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## Running Dogs in Capitalist Japan

Aaron Herald Skabelund, *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2011. xv + 267 pp. \$39.95 hc.

When I was in Yokohama this summer I made sure to observe the dogs, since I knew I would be reviewing Aaron Skabelund's *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World*. In fact, the book was my airplane reading for the trip to and from Japan. Here is what I saw. A brown toy poodle who had been trimmed to look like a teddy bear riding around in a baby carriage — teddy bear poodles are all the rage, apparently. A long-haired dachshund on a hot day in a Union Jack coat. A nasty Yorkshire terrier that loved one member of a family and growled at and bit the rest. A pet shop that sold miniature dogs, and lots and lots of pet clothes, but no toys. Here's what I did not see: Akitas, Shiba inus, or any other "Japanese" breeds of dogs (except for a picture of what was maybe a Kishu inu (white, fluffy, spitz-like) advertising a cell phone company). These observations supported Aaron Skabelund's claim that "dogs not only became pets, they were more than ever transformed into products" in postwar Japan (172).

Indeed, the claims of *Empire of Dogs* are generally quite convincing. Skabelund's thesis is that "dogs, both real and ... completely imagined, teamed with humans to construct imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and ..., in turn, imperialism shaped the world of dog breeding and dog keeping as we know it today," and he develops this thesis with specific concentration on Japan (1). He cleverly uses the story of Hachikō, the loyal Akita who waited every day for his master outside a Tokyo train station for years after the man died, to illustrate and question imperial constructions of dogs. The result is a readable historical overview of the interbreeding between dogs and imperialism in Japan since the nineteenth century with a stimulating thesis to give it substance. It is a little light on theory — I would have welcomed a bit of Haraway on dogs, for instance — but the acknowledgments make clear that Skabelund is approaching his subject as an historian rather than an animals studies theorist, so the lack is not as disappointing as it might be. Smooth writing and transitions, avoidance of specialized language, minimal bowing to sources, and the employment of Hachikō as guardian spirit, all contribute to a readable and lively book, if not one as revelatory as one might hope.

The book comprises an introduction and five chapters that are organized chronologically, as well as a number of illustrations, both black and white and in color. I wished for a chart and listing of the Japanese Kennel Club's recognized Japanese dog breeds, something that would have served both as a source of information and as an illustration of many of the points Skabelund makes about notions of purity and nationalism in dog breeding. The introduction points out that the movement from casual breeding for usefulness to more concentrated breeding for appearance paralleled movement from dogs as workers or, more usually, as another species inhabiting the same geographical area as humans, to possessions. These changes also paralleled the human rise in imperialism, and all of these parallels moved from Europe to Japan with imperial expansion. Or, as Skabelund says, "dogs and imperialism were inextricably intertwined and mutually sustaining" (30). He stresses dogs' pliability: they "pass between domestication and wildness" (6) and "oscillate between high-status animals and low-status people" (7), which reminded me of their genetic plasticity as well. The introduction also asks, "Can the Subaltern Bark?" (13): that is, what can we learn by exploring the changing social context of dogs in culture, rather than, what can we learn by listening to the dogs themselves. Oh, well. It isn't quite the same, somehow, although it is still very interesting, to study, as Skabelund does, photographs and taxidermy of dogs in Japan, in order to understand the relationship between dogs and humans.

Chapter One, "The Native Dog and The Colonial Dog," explores how European and American colonizers employed "the rhetoric of civilization and scientific racism" (18) to contrast the sleazy, vicious, cowardly native street dogs they encountered in the colonies with the adorable, loyal, brave, and refined dogs they imported. Skabelund reviews Harriet Ritvo's important work in *The Animal Estate* (1987) and elsewhere to develop this theme, particularly the "identification of certain dog breeds with particular nation-states" and "hierarchy ... that valued breeds that originated in colonial metropolises far more than canines associated with those regions that were objects of imperialist ambition" (23). He observes that most dogs associated with colonial areas were not domesticated breeds but wild canines, and that those dogs recognized as breeds were generally lapdogs, characterized as "effeminate and exotic," or large military or hunting dogs, described as "hypermasculinized" (25). The chapter deploys some close readings of prints, drawings, and contemporary writing that support these observations and themes. In the nineteenth century, "an age of rampant Darwinism and social Darwinism" (47), Skabelund notes that since most Japanese dog breeds looked

“wolfish” and therefore suggested a kind of continuum rather than a clear division between domestic and wild, Westerners found them “deeply unsettling” (48).

