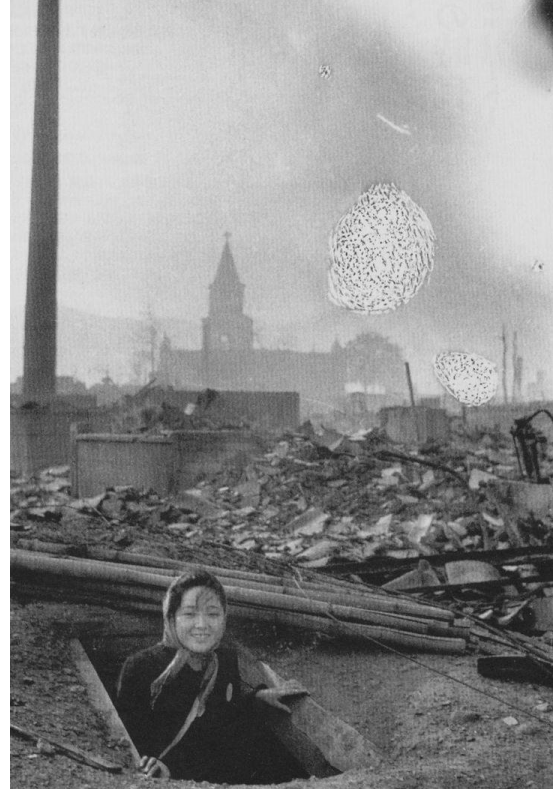


SOCIAL HISTORY OF JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE

THE CULTURE OF SHŌWA

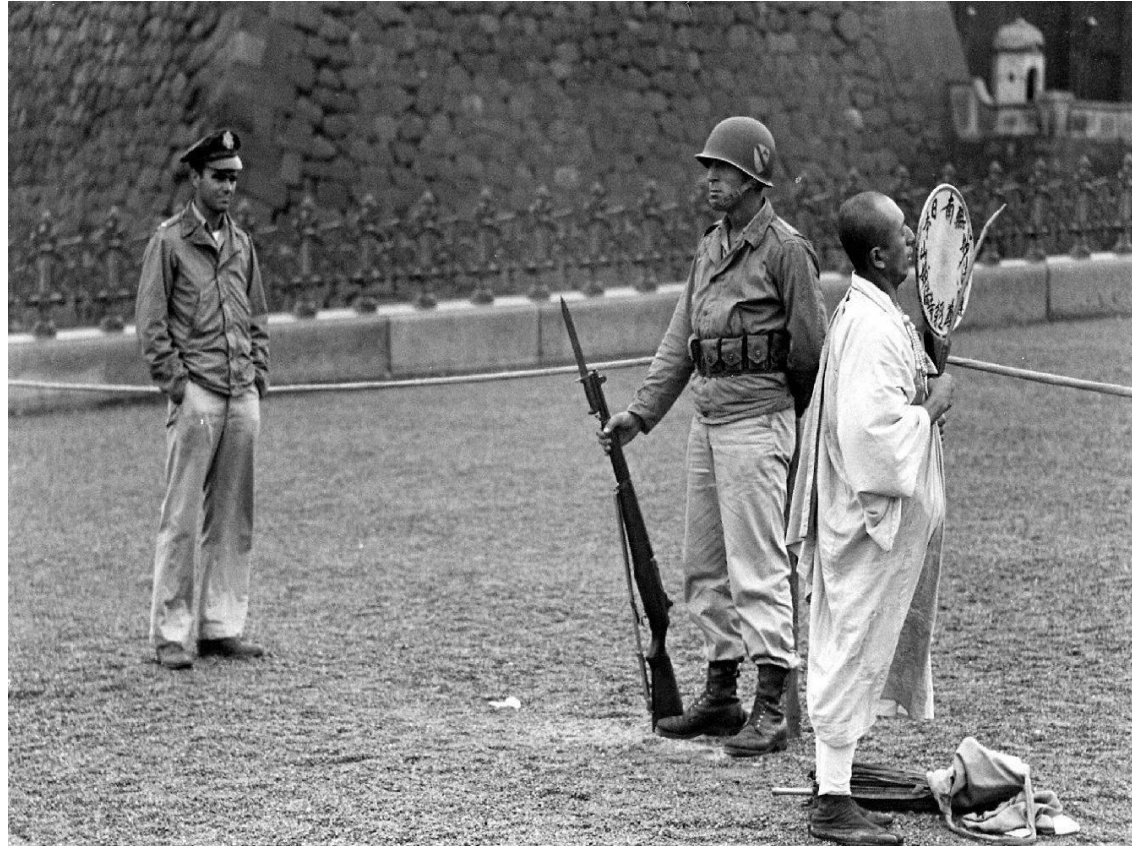
(1926–1989)

