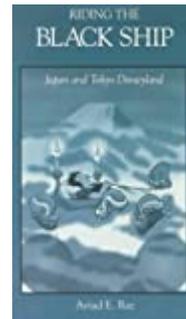




**Aviad E. Raz.** *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999. 200 pp. \$20.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-674-76894-9.



**Reviewed by** Sandra Katzman (Interac Co., Ltd.)

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### It's not Mickey Mouse

You learn a lot about Tokyo Disneyland, but that is not the main point of the Israeli author Aviad E. Rad.

“More than 200 million guest have streamed through the park's gates since they first opened TDL is owned and operated by a Japanese company which is a partnership between Mitsui Real Estate Development and Keisei Electric Railway.(p. 4)”

The main point is the mirror play of cross culture in the amusement park setting. “The selective replication and rearrangement of Disneyland in Tokyo can be seen as an example of a post-imperialist process that suggests a story different from that suggested by other forms of globalization.(p. 15)”

The Black Ship of the title refers to Commodore Perry's of 1850s, and is also the name given TDL by competing amusement parks. The author takes it as a sufficiently complex and recondite metaphor, expanding its use by previous scholars as a TDL descriptor. In Raz's book, riding the black ship of Disneyland in Japan becomes less pernicious and more superficial.

The book is thick with ideas, theories, and ap-

proaches. Part I is “Onstage,” including in its first of two chapters “The Dubbed Spiel: Jungle Cruise,” “Domesticating Disney: Cinderella's Castle,” and “Wishful History: Meet the World.” Part II is “Backstage,” including “Working for TDL” and “Organizational Culture and Organizational Critique.” Part III is “Offstage,” including “The Theme Park Boom” and “Traveling Theories: Aboard the Black Ship.”

“In this study, I focus on the relationship between the smile and the laughter, between TDL and its audience” (p. 5) the author states his focus in the introduction. He tries to get at the elusive cultural component of entertainment in a scholarly way. He succeeds by dint of various approaches. He fails in that the dissection cannot capture the life, although he comes pretty close in his description of the Jungle Cruise.

His approaches are three-fold: “TDL will be studied here within three broad contexts: the show, the organization, and the discourse of popular/consumer culture.” (p. 5)

This is anthropology, and is not easy to absorb or be

convinced by the unique approach of the author. Yet it is interesting and thorough without yielding any conclusion.

His method of observation is interviews. He quotes directly: "One of my informants, an American imagineer working in TLD, had to say about Meet the World: 'Well, the spiel is full of mistakes, and nobody bothered to correct it'" (p. 59)

His reporting includes Japanese terminology. He explains the puns of the Jungle Ride, for example, in the context of the Japanese language.

He compares various Disney parks and other conventional Japanese amusement parks. He brings in aspects of training the employees within TDL and at the conventional parks. He clearly alerts the reader to his intentions: "Following the presentation of hiring, training, and socialization practices as TDL, I compare my findings with the original culture of DL [Disneyland] and WDW [Walt Disney World], and then with that of Korakuen, a conventional Japanese amusement park. I conclude with a discussion and an ideological critique of organizational constructs such as 'manual society,' the 'smile factory,' and Taylorism. (p. 75)"

He does the literature reviews of comparing theories of globalization. "Otsubo, like many other Japanese, is constructing an ominous faade of globalization inspired by American cultural imperialism, with TDL as its fifth column/shock troops. (p. 142)"

He quotes other scholars, including Notoji Masaki:

"The opening of Tokyo Disneyland was, in retrospect, the greatest cultural event in Japan during the 80's. (147)" And then he describes exactly how that opening occurred.

The book includes table of International Comparisons of Attendance at Major Theme Parks, maps of TDL, and labor force participation rates for Japanese women.

The fascinating picture also includes future theme parks planned for Japan, such as a duplicate of volcanic islands of the South Seas (p. 153). "What interests me here, however, is the theme rather than the parks. The common cultural denominator of these leisure resorts is the remaking in Japan of a foreign part of the world. This remaking focuses on the cute, superficial, and marketable aspects of the foreign. (pp. 154, 155)"

He delves into the cultivation of Disney in Japan regarding life-span and TV shows. "*Mickey Kids* is the Japanized offspring of the original Disney television shows, hosted by Walt, which were broadcast in Japan during the 1950s. (p. 160)"

For the first time since coming to Japan three years ago, this Californian wants to go to TDL. I'm convinced it is different from my childhood's Disneyland, and accessible now that I've read the anthropology manual.

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