

Every Sunday, leather-clad teen-agers spill out of Harajuku Station and head toward Yoyogi Park, there to dance until dark. The passion for such distractions has its critics: A recent government white paper asserted that today's Japanese youth are "devoid of perseverance, dependent upon others, and self-centered."

Japan's New Popular Culture

On any given day, Americans encounter something from Japan. To Detroit's dismay, roughly 1.9 million U.S. citizens purchased Toyotas, Datsuns, and other Japanese-made cars in 1984. At work, we use Canon copiers, Komatsu tractors, and Epson computers. At home, we listen to Panasonic or AIWA stereos and watch TV on Sony or Hitachi sets. Scarcely a week of network evening news passes without some mention of Japan, either as economic rival or as political ally.

Yet, despite this daily presence, Japan today remains a country no less strange to American eyes than it was some eight decades ago. It was then that the American Lafcadio Hearn, one of the first Japan scholars, wrote of "the immense difficulty of perceiving and comprehending what underlies the surface of Japanese life."

Current American attempts to understand Japan reflect continuing confusion. Business analysts speak of Japan's economic success—quality-control circles, high worker productivity—in almost mystical tones. Sociologists sketch a society of labyrinthine complexity. Historians go back to the violent extremes of the feudal Tokugawa era (1603–1868) or the horrors of the Pacific War. Feature stories in American magazines and newspapers concentrate on kabuki performances, flower arranging, geisha, and tea ceremonies. What emerges from these various viewpoints is a fragmented, two-dimensional portrait, one that most Japanese would have trouble recognizing.

Unfortunately, fewer and fewer Americans know enough about Japan to overcome the prevailing stereotypes. The nation's top postwar Japanologists, most of whom first came to Japan as members of the U.S. military during the Second World War, are all nearing retirement. So are the bilingual, second-generation Japanese Americans (*Nisei*) who worked in various U.S. government agencies. No comparable crop of Japanologists

has appeared to take their place. In 1982, a mere 731 Americans were studying in Japan, versus the 2,656 U.S. students in Italy; in contrast, almost 11,000 Japanese were at universities and colleges in the United States.

Japan deserves closer attention, not least because it is emerging from a major postwar political and social transformation. During the 1970s, rapid economic growth and a young population—20 percent of all Japanese were between the ages of 15 and 24 in 1973—exposed a highly traditional society to unsettling new influences. Today, observes Kusaka Kimindo, a Tokyo economist and former Wilson Center Guest Scholar, a more prosperous population has abandoned the single-minded pursuit of economic advance and is entering a less arduous “cultural-intellectual” phase.

Popular culture is prospering in this new age. Japan is a society known for its collective instincts, and books, magazines, movies, and TV shows draw a wide audience. As the Japanese scholar Kuwabara Takeo points out, “A fad in Japan does not just take hold among urban or regional groups, but sweeps through most of the nation.” Thanks to such broad appeal, popular culture acts as a good mirror of Japanese social values. And since it takes forms familiar to both the East and the West, it provides an accessible means of cultural comparison.

Here, Fumiko Mori Halloran examines a recent sampling of Japanese best-selling books. Frederik L. Schodt analyzes the Japanese passion for *manga*, or comic books. James Bailey looks at Japan’s big box-office movies.

—Ronald A. Morse

Ronald A. Morse, 46, is secretary of the Asia Program at the Wilson Center and a specialist in Japanese folklore.

BEST SELLERS

by Fumiko Mori Halloran

Some 600 years before Madame de La Fayette penned *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), one of the first European novels, Lady Murasaki Shikibu told *The Tale of Genji*, an elegant fictional portrayal of life at the Japanese imperial court at Kyōto. Since then, Japan has produced its share of first-class writers, both men and women.

International recognition did not come until 1968, when the Japanese novelist Kawabata Yasunari received the Nobel Prize in literature. "His narrative mastership," noted the president of the Swedish Academy of Letters, "... expresses the essence of the Japanese mind."

To Westerners, the subtle psychology and traditional settings of Kawabata's novels may symbolize the "essence" of Japan. But his works bear little resemblance to the books read by most of today's 119.5 million Japanese. At one of the busiest intersections near Tokyo Station, the Yaesu Book Center houses more than one million different novels, mysteries, biographies, histories, cookbooks, romances, and treatises on science, politics, and economics. The aisles are crowded with students, housewives, business executives, and retirees, all engaged in the popular practice of *tachiyomi*, or reading while standing.

What makes a best seller in Japan?

In a country where the average paperback or hardcover costs roughly one-third of its U.S. equivalent, the range of best-selling titles is enormous. In 1982, best sellers included *How to Enjoy Baseball Ten Times More* and an unadorned edition of *The Japanese Constitution*. Foreign works also do well, especially analyses of business success and economic trends. The Japanese have bought more than 400,000 copies of the translated version of *In Search of Excellence* (1982), a survey of well-run American companies by Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman.

For the most part, however, Japanese historical epics, self-help manuals, mysteries, and biographies remain the readers' favorites. The novels regularly serialized in the national daily newspapers—among them the *Yomiuri* (1983 morning circulation, 8.9 million), the *Asahi* (7.5 million), and the *Mainichi* (4.4 million)—also sit high on best-seller lists.

Best-selling books seldom attract much serious scholarly attention. After all, what valid conclusions about Japan could be

drawn from the popularity of *An Introduction to Astrology* (1979), a two-volume work that sold a total of 7.8 million copies over two years? Consistently popular genres or themes, however, can serve as a fairly accurate cultural barometer.

To begin with, the current prominence of the million-copy best seller attests to the transformation of Japan during the last 25 years. More leisure time, higher incomes, and postwar educational reforms have given more Japanese more time and inclination to read. Since 1960, the number of books bought every year in Japan has quadrupled; the number of new titles has tripled. In 1983, the Japanese publishing industry put out roughly 31,000 new titles and a total of 1.2 billion volumes. The United States, a nation with twice Japan's population, published 42,000 new titles and a total of 1.9 billion volumes.

Swimming in the Nude

As books have become more popular, so too have their authors. Novelist Osaragi Jirō, who drew a large following with *Homecoming* (1948), the story of a Japanese expatriate who returns from Malaya at the end of World War II, was seen or heard primarily in literary circles. But Nozaka Akiyuki, a best-selling novelist during the late 1960s and '70s, also gave solo singing concerts and modeled men's wear. And Itsuki Hiroyuki, who gained broad appeal with *Gate of Adolescence*, his two-volume 1976 novel about a young man's move from a small Kyūshū town to the bright lights of Tokyo, profited from radio talk shows and the lecture circuit, where his handsome features attracted a large female audience.

According to Odagiri Kazuo, the head of publications at the prestigious Japanese publishing house Bungei Shunjū, prize-winning novels today are likely to come from "bankers, singers, stewardesses, film directors, cartoonists, and boxers—people writing miscellanies out of some small fund of personal experience." And as in the United States, many television talk-show hosts and "pop" sociologists have become "experts," their opinions sought and published on everything from teen-age mores to educational policy.

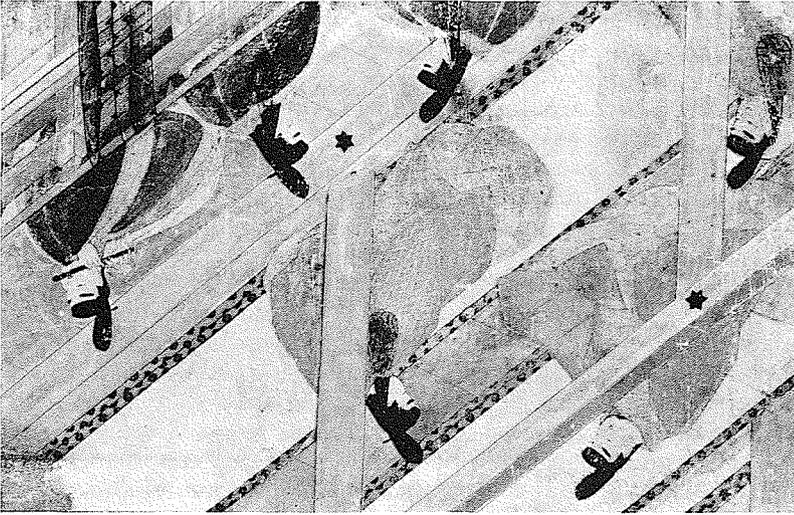
Fumiko Mori Halloran, 41, is a frequent contributor to the Japanese literary magazine Bungei Shunjū and a former Wilson Center Guest Scholar. Born in Ōmura City, Japan, she received a B.A. from Kyōto University (1966) and an M.A. from Columbia University (1970). She is the author of From the City of Washington (1979) and The Starlight over America (1982), both published in Japanese.

