

***A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words:* Connecting Through Canon in Post-Occupation Japan**

November 27, 2023 - January 26, 2024

9 Week Showing

Exhibition Checklist

*Note: This exhibition checklist has omitted quotes from letters that George Demeroukas wrote to his family that were included in the physical exhibit. Excerpts from these letters are contained in the George P. Demeroukas collection finding aid on-site at the Prange Collection.

Exhibition Poster

While the Occupation of Japan formally ended on April 28, 1952, the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty allowed for the continued presence of United States military personnel in Japan. Some men who served under this treaty were trained to maintain military communication capacities used by both countries. In the process, they came into contact with a transforming Japanese landscape.

Drawing from the Gordon W. Prange Collection's post-Occupation materials, the exhibit explores how one serviceman, George Peter Demeroukas, documented his time in Japan outside of his military duties. Demeroukas was a second-generation Greek immigrant from Chicago, Illinois, who, after being drafted, worked in Japan on military radio broadcast and telecommunication stations. His service was his passport, and while his initial hope was a posting to Europe, his second choice-assignment to Japan became his first love. He would capture scenes of everyday life and send the photos back to his family to connect them with his personal experience of the country.

As Demeroukas wrote, "The pictures I send home do my storytelling". Viewers are invited to reflect upon the ways in which he tried to make sense of a country on the cusp of change, and how his vernacular lens was shaped by his self-identity.

The exhibition team at the Gordon W. Prange Collection would like to thank Karen Adjei, an iSchool Field Study graduate intern, for curating the exhibition using materials from the George P. Demeroukas Papers.

Case 1

America's Presence in Post-Occupation Japan

Alongside the Treaty of San Francisco, which formally ended the Occupation of Japan by Allied Powers on April 28, 1952, the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty outlined how Japan would allow U.S. forces to remain in the country. This coincided with Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida's post war strategy, in which Japan relied on the United States for military power in order to focus on rebuilding its economy.

This newfound alliance secured the placement of military personnel in a strategic location in East Asia at the onset of the Cold War. To subdue the spread of Communism, the United States passed peacetime conscription legislation to supplement voluntary enlistment and ensure that vacancies in the armed forces would continue to be filled.

During this time, Demeroukas was drafted into the army for a two-year stint, from April 1954 to March 1956, and was assigned to the U.S. Army Signal Corps before entering Japan.

Doodle of Japan and cities visited

Demeroukas, George. (December 29, 1955). [Letter from George Demeroukas to his family].

Demeroukas was cognizant of the fact that his work on radio transmitter locations throughout the country allowed him access to places that tourists might not get a chance to see. He was intentional in taking advantage of every opportunity for personal travel, developing photographs along the way and collecting memorabilia.

MATS (Military Air Transport Service) Boarding Pass

Before flying to Japan in February 1955, Demeroukas was trained for 26 weeks, received the rank of Private First Class, and was assigned to the Japan Signal Battalion. The mission of a signal battalion at that time was to provide signal transmissions to military headquarters through various modes of communication such as ground, radio, and photographic transmissions, as well as installing and maintaining equipment.

"Sugadake Relay. Sugadake, Japan"

Demeroukas' first posting was to Camp Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture in northeastern Japan. As part of a six-man crew, he maintained their truck and performed installation, operational, and maintenance procedures on microwave radio repeater and terminal stations. Microwave signals were seen as an improvement to conventional overland transmission wires. The crew either worked in and around the post they were assigned to, or they fanned out over the countryside, spending several days at different sites, before moving to their next military post and repeating the process.

Resized print of Demeroukas next to Japanese people with camera

Demeroukas poses next to Japanese people with a camera, which he probably purchased at the Army Post Exchange (PX). During this decade, the Japanese company Canon had a contract to supply cameras to military post exchange stores, including the U.S. Army Signal Corps. It is likely a Canon Rangefinder Model 11F manufactured during the period of July 1953 and March 1955. It is stamped "E.P.", indicating that the camera was sold as an export product. As such it was illegal for a Japanese citizen to possess, because the camera was sold untaxed.

Camp Sendai Theater April (flier)

"Migawari Zazen Runway Is Called Hanamichi And Here The Actors Get Flowers And Make Exits and Entrances"

Demeroukas was fascinated by the arts and culture, and one of his favorite activities both inside and outside of military posts was attending theater shows. On a personal trip, he attended the hugely popular play "Migawari Zazen" (The Zen Substitute), showcasing comedic themes in marriage. His increasing ability to understand the format and language of such cultural performances became a source of pride.

