Organization (hereafter JNTO) and promotional materials presented through National Geographic by JNTO (Ng 2024), but are also fostered by decades and centuries of photographic images produced since the introduction of the medium in Japan. These 'souvenir photographs', a term used to refer to images created in the late 19th century and early 20th century, are still relevant today as they are the precursor to current travel photographs—photographic images taken by travellers around Japan. The concern is to determine the type of images taken (produced, created) by tourists. Ultimately attempting to answer the question: What are they trying to capture?

The Souvenir Photograph

The term "souvenir photograph" is one I first encountered in Wakita's (2009) article on Kusakabe Kimbei's images of Japanese women. In her work, she describes souvenir photographs as commercially distributed goods produced by photographic studios for both the national and Western market in the late 19th and early 20th Century. The importance of souvenir images during that time period cannot be understated as they became one of the most popular sources of imagery of Japan. Their dissemination played a vital role in shaping the way in which Japan and any knowledge about things Japanese was understood in the West. And as I will show later, early souvenir photographs still find their influence in today's travel photographs. While souvenir photographs were not limited to images of Japanese women (geisha, courtesans, and others that were willing to have their photo taken), a major part of the images produced from both photographic studios run by Westerners and Japanese photographers at the time were of Japanese women (Bennett 2006; Wakita 2009; Yoshiaki 2021). As Wakita (2009) argues, images of the time must be understood within their own context, and, as she shows, the visualization of women

from Kimbei's images "conformed to the signifying system of native commercial products," (223) effectively elevating the status of geishas to being paragon of Japanese femininity and finally a strategic move to sell "an image of Japan as an aesthetic, cultivated nation" (223).

From another perspective, in the analysis of the Discover Japan and Exotic Japan campaigns, the role of women in the marketing for these campaigns is manifold. On the one hand, travel is imbued with sexuality following the notions that women want to be seen and that "where women go, men follow," (Ivy 1995, 38-41) thus images of women travelling would draw both men and women's attention. In this rhetoric that makes use of women as the subject-figure of travel imbued with the ethnic authentic by making her travel domestically (41-42). Bennett's history of photography in Japan (2006) covers a wider range of souvenir photographs, including the work and biographies of early Western and Japanese photographers. As mentioned previously, the photographs taken by some of the first photographers in Japan consisted of portraitures and landscapes mostly. Souvenir photographs in the late 19th and early 20th century are thus images produced for commercial purposes, catering to both national and foreign markets. Their dissemination had powerful influence over the way Japan was perceived within and outside its national borders. Hence, the term 'souvenir photograph' is mostly defined by behaviour patterns, writes Seinfeld (2018); they are "photos that one used as piece of evidence, as proof *I was there*" (188, original emphasis).

The term souvenir photograph comes up also in Adachi's work on early Meiji photographs that focuses on an analysis of how Japan was presented to foreign audiences through these photographs during the late 19th century. She writes that "[w]hile the souvenir photographs played a part in exoticizing Japan, they also reveal various aspects of Japan beyond mere imagination" (Adachi 2022, 14). By that she means that the medium and images of Japan have often been evaluated and examined within the discourse on Orientalism and while, as scholars have pointed out, these images have served to reinforced and embed exotic images and stereotypes of the so-called East (Adachi 2022; Alloula 1986; Said 1979), her examination concentrates on presenting a more complex picture of things. She proposes that there is more to these images than "the fabricated, fake images of exotic Japanese life" (Adachi 2022, 14). Instead, Adachi writes that souvenir photographs, whose most popular subjects are landscapes and everyday life, tend to display and emphasize early modernity. The landscape and everyday life images do not only

present the mundane and quotidian but also the architectural details and the development in transportation and engineering. Therefore, together with the images of typical Japanese view such as Mount Fuji and of young Japanese women in kimono, there is also a large share of images that emphasizes Japan's latest technological developments, chiefly in transportation and engineering. Nowadays, travel photographs have for role to (re-)affirm and accentuate certain aspects of Japanese society.

This becomes extremely significant in the context of this research as there appears to be already a contrast between the "traditional" and the "modern/technological", or different types of authenticity (of the real). Yet, travel photographs today, while they can tell us more than what they portray literally, similar to Adachi's (2022) argument, they appear to be read just as they are: that is, as mementos of an experience, of a moment, a place, a mood, a time, a society (different from one's own), an everyday (different from one's own). Travel photographs today often exemplify and amplify notions of Japanese-ness, and even for the Japanese themselves, for instance, in the first interview with Eri Shimasaki, when asked about her recent trip to Kyoto and why her and her family regularly travel there, she said, "I was very happy to take pictures in Kyoto because I like the place because it's really traditional, historical and really different from Kōchi."[7] Hence, illustrating the high space in which Kyoto stands among other places in Japan as not only a place of cultural interest but as a place of a different type of authenticity.

Sontag ([1977] 2019) has written about the relationship between travel and photography: she states, "As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure" (8). Developing in parallel to photography was also the tourism industry, in which photographs became evidence of an event. However, she continues,

> "A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. Travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs. The very activity of taking pictures is soothing, and

[7] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 18, 2023.

> assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by travel" (9).

Drawing from the photo-walk experiences with Evan, and Tahlia and Vana, it can be argued that the insecurity and disorientation experienced are mostly likely from feeling out of place. For one, on both occasions the environment in which we found ourselves were vastly different from the environment of our everyday lives. The word 'travel' has roots in both the Old English *faran*, meaning "to go, to wander, to make one's way", but also meaning "to be, to exist, to happen", and the Old French *travailen* "to take pains, to suffer pains" or again "to struggle, to toil, to labour" (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). The word, thus, implies not only movement and transition, but also the difficulty in them. More significant is the disorientation may come from not knowing how to behave in that condition. Thus, we revert to taking our phones out, to use our camera and capture the most insignificant thing we think we could transform into an interesting subject through the camera lens. This once again speaks to the habitual behaviour or photo-taking. It is as if we did not know what to do with ourselves without our camera (or phones). Hence, we negotiate our discomfort by taking photos, by returning to habits, subjectifying the environment, the space, appropriating it, commodifying it, controlling it by means of photography.

Consequently, we find ourselves with hundreds of pictures to navigate through after each trip undertaken, with an extensive archive of photographs waiting to be filtered and sorted. Sometimes duplicate, messy, mistaken photographs are deleted. Sometimes, the archive is left to itself after only the few are picked out, edited, and shared. These are the travel photographs with which this research is concerned.

Tumblr: Consuming Japan Online

I cannot remember the exact moment I was introduced to Tumblr, a social media platform created back in 2007. The only points of reference that can tell me the moment I began to consume an incredible amount of visual data is the archive of my blog which goes back to August 2011 and vague memories about the reluctance to share my real name as well as the hesitancy on which image to reblog. The pace, the amount, and the diversity of my consumption have varied over the years, but I know that this introduction to Tumblr has played a major role in shaping the idea I have of Japan. Going back over the archive of my blog, I can see that my interests revolved around high-contrast cityscapes photography, food, and bright-coloured signs and lights.

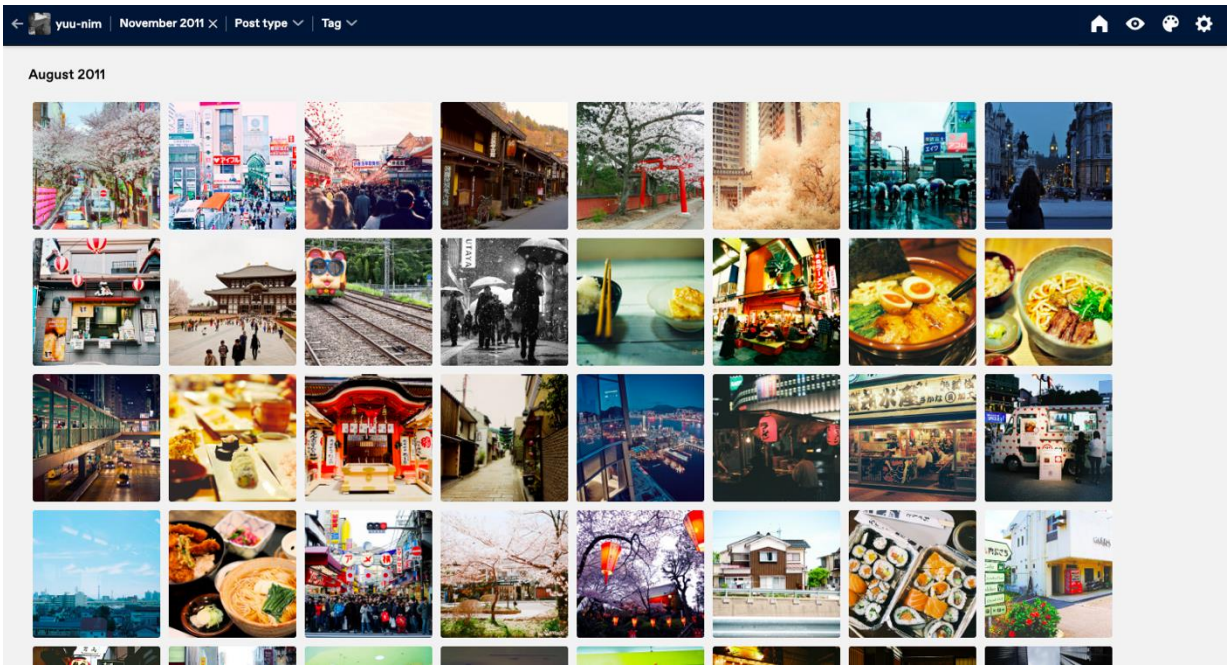

Figure 1: Screenshot of my August 2011 Tumblr archive

The pace picks up in 2014 when I started blogging more, meaning that my intake of visual images increased during that time as well. The colour palettes that interested me seem to have shifted to a more muted one, leaving behind the high-contrast images for more pastel-like images, focusing also on green and blue hues. The number of images representing nature (forests, trees, wood, the country, the sea, etc.) also increased.

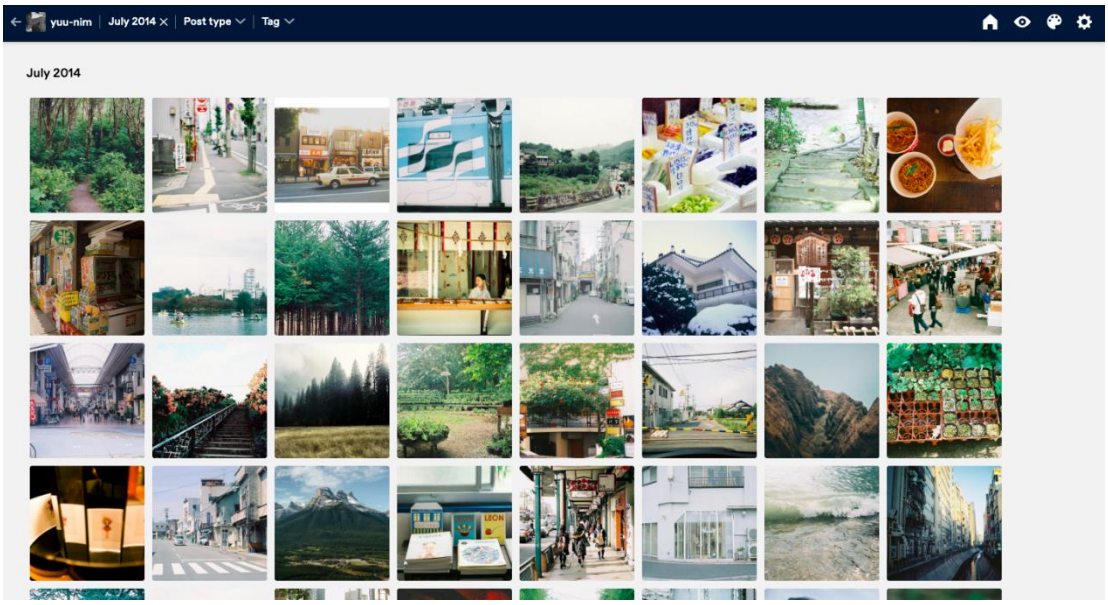

Figure 2: Screenshot of my August 2014 Tumblr archive

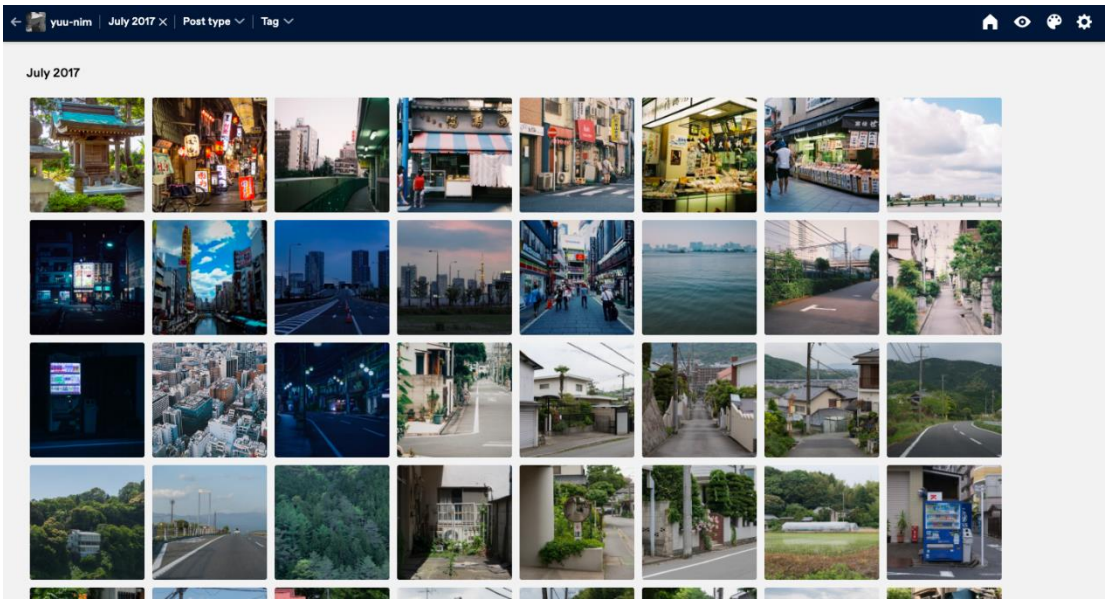

Figure 3: Screenshot of my July 2017 Tumblr archive

Using this as a starting point, I began questioning my photographic habits in 2021, ten years after I first started using the platform. The short summary above serves as an example to illustrate the increasingly ubiquitous presence of photography and visual images in our lives, with photography and its derivative, the photograph, becoming consumed quicker and at a higher volume in a shorter span of time. This progressive consumption of visual images has not only shaped Japan in my imaginary, and the concept of photography itself but, inevitably, my relationship with the medium. Like Sontag ([1977] 2019) writes,

> Taking photographs has set up a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events.
>
> A photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself and one with ever more peremptory rights—to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on. Our very sense of situation is now articulated by the camera's interventions. The omnipresence of cameras persuasively suggests that time consists of interesting events, events worth photographing (10-11).

Thus, arguing that photography or rather, photography's ubiquity, has changed our relationship to events, often reducing their meaning and experience through an ever-increasing voyeuristic position. In the six essays that constitute the book, she offers a critique of the photographic medium

and of contemporary photographic habits. However, it suffices to note that photographic habits are as diverse just as the multitude of photos taken are diverse. Furthermore, to begin understanding the relationship between photographic images and the national-cultural identity of Japan, it is imperative to examine the type of images at hand and explore the underlying motivation for their creation.

What comes at the forefront of this examination is also to question the time and place where people take photos. It goes without saying that most of us do not take photos in every situation, in every moment, every day. Thus, there seems to be social and cultural norms dictating the appropriacy of the act of photography.