A case in point is *Totto-chan at the Window*. Published in 1981, it was written by Kuroyanagi Tetsuko, the popular hostess of three weekly TV variety shows. *Totto-chan* posted sales of 4.5 million copies in its first year, easily surpassing the previous one-year record of 3.6 million—set by *A Japanese-American Conversation Manual* at the beginning of the 1945–52 U.S. Occupation.

Kuroyanagi describes her book as “a series of childhood recollections about an ideal school in Tokyo . . . that combined learning with fun, freedom, and love.” Expelled from public school at the age of six for unruly behavior, the author arrived in 1939 at the Tomoe School, where classes were held in remodeled railroad cars and each pupil worked at his or her own pace. The headmaster shunned traditional subjects for a curriculum that included public speaking, eurythmics, farming, and swimming in the nude. The story ends with the school’s destruction in a 1945 U.S. bombing raid, but an epilogue describes the successful careers enjoyed today by Kuroyanagi and many of her classmates.

Until recently, most Japanese would have frowned on such unorthodox notions of education. *Totto-chan at the Window*, however, appeared just as many Japanese parents, educators, and policy-makers began to question the effectiveness of their public schools. Many criticized the university admissions system, which measures students solely by their performance on

Scene from a 12th-century scroll of The Tale of Genji. Reading spread rapidly after the advent of commercial printing in Japan in 1609.



written entrance exams. Others lamented the classroom emphasis on memorized knowledge rather than creative thinking or analytic ability. Parents complained that teachers no longer regarded their work as sacred, while teachers in turn denounced parents for caring too much or too little about the education of their children. And both parents and teachers charged the Ministry of Education—which approves textbooks, establishes standards, and sets curricula—with being too rigid.

A highly centralized educational system was well suited to Japan 30 years ago. Then, only about 51 percent of all junior high school graduates entered high school, and only about 10 percent went on to universities. A firm grounding in mathematics and science contributed greatly to Japan's postwar industrial progress. Indeed, Japanese students—94 percent of whom went to high schools, 38 percent of whom attended universities in 1980—consistently score at or near the top in international tests of ability in mathematics and science. But in a contemporary economy that demands innovation as much as hard work, Japanese businessmen lament the passive thinking exhibited by their young, college-trained recruits.

Much of *Totto-chan's* success obviously stemmed from the widespread popularity of its author. Even so, it touched a nerve. A flurry of education proposals from the Office of the Prime Minister, and the recent adoption of *Totto-chan* as a third- and fourth-grade textbook, suggest that plans are being made for a school system more attuned to the diverse and economically mature Japan of the 1980s.

Eyes on the TV Set

Now that their country's gross national product ranks third in the world (behind that of the United States and the Soviet Union), many Japanese are assessing the psychic costs of their national drive to success. In *Recommendations on Sensitive Human Relationships*, which has sold more than three million copies since 1982, talk-show host Suzuki Kenji asserts that the Japanese "have forgotten how to use their traditional gentleness and sensitivity, a skill dulled by a postwar society centered on money and materialism." Fewer Japanese, for example, respond to the traditional greeting of *o genki desu ka?* (Are you well?) with *hai, okagesama de* (Yes, thanks to your wisdom and mercy). And when the modern Japanese family eats dinner, it is silent not in deference to an old, established rule of courtesy but because all eyes are on the television set.

A novel that describes the impact of affluence in a different

context is *A Flake of Snow* (1983), by Watanabe Jun'ichi. Iori Shōichirō, a well-to-do architect, spends his time and money chasing two women—one his assistant, the other the wife of a wealthy art dealer. Dinners at expensive restaurants, trips at home and abroad (to the Netherlands and Austria), and scenes of explicit sex occupy much of the novel. Despite his many amorous entanglements, Iori avoids any serious emotional commitments, convinced that “no matter whom one marries, the result will always be the same. . . . Only fatigue descends upon you in the end.” Eventually, his wife and his two mistresses abandon him, and Iori realizes that his own lack of commitment has cost him their affections.

Pearl Harbor Revisited

Watanabe's book sold almost one million copies in 1983. Male readers, nicknamed the “Snowflake Tribe,” seemed to identify both with Iori's high living and his dissatisfaction with marriage. Higher incomes have allowed many men to indulge in expensive extramarital dalliances. And judging from a divorce rate that has doubled since 1960 (but is still only one-quarter that of the United States), broken homes are no longer rare.

More outrageous to the older generation than the Snowflake Tribe has been the behavior of young Japanese in their 20s. Since the mid-1970s, novels on the problems of youth have been perennial best sellers. One of the first to go over the million mark was *Almost Transparent Blue* (1976), a novel by Murakami Ryu that depicts the aimless, drug-filled existence of Japanese youths living near the Fukuo U.S. Army Base in metropolitan Tokyo during the Vietnam War.

Substance abuse—mostly in the form of taking amphetamines and sniffing glue or paint thinner—remains relatively rare in Japan. But the rise in juvenile delinquency is regarded as a national scandal. Since 1973, the number of junior high school students arrested each year has doubled. In *Crumbling Toy Bricks*, which sold 2.8 million copies in 1983, a well-known screen and stage actor named Hozumi Takanobu related his struggle to reform his juvenile delinquent daughter, Yukari. With the help of a police department youth counselor, Yukari's parents finally succeed in stopping her from inhaling paint thinner, stealing motorbikes, and hanging around the more dubious quarters of Tokyo.

Older Japanese, who came of age in a bleak postwar environment that demanded sacrifice, have trouble accepting the comparatively coddled status of youths today. The world cap-

tured in *Somewhat Crystal*, a novel by Tanaka Yasuo that sold one million copies in 1978, remains alien to them. The protagonist, Yuri, is a college girl from a wealthy family who works as a fashion model. Together with her live-in rock-musician boyfriend, she spends her days in chic stores and her evenings in discotheques and restaurants.

At the end of this virtually plotless tale, a convenient glossary defines foreign terms such as *dilettante* and provides the names of fashionable stores in Akasaka where one can purchase Ellesse and Fila tennis wear from Italy, Louis Vuitton luggage from France, and Jaeger sweaters from England. But as Yuri herself remarks, "I feel most comfortable in Saint Laurent or Alpha Cubic dresses." Like many books of the "youth" genre, observes literary critic Nakajima Azusa, Tanaka's work "presented a world with no set standard of values."

Several recent best sellers have also focused on Japan's international role, beginning with a reassessment of the country's behavior during the Second World War. During the immediate postwar years, Japanese accepted complete responsibility for the outbreak of war in the Pacific. The U.S. Occupation authorities vigorously promoted this view, censoring all opinions to the contrary.

A familiar sight on Japan's crowded commuter trains, where, according to a 1984 Asahi poll, 31 percent of all Japanese do most of their reading.



Today, works that bring to light once-suppressed facts and interpretations have found much favor. In 1981, a dry and scholarly account, *The Shōwa History by His Majesty's Senior Subjects*, sold 150,000 copies. Drawing heavily on interviews of Kido Koichi, Emperor Hirohito's Chief Attendant, the book's author cites the strangling effect of events such as the decision by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to "freeze" Japanese assets in July 1941 and to stop U.S. oil imports to Japan in August 1941. Plans for Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, crystalized only in the face of this steady economic pressure.

More controversial was *The Two Fatherlands*, by Yamazaki Toyoko, which sold almost one million copies in 1983. At the outset of this novel, the hero, Amoh Kenji, a *Nisei* (second-generation Japanese American) raised in California, is arrested in Los Angeles after the outbreak of war on suspicion of being a spy. When he protests that he is an American citizen, the policeman responds, "That may be true, but until you bleach yourself white, a Jap's a Jap!"

Amoh is sent to a "relocation center," one of the many wartime internment camps set up in 1942 to confine U.S. citizens of Japanese descent. Later, he joins U.S. Army intelligence and serves as an interpreter at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials (1946–48). At book's end, disillusioned by what he perceives as "victors' justice," Amoh commits suicide.

Asking New Questions

The Two Fatherlands provoked a strong response. Prior to its publication as a book, it was serialized in a weekly magazine, overlapping with zealous Japanese press coverage of the November 1981 U.S. congressional hearings on federal compensation for wartime Japanese-American internees. Televised as a 50-hour series, the program reached millions of viewers. Japanese conservatives, who consider strong U.S.–Japan ties essential, decried the anti-American implications of the numerous scenes showing Americans beating Japanese Americans. In the United States, Japanese Americans objected to the message that their loyalties were divided.