Demeroukas at a VHF (Very High Frequency) radio terminal in Osaka.

"Members of CO.E Sendai"

A Public Hall and Peace Memorial Hall. Postcard of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Dated January 9, 1956.

The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum is dedicated to documenting the atomic bomb that was dropped on the city at the close of World War II in 1945. Over a decade later, Demeroukas visited Hiroshima, and sent this postcard to his family in Chicago by air mail. On the back side (pictured in the poster image), the mailing address is written in English, the note to his family in Greek, and the signature is given in Japanese characters with "George" written in kanji and "Demeroukas" in katakana, offering a glimpse into a man of three worlds.

"January 9, 56. Mrs. Demeroukas - Greetings from Japan and TSENEYAMA [Tsuneyama]. Much cold and snow here in the large mountains."

Unless otherwise noted, all display items are from the George P. Demeroukas Papers, Gordon W. Prange Collection, University of Maryland Libraries.

Case 2

A Changing Landscape

Japan as a country during this time was seeking to rebuild economically and redefine itself on both domestic and international fronts, and by the end of the Occupation in 1952, it had

exceeded its prewar industrial output. This growth came with rapid social change, at times fraught with tension.

Booming economic development and industrialization saw the beginning of a mass consumer and urbanized society. Amidst this transforming landscape, the work of American servicemen in Japan was no longer focused solely on imposing democratic values, but was now focused on supporting mutual military interests.

As Demeroukas immersed himself in the country through his travels, his camera at times inadvertently captured the geopolitics of the period. His reflections on both the mundane and memorable aspects of life in Japan reveal a sensitivity to such juxtapositions of old and new as well as colliding Japanese and American cultures that he observed.

“Japan TV”

NHK is pictured filming the New York Yankees exhibition game in Osaka. Baseball was an important sport that helped rebuild relations between Japan and the United States after the end of World War II and the Occupation. The New York Yankees traveled to Japan in 1955 with the help of the Mainichi Newspapers after losing the World Series title to the Los Angeles Dodgers. Demeroukas, who attended the game, was remorseful when Japan ended up losing to the Yankees.

“Pachinko player, the slot machine craze of Japan”

Takeichi Masamura, considered the founder of Japan’s modern pachinko game, developed a new pin arrangement to make the game more unpredictable and thus more thrilling to play. During this first “pachinko boom” in the 1950s, more than 45,000 pachinko parlors were in operation. However, the Japanese government imposed a ban on these machines to curb an increase in gambling among the population.

Mikimoto Pearls, pamphlet

“Diving for Oysters, Mikimoto Isle”

Ama, literally meaning ‘woman of the sea’, have specialized in freediving to gather shellfish for nearly 3,000 years. Kokichi Mikimoto hired Ama divers to look after oyster beds on an island off Toba, a coastal city in Mie Prefecture. He is credited with starting the cultured pearl industry in Japan. Mikimoto Pearls, his eponymous luxury pearl company, gained global prominence with the opening of international store locations after the end of World War II.

“Pepsi-Cola Fan”

“Inspecting Empty Beer Bottles, Asahi Breweries”

Occupation authorities sought to break up *zaibatsu*, Japan's commercial conglomerates, to encourage economic democratization. Asahi Breweries emerged from the breakup of Dai Nippon Breweries in 1949. In 1954, Asahi's popularity started to exceed that of its competitors due to its sponsored marketing efforts across media and sports industries.

“Formosa”

The float reads “Republic of China”. During the years that Demeroukas was in Japan, the Taiwan Strait Crisis transpired, which was a brief period of armed conflict between the Nationalist Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan and the Communist People's Republic of China (PRC). In response, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Formosa Resolution to counteract the threat of an invasion of Taiwan by the PRC.

“Jap New Year Flowers Similar To Our Holiday Poinsettas [sic] Suyimiyoshi [sic], Japan”

The term “Jap” came to be used in a derogatory manner during World War II. However, Demeroukas' use may have stemmed from hearing the term as a child, when it was more often a way to abbreviate “Japanese.”

