Understanding Relatively High Social Visibility of Excrement in Japan

Marta E. Szczygieł
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/sijp.2019.60-61.5

Abstrakt

Excretory experience is one of the modern-day social taboos. Toilets are designed so that we evacuate behind closed doors, water is used to conceal any foul smell, and we rely on euphemisms whenever we are forced to mention it in any social situation. Consequently, in the Western cultures, defecation has been largely eradicated from the public sphere: we generally do not talk about “it,” as it is not acceptable to remind others, as well as ourselves, of the body’s excretory capacity. If this unspoken agreement is broken, one is in danger of facing social sanctions such as embarrassment. In Japan, however, there is a relatively high social visibility of excrement. By this, I do not mean that material excrement is in abundance on the streets, but that there are many symbolic manifestations of excrement, namely things that remind us of our bodies’ defecatory capacities, such as poop accessories or “poop talk” on TV. Does Japan, country famous for its high-tech toilets, not see poop as taboo? This paper aims to understand the phenomenon of relatively high social visibility of excrement in Japan from a comparative perspective. Based on answers obtained from an online questionnaire with 185 non-Japanese participants who had been to Japan, I categorized various symbolic manifestations of excrement into three realms: health, education, and commodity. I argue the main reason why excretory experience is relatively accepted in Japan is a high health consciousness that sees bowel movement as a health barometer. In turn, Japanese are educated about the body’s excretory capacities, often in a fun way so that it appeals to children. Finally, because health and educational realms sanitized excretory experience, it became just another aspect of everyday life ready to be commodified. This, I conclude, is the ultimate example of relatively high social visibility of excrement in Japan.

Słowa kluczowe

Japanese toilet culture; defecation; comparative analysis

Pełny tekst:

PDF (ENGLISH)

Bibliografia


Hayashi Ryōsuke. 2011. Sekai ichi no toire. Uoshuretto kaihatsu monogatari [number one toilet in the world. Story of how the Washlet was developed]. Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Shuppan (加藤篤『世界一のトイレ ウォシュレット開発物語』朝日新聞出版).


In Japan, however, there is a relatively high social visibility of excrement. By this, I do not mean that material excrement is in abundance on the streets, but that there are many symbolic manifestations of excrement, namely things that remind us of our bodies' defecatory capacities, such as poop accessories or "poop talk" on TV. Does Japan, country famous for its high-tech toilets, not see poop as taboo? This paper aims to understand the phenomenon of relatively high social visibility of excrement in Japan from a comparative perspective. Based on answers obtained from an online questionnaire understand the dynamic of Japanese power in the wider frame of Asia’s emergence and globalization; assist decision making processes by providing a prospective approach based on future-oriented topics of discussion and groundbreaking analysis. Asie. Visions is an electronic collection dedicated to Asia. With contributions by French and international experts, Asie.Visions deals with economic, strategic, and political issues. The collection aims to contribute to the global debate and to a better understanding of the regional issues at stake.