Opinions on the historical accuracy of *The Two Fatherlands* may differ. Yet the popular response shows the long shadow cast by the Second World War. The shadow falls, however, not only on Japan as conquered but also on Japan as conqueror. Japanese face constant reminders that their Asian neighbors have not forgotten their experiences under the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.

In the summer of 1982, the Chinese filed a vigorous protest when they heard that the Japanese Education Ministry had proposed textbooks that referred to the invasion of China during the 1930s as an "advance." In reality, the ministry itself had little to do with the controversial revisions. The Chinese reaction, however, points to the residual bitterness left by the Second World War.

In the same year, novelist Fukada Yusuke received the Naoki Award—given to the best works of "mass" literature—for his *Merchants under the Blazing Sun*. Fukada writes of the animosity between Japanese trading-company men and Filipino lumber traders in Manila. When the Japanese director of the company sees a rusting anti-aircraft gun on the island of Corregidor, he remarks, "What did the Japanese military leave behind after three years? At best, this rusty gun and the Filipino's hatred." To Frank Satō, the half-Japanese, half-Filipino protagonist of the novel, the overbearing behavior of today's Japanese businessmen often seems no different from that of Japanese occupation troops during World War II.

The Japanese are trying harder to understand their fellow Asians. In 1982, for example, two of the best-selling titles were Korean-language textbooks, designed to accompany an instruction course broadcast on television. Twenty years ago, such reader interest would have been inconceivable.

But 20 years ago, Japan did not play the international role that it does today. Rapid growth in trade has brought the country unfamiliar new global connections—to the Mideast, even to Africa. It has also generated its share of domestic travails. In their variety, Japanese best-selling books supply no universally appealing panaceas—and often spark arguments. What their high sales figures do suggest, however, is that Japanese are ready, after 40 years of self-imposed intellectual isolation, to ask harder questions about themselves and their relationship to the rest of the world.



READING THE COMICS

by Frederik L. Schodt

In his travel book *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975), Paul Theroux recalls his encounter with a comic book left behind by a young woman seated next to him on a train in northern Japan: "The comic strips showed decapitations, cannibalism, people bristling with arrows like Saint Sebastian . . . and, in general, mayhem. . . . I dropped the comic. The girl returned to her seat and, so help me God, serenely returned to this distressing [magazine]."

Japanese *manga*, or comic books, come as a rude shock to most Westerners. With their emphasis on violence, sex, and scatology, *manga* do not seem to fit the typical Western notion of Japan as a subtle, even repressed, society. Yet *manga* are read and enjoyed by Japanese of every social class.

All told, comics accounted for 27 percent of all books and magazines published in Japan in 1980; the more than one billion *manga* in circulation every year amount to roughly 10 for every man, woman, and child in Japan.

The most popular Japanese comics appear in monthly and weekly magazines. Fat, 350-page boys' comic books—which have circulations as high as three million—combine dramatic stories of sports, adventure, and science fiction with humor. Girls' magazines place their emphasis on tales of love, featuring stylized heroes and heroines. Themes in adult male magazines range from the religious to the risqué, mostly the latter; the stories teem with warriors, gamblers, and gigolos. Until recently, Japanese women had to read comics written for teen-age girls or peruse those designed for their boyfriends or husbands. But in 1980, publishers came to their rescue with two monthlies, *Be in Love* and *Big Comic for Ladies*.

Why do the Japanese have such an unusual appetite for comics?

It is possible that their written language predisposes Japanese to more visual forms of communication. In its most basic form, the individual Japanese ideogram, adopted from the Chinese, is a symbol denoting either a tangible object or an abstract concept, emotion, or action. Cartoonist Tezuka Osamu has said of his comics: "I don't consider them pictures—I think of them as a type of hieroglyphics. . . . In reality I'm not drawing. I'm writing a story with a unique type of symbol."

The comic tradition in Japan dates back almost 900 years. During the 12th century, a Buddhist priest named Toba

(1053–1140) penned the *Chōjūgiga* scrolls, literally “humorous pictures of birds and animals.” In a style bearing strong resemblance to today’s Walt Disney figures, the scrolls showed monkeys, rabbits, and frogs bathing in rivers, practicing archery, wrestling, and worshiping. Refinements in woodblock printing during the 17th century spread cartoons from the aristocracy and the clergy to the common people.* European-style cartoons, often modeled on those of the British magazine *Punch*, became popular during the latter half of the 19th century; during the 1920s, Japanese artists marveled at the “Sunday funnies” in America and quickly adopted their style.

The real comic boom, however, did not take place until after the Second World War. Young Japanese in particular were starved not just for food but also for entertainment. Dozens of small *manga* publications sprang up to satisfy the growing demand, a demand spurred by the appearance in Japan of such American cartoon classics as Chic Young’s *Blondie*, serialized and translated in 1946.

To be sure, small children in Japan have always read comics for the same reason that children everywhere do—they are both accessible and fun. But the passage from childhood to adult life has not weaned postwar Japanese from their dependency on comics. Two modern developments help to explain why.

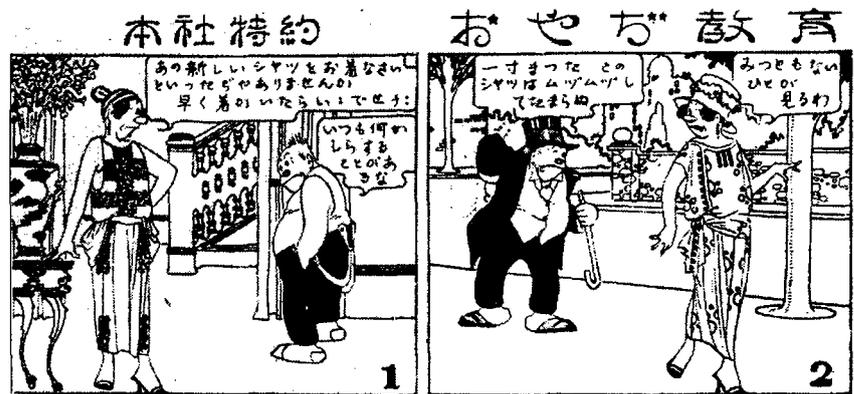
The Samurai Spirit

First, Japan has become a very crowded, urban nation, with a population density that ranks 20th in the world. Unlike many other amusements, comics require little physical space, and they can be enjoyed in silence and solitude. Pioneers in headphone amplifiers for electric guitars, tiny tape players, and other miniaturized gadgetry, the Japanese place a premium on not bothering others.

Second, Japan remains a society ruled by mutual obligations and codes of behavior. Individual desires must be subordi-

*The phrase *manga* was coined in 1814 by the Japanese woodblock print artist Hokusai, using the Chinese ideograms *man* (involuntary or in spite of oneself) and *ga* (picture). Hokusai was evidently trying to describe something like “whimsical sketches.” But it is noteworthy that the first ideogram also has the meaning “morally corrupt.”

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The first U.S. cartoon serialized in Japan, *Bringing up Father* appeared in 1923. *Mutt and Jeff*, *Felix the Cat*, and others soon followed.

nated to the good of the group, yet the pressures for individual achievement have, if anything, increased. To the student cramming for examinations, the businessman stuck in the corporate hierarchy, and the housewife trapped at home, *manga* provide an escape valve for dreams and frustrations. And as such, they play a vital part in Japanese popular culture, revealing legacies from the past, ideals of love, attitudes toward work and play, and above all, a thirst for fantasy.

When the first Japanese comic strips for children appeared during the 1920s, they depicted plucky samurai lads who always protected their feudal masters and fought for justice and the glory of Japan. The spirit, if not the figure, of the dedicated, skillful swordsman presides over many dramatic comics for men and boys. The typical modern samurai superhero slashes his way through sword fights that can last for 30 pages, usually against a backdrop of burning castles, ravaged villages, peasants in revolt, and assorted corpses. He tends to be stoic, not very vocal, and a member of a group. If not a member of a group, he is an outsider confident of his own purpose in a hostile world.

An example of the latter is *Ogami Ittō*, the anti-hero of *Kozure Ōkami* (*Wolf and Child*), by Koike Kazuo and Kojima Gōseki. Factional politics cause him to lose his job as executioner for the Tokugawa clan. After his wife is murdered, he becomes a paid assassin and embarks on a mission of vengeance. What saves the series from degenerating into endless bouts of slaughter—Ogami kills 37 opponents in one episode—is the presence of his infant son. Samurai stories often rely thematically on the

contrast between human bonds and battlefield violence.

