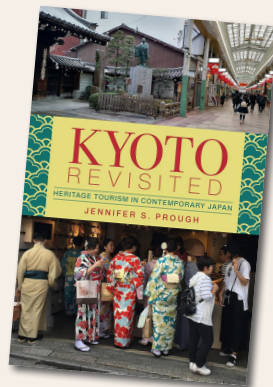


## BOOK REVIEW

### *Kyoto Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Contemporary Japan*

By Jennifer S. Prough

University of Hawai'i Press, 2022  
240 pages.



Reviewed by Daniel MILNE\*

Though long a prime destination for domestic tourists, the 2010s saw Kyoto explode onto the international tourism scene. In 2018, 4.5 million international visitors stayed in Kyoto, a stunning increase of almost tenfold from the half million of 2011.<sup>1</sup> While welcomed by Kyoto's cash-strapped government and its tourism industry, this led to complaints of overtourism. Growth then came to a crashing halt with the COVID pandemic. With exemplary timing, Jennifer Prough's new book, *Kyoto Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Contemporary Japan*, explores many of these changes by analyzing uses of heritage in Kyoto tourism prior to and during this tumultuous period.

Prough applies theories regarding changing trends in modern tourism, enabling us to both better understand Kyoto's local transformations and see them as part of broader, international trends. Primarily drawing on fieldwork, interviews, and the analysis of policy documents, Prough traces shifts in Kyoto's tourism from a mass "seeing" tourism of the 1960s, to the more independent "encounter"-centered forms from the 1990s, and on to "experience" tourism fostered by online social networking services. In particular, Prough focuses on theories of "encounter" and "experience" tourism to understand trends in contemporary Kyoto: specifically these include the seasonal events examined in chapter 3 in which visitors "experience Kyoto as both new and old" (p. 38); historical contents tourism focused on Sakamoto Ryōma that cultivates tourists' personal encounters with heritage in chapter 4; and, in chapter 5, the "embodied experience (*taiken*) of walking in Kyoto in kimono" (p. 39).<sup>2</sup>

As indicated by the title, the book's primary focus is the role of heritage in contemporary tourism. Heritage here refers not to how the past is preserved but how it is represented, commodified, and consumed. As a "quintessential urban heritage tourism destination," explains Prough, the book's case studies "demonstrate the ways that heritage is

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1 Kyoto City Industry and Tourism Office 2021.

2 Chapter 4 in particular draws on Philip Seaton's work on contents tourism, including that related to the *bakumatsu* era; see Seaton 2014.

complex—at once material and ethereal, nostalgic and personal, national and international” (p. 3). Specifically, the book explores the utilization of traditional Kyoto in city tourism plans and neighborhood revitalization projects (chapter 2), the use of premodern aesthetics in promoting off-season events (chapter 3), personal encounters with the past cultivated through heritage tourism to Sakamoto Ryōma-related sites (chapter 4), and how heritage is embodied in kimono tourism (chapter 5).

The book’s strength lies in its focus on contemporary trends. For example, Prough’s analysis of Kyoto City policy over the last decade highlights the complex relationship between three key stakeholders: a city government keen to increase tax revenue; tourists hoping to encounter Japan, the city’s culture, and welcoming hosts; and locals experiencing a mixture of pride, inflated expectations regarding economic benefits, and fears for overtourism. Another example is Prough’s explanation of kimono tourism as being motivated by tourists’ desire to physically embody, and thus experience, Japanese culture by walking in kimono around the cobbled lanes of Kyoto’s preserved districts. These are just two of multiple interrelated angles through which the book demonstrates the complex workings and utilization of heritage in Kyoto today, and, alongside work by Christoph Brumann and Alice Tseng, contributes to English-language scholarship on Kyoto’s urban heritage.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most important contribution of *Kyoto Revisited*, however, is that while there is work on Kyoto tourism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (for example, research by Kudō Yasuko and Riichi Endō), and on the uses of heritage in Kyoto’s modern development (such as Itō Yukio, and Takagi Hiroshi), this is the first full-length book to examine heritage tourism in twenty-first century Kyoto.<sup>4</sup> Prough’s contemporary lens places postwar developments in the city’s tourism trends in a meaningful sequence, pioneers exploration of experiential tourism in Kyoto, and points to the contemporary significance of more historically-focused studies of Kyoto heritage.

While this book will no doubt become a key text on the topic in English, it is not without shortcomings. First, the diversity of heritage examples covered is a strength but also at times a weakness of the book. Some chapters lack depth of evidence and there is little discussion of differences in tourist types, so that they depict Kyoto’s heritage as essentially uniform for all tourists. For example, interviews could have helped explain why kimono wearing—and the heritage it represents—is especially popular among East Asian tourists; while any estimate of the number of Ryōma-inspired tourists to sites such as the Ryozen Museum of History and Gokoku Shrine would have shown that this is a very niche domestic tourist market. Second, the focus of the book is lost when it strays from contemporary discussions into premodern history. For example, the explanation of Edo-period *meisho* as historical precedents for today’s tourist sites overlooks modern changes, while the ten pages devoted to Heian-period literature, poetry, and traditional gardens distracts from the book’s contemporary focus. Lastly, Prough makes little use of the wealth of previous research about modern Kyoto, especially that in Japanese. Greater awareness regarding arguments over the modern creation of the Heian period as being Kyoto’s golden age, for example, would have enabled the author to take a more critical perspective in the section on traditional aesthetics.

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3 Brumann 2012; Tseng 2018.

4 All of these are prolific, but for instance Kudō 2008; Endō 2018; Itō 2010; and Takagi 2006.

It would also have strengthened Prough's argument that the city's heritage is the product of constant selection, reinterpretation, and recreation.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the long history of tourism to Kyoto, the diverse examples of heritage covered, the contemporary focus, and the fact that fieldwork on this topic was essentially impossible for two years, these drawbacks are understandable and generally do not hinder the book's achievements as a pioneering work in English on tourism and heritage in contemporary Kyoto. *Kyoto Revisited* illustrates that Kyoto is a prime case study for future research in a range of areas, including global tourism, heritage tourism, over-tourism, urban studies, cultural representation, and contemporary Japanese and regional history.

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5 On modern developments in ideas of the "old capitals" of Kyoto and Nara, see Takagi 2006.