Photo-Walks and Place-making

> "It seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along."
> (Sontag [1977] 2019, 8)

Putting the photos together for this section felt like making a quilt. I had a vision in mind, but it really took shape as I worked to arrange my thoughts for the following chapter. Inspired by a picture of myself, Aoi Shimasaki and Emi on a day trip to Ioki Cave (fig. 4)—one of the local attractions in Kōchi Prefecture—the main theme I wanted to be reflected here is the ubiquity of the activity of photography and of the pervasiveness of photographic images in our day-to-day lives. As shown, photography is, to say the least, inevitable when engaging in travelling. It takes a lot of efforts to break the habitual action of taking out of our phone, our camera, and snap at just about anything. Photography has become so pervasive in our habits that it has become intuitive. The moment we arrived at the parking lot of Ioki Cave, I could already feel the urge to take out my phone and take pictures. As we walked across the street, from the parking lot to the entrance of the cave, I sensed my fellow partners already starting to shift into visitor mode, they started to take out their devices (smartphones and digital camera) and move in a way to observe interesting objects. Figure 4 shows us, barely passed the tunnel-like cave, finally having reached some space where light could shine through, thus, allowing us to take pictures at our own leisure—perhaps, even overdoing it.

Figure 4: Ioki Cave, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Eri Shimasaki
Taken with a Canon PowerShot SX720 HS

When Eri Shimasaki shared this picture with me (fig. 4) I was amazed and ashamed. In the first instance, I loved looking at it because of its composition—the perspective of the image, how interesting it is, how busy it is, how all the elements somehow take turn to attract the eye's attention. The perspective in this photo, how each one of us was situated, was pure coincidence. But it offers a layer of depth in which all of us, the objects, are linked together. The weight or the impact this photo carries is partly due to this depth. Then, ashamed because I, myself, am part of this picture. I became (or was made into) an object. And ashamed again because of how silly I look. Naturally, I was aware of the connection I felt with the people who were together with me in that moment—feeling like a *pull* (we were moving as a group) but almost never shooting the same way. That is not to say that we did not use the same subject—for we did (fig. 5)—but it is to say

that even while photographing the same subject, the images we ended up producing were slightly different. This photo-walk with Aoi, Eri and Emi was indication of several things:

(1) the knowledge that we were in a touristic place sanctioned a very particular behaviour on our part—that of snapping shots at everything;
(2) the habitual usage of technological devices (smartphones, especially) and the strong link between photography, memory and experience;
(3) the performativity of picture-taking and, thus, the attempt to capture an experience of Japan, or to materialize an experience.

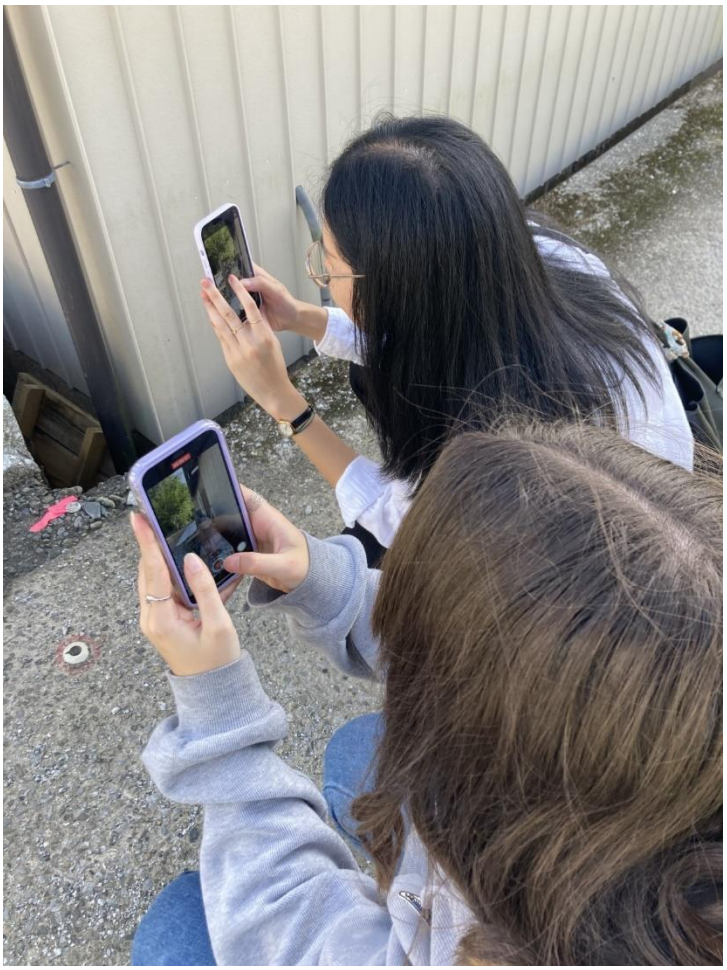

Figure 5: Outside of Ioki Cave, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Aoi Shimasaki
Taken with an iPhone SE (2nd generation)

Photography appears to be linked to our environment, our surroundings and to travel (Frow 1991; Ivy 1995; Kahn 2011). Indeed, the tourism industry has made use of the medium to promote

idyllic places and attractions to increasingly mobile populations. Local authorities have also made use of the boom in tourism to boost interest in remote areas, turning them into newly created or renewed attractions. One of the methods suggested to counter overtourism was to promote remote locations as potential touristic spots, a countermeasure to overcrowded metropoles by redirecting tourists toward the outer regions. Local governments and the transportation industry also took advantage of tourism to promote their own services. For example, as demonstrated by Ivy (1995), campaigns such as Exotic Japan (70s), Discover Japan (80s) and I would argue the more recent Cool Japan (2010s) and Go To Travel (2020) used a combination of tactics to promote tourism to various places in Japan. Train stations and trains themselves becoming spaces where tourists and daily commuters would be exposed to promotional materials such as posters and pamphlets.

As described by Berger (2010), travel to Japan involves three stages: *imaginary Japan, real Japan,* and *remembered Japan*. Whereby the *imaginary Japan* refers to "the imagined or pre-visualized trip" (11). In other words, this stage points to the expectations created prior to the trip itself, it alludes to the image of the place in the mind of the traveller. The second stage, *real Japan*, is "the experienced trip, as a tourist" (11). *Real Japan* pertains the actual experiences and experiments sustained, the lived reality of the traveller. At last, the third stage is *remembered Japan* that Berger describes as "the recollected trip, via journals, postcards, photographs, videos and souvenirs" (11). In this last stage, travel is linked to memories whereby both are manifested through memento objects such as photographic images, pamphlets, brochures, tickets stubs, postcards, videos, and other souvenir objects such as *omamori* (temple and shrine charms). There seems to be a reliance on a panoply of physical objects to support and sustain recollection; objects that were amassed throughout the trip. Kahn's (2011) work on Tahiti and the postcard is relevant here to illustrate Berger's argument on the three stages of travel. In her attempt to demonstrate how places and people are shaped, depicted and imagined through their (re-)articulation, she discusses the relationship between place-making and identity and, more significantly even, draws upon a distinction between imagined and lived reality corresponding to Lefebvre's *espace conçu* (conceived space) and *espace perçu* (perceived space) respectively (Kahn 2011). Kahn's chapter on her concept of the cocoon is significant here as it provides an answer to a question emerging from Berger's three staged: is *real Japan* real? In other words, is *real Japan*—Japan experienced by a tourist—the real Japan, the Japan that is to people who dwell, who inhabit it? At the core of place-making is this focus on a question of reality; the difference between what is imagined and

what is lived as well as the difference between lived realities. Kahn, with her examination of the postcards, brings into the analysis of place-making another layer of complexity. Postcards, one of many forms of visual representation materials, inform and are informed by lived and imagined realities.

However, travel photographs are not just recollection because they are instantaneous. They involve instant result and very often, almost instant sharing of both memories and experiences. The difference here is one between sharing memories and sharing experiences, both situated in the past but at different distance from the present. For instance, Instagram posts and stories focus much more on the sharing of experience due to their immediacy and short distance with the present. Perhaps, because of this temporal proximity, the experience of Japan through the sharing of photographs of lived experiences via social media produce a sense of authenticity informed by the fact that it was lived reality. Below is an analysis of two instances (fig. 6 and fig. 8) during fieldwork where my collaborators and I went on photo-walks together. In both cases, we were all tourists to the places we visited even though I had lived in Kōchi Prefecture previously and despite the fact that they were all, at the time these photographs were taken, living in Kōchi Prefecture.

Figure 6: Motoyama, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with an iPhone 14

In the first image (fig. 6), I was on a photo-walk with Evan who had graciously agreed to meet and even offered to drive around Tosa-cho, where he is stationed as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). In the process of making his photobook with the intention to tell the stories of

people from Tosa-cho, he has been visiting various spots, exploring on his own the places opened to him in the neighbourhood. That day, I took the local JR train from Kōchi Station to Osugi Station, where we agreed to meet. I remember the train trip as it was very early in the morning—the train was travelling through the thick fog that had not yet been lifted by the sunrise. Upon my arrival at Osugi Station, I noted how the platforms were amidst a range of mountain. I was greeted with the cool, foggy air of the countryside as I stepped outside the train onto the platform. Holding onto layers of sweaters, I rummaged through my bag to get my camera, capturing the first shot of the day (fig. 7). I proceeded to get off the tracks, because I feared an incoming train, though I was certain I would hear it before I saw it anyway. Evan had not yet arrived, so I waited inside the little cabin-like station, taking a picture of the train schedule back to the city. Shortly after, Evan arrived in his little red car.

Figure 7: In the middle of the track at Osugi Station, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifim 200

The first stop we made was at a small shrine located next to a cemetery on top of a small mountain. With the promise to visit multiple locations and a day all planned out, I was expecting something more picturesque than the local, almost forgotten shrine, for the first stop. Nevertheless, despite my own skepticism and disappointment, Evan proceeded to walk around, observing, gauging, before finally setting his tripod underneath a tree near the shrine's wooden cabin. On the contrast, being unfamiliar with the place, I had walked behind him, gauging if I could snap a shot

of the wooden cabin centered through the frame of the gate (a shot I often aim to take), then walked directly to the shrine's cabin but felt like it was not worth photographing as we were under too many trees, creating shadows that would render my photos too dark.

It appeared to me as I was lingering in front of the wooden cabin, wondering how often it was maintained and who was responsible for it, that Evan moved further back to the gate. Once again, giving me the impression of this repelling force between individuals, imposing a safe distance that gave space for individual for creativity. Luckily, the place we were at, being more local, allowed for such distance to be respected. Eventually, I settled for only observing Evan and what seemed to interest him. The light in particular seemed to be his primary concern; he would change locations, positions, angle, to capture what he desired with the assurance that the light coming through layers of leaves branching from the trees surrounding us would, if not play in his advantage, not hinder his photos.

Figure 8: Niyodo Blue, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with an iPhone 14

The second photo (fig. 8) was taken in Yasui Valley along the Niyodo River, on a day trip with Tahlia[8] and Vana which happened on a later date. Like Evan, both Tahlia and Vana were ALTs in Kōchi Prefecture at the time of my fieldwork. I met them at Onogo Station, and, like Evan, they were the ones who planned the whole trip. We met around 9 o'clock in the morning

[8] Tahlia is a pseudonym because the participant requested to remain anonymous.

and Onogo Station is situated in a relatively busier region than Osugi Station. However, unlike the day with Evan, I stepped out of the train in a hurry, knowing both Tahlia and Vana were waiting for me in the parking lot, and also noticing that the view of the station was not as scenic as Osugi Station, and unlike the photo-walk with Evan, the one with Tahlia and Vana consisted of stops at well-known locations—places seen on brochures and advertised in posters and blogs. In this instance, the major attraction of this trip was to follow the Niyodo River—also known as Niyodo Blue for the clarity of the water and its intense turquoise colour—one of Kōchi's most well-known rivers (the other being the Shimanto River), attracting both domestic and foreign tourists to the Prefecture. We stationed the car at what looked like the main entrance of the park, with a big wooden board as map and a small facility as public restroom. The three of us left most our belonging in our bags in the car: Vana kept with her her tote bag, Tahlia and I held our cameras, keeping our phones in our pockets. Perhaps it was due to the fact that this was off-season, there were very few people on the trail, if it could be called that. In fact, we walked along a paved road made for cars to travel to multiple parking spaces along the river, suggesting an attempt from the local government to facilitate access and the potential crowds.

The further we went and the smaller the paths we took, the more beaten the track was. We bifurcated a few times, exploring paths where we thought there would not be other visitors. Passing a big red bridge which I tried to capture with my film camera from the front but could not due to the lack of space, therefore tried from the side (fig. 9). We reached a big waterfall (fig. 10), but we were yet to see the scenic blue spot. For that, we had to walk further to finally be able to see the famous blue body of water. To be sure, once we had arrived at *the* spot—the best place allowing onlookers to overlook a large enough surface of water, enhancing the turquoise colour of the water—we were faced with, what appeared to be, a handful of domestic tourists, all holding cameras pointing toward the object in question. Putting aside my amazement, I stayed slightly behind and captured the moment (fig. 8). It was, for me and especially, I thought, in terms of my research project, an opportune moment; to have a view of all these people photographing the same object was exactly the kind of situation I referred to when discussing the repetition and redundancy (Hochberg 2015) of certain images of Japan, which will be explored further in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. In a moment, seven photographs of the same object were already produced. This experience is intensified at more well-known and visited touristic places located in metropoles like Kyoto.

Figure 9: Horai Bridge (the big red bridge), Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 10: Vana in front of Hiryu no Take (Hiryu Falls), Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with an iPhone 14

The scenic spot is called 水晶淵 (*Suishobuchi*), where 水晶 refers to ‘crystal’ (rock) or, taking the character individually to their literal meaning, it can be translated into ‘crystal clear water’, and where 淵 refers to a ‘deep pool’ or ‘deep water’. For the non-Japanese-speaking visitor, the name of the place evokes no images in the mind, no expectation. However, for Japanese-speaking visitors, the mere mention of the name, especially with the awareness of the characters used, conjure images and expectations as portrayed by highly circulated photographs in various formats of the place. This space, however remote, has been made into a place. A place that meets the expectations of its visitors by indeed being a place of pristine colour, seemingly undisturbed. But it would not be a *place* if it had been left invisible, unnoticed, unknown. There would not be a paved road with tourist facilities at the entrance nor any directional signs.

Figure 11: Shiragami Shrine, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Regrettably, I did not take a photo of the wooden cabin of the first shrine visited with Evan—something I realized as I was writing this chapter. How ironic that I felt I was photographing too much at the time. However, Shiragami Shrine was located near our second stop. It was not exactly where Evan had intended to show me at first. Rather, he was more interested in picturing the farm and the mountains. We were heading back to the car when I spotted the *torii* gate and asked if we could walk there. It was, to me, a good opportunity because it seemed to offer a chance to photograph a view iconic to Japan: a single path leading to a shrine hidden by dense trees, at the forefront a *torii* gate through which the path runs. A reminder and remainder of the past. In contrast, next to the *torii* gate, there was a utility pole. The place appeared iconic because it reminded me of the sort of frame that can be seen in the famous Ghibli movie, *My Neighbour Totoro* (となりのトトロ).

Figure 12: Niyodo Blue, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with an iPhone 14

The Niyodo River in Kōchi Prefecture runs through several towns. The colour of the water and its clarity is emphasized in brochures and pamphlets.

However, this begs the question of *how* places come to be exemplars locations for tourists. The first location visited with Evan was, aside from being remote and small, undisturbed and free of tourists. Why is that? I would argue that places need to check several boxes in order to gain status among tourists. Furthermore, this status does not operate in a binary way, meaning a place cannot be qualified as *touristic* or *not touristic.* Rather, it operates on a spectrum; a place is *more* or *less* touristic, and this status can change over time. For example, although it is more of a local spot, the small shrine can become more visited especially during festivals. For someone like Evan, who is interested in the everyday and the story of the village, such a place becomes imbued with immense value—more than any other place pictured on pamphlets and brochures.

Another point is that these less well-known places tend to be forgotten by local governments. Maintained and used by local folks, these places are not promoted and talked about in pamphlets and brochures, nor on official websites. One of the reasons for this could be related to their lack of picturesque-ness. Hence, despite their historical value and authenticity, the remoteness of the location and the level to which they are marketed are factors that would affect their popularity. For example, in the numerous pamphlets and brochures I have collected in both Kōchi and Kyoto, although they contain both practical information for visitors and a fair dose of history, one could not help but notice the redundancy of the locations advertised and promoted. The photographic images thus revolved around the same places—spaces controlled and maintained for tourists, most often by the municipal or prefectural government.