Given the martial quality of most traditional samurai epics, one would expect Japanese to savor "war comics" in the American style of *Fightin' Marines*, *Fightin' Army*, and *Sgt. Fury*. The ancient samurai idolized obedience and regarded dying for the sake of honor as a privilege, and the government tried to revive this aspect of the *bushidō* ethic in World War II. Total defeat, however, and the war deaths of 1,972,000 Japanese ended that tradition. Under ARTICLE 9 of the 1946 Japanese Constitution, the Japanese "forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation."

Everything but Cricket

Many artists, in fact, have done their best to ridicule the wartime warrior values. Mizuki Shigeru lost his left arm during an American bombing raid in World War II, and his 350-page comic *Sōin Gyokusai Seyo! (Banzai Charge!)*, based on his own experiences as a soldier, illustrates the hazards of blind obedience. A detachment of soldiers under the command of a major intoxicated with *bushidō* ideals arrives at an island off Rabaul, New Britain. When the Americans appear, the major orders a *banzai!* charge, sending his green troops to destruction. Some survive, but headquarters informs them that since their glorious deaths have already been reported, they must either commit suicide or attack again.

The demise of militarism, however, does not mean the demise of self-sacrifice, endurance, and competition. These Japanese ideals live on in other contemporary activities, notably sports. During the early years of the post-World War II U.S. Occupation, the authorities banned traditional Japanese school sports such as judo, karate, and kendo—all reflections, it was thought, of *bushidō* values. When Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, finally lifted the ban in 1950, the result was a tremendous boom not only in sports but also in sports comics.

One of the first sports strips to appear was *Igaguri-kun*, by Fukui Eiichi, a tale of a judo expert named Igaguri that found favor with Japanese youngsters. *Igaguri-kun* led to comics featuring not only traditional Japanese sports but also baseball, football, professional wrestling, boxing, and volleyball. (Perhaps the only major sport neglected by Japanese comic artists has been cricket.) Athletic prowess became a source of national pride and provided a legitimate channel for aggressive tendencies. If Japanese boys could no longer dream of growing up to be heroic warriors, they could at least become sports stars.

CONSUMPTION AS CULTURE

The Japanese first tasted American fast food—Howard Johnson's and Kentucky Fried Chicken—at the 1970 World Exposition in Ōsaka. At the time, their income per capita was \$1,702, below those of Puerto Rico and Italy. By 1980, that number was \$7,672, or close to the \$10,094 of the United States, and American-style fast-food franchises, as well as amusement parks, supermarkets, and other service businesses, had sprouted from Kyūshū to Hokkaidō.

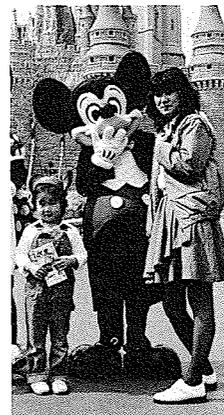
Indeed, McDonald's (with more than 450 Japanese outlets), Kentucky Fried Chicken (430), and other U.S. fast-food eateries probably owe little of their success to their cuisine; the more than 1,500 take-out sushi outlets run by one Japanese company attest to the superior appeal of native dishes. Both Japanese and American chains, however, have profited from the growth in disposable income and from the fact that 40 percent of all married women now work at least part-time.

Meanwhile, a new breed of "office ladies"—young, single working women living with their parents—has entered the consumer ranks, and the slow spread of the five-day work week has allowed more time for excursions and amusements.

The markets thus created or expanded were made to order for the formula of standard ingredients, computerized inventories, and comprehensive training manuals devised by U.S. service companies. One example is Tokyo Disneyland, which opened in April 1983. While it did not invest in the project, Walt Disney Productions provided the local developer with 300 volumes detailing everything from costume design to crowd control. The result: a 114-acre park identical to its counterparts in California and Florida. In 1983, some 10.4 million Japanese strolled with Mickey and Minnie, rode on the Mark Twain Riverboat, or listened to Slue Foot Sue sing (in English) "I'm Looking for a Big-City Beau."

Until recently, notes Tokyo economist Kusaka Kimindo, a former Wilson Center Guest Scholar, "Japanese companies, bound by a reliance on 'serious' industries, neglected to develop amusements." Now they make and market Windsurfers, hang gliders, and other "fun" items—for home and, of course, export. Last February, the Chinese government announced that a Japanese company would build a "Disney-style" park in Beijing.

The Japanese are also taking service technology a few steps further. Some five million vending units sell everything from shoes to mixed drinks. And at a suburban Tokyo supermarket, robots unload trucks and restock aisles. In Japan as in America, leisure and prosperity are now the mothers of commercial invention.



Most popular among the sports comics are highly stylized *bēsubōru*, or "baseball," stories. In 1966, the success of a baseball comic called *Kyojin no Hoshi* (*Star of the Giants*) helped to usher in the genre known today as "sports-guts" comics. Written by Kajiwara Ikki and drawn by Kawasaki Noboru, *Kyojin no Hoshi* stars a young boy named Hyūma Hoshi, who dreams of joining the Yomiuri Giants, Japan's most famous baseball team. His father teaches him to field flaming baseballs, part of a harsh training program for Hyūma that would make any real-life American coach sob with pity. Eventually, the boy becomes one of Japan's ace pitchers. The story ends, however, on a mixed note: Hyūma beats his arch-rival but tears a tendon in his arm and must abandon baseball.

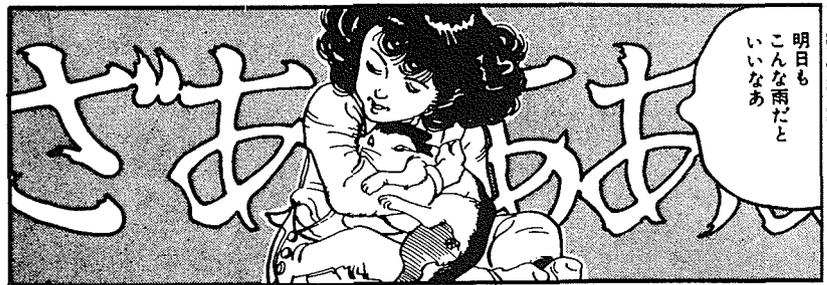
Salary-Man

A companion to the sports comic is the so-called work comic, aimed at an audience of boys and young men who have not yet entered the work force, or at those who have only recently found a job. The stories stress perseverance in the face of impossible odds, craftsmanship, and the quest for excellence; the heroes are young men from the low end of the social totem pole who strive to become the "best in Japan" in their chosen professions.

In *Hōchōnin Ajihei* (*Ajihei the Cook*), by Gyū Jirō and Biggu Jō, a young man forsakes his father's occupation as a traditional chef in order to make fast food for the masses. The relationship between master and apprentice supplies much of the drama. From the 23-volume series, readers also learn how to peel onions, chop carrots, make noodles, and even fry ice cream without melting it. A series by Nakazawa Keiji called *Shigoto no Uta* (*Ode to Work*) concentrates less on technical information and more on the spiritual meaning of hard work and a good job.

Yet, while the Japanese still pay homage to traditional values, they are not the diligent, dull automatons routinely portrayed in the Western news media. Japanese white-collar workers, for example, enjoy their own irreverent genre of comics, known appropriately as *sarariman*, or "salary-man," comics.

American and European business executives, awed by Japanese management techniques, often pine for a more obedient, loyal, and productive work force, like that which supposedly exists in Japan. Salary-man comics, however, show Japanese office workers as they see themselves. One of the first, *Fuji Santarō*, by Satō Sampei, began serialization in the *Asahi* newspaper in 1965. It featured a company employee who, in an early sequence, was shown painting open eyes on his glasses so



Three Japanese comic figures: Noriko (above), a normal Japanese girl; Mazinger Z (right), a warrior-robot controlled by a boy seated inside its head; and Ichiban, the test-taking hero of an "exam" comic, one of Japan's newest genres.



that he could sleep safely during staff meetings.

The typical hero of salary-man comics is a middle-class everyman known in Japan as the *hira-shain*, or rank-and-file employee. His is an unhappy existence. Married to an ugly woman, he dreads going home, and he hangs his head low after being scolded by his boss. The other key figures include the president (likes to play golf, is old and not too bright), the department head (hardworking and stern), the section chief (desperately wants to become a department head but fears he cannot), the "eternal chief clerk" (incompetent and stuck for life in his posi-

tion), and the rank and file, many of whom are also *madogiwazoku*, or "those who sit idle beside windows"—deadbeats in a system of lifetime employment.

