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

- **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 Shōwa 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
KEEP THESE HANDS OFF!

BUY the New VICTORY BONDS
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