Figure 13: Scan of part of the front page of a booklet made for tourists
The photo is copyrighted © Kenzo Nakajima

The Japanese subtitle (fig. 13) reads, "Kōchi Sightseeing". The description at the corner reads,

> "Kōchi Castle. Kōchi castle, which is in the center of Kōchi City, is a symbol of the family of the feudal lord, Yamauchi. It is an important national treasure which still looks the same as when it was built 300 years ago. It is one of Japan's three beautiful night castles."

The relevance of marketed materials lies in how they attempt to bridge the gap between past and present. For example, the description from the brochure on tourism in Kōchi is telling as it emphasizes the continuity: to be able to see and experience the same view as 300 years ago.

Figure 14: Scan of part of the front page of a pamphlet made for tourists

The headline of this pamphlet (fig. 14) reads, “Niyodo Blue. Yasui Valley. Prefectural Nature Park.” The pamphlet is folded horizontally, the inside/backside is an illustration of a map of the park. The park is made of entrances, cabins, hiking trails, and attractions such as ponds, waterfalls, dams, and caves. This is the place Tahlia, Vana and I visited. The day of our photo-walk together, we could not cover all trails and scenic spots in the park due to time restraints. The most arresting spots along the way were Hiryu Falls, Seriwari Cave and the Sabo Dam, which we managed to cover. This pamphlet, contrary to many I have collected in Kōchi, was not picked up at the tourist information centre next to Kōchi JR Station. Rather, this was below the big wooden billboard, there was a stack resting on a chair on top of which a rock was used to prevent the wind from blowing them away. It came in handy when we tried to find our way in the park. Aside from the headline, the emphasis of this pamphlet is clearly on the clarity and colour of the Niyodo River. Images from promotional materials are focused on presenting spaces that consumers (i.e. tourists) would like to see.

These image trends are significant because they play a part in creating a Japan in the imaginary. They anchor a version of Japan and they create expectations. The imagery from these widely circulated and readily available materials attest not only to the ubiquity of the camera and both the activities of travelling and photography, but also to the visual ecology in Japan. The presence of such images in various formats (physical in brochures, pamphlets, prints, and posters, and digital on blog posts, official websites, etc.) reveal the relationship Japan has with images of itself. While such images corroborate to the tourism industry and the efforts of local governments in attempting to draw people in, they also possess traces of self-representation from older time. Not unlike the image of Kōchi Castle (fig. 13) among the cherry trees, the subliminal message from this image is once again related to continuity. In this instance, continuity derives from the emphasis on the pristine water, implying an untouched and unspoiled environment, preserved and remote from modernity.

Visual Vignette: Vending Machines and Urban Gardens

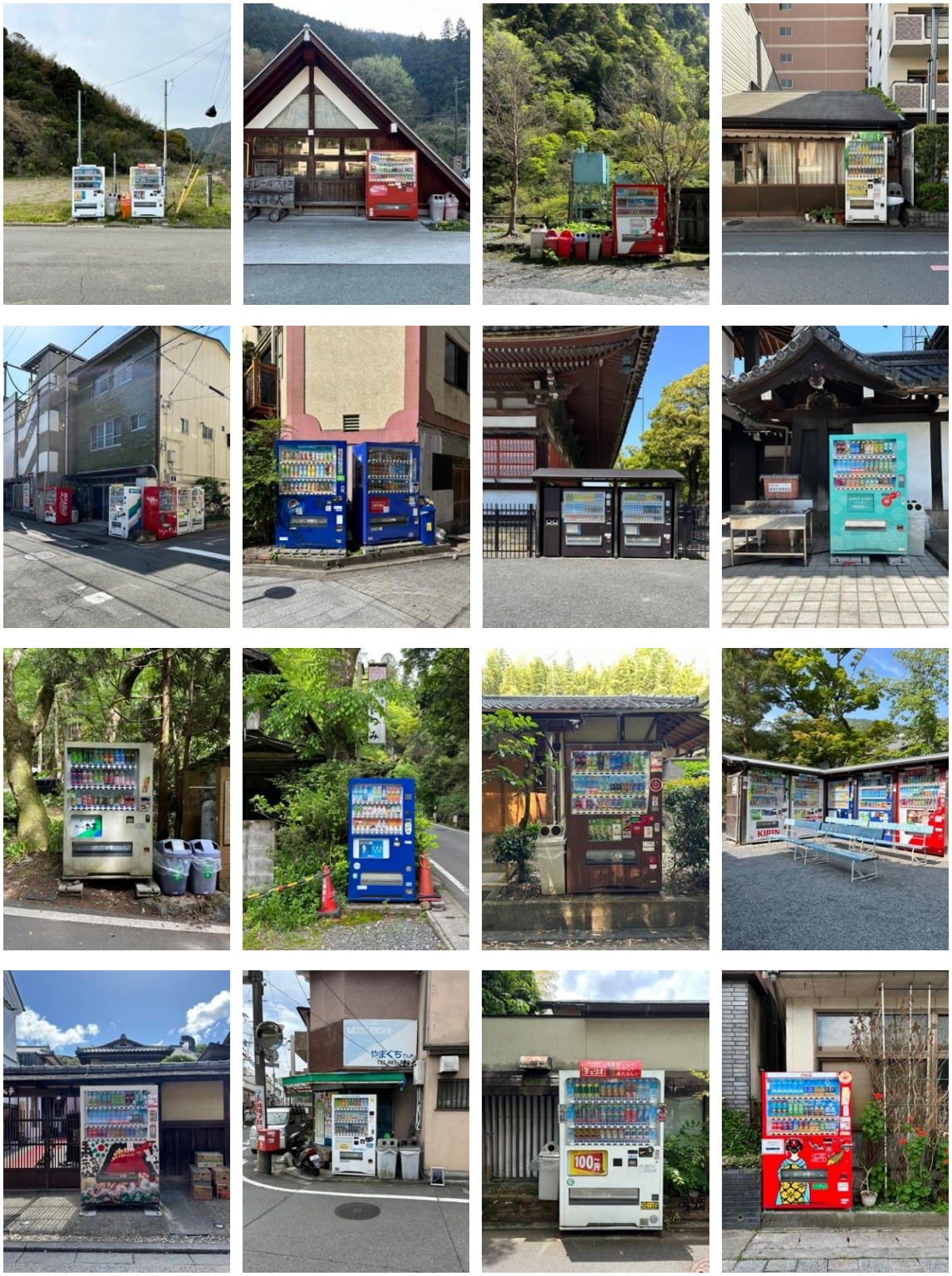

Figure 15: Selected photos of vending machines in Kōchi and Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with an iPhone 14

Figure 16: Selected photos of urban gardens in Kōchi and Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with an iPhone 14

Anticipating fieldwork for this research project, which happened in the spring of 2023, I recall having for objective the goal to create two specific albums (if not more): one of vending machines (fig. 15) and the other of urban gardens (fig. 16). This desire to document two specific subjects did not come from a vacuum. On the contrary, I believe they represent two distinct niches in the photographic representation of Japan, which feed the imaginary of Japan. These incidental images put forward a major question: why document such things? Why are vending machines and urban gardens compelling? What is the role and impact of such images on the construction of "Japan" in the imaginary? Just about anyone can produce them, mainly because of vending machines and urban gardens are two of the most easily available and accessible subjects. However, more telling is that our understanding—our reading—of Japan consists in part of these. It is in part through this kind of image that spaces are turned into places. Spaces, even nondescript and unknown, are given meaning and value, drawing the attention and captivating the first-time visitor while being overly mundane and irrelevant to the dweller—two sides of the same coin. Urban gardens and vending machine, while they reveal underlying aspects of Japanese social life, have become somewhat indispensable visual elements of "Japan". In the discourse on visual representation, images such as these put into question photographic habits, inviting a revisit of camera/smartphone archives, unsettling anyone with the slightest interest in photography.

Japan as a place to visit comes into being as it is increasingly photographed, documented, and shared. The more spaces and things are being made visible, the more they become, sometimes strangely, appealing. Hence, travellers can opt to document stories like Evan, but most often, photography is used to document experiences and photographs attest to events. As Aoi accurately put it, "it's like a visual diary,"[9] allowing us to remember what we did, what we felt, where and when.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to illustrate the relationship between travel and photography. Using fieldwork observations as point of departure, it became evident that people tend to take the most photographs when they travel. In the process, travelling and photography enable a space to become visible, turning it into a place. One of the significant observations is the documentative

[9] Fieldwork interview with author. March 22, 2023.

nature of photography. As noted through interviews, photo-walks, and my own experience, travelling compels us to document sights, objects, experience, moments, etc. whether for proofs that it happened, for personal records (a visual diary) or for storytelling. This desire—almost need—to document is, as argued by Sontag ([1977] 2019), a way to navigate the disorientation inherent to travel. It became obvious that places of interest could range from well-known to locally valued ones. And that the kinds of photos taken could be landscapes, scenic views, or particular subjects like vending machines or urban gardens. Yet, these photographs could be grouped under the term 'souvenir photographs,' which would refer to travel photos, not unlike the postcard picture. Part of this section has sought to shed light on the use of the term as well as the legacy of such photographs. What connects all these pictures together apart from the fact that they are travel photos? How is it possible to tell that these pictures are of Japan without textual support?

Chapter 2: Wabi Sabi and Nostalgia in Travel Photographs

> "Are we to look at the cherry blossoms only in full bloom, the moon only when it is cloudless? To long for the moon while looking on the rain, to lower the blinds and be unaware of the passing of the spring—these are even more deeply moving. Branches about to blossom or gardens strewn with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration."
> (Yoshida Kenkō 1967, 115)

The appeal of images of Japan comes partly from the cultivated Japanese ideals attempted to be captured in these photos. As argued in the first chapter, the relationship between travelling and photo-taking is evident by the numerous photographs produced and circulating. Travelling for leisure has been reinforced with photographic images which are used to promote the activity. Photographs are taken to convert an experience into an image and travel is a way to accumulate images (Sontag [1977] 2019). The pace and volume by which images are produced have increased exponentially in the last decade. Individuals take pictures to capture a memory (the moment of photo-taking becoming itself a memory), to have an experience (to take photos is one way to experience) and to turn a space into a place like the shrine and cemetery Evan and I visited, or Ioki Cave as visited with Aoi, Emi and Eri. Through all these processes, the images of Japan produced and shared possess an aesthetic resemblance, these images seem to be part of a whole. Travel photographs are similar to each other because they tend to portray quintessential aspects of Japanese society. These photos revolve around the same touristic sites such as gardens, shrines, temples, cherry blossoms, castles, billboard streets, etc. I argue that part of this similarity comes from notions of Japanese aesthetic that emanates from *mono no aware* which refers to a poignant aesthetic sensibility to the pathos of things (Bell 2015, 579).

This chapter will examine the notion of wabi sabi and explore romanticized nostalgia because a discussion of them will reveal what is being captured in travel photographs. Wabi sabi is a major notion in Japanese aesthetics, and it has, since its inception, influenced and informed many aspects of Japanese society by becoming a guiding concept. This chapter will demonstrate that the concept of wabi sabi is present in travel photographs of Japan. First, it will analyze two emblematic examples of wabi sabi: the tearoom and the cherry blossom. it will cover the history of tea ceremony, which paved the way for the notion of wabi sabi, referencing Okakura's *The Book of Tea* ([1906] 1964) which links the role of *chado* (teaism)[10] to aesthetic aspects of Japanese life,

[10] Teaism, as defined by Okakura, "is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence" (Okakura [1906] 1964, 1).

and Juniper's *Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence* (2003) in which he provides also a history of Teaism and the principle tenets of wabi sabi. Some of wabi sabi's principal tenets are continuously related to the past. It is thus important to note here that there are other social activities related to these social practices which have evolved over time. For example, associated with the tearoom are also the practice of tea ceremony and the moss-filled Zen gardens. Cherry blossom viewing also evolved and spread among the common folk to become a widely practiced activity. As we shall see, cultivated ideals are transported by means of images; the camera turning images of Japan and Japanese society into something that is more real than the real (Alloula 1986). Using wabi sabi as a conceptual tool will be useful to answer the research questions as it will help understand part of what individuals are trying to capture.

The idea that every moment, every second of a life passes not just quickly but also that it never lasts, makes this yearning—this longing for the past—so much stronger. And so, we are overtaken with nostalgia. In terms of photography, in terms of images of Japan and in terms of Japanese aesthetics, this is what individuals try to capture. The nostalgic and melancholic feelings inherent to wabi sabi. This is the focus of the second half of this chapter. I will attempt to explain the relationship between souvenir photographs of Japan and nostalgia. I will analyze the nostalgic feeling that is carried through these images, a nostalgia that has been nurtured by state-sponsored campaigns. Drawing from responses collected through a photo-elicitation exercise done with participants of this research, this chapter will highlight how romanticized nostalgia is recognized in photos of Japan.

Japanese Aesthetics: Wabi Sabi in Cherry Blossoms and Tea

It can be understood that there are several aesthetic ideals rendering an image more attractive. Such ideals have been explored by numerous Japanese and non-Japanese scholars, artists, and enthusiasts in attempts to explain the inherent characteristics and qualities of Japanese artistic propensity. While being difficult to define let alone translate, Juniper (2003) explains the core concept of wabi sabi in Japanese artistry. As Juniper (2003) writes, Japanese people are reluctant to provide a proper definition of it because of the ambiguity it carries (47). However, by breaking down the term and looking at the etymology of each character, we may be able to grasp some of its meanings. "The word *wabi* 侘 comes from the verb *wabu*, which means to languish, and the adjective *wabishii*, which was said to describe sentiments of loneliness, forlornness, and

wretchedness" (48-49). Overall, "wabi sabi refers to an aesthetic appreciation of natural imperfection and impermanence" (Wilkinson 2022). While the translated term carries negative connotations in the English language, these were used in a more positive way "to express a life that was liberated from the material world" (Juniper 2003, 49). One of its first reference made by the poet Fujiwara No Toshinari, the word *sabi* 寂 was used to express a sense of desolation. This spirit of desolation, along with loneliness and finality, were used more and more, especially together with the Buddhist concept of *mujō*[11] (49). Literature, especially the haiku of Matsuo Bashō (1644-1684), is often used as example of wabi sabi. Juniper (2003), in an attempt to provide a definition of the notion of wabi sabi, writes:

> Wabi sabi is an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty in the physical world that reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. It is an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, or even decayed, an aesthetic sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things (51).

The appreciation of wabi sabi is tightly articulated in photographs of Japan because it is through it that Japanese society is integrated, embodied and, thus, can be collectively recognized. One symbol that is emblematic of wabi sabi in Japanese society is the cherry blossom. The cherry trees, like other flowering trees (e.g. plum and peach), blossom in spring in Japan. Cherry blossom viewing (*hanami*) is a commonly known activity to enjoy the fresh spring air, spend time with friends and family outdoors, most often involving picnics under the pale pink flowers of the cherry trees. Every year in spring, with cherry blossoms being highly anticipated, there is a cherry blossom forecast broadcasted nationwide, letting individuals know when the trees will be in full bloom in each region and, hence, the best time for viewing. One night after dinner, I remember speaking to Eri about the cherry blossoms. We were sitting at the dining table having snacks while her husband and Aoi were watching the television. She told me that I should go enjoy the cherry blossoms with Emi and that she can pack a lunch for us.

Despite having lived in Kōchi before, my experience with cherry blossoms has been limited as I never managed to see them at their best time, either I had gone too early and they were not in

[11] The concept of *mujō* in Buddhist view refers to transcience or mutability. It is the idea that nothing remains unchanged and nothing can avoid death in the end. (See Andrew Juniper, *Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence* (Boston: Tuttle Pub., 2003, 49)).

full bloom, or a rainy day had ruined the sighting by making most the flowers fall too soon. However, I remembered Cul-Port[12] was a famous spot to view cherry blossoms as cherry trees were planted on each side of the canal, when in bloom it turned the space into a sightseeing spot with the boats anchored and the boardwalks on each side of the canal (fig. 17). I asked Eri if we should go to Cul-Port or if there was another spot nearby, and she told me about Kotsu Kōen (also known as Hijimakotsu Park) which came as a surprise as I used to ride my bike by the park on my way to work, yet I never thought this was a site for cherry blossom viewing. Because it seemed to me that enjoying the cherry blossoms meant a lot to her, I asked her what happens when she and her family cannot go and see the cherry blossoms. She replied by saying that it felt as if something was missing that year, and that the year before they could not enjoy the cherry blossoms because it rained too much, and she probably would not have the time this year to go and appreciate the flowering trees. When probed, she said it was hard for her to put into words but shared that what she felt was akin to sadness.