SHŌWA BEFORE 1945



- 1927: Akutagawa commits suicide
- 1929: Great Depression affects Japan
- 1931: Japan occupies Manchuria
- 1937: All-out war with China
- 1940: East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere
- 1940: The Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis
- 1941: Attack on Pearl Harbor
- 1945: Hiroshima/Nagasaki

SHŌWA AFTER 1945



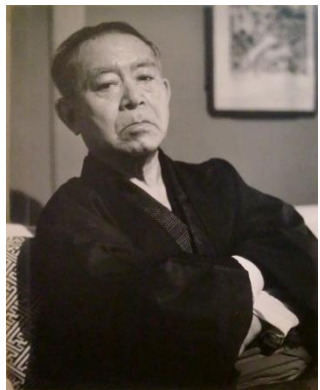
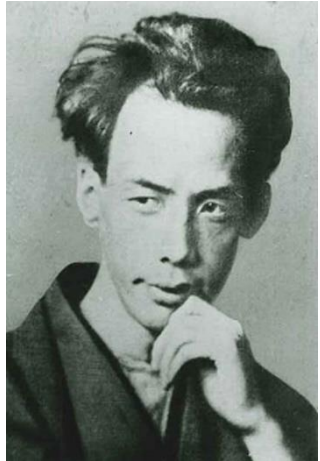
- 1945: U.S. occupation begins
- 1947: New constitution effective
- 1950: Korean War begins
- 1950: Japanese economy takes off
- 1952: U.S. occupation terminated
- 1953: First commercial TV broadcasts
- 1955: The LDP system begins
- 1960: The Security Treaty Crisis
- 1964: Tokyo Summer Olympic Games
- 1972: Return of Okinawa to Japan
- 1973: Oil crisis affects J-economy
- 1989: Hirohito dies, era Heisei begins

SHŌWA AFTER 1945: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

- The triumphant 1960s
 - The fruits of high-speed growth (*kōdō seichō*) and income doubling (*shotoku baizō*)
 - It took Japan only ten years to return to its prewar economic standard
 - The Tokyo Olympics (1964) as national TV spectacle; first shinkansen starts operating
- The turbulent 1970s
 - Major sociocultural change from “modern” to “postmodern” Japan
 - Triggered by Oil shocks and symbolized by *Asama Sansō jiken* (Incident of Sansō Asama) and Mishima’s coup
 - Popular culture came to gradually serve as mere distraction for the masses
- The thriving 1980s
 - Economy surges from cheap/laughable to technically sophisticated/desirable
 - Domestication of foreign things and dissemination of things Japanese (cf. *kokusaika*)
 - Japanese media/pop culture export is on the rise
- The traumatic 1990s
 - Japan falls into “lost decade” (*ushinawareta jūnen*)
 - The “bubble” bursts, crippling Japanese economy ever since
 - The “dark year” of 1995: Kobe earthquake, Tokyo Sarin attacks, Okinawa rape

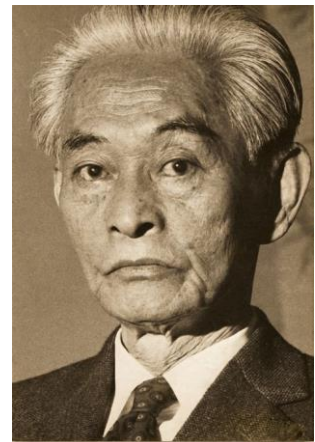
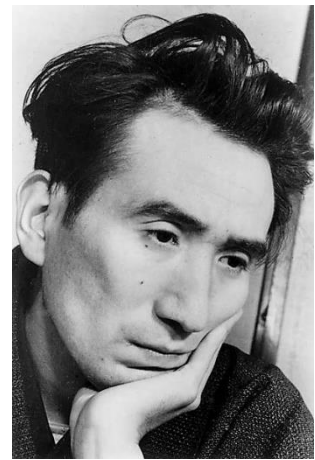
LITERARY LEGACY OF EARLY SHŌWA

