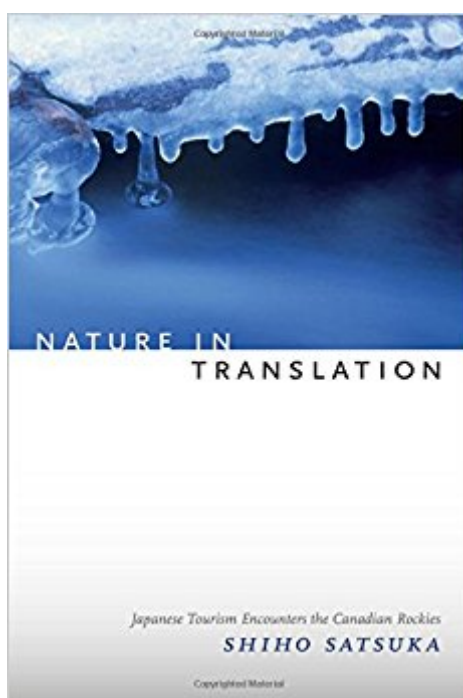


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Nature In Translation: Japanese Tourism Encounters The Canadian Rockies



Synopsis

Nature in Translation is an ethnographic exploration in the cultural politics of the translation of knowledge about nature. Shiho Satsuka follows the Japanese tour guides who lead hikes, nature walks, and sightseeing bus tours for Japanese tourists in Canada's Banff National Park and illustrates how they aspired to become local "nature interpreters" by learning the ecological knowledge authorized by the National Park. The guides assumed the universal appeal of Canada's magnificent nature, but their struggle in translating nature reveals that our understanding of nature—including scientific knowledge—is always shaped by the specific socio-cultural concerns of the particular historical context. These include the changing meanings of work in a neoliberal economy, as well as culturally-specific dreams of finding freedom and self-actualization in Canada's vast nature. Drawing on nearly two years of fieldwork in Banff and a decade of conversations with the guides, Satsuka argues that knowing nature is an unending process of cultural translation, full of tensions, contradictions, and frictions. Ultimately, the translation of nature concerns what counts as human, what kind of society is envisioned, and who is included and excluded in the society as a legitimate subject.

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Customer Reviews

"This brilliant exposition of postcolonial translation shows how nature emerges through lively reworkings of the West. Shiho Satsuka frees science studies, still trapped inside the imagined closure and coherence of the West, to address environmental knowledge in a diverse world. *Nature in Translation* is a pioneering intervention." (Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, coeditor of *Words in Motion*:

Toward a Global Lexicon)"Shiho Satsuka's intimate and rich ethnography vividly and meticulously traces these tour guides' dreams of self-making, aspiration, joys, and perhaps inevitably disappointments, through their work as nature's translators. Satsuka reveals the extent to which the conditions of possibility of the way of life they have chosen are critically linked up with post-war Japan-U.S. relations, the accelerated globalization of the Japanese political economy, and the genealogy of the linguistic and social reception of the western concepts such as freedom and subjectivity. *Nature in Translation* is a sheer joy to read." (Miyako Inoue, author of *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan*) "*Nature in Translation* is an excellent ethnographic monograph that is both theoretically innovative and eminently readable.... Her work is pioneering in bringing both the Japanese studies and STS into one volume.... *Nature in Translation* is an excellent read for scholars and students who are interested in contemporary Japan as well as science studies of nature. Satsuka's discussion of translation should provide fertile theoretical ground for upcoming studies on STS, and it has also opened up exciting new ways to study contemporary Japan." (Satsuki Takahashi *Journal of Anthropological Research*) "I... recommend this book to serious scholars of the cross-cultural dimensions of tourism. It is not a light read but it is an insightful read for tourism scholars with an interest in nature, translation and cross-cultural interactions." (Tom Hinch *Tourism Geographies*) "...an extraordinary achievement; a work at once ethnographically sensitive and theoretically innovative – not to mention operating as a marvelous travel guide to the travels of other guides. I hope this beautiful ethnography will be read widely by those who are interested in postcolonial science studies, in ecology, Japan studies, in the ontological turn(s) in STS and anthropology, and, of course, in multispecies anthropology." (Moe Nakazora *Science as Culture* 2016-03-04) "*Nature in Translation* will interest many who wish to know more about how perceptions of nature and environment, as well as the explanatory framework, vary in different cultures and intellectual traditions, between Japan and Canada in particular. It will also benefit those in tourism studies in that it directs our attention to more complicated touristic encounters than a simple and straightforward encounter between hosts and guests." (Okpyo Moon *Journal of Japanese Studies* 2017-02-28)

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How do you translate nature in Japanese? The obvious answer is *shizen* – the word “shizen” is the dictionary translation of