Eri's response speaks to the ephemerality of cherry flowers and a sense of melancholia associated with their viewing or particularly with having missed it. The popularity of the cherry trees and their flowers owes to this ephemerality and melancholy (Saito, Ohashi and Graham 2014). They are favoured above the plum blossoms precisely because cherry flowers are more fragile and tend to fall easily, making their viewing "a celebration of our own fleeting lives... a reminder that everything has its season and that they must be appreciated" (Juniper 2003, 55). According to Ohnuki-Tierney (1993), the adoption of the cherry blossom as a dominant symbol of the Japanese collective self came about in the ninth century and was a result of their discourse with the Chinese (11). The Japanese made use of the cherry blossom as a symbol opposing the Chinese plum blossom to establish a distinct identity.

[12] Kōchi City's Culture Plaza is known commonly by its shorter name, Cul-Port. It hosts theatre performances, concerts, ceremonies like graduation, exhibitions, and there is a memorial museum dedicated to Ryuichi Yokohama, a Japanese *mangaka* (or manga artist).

Figure 17: Cherry Blossoms at Cul-Port
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2020 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2

The appreciation for the Japanese cherry trees, however, goes beyond national borders. Individuals from overseas are also favour travelling to Japan during spring to be able to see and enjoy the cherry blossoms. In speaking with Vanessa, who works in Nakameguro in Tokyo, she mentioned the extensive number of tourists in the area in spring. Nakameguro is a neighbourhood in Tokyo that possesses quiet paths on each side of the Meguro River. Like Cul-Port, it is a popular place in spring due to the voluminous cherry blossoms juxtaposed to a body of water. The cherry blossoms as a symbol of Japan and the practice of *hanami* in Japan are highly associated with an experience of Japan. This intense desire and yearning for the cherry blossoms every year is described as 'the cult of the cherry blossoms' by Keene (1969). In his analysis of Japanese aesthetics, he argues that there are four aesthetic ideals that are significant in Japanese aesthetics: suggestion, irregularity, simplicity and perishability. Suggestion refers to the idea that less is more. Keene makes use of poetry and Noh theatre to illustrate his point: the ambiguity in the language is exploited to provide a specific atmosphere or emotional state (1969, 295). The characteristic of irregularity is set in contrast to the Chinese or other continental influence in arts and architectural constructions, where symmetry, perfection, and regularity were key aesthetic forms. The rusticity of the tearoom and its surroundings is often cited to refer to the aspect of simplicity. In fact, it ties in together with the preference for imperfection and irregularity. In a way, rusticity refers to an

appreciation of the mundane, the used and habitual. For example, simple and worn wooden utensils are preferred for fitting rightly in the hands. And perishability signifies an appreciation for the mortality, the finality of things. For example, the visible presence of this would be a cracked bowl that has been carefully mended (Keene 1969, 305). Like impermanence, the underlying idea behind the characteristic of perishability is that "without the possibility of aging with time and usage there could be no real beauty" (305). The 'cult of the cherry blossom', as Keene puts it, slowly made its way from the court to the outer regions, from the upper classes to the commoners, an example of the spread of aestheticism (294).

Cherry blossom viewing originated as a religious ritual which took place under the blooming trees in sacred mountains. The common picnic under cherry trees today derives from an act of commensality in the ritual where deities and humans would drink sacred wine together (Wakamori 1975, 180-81 as cited in Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 30). The ritual itself operated based on an agrarian cosmology where both the cherry blossom and rice stood for agrarian productivity and the cyclic pattern of agrarian activities. Farmers relied on cherry blossom to signal the beginning of rice seedling plantation (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 29). Moreover, the cherry blossom has been highly associated with rebirth and the impermanence of life. For example, mountains, where cherry trees were mostly found in ancient Japan before they were widely planted in towns and cities, are resting places for the dead (36-37). While in ancient Japan, the flower never represented directly death, this changed in the medieval period where falling cherry blossoms came to symbolize not only the impermanence of life but also death (42). This cyclic pattern of cherry blossoms is highly associated with the seasons, that is to say, with spring, youth and school graduation. Given that the Japanese school year ends and starts in the spring, school life (especially high school life) has been associated with the blooming cherry trees, where new homeroom photographs are taken under cherry trees if there are any planted on school grounds and where the falling petals represents the end of youth (high school graduation for example).

However, wabi sabi is most strongly associated with the tearoom where it first emerged (Yanagi 2018, 147; Okakura [1906] 1964) whereby "the beauty of tea is the beauty of *sabi*," the beauty of poverty, of simplicity (Yanagi 2018, 149). Teaism is defined as "a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence" (Okakura [1906] 1964, 1), in a way, it is a quasi-religious ceremony for tea-drinking, but it involves a lot more than just

tea. Teaism encompasses elements from both Taoism and Zennism. On the one hand, Taoism, which was imported from the continent (i.e. China) provided the basis for Teaism's aesthetic ideals. "Taoism accepts the mundane as it is," writes Okakura ([1906] 1964), with the mundane brought to the forefront and appreciated. Zennism, on the other hand, makes the aesthetic ideals practical. This was reflected in Zen discipline, in which every member of the monastery would be assigned work and chores like weeding the garden or sweeping (Okakura [1906] 1964, 28-29). Hence, the beauty and appreciation of the mundane finds its way in Teaism where "[t]ea with us became more than an idealisation of the form of drinking; it is a religion of art of life. The beverage grew to be an excuse for the worship of purity and refinement, a sacred function at which the host and guest joined to produce for that occasion the utmost beatitude of the mundane" (Okakura [1906] 1964, 17-18).

Similar to the four characteristics of wabi sabi provided by Keene (1969), Juniper (2003) lists his own four characteristics of wabi sabi: impermanence, humility, asymmetry and imperfection. Impermanence here would be akin to perishability as described by Keene, where it concentrates on the ephemerality of things. Imperfection is similar to irregularity: this feature is often used in contrast to the Chinese aspiration for perfection (Juniper 2003; Keene 1969). Juniper's characteristic of humility is concordant with Keene's feature of simplicity in that both characteristics centre on the idea of having less, showing less, possessing less. For example, a tearoom devoid of art scrolls, of vases, the utensils presented to guests are worn. The four characteristics, whether termed by Keene or Juniper, are well-expressed by Okakura ([1906] 1964) in his description of guests invited to a tea ceremony. He writes,

> All our great tea-masters were students of Zen and attempted to introduce the spirit of Zennism into the actualities of life. Thus the room, like the other equipments of the tea-ceremony, reflects many of the Zen doctrines. […] Again the roji, the garden path which leads from the machiai to the tea-room, signified the first stage of meditation,—the passage into self-illumination. The roji was intended to break connection with the outside world, and to produce a fresh sensation conducive to the full enjoyment of aestheticism in the tea-room itself. One who has trodden this garden path cannot fail to remember how his spirit, as he walked in the twilight of evergreens over the regular irregularities of the stepping stones, beneath which

> lay dried pine needles, and passed beside the moss-covered granite lanterns, became uplifted above ordinary thoughts. One may be in the midst of a city, and yet feel as if he were in the forest far away from the dust and din of civilisation. […] Thus prepared the guest will silently approach the sanctuary, and, if a samurai, will leave his sword on the rack beneath the eaves, the tea-room being preeminently the house of peace. Then he will bend low and creep into the room through a small door not more than three feet in height. This proceeding was incumbent on all guests,—high and low alike,—and was intended to inculcate humility (33-35).

The Japanese appreciation of both the cherry blossoms and tea (ceremony), in other words, wabi sabi, is articulated in photographs of Japan. It is through travel photos of Japan that individuals learn to integrate and embody a Japan that can be collectively recognized. The examples provided through the examination of the cherry blossoms and Teaism are attempts to illustrate components of the ways Japan is seen through the medium of photography. Therefore, travel photos of Japan are trying to capture more than just what can be seen. Similarly to the story about the tea master Rikyu who asked his son, Shoan, to sweep the grounds repeatedly despite perfectly cleaning the garden without leaving any twig nor a leaf behind, the point is not to provide a perfect picture (or to clean the garden), rather it is to capture wabi sabi, a nostalgic feeling about the ephemerality of all things (shaking the branch of tree to leave crimson leaves over the garden path) (37).

Visual Vignette: Postcards / 2023

Figure 18: It Felt Like Coming Back Home
Nishigawa Flower Festival, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 19: Among the Canola Blossoms
Nishigawa Flower Festival, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 20: The Pagoda at Chikurin-ji
Chikurin-ji, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 21: The Greenhouse at Makino
Makino Botanical Garden, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 22: Contemplating
Chikurin-ji, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 23: The View of the Kamo River
Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 24: Up North
Kibune, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 25: From Here
Kibune Shrine, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 26: On the Path
Kibune Shrine, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 27: There Was a Small Aquarium
Ponto-cho, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 28: Where the Light Used to Be
Kibune Shrine, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 29: And I Fell in Love in Uji
Uji, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 30: Among the Tea Leaves
Koyama Tea Farm, Uji, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 31: Once
Ginkaku-ji, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 32: And Twice Over
Ginkaku-ji, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 33: In Search of the Perfect Omamori
Kiyoomizu-dera, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Fujifilm 200

The arrangement of this vignette happened quite organically as I received the processed photos I took during fieldwork in a digital format. Part of this reflection was initially written in June 2023 when I was going over their scanned copies on my phone. This vignette came together by selecting photos that carry emotional value to me. For instance, the two pictures of Ginkaku-ji (fig. 31 and 32) were the first to make the cut so to speak because I remember the nostalgic feeling that day when I visited this pavilion. I knew the season of school trips had started but I was not expecting to see that many students after Golden Week.[13] The sight of students from many different schools who were on excursions around the city, taking photos, learning about the history of places they visited, and enjoying themselves was nostalgic. It reminded me of youth, of school years, of the summer. It was then on days like that one that I wished I had with me a portable printer in order to be able to print these pictures out and turn them into postcards, dated and sent to myself in order not to forget what it felt like being there, what was on my mind, whom I was with, the little details.

[13] Golden Week is a national holiday period in Japan, lasting from April 29 to May 5. Aside from New Year, this is the time of the year when people travel the most due to the spring weather and the many consecutive days.

Compared to digital cameras and smartphones, film cameras are often used to bring out a nostalgic mood. On the one hand, the use of a film camera is reminiscent of many people's youth. Some of my interlocutors have mentioned that their first experience with photography was with an instant camera (i.e. Polaroid) or a film camera. For example, in our interview together, Vanessa recalled her first use of a camera with a Polaroid she received as a present. She remembers "carrying it around, loading the new paper in and taking pictures and it comes out and giving it to people."[14] On the other hand, photos taken with a film camera tend to possess more grain and a particular tint, which is what many individuals describe as the vibes or the vintage mood of film.

When talking about film photography, the expenses of this hobby has come up. In my conversations with Evan, we have spoken about the rise of prices of film rolls and processing, agreeing that there is a need to pace ourselves when we take pictures. This is something he mentioned he is working on and got better at.[15] I am aware of the need to pace and train myself in my use of film cameras in order to get the most out of each film roll. And indeed, it may take months or years before a film is finished. I still have film rolls in the cameras I used during fieldwork, and I am waiting in anticipation for the day the film roll is finished, and I can finally get them processed. And in fact, I do not remember what pictures lie within these yet unfinished rolls, so this raises expectations. The appeal of film photography then comes partly from the romanticism, the effect of surprise almost like opening a gift or, perhaps a more accurate example would be opening a time capsule that was hidden away with childhood memorabilia and, more noteworthy maybe, the nostalgia that comes along with this moment.

Romanticized Nostalgia in Travel Photographs

The feeling of nostalgia across photographs of Japan seems to have always been an underlying topic, especially when I look at photos taken by analogue cameras or when I took photos with my own analogue cameras. To reiterate what has been said above, there appears to be characteristics to film photography that grant this nostalgic mood, mostly having to do with the tint and the grain. The feeling of nostalgia has been associated with analogue photography in particular because of the camera's ability to translate time into space. As we shall see, nostalgia and, by extension, nostalgic feelings can be produced. Through the visual vignette and responses

[14] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 25, 2023.
[15] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 22, 2023.

drawn from the photo-elicitation exercise conducted with interlocutors, I will demonstrate how nostalgia is derived from travel photos of Japan. This is significant especially considering that nostalgia can not only be reproduced but induced.

In reference to a sense of nostalgia that emanates from the medium and the object produced—the photo—Sontag called it 'pseudo-presence' or 'token of absence' ([1977] 2019). And in a similar fashion, Tsinhnahjinnie (2003) uses the metaphor of photographic images as messages in a bottle, ready to be transmitted to the future, ready to burst when opened, to illustrate the ability of photographs to act as reminders. Hence, photographic images inherently do something in and of themselves: theirs is an ability to displace temporally (Ivy 1995; Sontag [1977] 2019; Tsinhnahjinnie 2003). And so, despite having spoken to some of my interlocutors about the nostalgia from photos of Japan—either because we were talking about film photography or because we were speaking about a Japanese past—the decision to write about nostalgia did not come up until I met several ex-students in Tokyo. I travelled to Tokyo with the purpose to take a weekend off and to be able to meet them, the train system allowing practical commute between Kyoto and Tokyo. We planned to gather for dinner at a somewhat sophisticated sushi bar in the bay area, a place recommended by a parent. I was very glad to see them do so well in the city but was concerned. They told me how difficult it was, how lonely it felt to be living in a big city and, most significant, how homesick they felt. Homesick for homemade meals, the warmth and familiar taste of homecooked rice and dishes. Homesick for the mountains and the sea. Homesick for the clean air. Homesick for the freshness of ingredients: fish, vegetables, fruits. Homesick for the comforts of home. Their complaints about big cities focused on this dichotomy between the rural and the urban, but also on the notion of *home*.

The feeling of homesickness felt by my ex-students is reflected and linked to the concept of *furusato*, which is significant in understanding the way nostalgia work in photographic images of Japan. As mentioned previously, the term *furusato* means 'old village' but it is also commonly translated in the English language as 'hometown'. However, writes Robertson (1997), the term is mostly used not to mean a particular place, even though many individuals do use it that way to refer to an actual hometown in the rural Japan, "but rather the generalized nature of such a place and the nostalgic feelings aroused by its mentions" (103). *Furusato* is conceptualized in a dialectical relationship between the new and the old. For example, this involves the juxtaposition

of Tokyo (new) and the provinces (old), or of the Other (new) and Japan (old) (Robertson 1997, 98-99). Similarly to Ivy's (1995) 'uncanny', it resonates in that photographic images of *furusato* are representations that serve as reminders of what is there but not quite around, of what is displaced temporally and spatially. And so, in the political project that is *furusato-zukuri* ('old-village making' or 'native place-making'), through the agency of nostalgia aspects of Japanese social life are "negotiable symbolic constructs continuously reinvented in the present" (Robertson 1991, 27).

'Furusato Japan' conjures an image of 'traditional culture', of something broadly Japanese, it "connotes a desirable lifestyle aesthetic summed up by the term *soboku*, or artlessness and rustic simplicity, and its quintessential landscapes features included forested mountains, fields cut by meandering river, and a cluster of thatched-roof farmhouses" (Robertson 1997, 104). This lifestyle aesthetic as described by Robertson is strongly similar to characteristics of wabi sabi. The common notions of *furusato* and *inaka*, their presence in day-to-day conversation suggests an enduring longing for an ideal past. This is often translated into a desire to return to the provinces, a preference for a quiet life away from the metropoles. Like my ex-students who had a difficult time adjusting to life in Tokyo, many adults who leave the regions to find work in the metropoles eventually return to the provinces, either permanently or periodically. Until today, the countryside is considered to be the "last reserve of noble virtues" (Kelly 1986, 606), where many decide to return to raise their children. This rural nostalgia is fetishized in and widespread across travel posters, tourist itineraries, TV shows, blog posts, etc. All visual materials that serve to carry and maintain the desirability of the *furusato*.

