

Postwar Japan and the Shifting Value of Popular Culture

Condry / 21G.039 Japanese Popular Culture

Lecture 3: February 12, 2003

Postwar Period at a Glance

- 1945 - "burned plains" (*yaki no hara*)
- 1955-74 high growth period
- 1974 - oil crisis, restructuring
- 1980s - "Bubble Economy"
- 1990s - Recession
- 2000s - Economic doldrums, but pop culture vitality

Meaning of "Japan"
depends on era

Allinson (1997)

Japan's Postwar History

For him, "postwar history"
starts in 1932

- end of long agricultural depression
- end of industrial depression
- Occupation not the all-important factor

Three assumptions of Allinson

Gary Allinson,
History Dept.,
Univ. of Virginia

- **context** must be both cross-national and international
- **monocausal explanations fail** to capture historical dynamism
 - economic growth important,
 - but also political changes (1930s, 1950s, and 1980s)
 - material deprivation of 1920s, population changes in 1970s
- **stereotypes** jeopardize our understanding of Japanese history

From Small Agrarian Society to Industrial Giant

year	population	life
• 1935	69M,	47 years
• 1945	72M	
• 1955	89M	
• 1965	98M,	68 years
• 1975	112M	
• 1985	121M	
• 1995	126M,	79 years

- Currently second largest economy in the world
- One of longest life expectancies
- But troubled by ongoing recession

Japan's Population Pyramid

Population Shift in Postwar Japan

- baby boom after war
- then decline birth rate
- “clump generation” 1970s

Antecedents, 1932 - 1945

- Meiji Restoration 1868
- Inequality pervasive in pre-war Japan
 - imperial household
 - aristocracy
 - rural/urban status divisions
 - bottom of society: young, women, migrants, *burakumin*

Emperor Hirohito,
the Shôwa Emperor
from 1925 - 89

Social changes

- prewar economic growth led to urbanization
- cities' population increased by 50% 1930-35, and doubled by 1940
- urbanization largely unplanned and uncontrolled
- political instability
- military combativeness tinged w/ racism

Problems on horizon . . .

War before Pearl Harbor

- Manchuria euphoria
- terrorism at home
- fear of ABCD
- nativism in education, media
- 1937, southward
- Dec. 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor

See Reischauer (1964) p. 190

"Co-Prosperity Sphere"

1937, Japanese troops in China

Imperialism

The Rise and Collapse of the Japanese Empire

Source: Dower, *Embracing Defeat*

USS Bunker Hill after *kamikaze* attack





End of War

- 1942 - Allies use incendiary bombs on Japanese cities
- 1942 = height of Japanese conquests
- 3 factors in Japanese defeat
 - small economy
 - naval blockade
 - ineffectual manpower programs
- Aug. 6, 1945 Hiroshima; Aug. 9, Nagasaki
- Surrender Aug. 15, 1945

Revival, 1945-55

- Devastation of war
- Allied Occupation 1945 - 1952
 - reshape Japan on Euro-American political values
 - punitive attitude gives way in 1947 to “reverse course” (n.b., Soviets in Europe, Communist victory in China)

Young boys, 1946 (Dower)

John Dower (1999) *Embracing Defeat*

Democracy arrives from the sky

Occupation as Savior

Cutting the chains of
militarism and business.

Source: Dower (1999)

Peace / Advertising

Recovery of early 1950s

- mid-1950 Korean War boosts demand
- 1951 Peace Treaty - Japan gains autonomy following year
- Virtuous cycle:
 - Korean war increased demand,
 - profits to invest,
 - new jobs, consumption and savings
 - more investment

Growth, 1955 - 1974

- era of high speed growth
- preconditions for growth
 - occupational and demographic structures
 - skills and motivations of laborers
 - experience of war and reconstruction
 - corporate organizations primed for economic advance

Tokyo 1945 and today

Demographic factors for growth

- abundant supply of **young workers**
 - Population growth rapid
 - 1940 63 Million
 - 1945 72 Million
 - 1950 83 Million
- attributes of workers also contribute to growth

Moving Forward, Looking Up

- SAKAMOTO Kyû
 - *Ue o muite arukô* or "Sukiyaki"
- Pop song of 1961 becomes #1 Hit on Billboard charts in U.S.
- Japan on the rebound
- Japanese goods can make it the U.S.

Pop Music

- **Key points:**
- Sign of era: recovery from devastation
- Production style
 - in house writers and studio musicians
 - cute idol in front
- What Americans hear may be different from what Japanese hear

Discussion of Readings

- What is of value in popular culture?
 - i.e., what exactly are Adorno and Horkheimer's criticisms and how might we respond?
- How should we think about "authenticity" in popular culture?
 - Treat: popular culture is heterogeneous, like Japanese society, and this enables politics
 - Atkins: jazz and the authenticity complex

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