

SOCIAL HISTORY OF JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE

THE CULTURE OF MEIJI

(1868-1912)

BASIC CHRONOLOGY

- 1868: The Meiji Restoration
- 1873: "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*)
- 1876: Samurais are prohibited from wearing swords
- 1877: The "last samurai" revolt of Saigō Takamori
- 1877: Tokyo University opens in Hongō
- 1889: New Constitution is drafted
- 1890: New Diet opens in Nagatachō
- 1894: Beginning of The Sino-Japanese War
- 1905: Beginning of The Russo-Japanese War
- 1910: Colonialization of Korea

GENERAL BACKGROUND: SOCIETY

- The age of modern imperialism and building of Empire
- Returning to the Emperor system, but triggering modernisation campaigns
- Implementing the policy of “rich country and strong military” (*fukoku kyōhei*)

- Adapting British parliamentary system, Prussian military, and German constitution (Ōkuma Shigenobu, Itō Hirobumi)
- Embracing the West (Fukuzawa Yukichi and *bunmei kaika*) versus expelling the barbarians (Tokutomi Sohō and *sonnō jōi*)
- Samuraization of society (samurais enter the Tokyo University, later moving to high civil service jobs)

National assembly (*genrōin*) in early Meiji (1875)



Meiji Japan: re-modelling the capital

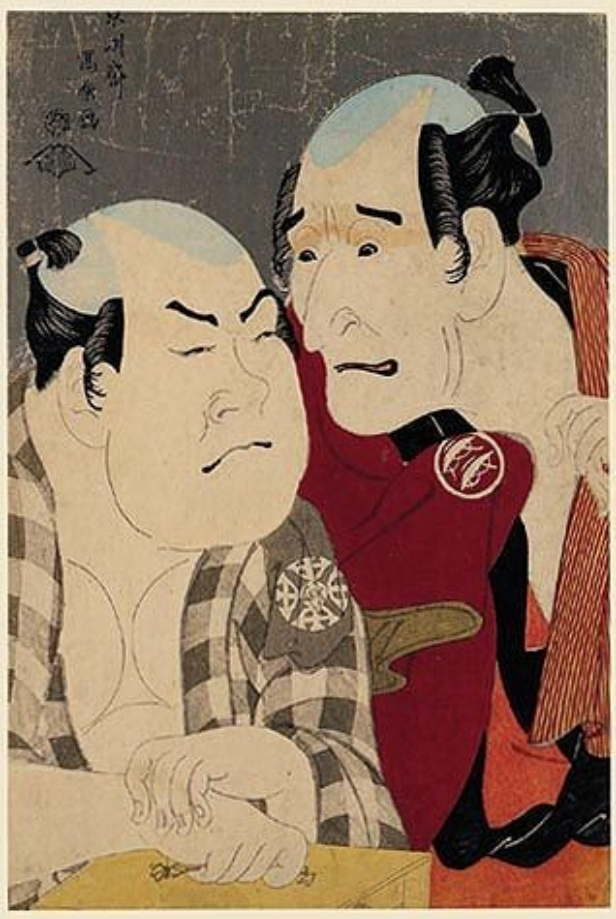


GENERAL BACKGROUND: POPULAR CULTURE

- Best elements of Edo culture were now deemed outdated/vulgar, but some old media survived
 - *yose* (variety halls) and *misemono* (open-air street shows-)
 - Woodblock prints (*ukiyo-e*, colored *nishikie*) as essential visual records
 - *rakugo* (comic story telling) and *manzai* (comedialogues)



Manzai



COMMERCIALIZATION OF CULTURE

- Some old media converged with the new ones (newspapers, cartoons, magazines)
- Traditional arts were (com)modified with the entry of foreign and Japanese capital
- Active participation of the masses was lost, commercial side of the arts developed
- Creating modern citizenry, fostering national integration, censoring popular culture
- The commercialized popular culture simultaneously gaining on political significance

FILM & MUSIC



first Japanese film: a scene from kabuki play *Momijigari* (1899)