- reflecting incompleteness of Japanese modernity (c.f. the “stray sheep” lost in Tokyo city lights in Sōseki’s *Sanshirō*)
- diagnosing Japanese society as “falling into a dark valley” (symbolized by Akutagawa’s suicide in 1927)
- Writing in the classical style in order to preserve tradition (e.g. Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows* from 1933, or *The Makioka Sisters* from 1948)



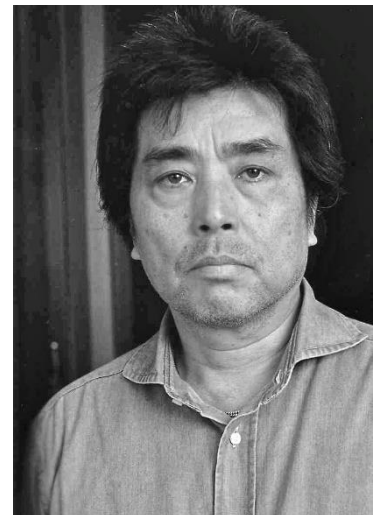
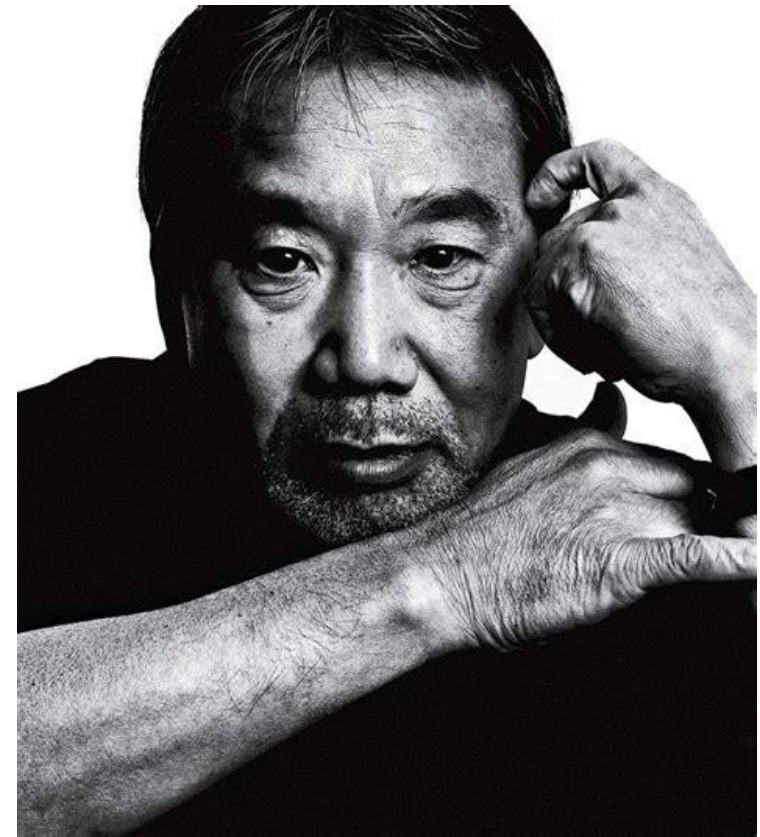
THE “TRAGIC HEROES” OF SHŌWA LITERATURE

- Osamu Dazai (1909–1948)
 - Transgressive poetics of “postwar dissolute”
 - Depression, nihilism, psychological emptiness
 - (e.g. *Setting Sun* 1947, *No Longer Human* 1948)
- Yukio Mishima (1925–1970)
 - “Dedicated genius” with samurai values
 - “Negotiating” elegance and destruction
 - (e.g. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* 1956)
- Yasunari Kawabata (1899–1972)
 - The refined “pure beauty” of Japan
 - Sensualist, perceptionalist, *mono no aware*
 - (e.g. *Snow Country* 1935)