Another much-lampooned sacred cow is Japan's traditional family structure. In *Dame Oyaji (No Good Daddy)*, by Furuya Mitsutoshi, a small, pathetic salary-man has the misfortune to have married Onibaba (Demon Hag), a scowling woman built like a warrior-robot. Early episodes all follow the same pattern: The father tries to assert himself, fails, and is tied up, burned, or beaten by his family. He represents the reverse of the stereotype in male-oriented Japan, where the father has traditionally been an aloof, authoritarian figure.

These *manga* that mock Japanese stereotypes are presented only half in jest. In reality, they are proof of the changes that Japanese society has endured since the end of World War II. For example, Japanese women—who first received the vote in the 1946 Constitution—can now turn to a growing number of cartoon strips created by women for women. One of the first was by Hasegawa Machiko, whose *Sazae-san* began in 1946 and ran until 1974. *Sazae*, the heroine, symbolized the new Japanese woman: still family oriented and respectful of tradition, but independent minded. Today, some 45 different young girls' and women's comic magazines appear every month.

Boy Meets Girl

Most of them do not embody current Western feminist ideals. Whether the heroine be a sports star, a young girl, a woman on the job, or a housewife, romance (often illicit) is invariably the motivating dramatic force. Scenes where a young girl is struck in the face by an angry young male, and then thanks him for "caring," can still be found.

The male and female characters in these stories have a distinctly Western look: tall, with large, expressive eyes and light hair. What their physical appearance reflects is a revolution in the way Japanese people view—or wish to view—themselves. Before the Japanese ever saw Westerners, they depicted themselves in scroll paintings and woodblock prints with Asian features, and often smaller-than-life eyes. Today, billboards, television commercials, and magazine ads usually feature Caucasian models, both male and female.*

*A form of surgery popular in Japan today is to have an extra crease put in the upper eyelid, creating a rounder eye (cost: \$1,000). Different ways of raising babies, an improved diet, and greater use of desks and chairs—instead of squatting on cushions—have given many younger Japanese the lithe and lanky look of their comic-book heroes and heroines.

Until a few years ago, most boys and men in Japan regarded girls' comics and the work of women artists with a mixture of puzzlement and derision. They could not understand the female obsession with syrupy romance, and they were repelled by the florid art style. But the increasing sophistication shown in girls' comics such as *Berusaiyu no Bara* (*The Rose of Versailles*), a 1,700-page fictional tale by Ikeda Riyoko of the life of Marie Antoinette, has attracted many male fans. Some read girls' comics in order to learn how women think. Others find the emphasis on emotion and psychology refreshing.

The Visual Generation

Recently, comic-book publishers have made tentative attempts to unite male and female readers. In September 1981, *Duo* emerged. Its catchy slogan: "We reached out for the same magazine at the store, and that was our beginning—*Duo*, for the two of us."

Despite their success in attracting a broad readership, *manga* are not without their critics. Nagai Gō came out in 1968 with *Harenchi Gakuen* (*Shameless School*), which aroused the wrath of parents by introducing overt eroticism into children's comics and by mocking Japan's monolithic educational system. Students in the series spent most of their time cavorting in the nude, playing mahjong, and throwing sake parties. Japanese law forbids the graphic depiction of genitalia or sexual intercourse. But through the use of suggestive techniques, many contemporary comics—children's and adults'—depict far more erotic scenes than are found in *Harenchi Gakuen*.

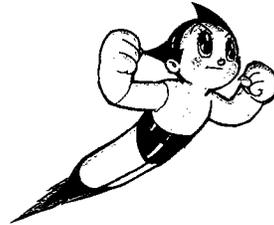
In 1979, as controversy continued, an educator named Matsuzawa Mitsuo fired off a polemic entitled *Nihonjin no Atama o Dame ni Shita Manga-Gekiga* (*The Dramatic Comics That Have Ruined Japanese Minds*). The jacket blurb on his book asked: "IS YOUR CHILD SAFE? . . . Children hold the key to Japan's future, and their minds are being turned into mush. This book tells how comics might ruin the nation . . . and issues a bold warning to parents whose children face the [university entrance] exams!"

Matsuzawa's appeal, and others like it, seem unlikely to stem the comic tide. Besides reading them for pleasure, Japanese now rely on cartoons and comics as an effective way to communicate: They can be found on street signs, shopping maps, instruction manuals, electricity and gas bills, and even in phone booths. One Tokyo publisher recently came out with a history of the world in comic-book form. The growing intru-

sion of *manga* into daily life is one reason that modern Japanese youths, already surrounded by television sets and video tape recorders, are described by pundits in Japan as the *shikaku sedai*, the "visual generation."

All in all, Japan's comic-book industry today dwarfs that of the United States or any other country. But the isolation that helped Japan to develop such a rich comic genre also limits its exportability. American comics can be found around the world: *Superman* alone sells in more than 45 nations. Transplanting Japanese comics is not so easy. To publish them in other languages would involve redrawing or photographically reversing the frames so that they could be read from left to right; word balloons also must be altered to accommodate horizontal (rather than vertical) dialogue. The difference in symbolic vocabulary alone dwarfs any technical problems. How would an American guess, for example, that when the nose of a Japanese male character gushes blood, he is sexually stirred?

Even so, there have been some export successes. Japanese robot stories have won many fans in Europe. A popular figure in mainland China is Tezuka Osamu's *Tetsuwan Atomu*, known in the United States, Venezuela, and Peru as *Astro Boy*. Since 1963, U.S. television has also dubbed and broadcast several Japanese TV series based on *manga*. Finally, the overseas market for *manga* spin-offs—toys, picture books, and video games—ensures that the world will get a glimpse, if only indirectly, of Japan's vigorous new visual culture.



AT THE MOVIES

by James Bailey

The average American knows two kinds of Japanese movies, if he knows any at all. In the first, grunting samurai slash at each other with swords. In the second, a prehistoric monster stomps through downtown Tokyo like King Kong, derailing trains, swatting down aircraft, and smashing buildings.

Today, such scenes seldom appear on the Japanese screen. Like the Western in the United States, samurai and monster films moved to TV (see box, pp. 72-73). Indeed, in Japan as in the United States, the advent of TV took its toll of the cinema business. Attendance is down to one-sixth of its 1960 level. (In the United States, the drop has been less dramatic, but ticket sales still lag below what they were 25 years ago.) In terms of production, Japan's film industry now devotes anywhere from one-half to two-thirds of its annual output to pornography.

Porn, however, accounts for only 16 percent of box-office revenues. Strict censorship ensures that the raciest parts of these movies are their titles: *Hateshinaki Zechō* (*Endless Ecstasy*), *Uzuku* (*Sex Itch*), and *Jokōsei Repōto—Yūko No Shiroi Mune* (*High School Co-ed Report—Yuko's White Breasts*).

What Japanese enjoy most at the movies is not porn but harmless family fare. In 1983, *Nankyoku Monogatari* (*Antarctica*), a tale of sleigh dogs accidentally abandoned on the frozen continent, attracted more viewers than any other domestic film in Japanese history. Ranked behind *Nankyoku Monogatari* on the 1983 list of box-office winners are romantic love stories—one involving a college girl and a private detective, another entangling a high school beauty with a visitor from outer space.

Foreign offerings have become increasingly visible. Today's youth, who make up almost three-quarters of the Japanese movie-going audience, eat Western-style food, wear Western clothes, listen to Western music, and watch Western movies. Twenty-four of the 30 most successful features in Japan were made in the West, mostly in America. Among the more popular in recent years have been *Journey of Love and Youth* and *Dusk*—more familiar to Americans as, respectively, *An Officer and a Gentleman* and *On Golden Pond*.

Twenty-five years ago, the Japanese were relatively content with their own cinema. A 1959 survey showed that 85 to 90 per-

cent of Japanese between the ages of 15 and 19 "disliked foreign films and never went." Internationally renowned directors such as Kurosawa Akira (whose *Rashōmon* took first prize at the 1951 Venice Film Festival), Ozu Yasujirō, and Naruse Mikio enjoyed the support of a studio system that produced almost 500 films in 1960. Their technical and dramatic skills moved Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie, the authors of *The Japanese Film* (1959), to label the Japanese film industry as "one of the world's most vitally creative."