“Modern Apartment, Old Shack & Gohan (rice) Fields”

Case 3

Embracing the Uncomfortable

Even with the abolishment of state-sponsored Shintoism under the Occupation, the Japanese continued to observe Shinto and Buddhist religious customs in the midst of rapid change and globalization. Raised in Greek Orthodox traditions, Demeroukas too sought out places of worship in 1950s Japan.

Yet he did not remain in the comfort of his own religion, instead immersing himself in diverse forms of spiritual practice that he witnessed. In doing so, he embraced the uncomfortableness that comes with cultural and religious differences in beholding new notions of the sacred in a genuine attempt to form connections with the Japanese.

Such encounters left an imprint on Demeroukas which would last well beyond his military tenure, which he yearned to share with his family an ocean away.

“Temple of India, Kobe”

The Kobe Mosque is Japan's first mosque. In 1928, a growing Muslim community composed mainly of Indian traders and Turks at the major port location began collecting donations through

the Islamic Committee of Kobe to build the structure. The Mosque was officially opened in 1935 and survived the United States air raids ten years later.

The Great Buddha of Kamakura, National Treasure, resized print

“Zutsi Matsuri Festival, Kitano Shrine” [Kitano Ten Mangu, Kyoto]

Established in 947, the Kitano Tenmangu enshrines Sugawara Michizane, a renowned scholar and politician from the Heian Era (794-1185). The shrine hosts a five-day Zuiki Matsuri to give thanks for bountiful harvests. The procession departs from the shrine, carrying smaller *omikoshi*, or portable shrines, with ox-drawn carts. These shrines are decorated with dried products, such as taro stems, marigolds, tofu skin, and wheat.

“Greek Orthodox Church, Nicolai Cathedral. Tokyo. April 16, 1955”.

The founder of the Japanese Orthodox Church, Ivan Dmitrievich Kasatkin (later St. Nicholas of Japan), was an archbishop who devoted himself to improving Japanese-Russian relations. He selected the location for the Holy Resurrection Cathedral, near the Imperial Palace.

“Nicolai Cathedral. Tokyo. April 15, 1955”.

The Chapel, Camp Sendai, Japan

“Japanese Hearse”

Case 4

Connecting Across Oceans

While the portrayal of Japan during this time period was that of an urbanizing and globalizing powerhouse, remnants of previous agricultural practices and infrastructure belied this image. What had been a frowned upon practice of hygienic management became a surprising yet familiar cultural point of connection for Demeroukas.

When he saw that open sewers were prevalent throughout the places he visited on personal travel, instead of gazing at them through a patronizing lens, he marveled at how much they resembled his parents' birth country of Greece. Demeroukas' ethnic background allowed him to more deeply appreciate and capture such realities of Japan that were quickly disappearing, as more modernized images of the country would come to define it.

Documenting such unique insights into a changing society anchored him to loved ones back home, helping Demeroukas to savor and his family to connect with a more unpolished rendition of an international Japan.

“‘Honey Buckets’ Typical Of Japan. A Mixture Of Water And Sh__ Used As Fertilizer”

“Koe Shoibai [sic], Honey Bucket Collectors”

“The ‘Honey Buckets’, Sendai 4/9/55”

“Young Farmers, Daikon (Turnips)”

Even though the practice was condemned by Occupation authorities, the collection and use of human waste, much of which was used as fertilizer for crops, was still in effect in cities as Japan was rebuilding its infrastructure including a centralized sewage system. The custom eventually ceased in the 1950s as chemical fertilizers took over.

Case 5

A Personal Paradise

In coming to know Japan through its food, Demeroukas continued to be grounded by his ethnic background through culinary similarities. However, discovering new Japanese fare became a bridge to connect with Japanese people that he met on personal travel throughout the country.

Taking time to master the intricate etiquette of Japanese cuisine allowed him to overcome differences and successfully partake in intimate and communal moments of bonding over culture tied to the meals. And of course, distance did not stop Demeroukas from sharing these encounters of hospitality with his family so that they could vicariously, and even directly, enjoy his experience of Japan.

In striving for genuine relationships during his service in Japan, Demeroukas was able to create a new home for himself, if only temporarily. What has lasted, however, is a nuanced story of navigating belonging in transient circumstances that provides glimpses into Japan’s evolution during the decade.

“Making And Selling Momiji Tempura At Mino-Toen (Real Tasty)”

“Favorite Nippon Food....Octopus, (Alive Here), Tako”

Visit the Grecian Garden Restaurant & Bar (In English and Greek)

“Geo [George], Osaka, Japan”