THE RISE OF “AVANT-POP” IN POSTWAR JAPANESE LITERATURE

- The “sun tribe” literature in late 1950s: focusing on young antiheroes emblematic of violence, nudity, and lack of social responsibility
- Kawabata becomes in 1968 the unshared Nobel laureate in literature, but commits suicide only four years later (c.f. the “demise” of *junbungaku*?)
- The growing influence of “avant-pop” in Japanese literature since 1970s: postmodernism, magical realism, socially challenging topics
- The “golden year” of 1987: Banana Yoshimoto publishes *Kitchin* (“Kitchen”), Ryū Murakami publishes *Ai to gensō no fashizumu* (“Fascism in Love and Fantasy”), Haruki Murakami publishes *Noruei no mori* (“Norwegian Wood”)



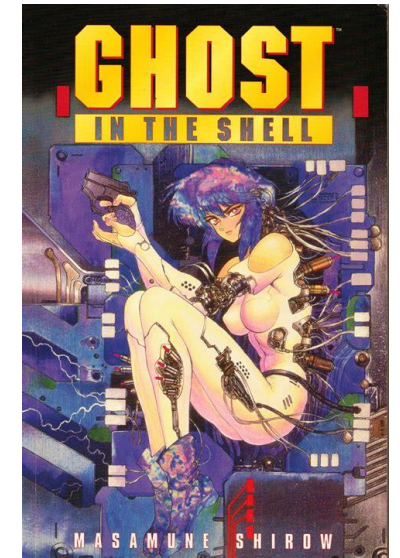
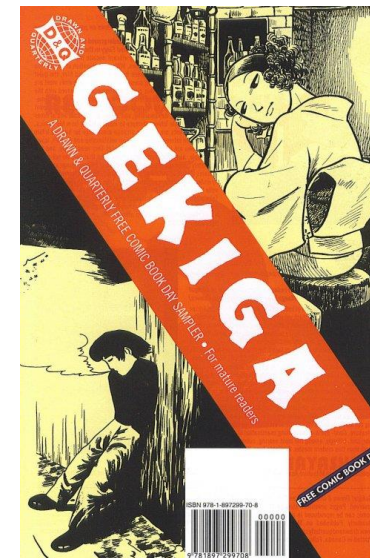
THE ORIGINS OF MANGA



- Traditional roots of manga: *emaki* and *kamishibai*
- (Pre)war manga: normalizing war for children via cartoon and animation
- 1950s
 - Osamu Tezuka (1928–89): the God of Manga (*manga no kamisama*)
 - *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy) as “android with feelings” (since 1952)
 - Astro Boy precedes the “future technopia” of Japanese robot anime
 - Embodying Japan’s pacifist nationalism (e.g. by fighting injustice)
 - Reflecting collective trauma of destruction and postwar occupation
- 1960s
 - The golden age of manga (e.g. the weekly *Shōnen Jump* begins publishing in 1968)
 - Further sexualization of manga content via *rorikon* imagery (e.g. *Harenchi Gakuen* 1968)
 - “Dramatic pictures” (*gekiga*) as a more serious form of manga (at times transgressive/antipolitical)

MANGA SINCE 1970s

- 1970s
 - Rise of *shōjo manga* (female cartoonists write for young readers): inner lives of teenagers as they negotiate with maturation
 - Portraying emotions and phantasy (large eyes, little physical action, emotive backgrounds) (e.g. *Berusaiyu no Bara* 1972)
 - Crossdressing and gender-switching: elegant feminine men (*bishōnen*) and their homoerotic imagery (*yaoi*)
- 1980s
 - More paper was used for manga than for toilet tissue
 - New “speculative” dimension in manga through the surprise of new life forms (e.g. *Ghost in the Shell* 1989)
 - Rise of adult manga (*seinen manga*): representations of genitalia forbidden but violence and rape tolerated
- 1990s
 - There are around 300 monthly/bi-monthly/weekly manga magazines in Japan, being published by large publishing houses
 - Manga are first serialized in manga magazines; and if they sell well, they get published as standalone books, or anime
 - Manga “fan fiction” (*dōjinshi*) enabling a participatory model of cultural production