Today, a film by a master such as Kurosawa still has enormous appeal: Only two other domestic releases have grossed more than his *Kagemusha* (*Shadow Warrior*), a lavish samurai epic that shared first prize at the 1980 Cannes Film Festival. But Japan's four largest studios—Tōhō, Tōei, Nikkatsu, and Shōchiku—have responded to competition from TV by moving away from film production. Kurosawa had to secure financing from Twentieth Century-Fox to make *Kagemusha*. Tōhō, his former employer, now earns much of its income by distributing foreign works and has branched out into real estate. The majors made only 116 films in 1983. Designed as commercial rather than critical vehicles, they almost always adhered to tried-and-true genres.

Such fidelity has its aesthetic drawbacks. Yet, repetition can also be an asset. As Thomas Cripps, a historian and former Wilson Center Fellow, observes, the use of "repeated and reworked formulas and archetypes . . . invites us to see reflections of [a society's] values and attitudes." The Japanese silver screen may have lost some of its luster, but it still serves as a somewhat faithful mirror, revealing the Japanese as they see themselves.

According to an old industry adage, a Japanese film-maker can never go wrong with *Chūshingura* (*The Loyal League*) or war. Since the turn-of-the-century advent of Japan's commercial cinema, *Chūshingura*, the saga of 47 samurai who commit mass suicide after avenging their master's death, has gone through more than 200 screen adaptations. The current dearth of locally made swordplay sagas suggests that times and tastes have changed, but there is still box-office appeal in war movies.

In August of 1981, Tōhō presented *Rengō Kantai* (*The Assembled Fleet*), a chronicle of the Japanese Imperial Navy up to the (disastrous) Battle of Midway. It remains one of the 10 most lucrative domestic films ever made. The following June, the studio restaged the Battle of Okinawa in *Himeyuri No Tō* (*Tower of the*

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Japanese movie viewers, whose forebears enjoyed daylong kabuki performances, sat enthralled through all 200 minutes of *The Seven Samurai* (1954), still considered one of the best samurai films.

Lillies) and last summer carried on—this time in the air—with *Zero-san Mōyū* (*Zero Fighter*). Nor has Tōhō alone profited from the dramatic possibilities of mayhem writ large. Tōei had one of its biggest 1982 hits with the World War II-era *Dai-Nippon Teikoku* (*The Imperial Japanese Empire*). In 1984, Shōchiku showed the 1937 conquest of Shanghai in *Shanghai Bansukingu* (*Welcome to Shanghai*). Needless to say, the upcoming 40th anniversary of what Americans call V-J Day will not go unobserved.

While World War II films have shocked Japan's neighbors—Chinese officials protested the whitewashing of Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki in Tōei's *Dai-Nippon Teikoku*—their popularity probably does not signal a renascent lust for martial glory. Few Japanese favor either greater defense spending (regularly about one percent of the Japanese gross national product, versus six percent in the United States) or an expansion of the all-volunteer Self-Defense Forces (manpower has stayed near 300,000 during the past two decades). Today's films of World War II tend to portray ordinary Japanese soldiers and civilians of the period as innocents, more sinned against than sinning.

Buffeted by fires, typhoons, and earthquakes, Japanese have nurtured a mentality known as *higaisha ishiki*, or "victim's con-

sciousness." Furthermore, past centuries of isolation have led many Japanese to feel easily misunderstood by the outside world. They consider their country's nature to be "inexpressible and, in the end, incomprehensible to foreigners," as the novelist Inoue Hisashi put it.

Seen through Japanese eyes, World War II becomes yet another link in a long chain of victimizations and misunderstandings. In *Dai-Nippon Teikoku*, the bombing of Pearl Harbor is but a Japanese reaction to Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt—as the President is depicted saying—to "get the Japanese to attack us"; a Japanese soldier advancing into Singapore is taken aback by the stiff resistance of the Chinese, who obviously do not realize that "we're trying to liberate them from British rule"; and at war's end, a judge at a war crimes tribunal in the Philippines tells Japanese defendants that "all Japanese deserve to die."

A few antiwar films criticize the military, but mostly for causing the deaths of so many young Japanese. Shōchiku studio's *Shanghai Bansukingu*, which roundly condemns Japanese atrocities in China, is the exception rather than the rule. Japanese noncombatants generally resemble the peace-loving villagers in *Kodomo No Goro Sensō Ga Atta (There Was a War When I Was a Child)*—prevented only through the strenuous efforts of the secret police from taking a half-American little girl to their bosoms and from giving rice cakes to starving Allied prisoners.

Troubles Ahead

The dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki did little to dispel the Japanese perception of themselves as victims. In *Konoko O Nokoshite (Children of Nagasaki)*, a boy survives the bombing of Nagasaki and later becomes a war correspondent. Tragedies elsewhere seem pale compared to his own experiences. At one point, he declares that the absence of nuclear weapons from more recent battlefields, including those in Vietnam and Biafra, causes him to "breathe a sigh of relief."

As seen in the movies, the Japanese sense of victimization continues during peacetime. Against a backdrop of exotic settings, *kaigai rokei* (foreign location) films depict the modern Japanese as a naive people at the mercy of the outside world.

A few examples convey the flavor of the genre. In *Kamisama, Naze Ai Ni Mo Kokkyō Ga Aru No? (God, Why Is There a Border in Love?)*, a Japanese photographer in love with a girl he meets in Switzerland is deported from that country on trumped-up charges. *Kaigenrei No Yoru (Night of Martial Law)*, filmed in Colombia, features a Japanese journalist and his girl-

friend who become embroiled in a coup d'état in the country of Nueva Granada. Eventually, both die by firing squad. The photojournalist hero of *Yōroppa Tokkyū* (*Trans-Europe Express*) endures insults to the Japanese as "yellow monkeys," survives a roughing-up by a muscle-bound bouncer, and is even refused by a Parisian prostitute who tells him, "No Asians."

The results of a 1980 survey by the Office of the Prime Minister illustrate the extent of Japanese xenophobia. Of the 3,000 men and women polled, 64 percent said that they did not wish to associate with non-Japanese, and 38 percent unconditionally opposed international marriage.

Hole in the Pants

In the face of increased outside contacts, however, the Japanese fear of foreigners should eventually fade. Between 1955 and 1978, external investment in the country jumped from \$52.2 million to \$20.2 billion; Japanese investment abroad, from \$159.4 million to \$4.6 billion. The resident foreign population also rose from 599,000 to 767,000, and the number of Japanese living overseas in October 1984 was up nearly two percent from a year earlier, to almost half a million.

Reflecting the increase in foreign exposure, many recent foreign location releases have lost their paranoid flavor. *Rongu Ran* (*Long Run*), which premièred in 1982, is about an athlete who roller-skates across the United States, accompanied by his trainer and a camerawoman. In the course of his journey, he receives a \$1,000 reward for heroism and constant gifts of food and shelter. The 1984 hero of *Uindii* (*Races*), a professional motorcycle racer, never sets foot in Japan, maintaining an apartment in Berlin and a cabin in Canada. He prospers without Japanese female companionship (all his girlfriends are Caucasian), without Japanese food, even without expressing his deepest feelings in his native tongue, since his English is perfectly fluent.

If the Japanese cinema, as critic Furukawa Kiyomi asserts, is more likely to reflect the status quo than to challenge it, then the increase in more balanced portraits of foreign countries deserves much applause.

Cinema-going in Japan is a seasonal activity. Theaters do their best business during school holidays at New Year's, in late April and early May, and, of course, in summer, when distributors release those films aimed at Japanese under 20.

Their overwhelming favorite is the *aidoru eiga* (idol movie), a financial mainstay of the film industry. In 1981, Tōei studio reaped 55 percent of its revenues from idol movies, which ac-

**THE JAPANESE AND TV:
'BLIND DEVOTION'**

In few countries does television exert as much influence as it does in Japan. As Tokyo critic Satō Kuwashi puts it, "Most Japanese worship TV with blind devotion."

A recent survey by the public network, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai, or NHK), supports Satō's assertion: The average family in Tokyo has its set on for eight hours and 12 minutes a day, the highest level of viewership in the world. By contrast, Americans, also noted for their addiction to TV, watch the tube for six hours and 44 minutes daily. So enamored are the Japanese of the medium that, when polled recently on which one of five items—newspapers, TVs, telephones, automobiles, and refrigerators—they would keep if they could have only *one*, 31 percent (versus three percent in the United States) answered "television."