Visual Vignette: Homesick / 2023

The creation of this album titled "homesick / 2023" was spontaneous because, even though I have missed this place for as long as I was gone, it was never my intention this time around to capture a feeling that perhaps only people native to this place can have a claim to. The photos I have included in here were mostly taken with a Contax T2, but more significantly, perhaps, is that throughout my fieldwork, I used only Kodak Ultramax 400 and Fujifilm 200 rolls. I took a risk working with expired rolls (the Kodak Ultramax 400 were all expired rolls I managed to buy for

one ninth of the average price nowadays)[16] but I think that it ended up giving the pictures an even more nostalgic mood.

Figure 34
Kōchi City, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

In particular, this image (fig. 34) has become important to me because of the comments I have received about it. It was first shared on June 24, 2023, a few weeks after coming back from the field. On the 26th, one of my colleagues at the University of Ottawa reacted to the post on Instagram with the comment "I LOOOOVE this picture! It's so poetic"[17]. Wanting to know more, I asked her what she meant. She then proceeded to write that "it is in the vibes"[18]. She continued,

[16] A Kodak Ultramax roll costs about CAD$18 today (August 2024), I bought a single roll in sale for the price of CAD$2.
[17] Informal chat with the author via Instagram. June 26, 2023.
[18] Informal chat with the author via Instagram. June 27, 2023.

> "It's in the aesthetics. The pastel hues, the collage of incomplete objects, the half-opened window onto another world that shines in its best colours. It creates a feeling of anemoia[19]—of a warm summer afternoon where a myriad of things peacefully come into place for a split second before it fades away, of a picture you took with your eyes when you could taste the colours in the air. That's why the picture is poetic. It sparks your imagination, your sensitivity, your ability to project yourself in the pictured reality. It makes you experience something, a crafted memory. It offers a little moment of respite in the overstimulating vibrancy of the endless feeds on social media."[20]

Her feedback was a lot to unpack; it was late at night when I got it, and I thought I should give myself the chance to read it a second time the next morning before replying to her. Fundamentally, it was a surprise that she liked this specific image that much, and it was a shock that she described it as poetic. But upon reflection it all made sense. This is an image I took in the split of a second, one of the first photos I took with my new camera, the Kodak Ektar H35. Therefore, I never thought it would turn out this nice nor that it would mean anything to anyone. The tramway, the colours, the police box in the background, in my mind I can picture these, and I could point to this place on a map because it is one that is familiar to me. This is probably why I took the photo this way—it does not show any of the objects in their entirety, feeling much like a collage, the tramway, the half-opened window, the frame of the car, the sky and the street superimposed on each other—because *I* can recognize where this is even only with bits and pieces.

In the moment the picture was taken, I was in a car, leaving the school where I used to work. It was around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and I had just spent hours in crowds—the alumni of the school got together to organize an event to celebrate all the years the school was opened, to celebrate the staff and students. The whole thing felt like a school cultural festival, it was

[19] The term 'anemoia' is refers to "nostalgia for a time one has never experienced" (See Alicia Kulczynski and Margurite Hook. 2023. "Typography Talks: Influencing Vintage Anemoia and Product Safety Perceptions with Vintage Typography." *Journal of Marketing* 88 (4): 129-53.)
[20] Informal chat with the author via Instagram. June 29, 2023.

energetic, festive and busy. It is strange to think that it is probably just an empty building sitting by the bay of the city now[21]. I captured the photo quickly in the hope to have something to remember that routine associated with that place. Therefore, for two reasons it is intriguing how that colleague described the image's ability to make the audience experience "a crafted memory". First, in so far as I, the photographer, made the decision to press the shutter button, to do so before the tramway completely disappeared from the frame, this image was indeed "crafted". It was crafted in so far as it involved thoughts, it was produced and shared. Also, it is a "crafted memory" in so far as it evokes anemoia, that it makes the observer, the audience, feel nostalgic for a place they have never seen let alone been. Second, the word "craft" connotes inauthenticity precisely because it involves arrangement, manipulation, design and framing. It is intriguing in this case because I captured this quickly in the hope of having one more thing to remember this place by, to have another memory, but this is not the same as a memory, is it? Rather, it is more a vehicle for memory, a carrier, a fabricated memory.

This image eventually became part of the album which I started on May 22, 2023, after that weekend stop in Tokyo, meeting with ex-students, alumni of that school that is now abandoned. They expressed the intense feeling of homesickness they felt after being in Tokyo for a little over a month. This homesickness was exacerbated by the lack of fresh seafood, the feeling of isolation in the busy streets of Tokyo, in the grey sky and the innumerable buildings. They missed the fresh fish, the blue and the green of nature, the sound of the birds, the tranquility of a smaller town. With this album, which was still in the making at the time of my conversation with my colleague, I hoped to convey the feelings experienced by people who are important to me and who were at a turning point in their life, transitioning, to capture—even slightly—a scene, a moment, a mood, a memory and surely the warmth of this place (Kōchi) that is dear to all of us.

[21] The school in question, Kōchi Minami Junior and Senior High School, closed down because of its location. It was situated too close to the bay and, thus, at high risk for the coming Nankai megathrust earthquake.

Figure 35
JR Akaoka Station, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Contax T2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 36
Otonashi-jinja, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Contax T2 on Fujifilm 200

Figure 37
Otonashi-jinja, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Contax T2 on Fujifilm 200

The photos portray places that may be recognizable to certain but, to me, they represent more than places—the mood derived from the colour and the grain that are almost iconic to film photography brings out the summer air, the day trips, the jokes, the sincere conversations, the people that embody and inhabit these places. Precisely, these pictures embody the experience I had when I took them—the memories made with the people I was on those days in all these places, some of whom were old connections, others were people I had never met before. And while this experience has allowed me to catch up with old friends and to meet new ones, I am now using this album and prolonging the photos' ability to connect with those who have never seen such scenery, with those who have never been to these places, with those who were born there but have left and with those who have been missing it strongly. It might be pretentious and perhaps a desperate

attempt to sound poetic not unlike the photo my colleague liked so much, but I hope this album reaches the audience like a long-lost letter and extends the feeling of nostalgia.

Figure 38
Kurehachimangu, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Contax T2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 39
Futajima, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Contax T2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 40
Nishigawa Flower Festival, Kōchi Prefecture © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Contax T2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

However, it is not just what is being captured that evokes nostalgic feelings; cameras are inherently nostalgic objects. To take a photo is to displace temporally the object of the photo, to relegate an experience, a thing, an event to the past. It is no wonder that cameras have been associated with death: death as in the fear of cameras (i.e. when cameras were first introduced to societies and peoples, many feared of its abilities. They were under the impression that cameras captured part of their soul (Wright 2004); death as in portraiture of the dead (not just portraits made and/or chosen for funerals or death related rituals, but also images portraying people during their lifetime); and death as in the end of an event (to capture a photo means to witness, and to look at a photo means to look at something that is not more, that has passed). And perhaps this is where Japan's obsession with the enduring market for photobooks speak to this kind of nostalgia. In other words, sharing photos is to be able to see in a book all the events that have passed, that one was not there to witness but that happened nonetheless. Like the sense of finality appreciated in Japanese aesthetics and way of life, there is a sense of finality in the use of a camera, in looking at a photo.

Hence, a sense of melancholic beauty emanates from photos, whether physical or digital. What travellers are intent on doing is not just to capture memories, scenic view of Japan but also

to acquire the object (i.e. the photo) that they can use to reminisce. In our conversation, Aoi told me that the photos she takes, and particularly the ones she decides to share on her Instagram account, are like entries to a visual diary.[22] She uses them to recollect the feeling, the mood, the air, she felt in the when the photo was captured. This, she says, is also why she refrains from using captions since she thinks words would disturb her remembering, because words are limited and inaccurate, thus, they fail to convey the depth of her emotions.[23]

Photo-Elicitation: Recognizing Japan

The method of photo-elicitation was insightful in trying to understand how individuals recognize Japan through photographic images. Photo-elicitation refers to the method by which interlocutors are shown photos with no textual or verbal support and are asked to comment on them. The method of photo-elicitation is useful because it permits the researcher to learn about individuals' ways of seeing, habits in looking and recognizing cues. As Harper (2002) writes, photo-elicitation "mines deeper shafts into the human consciousness than words-alone interviews" (22-23). In the context of this research, photo-elicitation was useful in its ability to provide insight on interlocutors' recognition of Japan in the photos provided. The exercise was conducted using 15 photos I had taken during fieldwork in both Kōchi and Kyoto. The photos were included in the online questionnaire, which was then sent to participants who had previously agreed to participate on a voluntary basis. They were asked to comment on each of the photo by use of key words, phrases, sentences, writing anything that came to mind. Participants also could skip a photo if they wished to do so. A total of nine interlocutors participated in the exercise.

Once all participants submitted their survey, I proceeded to collect the responses for each photo. The first thing I noticed was that many of my interlocutors assumed the images were of Japan. When questioned, they said that sometimes they knew because the photo portrayed somewhere they recalled encountering. For instance, Evan told me that he vaguely recalled seeing the big cat in Kōchi City. Along the same line, Eri wrote that this shot was "nostalgic and familiar." The photo of a big *maneki-neko*[24] at the corner of an empty street (fig. 41) was indeed taken in Asahimachi in Kōchi City. Interestingly, three of my interlocutors used the keyword "the past" to

[22] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 22, 2023.
[23] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 22, 2023.
[24] A *maneki-neko* is cat doll figurine that is thought to bring luck to the owner.

describe the photo and specifically, they found it evocative of the Showa Era (1926-1986). But more significant, their assumptions were based on an overall familiarity with certain views. In particular, the image of the cherry blossom tree in front of the gate to a local shrine in Tosa-Kure (fig. 42) and the image of a small path surrounded by intense green moss, trees and bushes with the rain reflected on the stones (fig. 43) were familiar views to many of the participants. Vanessa in particular was fond of the latter; she expressed, "Oh I love this one because the moss and the stones. It's such a pretty image and it reminds me of the smaller temples that aren't necessarily packed with people all the time."[25] Indeed, the moss and the abundance of green was emphasized by Monica, Evan, and Vanessa who all expressed awe at the greenery. Yoko wrote about "the beauty of dampness"[26] in reference to the luster of damp rain on the stones.

Interesting too is the association to the Ghibli world. Both Eri and Moto made the reference, with Moto specifically mentioning *Mononoke-hime* (1999) (also known as *Princess Mononoke*).[27] Why are these photos evocative of Japan? I argue that images like the ones mentioned above are evocative of Japan because they portray elements of Japanese society (i.e. shrines, temples, cherry blossoms, street figures and signs, etc.) that have, through the spread of Japanese notions of aesthetics, become exemplars in the imaginary of Japan. Travel photographs often capture these symbols, practices, and events.

[25] Fieldwork notes (elicitation exercise). October 5, 2023.
[26] Fieldwork notes (elicitation exercise). October 5, 2023.
[27] *Mononoke-hime* (1999) is an animation move directed by Hayao Miyazaki, produced by Ghibli Studio. Movies procudes by Studio Ghibli, and especially the ones directed by Miyazaki, have been appreciated both within and outside Japan. The Ghibli Park (a theme park) opened in 2022 in Aichi Prefecture.

Figure 41: The Cat in Asahimachi
Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 42: Kurehachimangu
Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a ContaxT2 on Kodak Ultramax 400

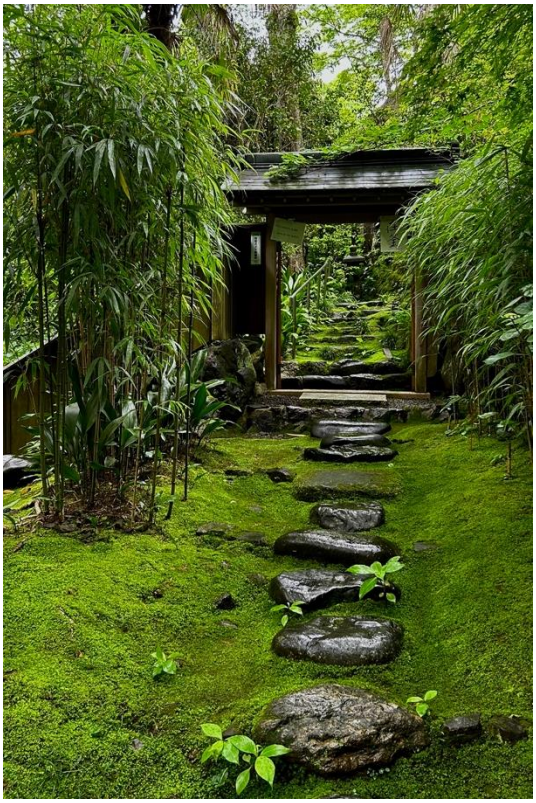

Figure 43: Entrance to Kinmo-in Temple
Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with an iPhone 14

Another point I noticed further in discussion with Evan and Monica who both agreed to a post-elicitation interview was that they did not notice how the moss-filled stone pathway photo (fig. 43) was actually taken digitally compared to the other photographs included in the exercise. As a matter, the selection was made of ten photos taken on films and five digitally, using my iPhone 14. In a way, while looking at the photos, they did not look for whether the photos were taken with a film or a digital camera. What they seemed to focus on was rather the object of the photos as well as the feelings the photos evoked. This is significant because it speaks to the photographer's and the camera's ability to reproduce and induce nostalgia. While Bartholeyns (2014) writes about photo-apping, that is, the use of mobile applications to edit digital photos to give the impression that they were taken using a film camera, thus, granting a photo instant emotional value, it seems also that the emotional value of recognizable romanticized nostalgia is also derived from the aesthetics of wabi sabi and of scenes, views, objects already in the imaginary of Japan.

Conclusion

On the one hand, in this chapter I have explored the relationship between one of the notions of Japanese aesthetics, wabi sabi, and photographic images of Japan. Wabi sabi is a concept that is difficult to translate into the English language, but as attempted by scholars (Juniper 2003; Keene 1969, 1989; Okakura [1906] 1964) it refers to a particular aesthetic affection for the ephemeral, impermanent, simple, rustic, asymmetrical, irregular, and imperfect. Using the example of the cherry blossom and the tearoom, both meaningful symbols of wabi sabi, I have attempted to show how souvenir images of Japan are partially trying to capture wabi sabi. This yearning and longing, this affective sensibility to the impermanence of things is translated into homesickness and nostalgia for an idealized past.

The second section of this chapter has attempted, on the other hand, to demonstrate the link between romanticized nostalgia and travel photos of Japan. The concept of *furusato* is of extreme significance as it illustrates the continuous desire to return, not necessarily to a particular place (i.e. in the countryside) or time, but to a generalized feeling of nostalgia that overcomes one with the mere mention of the term. This affective capacity is translated into travel photographs, especially images of the places of rural Japan. The analysis made use of photo-elicitation as a method in determining how individuals recognize Japan through the particular aesthetics of wabi

sabi. The analysis of nostalgia also incorporated a visual vignette in which some of the photos taken and posted on Instagram drew attention for their ability to convey anemoia. To conclude, travel photos of Japan are recognizable through aesthetics notions such as wabi sabi and romanticized nostalgia, which have become associated with iconic, typical travel photos of Japan. The next chapter will situate Japanese aesthetics and romanticized nostalgia within a larger social and political discourse on Japanese national-cultural identity.

Chapter 3: The Japanese National-Cultural Identity and Travel Photographs

Photographs have their role to play in the fashioning of a nation's cultural identity. In her discussion and analysis of nostalgia and the continuous popularity of Japan's rural regions for domestic tourism, Creighton (1997) writes, "images of the past are invoked to refute the perceived threat of cultural loss" (242) because "the past will always seem more stable than the present (Smith 1982, 128 as cited in Creighton 1997, 242). Indeed, photographs have been used to create and anchor an imaginary of societies and people of remote places, even within national boundaries. For example, the work of Alloula (1986) reminds us that the medium of photography and the object it produces, the Photograph, have the ability to entrench certain perceptions of the subject. Photography and the Photo, have in this way been used as tools to describe and ascribe (self-)identities to a wide audience like in Japan.