ANIME

- Origins in late 1910s (e.g. Ōten Shimokawa), popularized during the U.S. occupation)
- First television anime was sponsored by food companies to improve corporate image (e.g. Calpis)
- The post-WW II animation is largely trans/posthuman, apocalyptic and dystopian
- In 1960s the TV/anime industry introduces new genres: robot hero and magical witch
 - Change of focus from the “heroic robots” to super robots (e.g. *Kidō Senshi Gandamu* 1979)
 - Introducing *rorikon* to anime: *mahō shōjo* or “magical girl genre” (e.g. *Minky Momo* 1982)
- Animation studio Ghibli co-founded by Hayao Miyazaki (1985)
- The postmodern message of Katsuhiro Ōtomo’s *Akira* (1988)
 - An image of collapse (social, material, spiritual)
 - Nihilist corruption of authority and authenticity
 - Not offering a moral center, but a dystopian chaos
- 1990s and beyond
 - Humanoid robots still sell well
 - Pokemon shock (1997) followed by Pokemon Boom
 - Ghibli triumphs internationally with *Spirited Away* (2002)



NUCLEAR DISCOURSE IN POSTWAR JAPANESE CULTURE



- “nuclear discourse” as a set of artistic and political utterances on the use of nuclear power for both military and peaceful purpose
- Anti-nuclear message conveyed in different allegorical forms: nuclear power as an energy source is represented in dual terms (cf. Japanese videogames)
- Anti-nuclear mementos in postwar Japanese culture:
 - Honda’s “Godzilla” (*Gojira* 1954)
 - Nakazawa’s “Barefoot Gen” (*Hadashi no Gen* 1973)
 - Ibuse’s “Black Rain” (*Kuroi Ame* 1969/1989)
 - Okamoto’s “The Myth of Tomorrow” (*Asu no Shinwa* 2008)

POSTWAR JAPANESE FILM

- 1940s
 - Popular culture heavily censored during the US occupation
 - First Japanese on-screen kiss: *Hatachi no seishun* (1946)
- 1950s
 - Akira Kurosawa's *Rashōmon* wins the international Venice Film Festival (1951)
 - Yasujirō Ozu's bittersweet poetics and conflict between generation (e.g. *Tōkyō monogarari* 1953)
 - Popularization of "monster movies" (*kaijū eiga*): Ishirō Honda's *Gojira* (1954)
 - "sun tribe" films (*taiyōzoku*) about the "corrupted" Japanese youth (e.g. Kō Nakahira: *Kurutta kajitsu* 1956)
- 1960s
 - Superhero movies with special effects (*tokusatsu*): *Gekkō kamen* (1958) or *Ultraman* (1966)
 - "romance pornography" (*roman poruno*) (e.g. films of Masaru Konuma or Nagisa Ōshima)
 - Golden age of *yakuza* films in Japan (e.g. Tadashi Sawashima: *Jinsei gekijō* 1963)
- 1970s–1980s
 - change of zeitgeist corresponds with change in heroes (e.g. from *kōha* to *nanpa*)
 - social/family-oriented TV "morning dramas" (*asadora*): e.g. *Oshin*, *Tokyo Love Story*
 - Shin'ya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo* (1989) becomes internationally acclaimed cyberpunk hit
- 1990s–2000s
 - "post-trendy TV dramas" as escapist/romantic entertainment (e.g. *Long Vacation* from 1996)
 - revival of *yakuza* films, now being more graphic and nihilist (e.g. late works of Takeshi Kitano)
 - Boom of horror movies, revival of war-related films



Hatachi no seishun (1946)



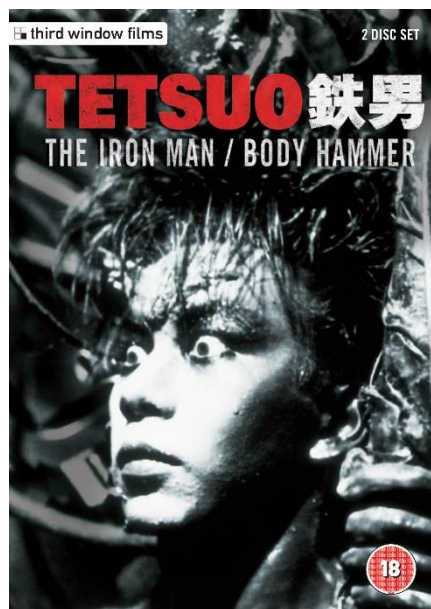
Tōkyō monogarari (1953)



Gojira (1954)



Jinsei gekijō (1963)



Tetsuo (1989)



Outrage (2008)