NHK spokesman Yoshinari Mayumi asserts that television "fulfills a collective Japanese urge—to be all of a group together, watching TV." Indeed, Japan's "group" mentality has encouraged the medium's rapid growth. In 1959, six years after broadcasting began, networks advertised the marriage of Crown Prince Akihito with the slogan "Let's all watch the Prince's marriage on TV." Japanese bought four million sets that year. Similar sprees preceded the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the 1970 International Exposition in Ōsaka.

During the 1970s, color TVs, cars, and "coolers" (air conditioners) made up the "three Cs"—a trinity of appliances, possession of which signified membership in the middle class. Today, 98 percent of all Japanese households have color sets, versus 89 percent in the United States.

Most Japanese TV sets stay tuned to one of the two channels operated by NHK, a nonprofit network created by the government 32 years ago. NHK subsists on a fee of about \$40 a year, paid on a voluntary basis by more than 30 million subscriber households. "Part national conscience, part full-time instructor," notes Frank Gibney in *Japan, the Fragile Superpower* (1975), NHK acts "as executor of what the French used to call a *mission civilisatrice* on every level of Japanese society."

On NHK's Channel One in Tokyo, viewers get a steady diet of news (38 percent of broadcast time), soap operas, sports, variety shows (23 percent), and "cultural" programs (16 percent) such as concerts, local folk festivals, and a recent 30-hour documentary on ancient Chinese caravan routes. Channel Three serves educational fare: high school science courses, music instruction, English, Russian, and Chinese lessons, and the finer points of *Go*, a Japanese game akin to checkers.

Even the NHK programs that fall in the "entertainment" category take pains to promote national values. One of the more successful Japanese soap operas was NHK's "Oshin," the

ragged-to-riches story of a waif who becomes a supermarket magnate. From 1983 to 1984, the series ran for a total of 297 episodes. Oshin's powers of endurance—tested by a separation from her parents in childhood, her husband's suicide, and other assorted tragedies—became legendary. Parents admonished their children to "be like Oshin," and in 1983, when former Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei was convicted of accepting bribes, he signaled his resolve to remain in politics by saying "I am a male Oshin."

Japan's five commercial networks—TV Tokyo, Fuji Telecasting, the Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), TV Asahi, and the Nippon



Scene from "Oshin"

Television Network (NTV)—are far less didactic. Their most popular offerings are homegrown variety specials hosted by comedians and musicians. Hagimoto Kin'ichi, Japan's *Owarai Tarento No. 1* (Laugh Talent No. 1), presides over five different shows a week. U.S. imports fill 15 to 20 percent of airtime, but programs such as "Dallas" and "Kojak" seem relatively tame. (Viewers were puzzled, for example, by a "Dallas" episode that included an attempted rape but no nudity—both often shown on Japanese TV.) Japanese prefer their own samurai dramas, soap operas, and detective stories, all liberally laced with sex and violence. They also enjoy a menu of sports programs, including "Megaton Supoutsu Today—Puro Yakyu Sokuho" ("Megaton Sports Today—Pro Baseball Report").

While critics have long inveighed against lurid commercial programming, the ever-rising level of sex and violence on the screen is beginning to prompt widespread viewer protests. Along with the novelty of TV ownership, the enthusiasm of the home audience is waning. Even the highly popular "White versus Red Singing Match," an annual New Year's Day variety extravaganza that stars Japan's best video talent, has seen its ratings decline. High as it is, overall viewership has been slipping since 1979. A 1983 NHK survey found that 42 percent of Japanese viewers considered much TV programming "monotonous."

Ironically, boredom has set in against a backdrop of rising technical quality. Among other innovations, increased cable and satellite hookups have improved and expanded reception. More importantly, NHK is on the verge of perfecting "high-definition" sets, which promise a picture five times sharper than that available anywhere in the world. If programming improves, the networks could enjoy a boom like that which swept the nation in 1960, when color TV made its Japanese debut.

counted for only 20 percent of new titles. To describe these movies, one is almost forced back to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's remark on pornography—that while he might not be able to define it, he knew it when he saw it.

Idol movies feature young singer-stars, usually wrestling with loss of innocence and the quest for identity. These rites of passage, however, differ in Japan and the United States. American-made "teenpix" such as *Porky's* and *Risky Business* feature randy boys and girls who want nothing more than to test their sexual skills. Couples in the Japanese idol movies, like determined Peter Pans, strive to remain children for as long as possible. Even in a feature as raunchy as *Pantsu No Ana (Hole in the Pants)*, rife with sexual and scatological jokes, the hero and heroine never exchange so much as a chaste kiss.

Pumping Gas

For young Japanese, the loss of innocence does not entail exchanging the constraints of adolescence for the privileges of adulthood. As Ruth Benedict notes in her famed study *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946): "The arc of life in Japan is plotted in opposite fashion to that in the United States. . . . Maximum freedom and indulgence [are] allowed to babies and to the old. Restrictions are slowly increased . . . [until] having one's own way reaches a low just before and after marriage."

The familiar adolescent's question, Who am I? is answered less by declarations of independence than by a reaffirmation of social and family ties. Consequently, many idol movies involve a search for missing family members: Yamaguchi Momoe's for her father in *Uaito Rabu (White Love)*, Tahara Toshihiko's for his brother in *Uin Monogatari (Vienna Story)*, Harada Tomoyo's for her father in *Aijō Monogatari (Curtain Call)*.

That these young men and women seldom set out to find their mothers is a reflection of the typical Japanese family. Traditionally, the Japanese mother acts as a constant and close companion, often living vicariously through her children. The father remains a distant figure, devoted as much to his job as to his family. Indeed, a recent survey of salaried males disclosed that over 70 percent answered Yes to the question "Is work the most important thing in your life?"

A postwar trend toward social and economic equality, not to mention the traditional reluctance of individuals to stand out in a group-oriented society, has led to the portrayal of young characters who are the equals of—rather than the role models for—the predominantly middle-class viewers. Gone are the days of heroes



Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence (1983), a Japanese-English co-production about a POW camp in Java, was one of the few films popular both in Tokyo and abroad.

such as Nakamura Kinnosuke, a kabuki apprentice who appeared as a sword-wielding swashbuckler in a series of idol movies during the 1950s. Today's typical youth identifies instead with the roles played by Tahara, who works at a service station and dreams of becoming a big-league pitcher in *Sunika Burūsu* (*Sneaker Blues*) or is a student of music in *Uiin Monogatari*.

Idol movies are also less likely to set trends than to reflect them: A trendsetter, after all, stands apart from the group. Hence, a film such as *Munasawagi No Hōkago* (*Uneasiness after School*) presents not what will be chic but what already is chic: high school girls strolling down a currently fashionable street, visiting a currently fashionable department store. The amazing speed with which films in Japan are shot, edited, and distributed enables them to embody what is *au courant* when it is *au courant*. Last October, for example, a local studio announced that producers of its late December release would begin shooting in early November.

Comedies are often the only films that can rival the popularity of idol movies. In 1979, they were the most profitable products for three of the four major Tokyo studios. Comedies have also employed the talents of some of Japan's newest and bright-

est directors. Vincent Canby, the *New York Times* film critic, named *Kazoku Gēmu* (*Family Game*), by Morita Yoshimitsu, one of the 10 best films of 1984. A cold-blooded satire of the middle class, Morita's film is about parents who hire a private tutor to help their son pass his university entrance exams. The tutor browbeats and humiliates the entire family, a fate they stoically endure because their son's test scores have improved.

But while Morita and other directors have recently won critical plaudits, Yamada Yōji and his 16-year-old comedy series *Otoko Wa Tsurai Yo* (*It's Hard Being a Man*) still draw the largest crowds. Semiannual installments have regularly been Shōchiku studio's top money-earning films. All told, the 34 episodes make up one of the world's longest running film series.

Good-bye to Gangsters

The series's appeal does not lie in innovative plot lines. In each installment, an itinerant peddler and ne'er-do-well named Torajirō Kuruma, or "Tora-san," as he is known affectionately, returns from his travels to try the patience of his loving and long-suffering family, which forever wonders when he will marry and settle down. An incurable romantic, Tora-san invariably falls deeply in love with what the vernacular press has dubbed his "madonna"—a geisha, an old high school classmate, a boarder at his relatives' house. And, just as invariably, he loses her.

The reasons for Tora-san's eternal appeal are twofold: his plight, and the way of life that he represents. "Humor which allows one both to laugh and to weep," note Anderson and Richie, "is particularly admired by the Japanese." Like Charlie Chaplin—widely revered in Japan—Tora-san, in his trademark checkered suit, is both funny and sad. "He is eager to help others in trouble," observes director Yamada, "but he is simple, not very smart, hasty, and is constantly misunderstanding situations."