However, photographs that contribute to a particular narrative on political, gender, national, cultural identities tend to have particular attributes. In the images analyzed by Alloula (1986) to put forward his argument that the harem remains the center of colonial curiosity and desire, the excess of authenticity is one of the defining attributes. This excess, a priori derived from the overuse of props, distorts the represented, the referent, by providing the frame with feigned realism and the redundancy of stereotypical objects. In this way, the concept of 'counterfeit realism' describes an attempt "to make something more real than the real" (Alloula 1986, 86). In the context of this research, however, excess in authenticity in photos of Japan is attributable to the emphasis on elements of wabi sabi and on a sense of nostalgia.

As seen in the previous chapter, travel photographs are imbued with wabi sabi and nostalgia. Yet, authenticity of the Japan experience and in photographs of Japan is attributable also to something else: mainly the emphasis on the duality of the Japanese social life. By this, I mean the dichotomies of city/countryside, urban/rural, new/old, high technology/'traditions', etc. that has been asserted through visual data to produce in the end an imaginary of Japanese society and identity. What is significant about this is not so much the fact that these dichotomies exist, for they are present in other parts of the world too, but that they are used to feed the national rhetoric, a political narrative, of a Japanese essence, a character uniquely Japanese. The danger, as argued by Gupta and Ferguson (1992), is that it undermines differences, it territorializes identities whereby a nation equals a people, which, in turn, equals a culture.

Oguma (2002)'s genealogical work on the self-portrayal of Japan is insightful if we are to understand how internal and external forces have helped shape, form, and guide national narratives on identity. It also sheds light on the formation and development of what is understood as the myth of Japan. In his book, he outlines the historical (self-)portrayal of Japan by focusing on the ideological development of what it means to be Japanese. He argues that by the 1880s, theories on the Japanese nation developed into two main ideological currents which have been claimed, asserted and clashed in contentious time periods: (1) the mixed nation theory, and (2) the myth of Japanese homogeneity. The mixed nation theory stipulates that the Japanese nation (people and society) was formed by through waves of immigration of different peoples to the island of what is today known as Japan (Oguma 2002). On the other hand, the myth of Japanese homogeneity rejects all allegations that the Japanese nation has been taking in people from the outside. In its most radical form, the myth of Japanese homogeneity insists on ideas of (blood) purity and on "[t]he notion that all 'Japanese' shared the same 'Japanese' disposition produced by a unique climate" (Oguma 2002, 276). The myth, like Barthes ([1957] 1991) has written, "transforms history into nature" because "it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflection" (128). Japanese society and Japan as seen in the photos explored in this thesis are neither a lie nor a confession. The Japan seen in the travel photographs is not a lie because the photos themselves are proofs that the event photographed did indeed happen, at best, it would be a partial truth, a fragment of reality, a spun narrative.

This chapter will explore the relationship between notions of Japanese aesthetics and nationalism in Japan. In particular, it will use the work of Ohnuki-Tierney on the cherry blossom (2002) and rice (1995) to illustrate how images of these symbols continue to contribute to foster underlying national rhetoric of the myth of Japan. In other words, travel photographs of the cherry blossom and the country's rice fields, for example, continue to portray Japan as possessing a unique character, an essence. This discussion on the cherry blossom and rice will lead to other symbols such as empty Zen gardens and red torii gates to emphasize not only the touristic experience but more significantly an authentic experience of Japanese society. Here, I argue that familiar photos of Japan perpetuate a single version of the Japanese national-cultural identity, allowing little room for ambivalence, for divergence and multiplicities. These iconic photos serve to reinforce the myth of Japan, underscoring the differences between Japan and the rest of the world.

Firstly, this chapter will analyze the relationship between photography and the national-cultural identity of Japan by drawing on the works of Creighton (1991, 2015), Ivy (1995), and Robertson (1991, 1997). These works have not only served as useful guides for this research, but they also contain concepts that will problematize travel photographs of Japan. Secondly, using my own experience of Japan and the photos I have produced before and during fieldwork, the interviews with interlocutors and their understanding of travel photography of Japan, I will highlight how certain aspects of Japanese society are indicative of an "authentic experience" of Japan. Lastly, this chapter will put the emphasis problematizing picture-taking as an act that can be politicized. In a way, because photographs are open to interpretation, as we shall see, the sharing of photos and communication that happens through them create a whirlwind that forms the dominant narrative.

In the context of Japan, this whirlwind is the myth, constantly (re-)shaped, (re-)invented, (re-)framed by an ever-changing Japan in the world. In this examination, however, the work of the Provoke movement in the 1960s will be the starting point of what I am offering as a solution to familiar images of Japan, whereby we return to the conception of photographs as being solely a partial truth, a fragment of reality, oftentimes intentionally captured to tell a story. Provoke's concept of *are bure boke* (grainy, blurry and out-of-focus) (Kim 2015) offers a different way to practice travel photography through a recognition that the *perfect* photo does not exist and the conscientious recognition that most photos taken are neither iconic nor do they fit the myth.

The Myth and Consuming Japan

The discourse on Japanese identity is a well-established and recognized genre, often referred to as *Nihon bunkaron*, *Nihon jinron*, *Nihon shakairon*, or *Nihonron*. According to Befu's (1993) work on nationalism, *Nihonjinron* has been, among other things, considered as a cultural policy. Awards and medals, as she explains, are awarded in recognition of artists in performing arts, museums are places where the uniqueness of Japanese culture and history as well as its new identity as an economic success are established in the general public's mind (Befu 1993, 119). This propagation is in line with Japan's internationalization policy, which Robertson (1997) conceptualizes not only as a relationship between Japan and the world but also a relationship within Japan itself, between the metropoles and rural regions (97-122). For instance, one effort at internationalization is to send scholars and artists abroad as part of the Japan Foundation's goal to

demonstrate the uniqueness of Japanese society (Befu 1993, 120). Why is *Nihonjinron* problematic? *Nihonjinron* is written as prescriptions for behaviour, the writings serve as a moral textbook in which propositions become moral imperatives (Befu 1993, 116-118).

Additionally, it is significant to understand the conditions and rationale behind the myth because at the core of *Nihonjinron* is ethnocentrism. By means of comparison, what is uniquely Japanese is apparent in contrast to other societies (Befu 1993, 113). This is important as it has and carries the potential to fuel notions of inclusion and exclusion of people. For example, Ohnuki-Tierney's (1995, 2002) work on the symbolism of the cherry blossom and rice are relevant here. Both the cherry blossom and rice have come to represent the Japanese essence and its purity. This example is relevant here because the (re-)production of photos of cherry blossoms have come to associate the flowering tree and rice with Japanese national-cultural identity by being portrayed as something uniquely Japanese. In the first instance, the cherry blossom is equated with youth, sacrifice and innocence. In the second, rice represents purity.

As seen in the previous chapter, there are elements of Japanese society that are intentionally brought to the forefront of popular imagery of Japan, just like nostalgia, wabi sabi is continuously used to reinforce a sense of uniqueness, an essence of Japan. This emphasis on wabi sabi and on the past sustains and perpetuates the myth by making it appear as a natural condition of Japanese society and a natural essence of what it means to be Japanese. Japanese society, and by extension what is understood as Japanese culture, takes on an overly nationalistic tone whereby practices come to be equated with a people, and national boundaries. As argued by Gupta and Ferguson (1992), space plays a major role in the understanding of a national-cultural identity; spaces are turned into places which then are made and/or become touristic places for visitors. For instance, there are places in Kōchi like Ioki Cave which I visited with Aoi, Emi and Eri. It is a "natural place" (because it is a cave) that is somewhat remote even for residents. However, it has been made to accommodate visitors' need by the addition of signs, stairs, ropes and ramps to hang on to, etc. Other places like temples and castles like Chikurin-ji and Kōchi Castle were made for a purpose previously; they were residences, refuges, etc. However, these have now taken on an additional role: a place for visitors to marvel at the history, the architecture, beauty of the garden, the quiet.

Moreover, one might think of space in the broader sense. What of photos of the rural regions, of rice fields, of mountains, of the sea, of anonymous temples and shrines? These general photos void of any indication for their specific location are nevertheless contributing to create an imaginary of Japan—a Japan that despite its miracle growth has managed to preserve its natural spaces and used it to further enhance its economic development. The 'economic miracle' of Japan, as it is referred to, is also a term that contributed to the myth of Japan by portraying it as an exception. The development of transport and communication technology in the 1960s is what allowed the rediscovery of 'traditions' (i.e. Japan's more pristine past), "with Japanese identity and topography becom[ing] almost a national obsession" (Ivy 1995, 21). The myth, thus, highly focuses on this (un)balanced duality of the modern/traditional and urban/rural and where the past is continuously vanishing, yet never fully gone, rather transformed into the present.

Spaces and places depicted in travel photos tend to portray what Ivy (1995) refers to as the vanishing, which she defines as 'something passing away, gone but not quite, suspended between presence and absence, located at a point that both is and is not here in the repetitive process of *absenting*" (21, original emphasis). Her work on Japan focuses on events, practices, places that are suspended in moments of near disappearance, threatening to fade yet flourishing precisely because of this status of the vanishing. These are places out of place (23), drawn from Freud's concept of the 'uncanny', which "is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression" (as cited in Ivy 1995, 107). Ivy's analysis examines a process by which events, practices and places are turned into the familiar and old-established, whereby she demonstrates that the 'vanishing' reveals a persistent, fostered and deliberate effort to emphasize the pre-modern, the past, nostalgia and sites of "authenticity". Her examination focuses on the fostered tourism-driven economy of the 1970s and 1980s Japan where state-sponsored campaigns such as Discover Japan and Exotic Japan nurtured an interest in the 'vanishing' by marketing it as something desirable and encouraging visitors to visit these locations.

Moreover, Ivy (1995) evaluates the role of train commutes in the construction of a cohesive Japanese community. She writes that the development of the shinkansen and the multiplication of train stations have expanded a sense of cohesiveness, of connection between different regions, but more significant is that it facilitated travel to remote regions. This newly enabled travel experience

in turn supported the narrative of a unified national-cultural identity on which rested the basis of a Japanese essence: the past is still accessible, is still at hand's reach and available to experience if only one has the time to travel. These events, practices and places that Ivy describes as 'vanishing' tend to be geographically located in the *furusato*. 'Furusato,' as discussed, is a term in the Japanese language that can be translated to mean 'village' or 'hometown' in the English language. However, in Japanese, the word is evocative of a sense of nostalgia rather than simply a specific geographical location. No matter where in rural Japan, *furusato* becomes one's *furusato* (Robertson 1987, 1988, 1991 as cited in Creighton 1997). Photography of 'furusato' in a broad sense are photos of events, practices and places that are outside the quotidian, these things that are nostalgic because they offer an experience that is outside the routine of the present, an experience of the past. As examined thus far, these events, practices and places include festivals, holidays, tea ceremony, Zen gardens, cherry blossoms, rice fields, and simply even a landscape of an anonymous location. These have become strongly associated with the national-cultural identity derived from state ideology of the myth of Japan.

Azoulay writes, "no photograph stands outside of ideology" (as cited in Abu Hatoum 2017, 23); aesthetics' role, and particularly the role of imagery, with politics is significant. The above-listed symbols are a few examples of Japanese events, practices and places adopted and employed by the Japanese state to establish a coherent and cohesive, contained and bounded national-cultural identity. To bring back Ivy's (1995) work, the state-sponsored campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s have entrenched these events, practices and places in the authentic experience of Japan. This aligns with Robertson's (1997) concept of *furusato-zukuri*, which would be translated as 'old village-making' or 'hometown-making', whereby the *furusato* is constructed as a space of 'authenticity'. The authentic is fashioned in the sense that it is selected and emphasized, it is adapted, portrayed, told as the *reality*.

The concept of *furusato-zukuri* is not unlike Kahn's concept of the 'cocoon' (2011). Cocoons, in her research on Tahiti, tourism and the postcard, are defined as spaces of conjunction between *l'espace perçu* and *l'espace conçu*, between the "physical, tangible, material reality" of what visitors perceive and the "mental space composed of representations, signs, symbols, codes, abstractions, ideas, and depictions" (19) of what is conceived by visitors. The political project of 'hometown-making' or 'old village-making' is to continuously ensure that the conceived space is

aligned with the perceived space, that is to say that, that real space in Japan, real locations meet the expectations of the visitors' image of what they want to be encountering, seeing, experiencing.

Earlier, I used Alloula's (1986) concept of 'counterfeit realism' to discuss how events, practices and places are made more real than the real in photographs, in this instance I would like to extend this concept to the overall of the Japanese national-cultural identity. The selection of, the emphasis on and the excessive presence of certain sign, symbols, markers enforced in the imaginary of the visitor makes this identity more real than the real. The process of production is, thus, inextricably linked to a sort of demand for images, expectations of visitors to be able to experience something they have imagined as being 'authentically Japanese'. In this process of consumption and production, it becomes difficult to differentiate which came first, but this question is moot. Regardless of whether there is a demand first for familiar and iconic images of Japan or such images were produced first, creating a demand, the significant point is that the experience of Japan is turned into consuming an experience of Japan. In particular, the work of Creighton (1997) discusses the nostalgia underlying the popularity of domestic tourism to Japan's rural regions through an analysis of *furusato* imagery. She states, "[r]emote areas become idyllic representations of a more pristine way of like, less corrupted by industrial dehumanization, urban anomie, or Western influences" (Creighton 1997, 240). *Furusato*, perceived this way, thus becomes a quest for a 'home' driven by a desire to travel home. In this way, 'home' is more than simply a geographical location, 'home' becomes a feeling sought continuously (Creighton 1997).

In terms of imagery, *furusato* is decontextualized through images of unnameable rural landscapes, dilapidated shrines, remote anonymous train stations, circling back to the matter of anonymity and the idea that wherever one travels in a somewhat remove region or a place in the *furusato* imaginary, that place becomes one's *furusato*, one's "hometown". As Befu (1993) and Ivy (1995) have demonstrated, the *furusato* imaginary is a result of Japan's identity crisis on a massive, collective scale, which ensued from rapid modernization and a sense of cultural loss derived from increasing Western influences. This identity crisis felt until today drives individuals to elevate aspects of Japanese society and social life and consider them to be essentially Japanese. For example, Creighton (1998) examines the reproductions of rural festivals by department stores provided for urbanites unable to travel back to the *furusato* to enjoy the festivals. She writes that these re-creations rely largely on mass-disseminated imagery whereby the symbols, the aesthetics

associated with these *matsuri* "have the strength to emotionally move people, despite the actuality of their origins" (Creighton 1997, 249). What is significant in Creighton's analysis is, like Kahn's, the romanticization of the past, the *furusato,* possesses an inherent contradiction: that both the *furusato* (equated with the past) and the cities (equated with the present) exist simultaneously. This contradiction alludes to the possibility of replacing the temporal distance with a geographical one (Creighton 1997, 252). In other words, time is a place accessible to all who wish for return. It makes home, community, "the heart of Japanese identity" accessible once again, rather than something that has been lost and is not irretrievable. The 'cocoons' in Japan are thus 'places of *furusato*' rather than the *furusato* per se because I do not think that cocoons are to be found only in rural areas. With the expanding tourism industry and Japan's reliance on domestic and international tourism, the *furusato* has emerged in urban cities. For instance, Kyoto is itself a place of *furusato,* and within Kyoto there are smaller cocoons like temples and shrines whose gardens offer a peaceful home secluded from the outside world.

Consumption of Japan, and particularly of *furusato* Japan, thus becomes an experience of 'chasing Japan'. This chase is apparent when one thinks of the mania over collecting experience. One example of such chase is the collection of stamps from temples and shrines. This practice consists of acquiring a *goshuincho* (a little collection book) to be eventually filled with *goshuin* (an original shrine or temple stamp on top of which a shrine or temple staff will mark with ink inscription). This practice encourages collectors to visit many more shrines and temples, to go out their way so-to-speak to reach more remote shrines and temples. Collecting *goshuin* is linked with the notion of pilgrimage, whereby individuals will attempt to journey religious sites (Munro 2020). One of the most famous pilgrimages is the Shikoku 88 Temple Pilgrimage. I recall the numerous time I have crossed paths with an *o-henro*[28] at Chikurinji-ji or passed by one while in a car in Kōchi.