Shizen (自然) is not so obvious, at least for historians of Japanese thought. Shizen is a Japanese pronunciation of the Taoist concept of ziran, drawn from Laozi. It describes the condition of artlessness or a situation happening without human intention. Its opposite is the notion of *sakui* (作), or invention, the forces of human agency that intervene to create social order. The opposition between shizen and sakui, between the natural way of heaven and earth and the power of human creation, was revived after the Second World War by public intellectual Maruyama Masao when he tried to identify the responsibility for Japan's wartime aggression. In order to exonerate the Emperor who remained in place as a symbol of the Japanese nation, the war was narrated as if it happened naturally, and ordinary Japanese people were framed as the victims of the war. For Maruyama, who chose to emphasize the forces of sakui as first conceptualized by Confucian scholar Ogyō Sorai, the ambiguity in the notion of shizen, and the difficulty to find a proper translation for human subjectivity, was precisely at stake. In order to reenter the international community as rational agents, the Japanese needed to establish a new spirit of individual autonomy, or shutaisei, and to overcome nature as shizen. Only so could they find a proper sense of freedom (*jizai*)—another concept that was difficult to translate, as the word *jizai* retains the meaning of its origin in the Buddhist expression of *jizai*, which designates liberation as self-detachment. For Shiho Satsuka, translating nature takes a different meaning. Trained as an anthropologist in the intellectual hotbed of the University of California at Santa Cruz, she did her graduate fieldwork training as a travel guide in the Canadian National Park of Banff, a destination favored by Japanese tourists. Her book, drawn from her PhD thesis and published in 2015, analyzes the way Japanese tour guides translate ecological knowledge into lived experience. Translation of nature involves much more than finding proper Japanese equivalents of English notions. As Shiho Satsuka states, it “concerns what counts as human, what kind of society is envisioned, and who is included in the society as a legitimate subject.” The focus of the book is on the tour guides, not on the tourists they accompany. In classic anthropological fashion, the author elaborates from her field notes to describe how the guides left Japan and came to Canada to live in “magnificent nature”; what image they held from Canada and how it contrasted with the reality they found there; how they went through training and transformed themselves into service workers; and how they negotiated issues of gender, cultural difference, knowledge politics, and personal identity. The book mobilizes a vast array of authors and theories, Western and Japanese, while

staying close to the lived experience and worldviews of the tour guides that the author befriended during her anthropological fieldwork. Japanese guides offer *freedom* to account for their departure from Japan and their adoption of a new lifestyle in the Canadian Rockies. Their decision to leave Japan coincided with a period of national angst and crisis. In a newly established neoliberal environment, the meaning of *freedom* became a contentious issue. The *furitomo* captured the imagination of a generation aspiring to detach itself from the secure but constrained environment of the corporation. Becoming a *furitomo* was often a choice born out of necessity, or necessity made virtue, in the context of widespread liberalization of corporate regulations and labor laws that resulted in growing youth unemployment and precariousness. In the midst of economic change, as the Japanese economy moved from bubble years to prolonged depression, a growing number of young adventurers escaped from Japan to go overseas for self-searching travel. In their pursuit for freedom, they chose to drop out of, or not participate in the Japanese corporate system. A number of them found in Canada and its national parks a convenient site to reinvent themselves and establish their new subjectivities. Some thought guiding was their dream job, while others only considered it as transitional work until they found what they really wanted to do with their lives. Their aspirations were projected onto *magnificent nature*: Canadian natural environment offered the canvas on which they could reinvent themselves, unfettered by national boundaries, cultural norms, and social rules. Moving to Canada offered them what they couldn't find in their home society: the opportunity to pursue freedom and the choice to live one's own life as a self-standing individual. Japan was perceived as oppressing the true, authentic self with layers upon layers of social rules and obligations. Escaping to the West was a way to take back control of one's life and to embrace the centrality of the individual. At the same time, Canada provided a version of Western subjectivity distinct from the American model, an alternative space in which nature played a significant part in the guides' construction of subjectivities. Japanese candidates to Canadian immigration were often attracted by mere pictures, anecdotes, or TV shows depicting life in the wilderness. They embraced the image of the natural park's guide as a figure of independence and freedom—a person who had a solid sense of her own subjectivity and the ability to move beyond national, social, and cultural boundaries. Shiho Satsuka tracks the construction of this imaginary space in the work of a value entrepreneur, former politician