Those misunderstandings produce the word play for which the series is renowned. In installment number 24, *Torajirō Haru No Yume* (*Torajirō's Dream of Spring*), Tora-san's family has lent his room to a luckless American salesman named Michael (pronounced "Mai-ko-ru" in Japanese). When Tora-san returns unexpectedly, his flustered sister tries to dissuade him from taking a peek at the new lodger: "Well, uh, you see, we gave your room to, ah, Maiko . . ." "A *maiko* (apprentice geisha)!" interrupts a delighted Tora-san. "Well, why didn't you say so?" Off he goes on a tangential, rapid-fire disquisition on the imagined charms of the beautiful boarder, who, in actuality, stands behind him—lanky-limbed, big-nosed, and bald.

In addition to laughter, Tora-san provides a comforting reminder of bygone days. "His clothes, his language, his outlook on life," declares film critic Ian Buruma, "suggest the long-lost world of artisans and small merchants, large families, and tightly knit neighborhood communities where the policeman knows the beancurd-maker and values are fast and firm." Above all, Tora-san and his relatives embody a traditional Japanese sensitivity and gentleness. And like Tora-san's friendly fictional neighborhood—the Tokyo *Shitamachi* (Low City) near the Sumida River—such sensitivity is disappearing amid the pressures of modern urban Japanese life.

Popular as the current cinematic fads may be in 1985, they are subject to change. Fifteen years ago, *yakuza* (gangsters) were the rage. As film critic Satō Tadao points out, gangster heroes were "loved by the Japanese, who were mostly poor and believed that they were honest while the rich were liars." Today, a better-off nation no longer dotes on the exploits of gangsters. When executives and directors with no experience of World War II take the helm at Japan's movie studios, war films, too, may disappear.

Yet inevitably, a thematic continuity among these various genres will persist. In the United States, the cinematic "death" of the Wild West cowboy was matched by the "birth" of the outer space heroes of *Star Wars*—the fight for truth, justice, and the American Way simply moved to another arena. In Japan, the *tateyaku* protagonist—strong, noble, and not given to displays of emotion—began as a stock kabuki figure. Although he has changed somewhat during his dramatic evolution (first as a samurai, then as a *yakuza*), he still exists in the current crop of World War II features.

With its ever-changing translations of age-old themes and images, popular cinema gives us a certain access to the way people think and act in the societies where such films are made. It is especially valuable in understanding Japanese society. But basing any overarching conclusions on the limited sampling offered here would be unwise. War, "foreign location," "idol," and Tora-san movies tell us this much: Japan is becoming less isolated, more worldly, and it is adopting more Western fads, habits, and ideas. In the process, the Japanese are adjusting, rather than discarding, their own traditions and beliefs. East is not yet West, nor is it ever likely to be.



BACKGROUND BOOKS

JAPAN'S NEW POPULAR CULTURE

Despite the proliferation of Japanese television, video games, and video cassette recorders, most Western works on Japanese culture still sketch a society of dedicated aesthetes, variously arranging flowers, sipping green tea, plucking the three-stringed *samisen*. A few books indicate, however, that popular pastimes are more contemporary and less refined.

Kuwabara Takeo, a scholar of French literature, analyzes his country's cultural shifts during the last 150 years in *Japan and Western Civilization* (1983; Columbia, trans., 1984). Any study of Japan's "mass" society must take into account the appeal of *pachinko* (a form of pinball), golf driving ranges, and *karaoke* (empty-orchestra) bars, where patrons sing along to the latest pop tunes. "We can no longer pretend," Kuwabara asserts, "that Japan's ancient artistic traditions represent our contemporary culture."

Truly popular amusements began to emerge during the 17th century. The unification of Japan under the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868) brought stability and nurtured the growth of an urban merchant class. These townsmen supported new varieties of "theater, painting, and prose fiction, all of which, while drawing heavily on Japan's aristocratic cultural tradition, evolved as distinctly popular, bourgeois forms of art." So writes H. Paul Varley, a Columbia University Japan scholar, in his survey of *Japanese Culture* (Praeger, 1973; Univ. of Hawaii, rev. ed., 1984, cloth & paper).

Sir George Bailey Sansom, one of the most respected Japanologists, supplies a more comprehensive

chronicle of these times in *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (Cresset, 1931; Stanford, rev. ed., 1952, cloth & paper). Among other theatrical entertainments, kabuki enjoyed a large audience. Sansom notes that "not only did the plots and languages of the plays affect contemporary behavior and speech, but the dress and conduct of the actors . . . dictated the fashions of the day."

Those interested in the modern form should turn to *Kabuki* (Kodansha, 1969), a lavishly illustrated volume by Gunji Masakatsu, one of the foremost authorities on the subject. Though television, radio, and cinema have thinned the ranks of kabuki viewers, roughly 1.5 million still attend performances every year.

Like kabuki, sumo wrestling had its professional origins during the Tokugawa era. Free-lance samurai, or *rōnin*, turned a rite at Shintō shrines into a commercial attraction by staging matches on street corners. The wrestlers now train in 30 different "stables" and compete in 11,000-seat indoor arenas. Patricia L. Cuyler traces the evolution of *Sumo* (Weatherhill, 1979) and argues that its unique combination of the sacred and profane—"the observance of ritual added to the spectacle of 300-pound giants slamming into each other—makes this indigenous wrestling form the national sport of Japan."

During the late 19th century, the Emperor Meiji opened his country to the West and declared: "It is our firm wish that you, our subjects, change your way of dress and your manners." His countrymen responded by taking their first lessons in the waltz and the quadrille (1884), exchanging

toasts at their first beer hall (1899), and drinking coffee at their first café (1911). Edward Seidensticker, a noted author and translator, relates these developments in **High City, Low City** (Knopf, 1983), a survey of life in Tokyo from 1868 to 1923.

Japanese Popular Culture (Tuttle, 1959; Greenwood, 1973) received its next dose of Westernization during the U.S. Occupation (1945–52). According to the Japanese authors of these 15 essays—edited by sociologist Katō Hidetoshi—the Americans influenced everything from “the desirable shape for a woman’s bosom” to nightclub names (Metro, Hollywood, and Chicago) and advertising slogans (“Kiss-proof lipstick—Now popular in America”).

The Japanese, however, retain only those foreign elements that suit their sensibilities. So argues George Fields, an advertising executive who sums up his Japanese experiences in **From Bonsai to Levi’s** (Macmillan, 1983). A case in point is the failure of instant cake mixes. General Mills based its marketing strategy on the fact that Japanese could use their rice cookers to bake cakes. But housewives balked because, as Fields observes, “the cake mix ran the danger of contaminating the rice”—the staff of life.

One import that the Japanese have adopted as their own is baseball. Yet, while the 12 Japanese major league teams may play the same game as their 24 U.S. counterparts, the way in which they play it is profoundly different. Few American teams would emulate the behavior of the Yakult Atoms (now the Yakult Swallows), who lined up on the first base line, removed their caps, and bowed to their fans to apologize for their

12th straight loss.

In **The Chrysanthemum and the Bat** (Avon, 1983, cloth & paper), a look at Japanese baseball, Robert Whiting notes that tense games can reveal a side of the Japanese not often seen. After one loss to the hated Yomiuri Giants, irate fans of the Hiroshima Carp pelted the Giants’ bus with rocks, cans, and beer bottles.

Although the Japanese still seldom give vent to such outbursts in public, the portrayal of violence in their books, magazines, and movies has steadily increased. Growing in popularity are macabre mysteries and detective stories. A sampling is in **Japanese Golden Dozen** (Tuttle, 1978), edited by Ellery Queen. Japanese commuters are especially fond of these tales, which annually sell more than 20 million copies.

This obsession with mayhem appears in a society known for its low crime, suicide, and divorce rates. Actor and film critic Ian Buruma ponders this paradox in **Behind the Mask** (Pantheon, 1984), which traces the Japanese imagination from the myths of creation to the present day.

More than anything else, Japanese popular diversions supply an escape, one no less governed by strict conventions than the tea ceremony or flower arranging. When Japanese company men go on their regular group binges, they regress into almost childlike behavior: Some are fed by hostesses wielding chopsticks; others dance around in their underwear. By the end of the evening, observes Buruma, “emotions have been vented, the play is finished, the hierarchy restored and nothing remains the next morning except . . . a headache.”