



Kirsten L. Ziomek. *Lost Histories: Recovering the Lives of Japan's Colonial Peoples.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019. xix + 406 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-674-23728-5.

Reviewed by Brian W. Platt (George Mason University)

Published on H-Diplo (June, 2020)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

The past fifteen years or so have seen a dramatic growth in the scholarship on Japanese imperialism, with the publication of dozens of impressive books on the topic. We now know much more about, for example, the reach and complexity of the colonial apparatus, the interdependent relationship between the colonies and the metropole, and the engagement of Japanese citizens in the colonial project—both settlers and those who remained in the home islands. Kirsten L. Ziomek's remarkable book *Lost Histories* occupies a unique place within this wave of scholarship and represents a valuable contribution to it. Its uniqueness lies not in the fact that her focus is on Japan's colonial subjects rather than its colonial apparatus or its settlers (though this, too, is relatively unusual). What is novel is her focus on colonial subjects—primarily Ainu, Okinawan, and aboriginal Taiwanese—who participated actively in the ethnoraacial pedagogy of empire by performing their indigeneity before an audience of mainland Japanese.

Ziomek's book is divided into three sections. The first and largest part focuses on Ainu, Taiwanese, and Okinawan people who were featured in the "human displays" at exhibitions, both in Japan and abroad, during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The second section is about the tours sponsored by colonial offices in which colonized peoples were brought to the metropole

with the intent of educating and assimilating them through exposure to the glories of civilizations (a practice called *naichi kankō*). The third section explores the lives of Ainu in Hokkaido, who played lead roles in the tourist industry during the prewar and postwar era. Throughout the book, Ziomek seeks to highlight the agency and complex humanity of the individuals who participated in these practices. Some scholars have looked at these practices primarily as expressions of the colonial gaze,[1] while others have studied the anticolonial nationalist critiques of those practices articulated by Okinawans, Chinese, and Koreans.[2] Ziomek, however, focuses on the details of the lives of the colonial subjects who participated in them in an effort to achieve "a more nuanced analysis of how colonial subjects moved and lived within Japan's imperial spaces" (p. 11).

The human displays at expositions in the early twentieth century are perhaps the most well known of these three topics. The Japanese authorities organized several such displays. The first was in the "Human Pavilion" at the 1903 Industrial Exposition in Osaka. Several more displays followed over the ensuing decade, including two abroad (at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904 in St. Louis, and the 1910 Japan-British Exposition in London) and three more in Japan (in Tokyo in 1907 and 1912, and in Osaka in 1913). The displays,

most of them organized by the anthropologist Tsuboi Shōgorō, permitted those with a ticket to view peoples from around the world. Following the example of similar events in Europe, the displays featured only those peoples presumed to be uncivilized, and they included those who had recently been brought under Japanese colonial rule: Ainu, Okinawans, and Taiwanese (both aboriginal and those of Han ethnicity). These people were contracted to perform their ethnicity, living on-site in supposedly authentic houses, while wearing traditional clothing.

Historians who have written about these displays have seen them as expressions of Japanese orientalism: an effort by the Japanese to construct an image of the national self as “civilized” by displaying Japan’s colonized peoples in the role of primitive “others,” thus providing moral justification for their colonial project—a practice that they had learned from their own encounter with European imperialism. Historians have also written at some length about the reaction of commentators from those ethnic groups, who were upset not as much by the spectacle itself as by being included in the category of “uncivilized” peoples.

Ziomek does not dispute this scholarly understanding of the displays but mines a variety of sources—contemporary newspaper accounts, postcards, oral histories, gravestones—in order to reconstruct the lives of those colonial subjects who were on display. She writes about Fushine Kōzō, the Ainu Christian who normally dressed in Western clothing but grew a beard and wore Ainu clothing for the 1903 Osaka exhibition, motivated by the goal of earning money to support Ainu schooling. Ziomek also tells the story of two Okinawan prostitutes who played the role of Shuri princesses at the exhibition. Through her research in Okinawa we also learn of the local rumor that one of these two women was able to use the income she made during the exhibit to build a nice house upon her return to Okinawa—and, sadly, that the other likely committed suicide at some point after her return.

We also learn a great deal about the experience of the participants while they were on display. They went sightseeing and bought souvenirs. Those who participated in the exhibitions abroad often learned English and sometimes interacted extensively with visitors to the exhibit. In London, for example, the Ainu participants worked collaboratively with the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Pilsudski, who had lived in Hokkaido and took the opportunity provided by the London exhibition to conduct further research into Ainu language and culture. Ziomek’s book also sheds light on the tensions surrounding the visits. One participant, a renowned Ainu wood carver, reportedly threw a ladleful of water at spectators who had gathered around the window of his home—remember, these were living human displays—while trying to watch him carve wood. Some participants were offended by the visitors’ habit of peering at them through the windows of their display houses. Some of the participants at the 1913 Osaka exhibit heard that those in the 1912 Tokyo exhibit were paid more generously and then complained that their per diem didn’t cover the cost of beer. As she did in the case of the two aforementioned Okinawan prostitutes, Ziomek also tracked down what happened to many of the participants upon their return. One Taiwanese man, Tugie Kalowan, later worked for the colonial government and played a key role in quelling rebellions by other aboriginal peoples in Taiwan. The Taiwanese in the London exhibition, due to their facility with English and their prior experience abroad, were depicted as sophisticated, “high-collar barbarians,” and were sometimes called upon to receive foreign visitors.[3] After returning, some took the opportunity to chide their Japanese colonial masters for the appearance of their cities, which they determined to be unimpressive in comparison to London.