The second chapter, “Civilizing Canines; or, Domesticating and Destroying Dogs,” explores the changing attitudes toward dogs in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century during the Meiji era. In a period characterized by increased “surveillance and control over its subjects, both human and non-human,” Japan joined the rest of the world in either eliminating other animals by “killing them or restricting them to so-called natural areas” or by “completely domesticat[ing] and commodif[y]ing” them, either as sources of food and other products or as pets” (54). Wolves were almost completely wiped out, and rabies, spread in fact by human globalization, Skabelund asserts, was used as an excuse to eradicate those canines associated with “groups and classes of people who were similarly seen as unruly and uncontrollable” (56). In a kind of cultural cringe, Japanese elites adopted “civilizationist and scientific racist” language and attitudes to vilify native dog breeds and extol imported ones. Skabelund provides a balanced perspective on this movement, however, pointing out that:

The language of canine imperialism, especially civilization and scientific racism, may have been largely adopted from the West, but the use of dogs to denigrate other ethnic groups seems to have been universal and began long before the age of New Imperialism had arrived in Japan. (67)

Particularly interesting in this chapter, and illustrative of the book’s emphasis on material culture, is Skabelund’s analysis of a statue of a major military and political figure, Saigō Takamori, and his dog. Skabelund outlines a controversy about the way in which the dog was depicted, at first with floppy ears, then recast with very pointy ones, more suitable for a native dog breed. Thus, the statue marks a movement away from Western influence toward Japanese nationalism. Other examples from the time (the turn of the twentieth century) include a short story from the point of view of a native Japanese dog.

The third chapter, “Fascism’s Furry Friends: The ‘Loyal Dog’ Hachikō and the Creation of the ‘Japanese’ Dog,” is the most successful and stimulating of the book. Here Skabelund parallels the rise of fascism in Japan, along with the differences between Japan’s nationalism and Germany’s more race-based version, and the shaping of the

story of Hachikō. Skabelund neatly summarizes the symbolic power of animals in human politics:

What it means to be human is understood in relation to the nonhuman — whether the divine or bestial — so animals serve as metaphors through which to assert the humanity and civilized nature of one's own group and the animality or barbaric character of "Others." (89)

Citing dogs' "malleable symbolic power," Skabelund then analyzes the differences between German and Japanese imperial fascism. While the Germans emphasized breeding and eugenics, "the creation of 'Japanese' dogs, with Hachikō as its paragon, was one of the building blocks of a culture of imperial fascism that venerated the nation, celebrated purity, esteemed fidelity, and glorified violence" (91). Skabelund describes the process of "nationalizing" native dogs, of reappraising their value as representatives of a separate national identity that rejects Western influence. Thus, the Akita, for instance, became a representative of the national character. Here is the current (2013) description of the Akita from the Japan Kennel Club website: "It is an intelligent and courageous breed, slightly to highly reserved, even with its owner. Yet, it is an extremely loyal and devoted dog and discerning guardians of their families." Like the American Kennel Club, then, the Japanese counterpart is a last bastion of this kind of nationalist characterization.

One of the fascinating aspects of this chapter is that Skabelund finds photos of Hachikō and digs up gossip about him that suggest the ways in which he was shaped and mythologized into an ideal representative of Japan rather than an ordinary doggy dog. As in the previous chapter, Skabelund explores the history of the making of a statue, this time the famous statue of "Loyal Dog Hachikō" in front of the Shibuya Station in Tokyo. The real Hachikō had, scandal of scandals, a droopy ear; the statue has two pointy ones. The real Hachikō was fed on scraps to keep coming by the station, and may have died from ingesting yakatori skewers; the mythic one came because of steadfast loyalty. The real Hachikō was afraid of gunfire; the mythic one, never.

Chapter four, "Dogs of War: Mobilizing All Creatures Great and Small," makes clear the effect of total war on all animals including dogs and provides a history of dogs in war, offering examples in which they were fictionalized and mythologized for propaganda purposes. The final chapter, "A Dog's World: the Commodification of Contemporary Dog Keeping," catches us up to the twenty-first century and to dogs as "'family member' and an 'animate stuffed toy,' as an 'object of deep friendship' and a

‘thing to be bought and sold’” (Ōhira qtd in Skabelund 184). As in the earlier chapters, we learn much from material culture — children’s books, statues, and so on — as the author surveys Japanese history from wartime through fifties scarcity, the resurgence of the middle class, to the booming of conspicuous consumption.

My own visit confirmed the continuing power of conspicuous consumption in a dog’s life in Japan. I wondered, reading the book, and walking around Yokohama, Hiroshima, and Kyoto, whether dogs are becoming more attenuated and unnatural as their usefulness for work wanes and as the presence of other animals in our daily lives disappears. Is that tendency present throughout the world or more prevalent in Japan than elsewhere? In Akira Mizuta Lippit’s terms, as other animals disappear, do they become more spectral? Are the tiny Yorkies and coiffed teddy bear poodles in some way spectral? Is there a connection between commodification and the disappearance of the real? As enjoyable and convincing as *Empire of Dogs* is, I wanted it to think harder about the implications of the historical trends it describes. Still, the combination of historical information and material analysis was valuable for inviting further work.