and popular television entertainer, Ohashi Kyosen, who provided his readers with the dream vision of *ikigai* – “living one’s own life free from the company and nation, the two most important social contexts in shaping a sarariman’s life. Although Ohashi’s main target was more the young male retirees whose corporate alienation had left them bereft of any social ties, his vision was also influential among young office ladies and freeters who found that the corporate ladder was closed to them and chose to escape to a world of unbound possibilities. What they discovered in Canada was that work was still work, and that becoming a tour guide entailed what the author labels a *kyosei* – “co-modification of the self. As service workers, they were enjoined by their training manager to become a commodity, in the sense that their public expected to consume a commodified performance similar to the one offered by an artist or an entertainer. Co-modification also designates the modification and production of self through interactions with nature and with the public who came to see the guides as a reflect of their environment. Becoming a commodity therefore had a quite different meaning from that of the commodification of labor that Marx saw as a centerpiece of capitalist exploitation. If anything, the commodity or *shin* implicit in this process of self transformation retains the qualities of premodern craftsman’s production. There was a tension between the unique skills and personalities of each guide, their obligation to act with *shin* – “sincerity and *shin* – “authenticity, and the demands of mass tourism which asked for a standardized level of comfort and quality of service. Each trainee was therefore encouraged to build his or her unique narrative, while assimilating the rules and procedures listed in a hefty manual. There was a Zen-like quality in their apprenticeship, as the trainees had to guess what the managers and senior guides had in mind even though they did not spell out their intentions. They were invited to blend with nature and transform themselves into locals, while retaining some traits of *old-style* Japanese behavior. For their instructor, the perfect match between a person and his or her surrounding was the foundation for attaining *jiyū* – “freedom, in the sense that the Buddhist tradition gives to the term *jiyū* – *jizai*. To achieve this notion of freedom, it is important to train one’s own body and mind, and let oneself detach from one’s self-interest in order to become one with nature. The guides’ performance as *Japanese cosmopolitans* were the result of this co-modification of self and environment. For the Japanese tourists, the guides embodied the cosmopolitan dream of escaping the standard course of stable yet constraining lives of salaried workers in order to live a frugal yet fulfilling life in nature. Despite this or because of this the

stereotypical association of outdoor activity and masculine culture, female outdoor guides played a particularly significant role. They performatively constructed their subjectivities as people who could transcend the dominant gendered norms. By doing so, they produced a charismatic aura and presented themselves as mediators with the special ability to go back and forth between the everyday world and an elsewhere, imaginarily staged on Canada's vast natural landscape. Shiho Satsuka draws the portrait of three of these charisma guides, referring them to familiar gender figures in Japanese pop culture: the male-impersonating female found in girls' high schools or Takarazuka plays; the tomboy who refuses to grow up and fall into assigned gender roles; and the girl medium fighting to save the world as in video games or anime movies. The ambiguous characteristics of female tour guides who straddled various sets of two worlds • male and female, adult and child, and human and nature • exemplifies the limits of standard binary frameworks used for categorizing human beings. It shows that being female is not a "natural fact" but a cultural performance: choosing a gender category for oneself or others is not necessarily based on a biological body, but on a person's social role and position in everyday interactions. Here the author makes reference to the work of Judith Butler, but her "gender trouble in nature" is devoid of any militant charge, and gender ambiguity is presented as an everyday fact of life. If anything, the gender roles performed by female outdoor guides are more "natural" than the artificial roles assigned to young women in Japanese society. Japanese outdoor guides offer "nature in translation": they are expected to tell the stories of nature as if they were national park interpreters. In the park managers' view, ecological science is the basis of understanding nature's language. Guides play a role of environmental stewardship as a result of a neoliberal privatization process that has outsourced nature's protection to the commercial sector. But nature and science take on different meanings in English and in Japanese. The Japanese guides' participation in an accreditation program revealed discrepancies of worldview that locate humans in relation to nature. Japanese participants asked more questions about plant and rocks as opposed to animals, they did not laugh when their instructor ironically hugged a tree, and they had trouble translating notions like "nature interpretation" or "stewardship" into Japanese. In their view, the guide was not a decoder of nature's true message but more like a matchmaker between the tourists and the landscape. They let nature do the talk. This doesn't mean that

Japanese guides were not interested in environmental science and technical knowledge as dispensed in the training program: on the contrary, they were keen to update themselves with the latest research by the park scientists, and embraced the principles of environmental conservation. But they insisted that nature was much larger than any person's ability to grasp it, and their questioning suggested that the dividing line between nature and society varies across cultures. The notion of stewardship, which implies that man is accountable for this world and has to answer to a higher authority about its management, is not easily translated into other religious and knowledge traditions. Multiculturalism and environmental protection are two key areas in which Canada has assumed a self-assigned leading role in the world. They have become pillars of Canadian national identity, a source of pride and attractiveness in a world where these two values are put under stress. But nature conservation is seldom seen with the prism of multiculturalism. Instead, ecology has adopted the language of science, with the underlying assumption that scientific knowledge is culturally neutral and universally applicable to people with diverse backgrounds. By following the trail of Japanese tour guides in Banff, Shiho Satsuka shows that nature needs to be understood as a constant process of translation. Ecology as a language is inseparable from the politics of knowledge translation: notions such as nature, freedom, work, or identity are constantly renegotiated in distinct social contexts. The Japanese guides portrayed by the author occupy a liminal space away from mainstream Japanese and Canadian societies. But these service workers have much to tell us about what it means to inhabit nature as cosmopolitan agents seeking freedom and independence in a globalizing world. This book, the first one published by the author, also demonstrates the proper value of a graduate education in anthropology. Anthropology is a discipline that addresses big issues – the relation between mankind and nature, the political economy of neoliberalism and flexible work, the definition of freedom and subjectivity – in a located and situated manner. Theory – and this is a theoretically rich book – always come as a tool to understand our present in concrete situations. Her graduate education has provided Shiho Satsuka with a rich toolbox of concepts and references, but more important to her was the patient learning and questioning accumulated during ethnographic fieldwork. This book marks the birth of a great anthropologist.

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