Another way of 'chasing' Japan is through consuming photos on social media platforms and (re-)producing photos in Japan. The chase is represented by "liking" and/or sharing an image on social media, it is represented by "collecting" or creating an archive of images of Japan, an archive of images that are iconic and thus limiting. To bring back Hochberg's (2015) concept of

[28] The term "henro" refers to a pilgrimage or a pilgrim. The prefix "o-" is used for respect. In this instance, the reference is made toward the Shikoku Pilgrimage consisting of 88 temples spread across the island.

‘limiting-images’, the iconic and familiar travel images of both rural and urban Japan further perpetuate and reinforce an already entrenched imaginary of the experience of Japan precisely because they do not give space to other kinds of images. Furthermore, through social media and Japanese popular culture like manga and anime, travellers have been trying to find locations depicted in famous movie scenes for example and attempting to reproduce the known imagery of Japan (Loriguillo-López 2020). In other words, because of their familiarity and popularity in the imaginary of Japan and the Japanese experience, they dominate the visual culture of Japan.

Ultimately, the consumption of Japan that results in a ‘chasing’ behaviour from travellers is possible through the creation of what Fujitani (1993) calls a ‘memoryscape’. The memoryscape of Japan is created using two types of mnemonic sites. First, there are rituals, holidays which are spread across the nation. National holidays are, according to Fujitani (1993), invented tools to remember the mytho-history (90-91). Second, there are sites that are signs on the physical landscape like shrines, temples, buildings, monuments, etc. Fujitani (1993) writes that Kyoto is the example par excellence as it is “filled with reminder that it had served as the seat of the imperial court… [it] became a representation of the depth of the imperial institution’s historical past. It became the nucleus of the officially prescribed notion of ‘tradition’” (97). This is relevant because consuming Japan involves in part the consumption of these reminders and the participation in rituals, ceremonies, festivals and holidays. Viewed this way, the memoryscape of Japan is centered on an obsession with the past, of romanticized nostalgia.

Visual Vignette: The Other Side of Everything / 2023

The purpose of this vignette is to show, as alluded to from the title, another side of travel photography, of photos of Japan. While it remains accurate that individuals are fed photographs of Japan corresponding to the myth, that is, corresponding to the images of pristine, rural, exotic, traditional, and, at the same time, eccentric Japan, this vignette illustrates a little bit more of the everyday, the reality, the small corners of (travelling in) Japan in the hope to provide a space for other kinds of travel images to work against the overwhelming dominance of iconically captured photos of scenic places.

There are many types of photos that can emerge in this space. In the first instance, there are photos that result from photographic experimentation. In my interview with Vana, she mentioned that she has been carrying with her a disposable Fujifilm camera every day in order to

capture a daily shot, acting as a diary. The choice of a disposable (versus using the camera on her phone) was solely for the nostalgic effects: one the one hand, she meant the effect of surprise the moment she would get the processed photos, the idea that she will be looking at a whole month, at days she might have already forgotten, like opening a gift given by herself; and, on the other hand, the use of film photography (even as a disposable camera) is reminiscent of a past, where photos were not so readily available and when processed provided a specific mood. However, nostalgia can now be readily made without having to wait for time to do its work. Bartholeyns (2014) refers to this as 'self-induced nostalgia' and 'staged nostalgia' whereby it is "a feeling of nostalgia deliberately brought about by a specific action" (rather than nostalgia emanating from the photographs due to the time passed) (Bartholeyns 2014, 55). In his research, the temporal distance is made visible by photo apping or editing granting a dated aesthetics (i.e. the mood and tones of film photography), rendering the photos older than they are. The use of photo apps to grant digital photos instant emotional value is, in other words, a new practice of nostalgia, a new kind of nostalgia. This is relevant because it means that for individuals who take photos with their smartphones, it is possible to immediately turn the present into the past.

Experimentation for myself during fieldwork, however, had more to do with the use of a new camera. I had acquired the cheap Kodak Ektar H35 before fieldwork, with the intent to use it first in Japan. I had never used a half-frame camera previously and, sure enough, I did not know what I was doing with it. The photos below are the results of a poor attempt to use, for the first time, a half-frame camera. My intention by selecting these photos was to show how these could represent a way to oppose the dominant photographic culture and imagery of Japan. Yet, while these photographs, because they were taken with an analogue camera and with expired films, give a strong sense of nostalgia, they provide also a more intimate look into the crooks and crannies of Japan through the improper lighting, the leaning to one side of the photo (due to my unstable stance), out-of-focus subject, and other mistakes made from amateur skills. They are less scenic, less perfect, and perhaps in this way, it can be argued that they correspond to Japanese aesthetic notion of wabi sabi even better, as they offer a more humble, more rustic look at Japan.

Figure 44
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 45
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 46
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 47
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 48
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 49
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 50
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Another attempt to capture the everyday that contrasts to the iconic image of Japan was first brought up in the informal interview I had with Aoi, when she spoke about her use of social media, Instagram in particular. She said, "…for me, it's like a visual diary because… in my case, the reason I post a lot is for myself, not for someone else. Because I want to remember what I did or what I felt."[29] She elaborated, explaining that to her there was a difference between photos of Japan by ordinary people and photos of Japan found on Pinterest for instance. The latter she described as being "too Japanese". What Aoi meant by 'too Japanese' refers to the iconic photos of Japan: views of Zen gardens, a shot of the gallery overlooking a Zen garden, stone pathways covered in intense, healthy, green moss, shots of a canal with blooming cherry blossoms on each side and the night sky, the castle view, the curved path under closely lined-up red torii, etc. These are all examples of perfect, iconic images of Japan in the common imagination, these are photos of Japan that are 'too Japanese' because they are the surface-level experience of Japan, they are the self-induced experience of Japan. This obsession with the perfect capture of a view of Japan is particular when considering that part of the attempt to capture 'what is Japanese' is to capture wabi

[29] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 22, 2023.

sabi, which, ironically, is fundamentally opposed to perfection, symmetry and other characteristics that were attributed to Chinese aesthetics.

Yet, despite what might be perceived as an attempt to resist reproducing iconic shots of Japan and Japanese life, the everyday photo may itself fuel and feed into a conception of Japan and Japanese society that emphasizes its peculiarity and particularities. In one of my interviews with Monica, she recalled that one of the first pictures she took in and of Japan was a photo of the meat bun display at a convenience store. When I asked her why she took that picture, she replied explaining that she took a picture because it was an overly iconic object of Japanese quotidian life, something that is represented in popular culture (e.g. anime and manga) and in the moment the fact that it was such an accurate representation made the display iconically Japanese.[30] Monica also mentioned that the photo was taken because she wanted to be able to share it with her friends and family—to share how iconically Japanese the meat bun display was. In thinking about this, it seems to me that the combination of what appears to be particular about Japan and the sharing of it feed an ethos of Japan. Therefore, very mundane images can contribute to this ethos of Japan, they become another layer of iconic images of Japan. These mundane images, or photos of quotidian life and objects of Japanese society, sustain the exotic image of Japan through the emphasis on the curious, the peculiar, the particular, the strange, the amazing.

[30] Fieldwork interview with the author. June 10, 2023.

Figure 51
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 52
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 53
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 54
Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 54
Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 55
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 56
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 57
Kōchi City, Kōchi © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 58
Kyoto City, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 59
Kyoto City, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 60
Kyoto City, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

Figure 61
Kyoto City, Kyoto © 2023 Cindy Tat
Taken with a Kodak Ektar H35 on Kodak Ultramax 400

This rhetoric of (self-)exoticism, of (self-)Otherness is part of the overarching national identity and politics of difference. An example of a classic work on Japanese society and culture

that contributes to emphasizing the particularity of Japan is Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. This work was a result of a commission during the World War II in an attempt to understand Japanese society and particularly the willingness of Japanese soldiers for sacrifice and the "what makes Japan a nation of Japanese" (Benedict [1946] 2005, 13) that would explain Japan's action and behaviour, and more so Japanese solders' drive during the war (Benedict [1946] 2005). The book has encouraged and contributed to the myth of Japan. And this focus on difference is present in the aforementioned kinds of photos: the iconic images as well as the mundane and quotidian ones. So, the question that arises here is: when engaging in photographic activity in Japan, how are we to resist falling into this cycle of (re-)production of the myth? But before answering this, we need to ask ourselves why is it necessary to rethink how Japan is photographed? In other words, what is problematic about the iconic, familiar photos of Japan?

Provoke's Intentional Unintentionality

Knowing that travel photographs of Japan tend to limit the ways in which Japan can be imagined, what are some ways through which it is possible to resist falling into the cycle of (re-)producing limiting-images? How are we to change our gaze? How can we? How can we create new ways of seeing? What does it take to reshape a visual field that dominates and sustain the status quo? According to Hochberg (2015), "[t]his process involves not just tactical, physical interventions into the landscape, but also the manipulation of visual positions, new settings for spectatorship, new modes of appearance, and at times new modes of *dis*appearance, concealment, or refusal to appear. It also involves the ability to see one's own blindness and render visible one's failure to see" (3). What does it meant to be preoccupied with the denaturalization of not only notions of identity and borders but of "vision and the political construction of sight and visibility"?

One way is to reconsider the techniques from the Provoke movement. One suggestion offered by Hochberg (2015) is to shift away from popular media images (6). Using this vignette as a prompt for reflection, one the questions that came to mind was: Is one solution to go back to the core idea of the Provoke Manifesto (i.e. conceptualism over realism)? That is to say, the image is solely a document to complement language and ideology. How can understanding the familiar images of Japan as simply fragments of a reality help us avoid (re-)producing the myth in taking, sharing, circulating and reading these images? One of the takeaways from the Provoke era that can be useful in today's photography, in terms of resistance against the mainstream iconic images of

Japan, is the idea that one way to do and read photography is to conceptually understand it as a method through which the unknown can reveal itself (versus the idea that photography is a tool to capture reality). Hence, not only is it important to understand that the camera can only capture part of the reality, but also that the unknown can emerge from the images created.

Going back to the first example of the vignette, Vana took pictures with a disposable camera in the hope to capture fragments of her own reality, her lived experience in Japan, throughout a month. This recording of a single month in Kōchi was fragmentary. Each day, she allowed herself to take only one photo. This meant that aside from the moment the photo was taken, no other events that happened during the day would be recorded by the camera. Despite the intention behind each photo, in this experiment, Vana was able to let the unknown emerge by not knowing what the picture will look like the moment they will have been processed in the sense of whether they were successfully taken or not. This was possible, of course, because she was using a disposable film camera. The unknown in Vana's case was also the ability to draw memories from the pictures. What I mean by this refers to our inability to predict the feelings that will be felt and the memories that will be flow back while looking at the pictures, a month, a year from now. Vana may initially have intended to remember the 'moment', for example, walking with Tahlia and I in Yasui Valley, but perhaps, looking at these pictures, she would also remember the fresh air, the peaceful sound of the flowing water which varied in intensity, the humid and wet floor of the cave, the leaves rustling from breezes, etc. Or she may perhaps remember the statue placed in the middle of the path, or the old, painted map with which we tried to determine where the waterfall was. The example of Vana's experiment with a disposable camera illustrates how the unknown can emerge from photos (especially film photographs) because this permits us to practice travel photography that does not *au final* create limiting-images.

Furthermore, the discussion on captions or a descriptive text supplementing the image is relevant. A caption acts to anchor a single interpretation of the image in the mind of the audience; the more detailed the descriptive text is, the less room there is for the audience. For instance, Evan mentioned during our first conversation together that he rarely uses captions when he shares his pictures on social media (e.g. Instagram).[31] He specified that his rare use of captions might be related to his desire to let the image speak for itself. On the topic of hashtags and social media, he

[31] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 25, 2023.

said “I want people to look at my photos, but I don’t want to lose myself in wanting fame. I think there’s a balance, I definitely want to learn to do some balance. But I think starting to get into hashtags might make me more obsessed with it… You know, the darker part, or more obsessive part of social media.”[32] Captions and hashtags fuels the idea of a single reality, leaving out the fact that all photos are but a fragment, a snippet of a bigger whole, which could very have been staged, intentionally captured in a particular way, including or excluding elements from the frame, etc. In short, a photo never portrays nor convey the full picture.

In addition to the working against realism, the Provoke movement of the 1960s also opposed the idea of perfection. The Provoke Movement was established against the geopolitical context of the 1960s, against the conventions of documentary photography of the time, mostly against journalism photography, which using a single image to showcase “the reality.” Provoke’s aim was to highlight that an image can only be a fragment of reality. An image is, at the end of the day, a single snapshot. It is a single moment, potentially part of an event (i.e. not even the entire event). The concept of *are bure boke* came forth from the experimentation of Provoke, from that movement. Ultimately, *are bure boke* means “grainy, blurry and ‘out-of-focus’”. These grainy, blurry and ‘out-of-focus’ images permitted the Provoke movement to prove a point: that images are intentional (Kim 2015). The core of *are bure boke* was to question whether realism was possible. This meant to take anti-photographs. Photos that are not so-to-speak proper photos. Images created by the camera that do not conform to the norm of a travel photography (e.g. the Scenic View, the Selfie, the Group Picture, the Staged Photo, the Niche Photo). On the contrary, this means to take pictures that may be considered “accidents” or “wasted films” and being open to recognize that the reality portrayed by a photograph can always have been staged, manipulated, edited, or decontextualized.

The irony that even these anti-photographs can get turned into something very niche, very iconic is a tension that arises not so much because of photography itself but because of the changing nature of travel photography. By this, I mean naturally that picture-taking is now interlaced with social media platforms, with the act of sharing and posting images on the Internet. For example, the photos included in the visual vignette “The Other Side of Everything / 2023”, especially the ones portraying empty streets and back alleys (figs. 44, 45, 55 and 56), are for the

[32] Fieldwork interview with the author. March 25, 2023.

accustomed viewer iconic of the Japanese social life. They represent something extremely quotidian, a street in a residential area, a narrow back alley used by students, the almost too famous, orange-framed convex mirror in sharp corners. There are also potted plants that borders brick and stone walls of houses, which sometimes are left to their own, giving off an image of the resilience of life in a post-apocalyptic abandoned space (fig. 46). Then there is what resembled snapshots of a diary, as described by Aoi above, where the pictures seem almost random, and certainly so if they are without captions. Only the photographer knows the *where, when, why, what* and *how* of the image (see figures 51, 52, 54, 60 and 61).

Conclusion

This chapter explored how the collective imagination of Japan is based on the widespread dissemination of travel photographs whose production was intentional and aligned with propositions of *Nihonjinron*, nationalistic notions of a unique Japanese character. Familiar images of touristic sites, of cherry blossoms, of anonymous landscapes, of rice fields, all end up perpetuating a dominant visual field and a national-cultural identity concentrated on Japan as a particular place for all its contradictions yet ability to harmoniously reside in unity. The experience of Japan for both domestic and international travellers has become a matter of consuming Japan, involving 'chasing' elements that are vanishing—practices, events, places that are reminders.

One of these remnants is the *furusato*, the rural regions of Japan where traditions should have remained. The *furusato* presence serve to alleviate the discomfort that modern life has brought, it assuages the sense of cultural loss. Hence, even within the metropoles the *furusato* can be preserved. Places where "Japan of the old" can be experienced, such as the numerous temples and shrines in Kyoto, are like small cocoons in a big city. Crossing the gate almost feels like stepping into another world, like going back in time. Yet, ironically, most of the time these places a filled with crowds, with groups of travellers trying to take photos akin to the ones they saw online. Indeed, as seen with Fujitani's concepts of 'memoryscape' and 'mnemotic sites', these are devices used to emphasize an invented past (Fujitani 1993). Thus, it is in this way that the national-cultural identity of Japan is continuously being (re-)produced, leaving little space for divergence.