The second section of the book is similarly rich with details about the colonial subjects who participated in the effort to teach or embody ethnoracial difference—in this case, by participating in the Japanese government’s effort to provide representa-

tives of the ethnic groups under its imperial umbrella with the opportunity to tour the metropole. There is the story of Aliman Siken and Dahu Ali, two aboriginal rebels in Taiwan who, after a long, violent struggle against the Japanese authorities, were granted immunity in exchange for their participation in ceremonies in which they performed their submission to Japanese colonial rule. Ziomek also provides a memorable account of Yayutz Bleyh, a Taiwanese aboriginal woman who, after exposure to the metropole, returned to her people as—in the eyes of the Japanese, at least—a civilizing influence. Yayutz married a Japanese man under unusual circumstances, graduated from a Japanese language school in Taipei, spent time in Japan’s major cities under much scrutiny from the media, and proceeded to work for many years in the Japanese colonial government. Her proficiency in Japanese, her love story with her husband, and her exotic beauty—marked by her facial tattoo, which she later had removed—her made her catnip to the Japanese media. While the Japanese narrative of her life emphasizes her role as a translator and educator among the savages, Ziomek highlights her role as a colonial official (in both the internal affairs and aboriginal affairs offices) to point out the extent to which colonial governments relied on colonial subjects like Yayutz to govern the empire.

Ziomek uncovers more memorable stories while discussing the development of the Ainu tourist industry in the prewar and postwar periods. One of the early leaders in that industry was a man named Ekashiteba, an Ainu who as a fifteen-year-old participated in a performance of Ainu culture for the Emperor Meiji during an imperial tour in 1881. Another leader in the tourist industry, Ekashimatoku, fought in the Russo-Japanese War in the Japanese cavalry before devoting much of his life to representing and teaching Ainu culture in the burgeoning tourist industry. He also played a key role in a remarkable incident that highlights the tensions within Ainu society surrounding the tourist industry. After the war, while entertaining

Occupation officials in Hokkaido—one of whom was Herbert Passin, a noted Japanologist at Columbia—an Ainu youth interrupted one of Ekashimatoku’s Ainu dances and castigated him for “making a spectacle of us” and “treating us as barbarians” (p. 336). Ziomek also explores the additional tensions generated by the tourist industry in postwar Hokkaido due to the encroachment of Japanese entrepreneurs who arrived from the mainland to profit off it.

This review has focused on the people and stories in Ziomek’s book not only because they are so memorable but also because it is a central purpose of the book to recover them—to bring to light the “lost stories” that are either silent in the colonial archives or are skewed by their retellings within the metropole. Two additional arguments run through the book and help to tie its stories together: first, that the Japanese colonial government relied on colonial subjects to enact its rule; and second, that the ideology of ethnoracial difference that undergirded the colonial order was appropriated by colonial subjects to their own advantage. These arguments are not entirely new, and they prompt key follow-on questions: What was the extent, and the effect, of this reliance on colonial subjects? And what were the limits of the agency entailed in those subjects’ acts of appropriation? These are enduring questions in the historiography on colonial rule, and Ziomek could hardly be expected to settle them. What she has done, however, through her dogged research, is to force us to bring greater precision and empathy to our arguments about ethnicity and agency in colonial rule, in view of the lived experience of colonial subjects. In that sense, the book is truly a gift, one that I hope will feature prominently in future scholarship and teaching on the topic.

Brian Platt is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of History and Art History at George Mason University. He also directs the Smithsonian-Mason Graduate Certificate in Digital Public Humanities. He is the author of Burning and

Building: Schooling and State Formation in Japan, 1750-1890 (2004) and, more recently, “Farmer-Soldiers and Local Leadership in Late Edo-Period Japan,” in *The Meiji Restoration: Japan as a Global Nation*, edited by Robert Hellyer and Harold Fuess (2020).

Notes

[1]. Arnaud Nanta, “Colonial Expositions and Ethnic Hierarchies in Modern Japan,” in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. Pascal Blanchard (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 248-58.

[2]. Alan Christy, “The Making of Imperial Subjects in Okinawa,” in *positions: east asia cultures critique* 1, no. 3 (1993): 607-39; Lisa Claypool, “Sites of Visual Modernity: Perceptions of Japanese Exhibitions in Late Qing China,” in *The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art*, ed. Josh Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 154-80; and Hyeokhui Kwon, “An Analysis of Korean Intellectual Responses to the Exhibition of Koreans at Japanese Expositions,” *Sunkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (April 2017): 19-40.

[3]. This phrase was used in the Japanese press to describe the group of Formosans who visited Kobe and Osaka following their participation in the 1910 London Exhibition. See pp. 131-134.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

Citation: Brian W. Platt. Review of Ziomek, Kirsten L. *Lost Histories: Recovering the Lives of Japan’s Colonial Peoples*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. June, 2020.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=54757>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.