However, I have attempted, in my analysis, to demonstrate that it remains possible to engage in photographic activity in a way that would step towards working against the dominant narrative of the myth. Taking inspiration from the Provoke movement and their concept of *are*

bure boke, quotidian, imperfect, mundane photos of Japan may reveal another layer of reality to the experience of Japan.

Conclusion

This thesis was concerned with exploring the role of travel photographs in the conception and perception of Japan and the national-cultural identity of Japan. The goal of this research was to understand how picture-taking during travels in Japan is impacted by and impacts iconic photographs of Japan, and how the circulation and sharing of photographs of Japan construct and shape Japan in the imaginary. This research project was motivated by my need to understand the photos I took of Japan after having noticed habits in picture-taking and patterns in my photos. For instance, rare were the times I would photograph crowds or frame a photo with several individuals in it. I noticed a preference for photos void of physical human presence. Another pattern I observed was an attempt to replicate photos of a popular sightseeing spot I had seen before in brochures or on blogs. For example, I would often see pictures of Ginkaku-ji on Tumblr and when I went there for the first time, I had tried to frame my photo in order to reproduce something similar. These habits and patterns that I noticed lead me to wonder if these were widespread and if they were symptomatic of a larger discourse. My research questions were twofold: first, how do travel photographs of Japan shape the Japanese national-cultural identity nowadays, and second, what are Japanese and non-Japanese trying to capture when they engage in photographic activity while travelling in Japan? By 'travel photographs' this research focused mostly on photos taken by travellers in Japan, whether domestic or foreign tourists, however, I think it is meaningful to note that these photos circulate and have the tendency to become just as influential, credible, authentic as photographs produced by the Japanese government, such as official photographs on local government websites or from the Japanese National Tourism Organization (JNTO).

Fieldwork for this research project was done in Kōchi and Kyoto Prefectures where famous and more remote locations were visited. For example, in Kōchi, observation was done at Makino Botanical Garden, Chikurin-ji, Shikoku Karst, Ioki Cave, and in areas around the Niyodo River. And in the case of Kyoto, observation was done in Fushimi Inari, Kiyomizu-dera, Ginkakuji and Kinkakuji, Kibune Shrine and lesser-known shrines and temples as well as in Uji. Fieldwork interviews were conducted in tandem with photo-walks for observations. The participants for fieldwork interviews were recruited through the broad network of the JET Programme. In total there were twelve interlocutors, some of whom were more available to meet and, thus, several interviews were conducted. It is also worth mentioning that for two interlocutors, interviews were

done solely online as meeting was not an option due to conflict in schedule as well as not being in the same city.

All interlocutors had been living in Japan at the time of the interviews, ranging from six months to years, including individuals who have lived all their life in Japan. This range of participants proved to be insightful as the interlocutors provided varied responses on the same questions and topics and yet there were common themes that stood out overall. For instance, while most people took different kinds of photos (family, artistic, landscape, curiosities, flower pictures, selfies, etc.), some even rarely, they agreed that picture-taking was mostly practiced for the purpose of being able to capture moments and to have something through which they can recall the moment, the place, the smell, and the feelings. Informal interviews, contrary to photo-walks, permitted for a deeper understanding of the interlocutors' perspective and take on the Japanese national-cultural identity and on photography. The photographs I created during photo-walks with some of the interlocutors ended up being potent records that could be considered as part of this research's fieldnotes. Itineraries and locations of visits for the photo-walks were all decided by interlocutors, offering them the flexibility to choose themselves not only increase their interest but also was worth analyzing as well. Most photo-walks were done in places I had never been to. The photo-walks with interlocutors were a method that granted the opportunity for reflection, for thinking to happen (Pyyry 2015). And indeed, photo-walks further put into question photographic habits such as choice of locations, the object of the photos, the intention behind capturing certain things, and what is done with the photos produced.

Another method that was used as part of this research project was photo-elicitation. The intention behind using photo-elicitation as a method was to learn about interlocutors' way of seeing, that is to say, the way they read photos, and particularly photos of Japan since "the image is like a springboard," (Mohr 2016, 20) reflecting and projecting something about the audience himself or herself. Photo-elicitation also allows for a deeper dive into the interlocutors' consciousness, adding an additional layer of understanding of the topics of photography, photos of Japan and the Japanese national-cultural identity. In sum, photo-elicitation as a method was used for its ability to prompt engagement and evoke ideas and thoughts anchored in memories (Harper 2002). The photo-elicitation exercise was done online upon my return from the field. The photos used in the exercise were all ones I had taken myself during the field. Responses provided

by interlocutors during this exercise were analyzed and used to support the points regarding tendencies in reading images of Japan in a particular way, as seen in the chapter on wabi sabi and nostalgia.

The first chapter of this thesis examined the relationship between photography and travelling, this junction at which the results are travel photographs. The goal was to define the souvenir photograph and to situate it within the discourse on the national-cultural identity of Japan. As was seen in that chapter, photographs are produced as an attempt to capture, share and produce memories, to experience Japan, and these photographs are contributing to giving an identity to a space, that is to say, to turn a space into a known place. For example, photographs of Japan have created expectations, an imaginary of Japan that built over time, memories that were not so much lived as induced through the encounter, the reading of photos of Japan on Tumblr. The photo-walks photos and the series of pictures on urban gardens and vending machines were brought forward as examples of experiencing Japan while travelling. The former often time being the typical photos of landscapes whereas the latter represents a different take on the curiosities, the peculiarities that may often grab the attention of travelling individuals who have not yet taken the mundane, the day-to-day objects for granted. In both these cases, the emphasis was on experiencing Japan through the visit to unknown places, the amazement of curious or peculiar sights that are iconic in the imaginary of Japan. And it is, thus, through picture-taking that sites come to gain reputation among travellers, like Ioki Cave or the Niyodo River and life in Japan, and that certain objects become typically iconic of 'Japan' such as vending machines and urban gardens.

In the second chapter, the Japanese notion of aesthetics of wabi sabi was examined as one of the major characteristics of travel photographs and, as such, as what individuals attempt to capture. The reason for this resides in how elements of wabi sabi have been presented to the Japanese and non-Japanese audience. The Japanese appreciation of tea, or also known as "The Way of Tea" (or Teaism) played a major role in establishing characteristics of wabi sabi in common perception of Japanese society. Characteristics such as impermanence, humility, asymmetry, and imperfection are often found in photos of Japan.

Moreover, another element noticeable of travel photographs is the nostalgic feelings that emanate from them. Nostalgia, it seems, is another major aspect of travel photographs. On the one

hand, the term ‘travel photograph’ is in itself nostalgic as it brings to mind notions of past, and of memories and remembering. There is also the fascination with analogue photography, due to Japan’s history with the medium, whereby many individuals travel with not only their cellphones but also with a film camera around their neck. Nostalgia from the photos produced with film cameras tend to have particular aspects to them such as the tint, the hues, the grain, that make them nostalgic. Evidently, it has now become possible to use mobile apps or software to edit digital photographs to replicate the atmosphere or characteristics of analogue photography. Yet, despite this ability, film photography remains prevalent because nostalgia is derived from more than just the content of the photograph. In other words, nostalgia is partly derived from the activity of picture-taking and particularly with film cameras. As explained in the chapter, the use of film cameras involves loading in the film roll in the canister, winding the film using the spool, the shutter of each camera sounding slightly different, and then the wait associated with processing a completed film roll. The processed photos coming to the photographer as a letter in the mailbox, this effect of surprise comes together with nostalgic feelings. Picture-taking in this sense is nostalgic; cameras are nostalgic because to take a photo is to temporally displace the object.

Nostalgia in photographs of Japan was analyzed using the concept of *furusato*, and more broadly through feelings of homesickness and a desire of return. Souvenir photographs tend partly to be landscapes or iconic views in famous touristic sites. These represent a desire to return to a past. However, this is a past that is much in the present; *furusato* is conceptualized in a dialectical relationship between the new and the old. It is this contrast that permits, gives space, for this desire of return, this homesickness. Without the metropoles, the countryside has no meaning, and vice-versa. Photos of quintessential landscapes of the Japanese *furusato* are invoked to carry and maintain its desirability, and these are continuously being (re-)produced and captured by travellers precisely because they represent and articulate the dialectical relationship between old and new, a particularity emphasized in the Japanese national-cultural identity. Hence, both wabi sabi and romanticized nostalgia are what travellers attempt to capture in their photos of Japan.

The third chapter focused on examining photographs of Japan in relation to the Japanese national-cultural identity. Souvenir photographs of Japan reinforce the myth of Japan, which can be defined as an insistence on the uniqueness of Japanese society, because they emphasize the dialectical relationship between dualities in Japan such as urban/rural, new/old. Famous

photographic objects such as cherry blossoms, rice fields, moss-filled Zen gardens and paths are part of the notion of 'vanishing'. These are places gone but not quite, they are suspended between the present and past (Ivy 1995) and they are part of what travellers are attempting to capture. State-sponsored campaigns have concentrated heavily on the meaning of 'Japan' while trying to encourage individuals to travel more, to use the railways, to explore remote regions, boosting local economies. The *furusato* continuously being what individuals seek, the desire to capture an essence of the Japanese past always on the mind of travellers, this quest has become one of 'chasing Japan'. The experience of the Japanese national-cultural identity is, thus, formed, through the consumption of its past, which is not quite the past in so much as it is past constantly re-shaped, re-adjusted, re-invented for the present.

In this chapter, photographic images of Japan were analyzed using two concepts: Alloula's (1986) 'counterfeit realism' and Hochberg's (2015) 'limiting-images'. On the one hand, 'counterfeit realism' refers to the way in which a body of visual data is able to present certain aspects of a society as reality. Important here is not that photographs of Japan are unreal or made up, rather through the redundancy and repetition of certain symbols, certain views, places, events, etc. the real is made more real. In other words, certain elements of Japanese society are elevated to become markers of authenticity and, thus, reality itself. On the other hand, this redundancy and repetition through the reproduction and circulation of the of similar symbols, views, places, events, etc. limits the possibilities of the visual field and visual culture of Japan. That is to say, the significant volume of photos of cherry blossoms, for example, overtakes the visual field of Japan and this serves to create a perception of Japan that is conditioned to equate cherry blossoms with the Japanese national-cultural identity. Hence, through these two concepts, souvenir photographs can be conceptualized as attempts to capture the experience of Japan, the 'chasing' of a Japan that seems constant and whose authenticity is continuously being re-adjusted and re-fashioned into the myth.

Potential Contribution & Limitations

This research is situated at the junction of photography and the discourse on Japanese identity (*Nihonjinron*). Its focus on travel photographs reveals contemporary practices of picture-taking that are enmeshed with the tourism industry, social media platforms and perhaps even performativity. It has considered the way in which a photograph is conceptualized and the versality

of the medium, putting into question the influence of Photography and the influence of the Photograph has over on matters such as nationalism. The medium has been used as a tool in imperialist and colonialist endeavours but as seen with the Provoke Movement, photography can also be used to contest dominant narratives and trends, to challenge and unsettle. Within the discourse on the Japanese national-cultural identity, this research comes after the COVID-19 pandemic, a period through which Japan saw, because of border closure, its economy in decline. Especially for Kyoto, a prefecture that relies heavily on both domestic and international tourism, it was labeled "bankrupted" by the popular media (Boyd and Johnston 2021; Craft 2022). The relevance here is that once the borders opened in October 2022, Japan saw a surge of to tourists in the subsequent months, particularly in spring 2023 as spring is the high-season to visit Japan due to the blooming cherry-blossoms.

This re-opening of borders gave a chance to Japan to recalibrate its own national-cultural identity, yet it appears that little has changed, and travellers continue to seek authentic experiences of Japan through tea ceremony, the wearing of kimono, attending *matsuri*, visits to shrines and temples. It would be mistaken to consider this research a simple critique of ways of experiencing Japan. On the contrary, this research contributes to the discourse on Japanese national-cultural identity by pointing out the photographic and travelling habits of visitors (myself included). It contributes to the discourse by demonstrating our role in maintaining and sustaining perceptions of Japan—some of which are stereotypical—as well as portrayals of Japan as possessing a unique character and essence.

One limitation of this research is that it focuses heavily on the photographs I took, rather than provided photos taken by interlocutors and analyzing their photographic habits through the photos they create. This would be an interesting aspect to consider and perhaps even a method to include in further research, where interlocutors could be given a disposable camera and to shoot with during photo-walks, and alternatively they could decide to use both digital and analogue, allowing the researcher to observe how they proceed to use each. Furthermore, there are many kinds of photos of Japan being created and produced. This research was limited to travel photographs. For example, photographs that tend to be more niche or catered to a particular audience such as photos of trains and train stations, photos of small, nondescript shrines, or again photos of plants and flowers have not been explored in detail. However, these niches represent the

different layers and the complexities of the discourse on Japanese photography. These are just a few examples of how broad the visual field is.

Furthermore, this research was limited to Kōchi and Kyoto due to limited resources such as time, scope, and budget. While these are relevant locations, they nevertheless do not represent nor articulate the intricacies and complex relationships of other prefectures with travel photographs. Additionally, I had intended to visit more sites in Kōchi prefecture such as Muroto Global Geopark Center, the Kōchi Prefectural Ashizuri Aquarium and the Ashizuri Underwater Observation. However, due to their locations and inaccessibility, I was unable to visit them during fieldwork, thus, limiting my observation to fewer sites closer to the city centre or to observation possible on the basis of photo-walks.

Another limitation to this research is the focus on a single notion of Japanese aesthetics, wabi sabi. There are more notions of aesthetics that have not been explored such as the notions of '*kekkai*' which means "the boundary or limit from which the quality of spaces is determined and built" (Leleu 2020), '*fuzei*' which refers to a feeling that resonates with the mind (Robert 2021), and '*mu*', referring to the void (Yanagi 2018). These are just a few notions that have not been explored, but there are surely more that articulate a sense of *mono no aware,* or a sensibility to the pathos of things. A further examination of these notions could reveal even more about what travel photographs of Japan are trying to capture and how they, in turn, contribute to the imagery and imaginary of Japan.

This research was partly exploratory as it ventured to include visual vignettes. The objective of these vignettes was to provide space for the reader to engage with the visual data, offering an additional role to images within this research. These vignettes also were part of process of doing anthropology, they allowed me to reflect on themes significant to this research after coming back from the field and provided support for this thesis.

Avenues for Future Research

One possible avenue for future research pertains to further developing an understanding of photographs of Japan using Hochberg's (2015) proposal that *witnessing* is a counter-visual practice. If the long-term goal is to transform the visual field of photographs of Japan and move away from a visual field dominated by souvenir photographs, then it will be necessary to adopt a

method that is based on two things: eyewitness accounts and visual evidence (Hochberg 2015). I think that this lead us back to the discussion on captions and social media. The rapid and voluminous circulation of souvenir photographs and iconic views of Japan on social media platforms tend to lack proper textual support. Many photos on Tumblr simply have the location as the title or caption. This lack of description leaves photographs of Japan to be open to interpretation, and with a limited visual field, interpretations tend to revolve around the same perceptions of Japan. To counter this lack of detail, accounts of photographs would help support the visual data and give it context and meaning.

Another avenue for future research pertains to performativity. I believe it would be interesting to understand how these travel photographs of Japan become part of an experience to be had, and, more significantly even, how these photographs are used to market it as such. Especially in the context of popular imagery of Japan and popular culture such as manga, anime and movies, the consumption of Japan and 'chasing' Japan seems to be linked to an attempt to hunt down locations of famous (manga, anime, movie) scene. How is this affecting the environment and local residents, the social dynamics surrounding a particular site? How is this particular experience of Japan to be understood?

Lastly, on a personal level, writing this thesis felt like bringing closure to a decade-long relationship with images of Japan. Sontag ([1977 2019]) wrote about the refusal to take photos; I would be lying if I said what when I read her essay prior to fieldwork, I did not think about putting an end to my incessant picture-taking, or at least, limiting the volume of photos I produce. However, it turned out that I took more photos in the two months on the field than when I lived in Japan for three years. I also want to believe that once this project comes to an end, my photographic habits will have changed but I know old habits are hard to get rid of. I can only say that now I have more tools at my disposition for a more conscientious use of the camera and social media.

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