FILM & MUSIC

- **Film**

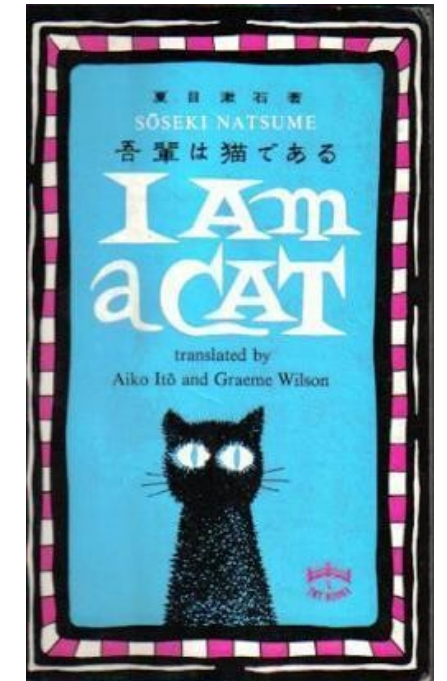
- 1903: first permanent movie house (“Electric Theater”) built in Akasaka
- 1904-1905: first Japanese “blockbusters” during the Russo-Japanese War
- 1910s-1920s: film companies Nikkatsu and Shōchiku established

- **Music**

- More pragmatic than artistic
- Western music essential to the ceremonial style of governance
- “national music” (*kokugaku*) inculcates morality and nationalist sentiments

NATIONAL LITERATURE

- 1887: Futabatei Shimei: “Drifting cloud” (*Ukigumo*)
 - first modern Japanese novel
 - psychological exploration of characters, the role of anomie (cf. Durkheim)
- 1900: Japan's publishing industry undergoes an unprecedented boom
- 1900s: wave of translation of European literature (Nietzsche popular)
- 1905: Natsume Sōseki: “I am a cat” (*Wagahai wa neko de aru*)
 - becomes very popular
 - domestic cat reflecting the modernized Meiji society in “ich-form” (*shisōsetsu*)
- 1906-10 Japanese naturalism becomes national literacy movement
- Others: Shimazaki Tōson, Mori Ōgai, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke



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THE CULTURE OF TAISHŌ

(1912-1926)

GENERAL BACKGROUND: SOCIETY

- 1912: the new emperor Taishō, 1914: entry of Japan into WW I.
- Facilitating transition from agricultural society to an industrial one
- Implementing imperialism (*teikokushugi*) and national policy (*kokusaku*)
- Paternalism toward Korea, contempt for China, emulation of the West
- Emergence of individualism, consumerism and internationalism



GENERAL BACKGROUND: CULTURE

- Cultural imperialism: exporting culture and language to colonies and peripheries
- The rise and massification of the Japanese media during wartime
- Japanese “pure literature” (*junbungaku*)
 - Contemplating contemporary social issues
 - Reflecting incompleteness of Japanese modernity (e.g. Sōseki’s *Sanshirō*)
 - Vague insecurity about the future (Akutagawa’s *bonyari shita fuan*)
- 1920s: the rise of new pop-cultural forms
 - Cosmopolitan culture of “Modern Girl” (*moga*) and “Modern Boy” (*mobo*)
 - Performance of “puppet theater” (*kamishibai*) and “female revue” (Takarazuka)
 - Provocative and perverted world of “erotic grotesque nonsense” (*ero guro nansensu*)

Moga and Mobo

- 1920s–1930s: time of radical social change especially for young women
- Secretaries and accountants created a new cosmopolitan “culture of taste”
- Dating/Chaplin/baseball/jazz/café/Ginza/cigarettes/magazines/celeb gossip
- Loanwords from English, French, German; fashion from New York, London, Paris
- Commuting to new commercial ballrooms (selling dance tickets to “modern boys”)



- *Moga/mobo* as self-awakened, emancipated youth, or self-involved, citified brats? [cf. hipsters]

Moga in popular media



Ten Commandments of Moga

taken from “Ladies’ World magazine” (*Fujin Sekai*, 1929)

1. Strength is the enemy of conventional femininity
2. Conspicuous consumption of Western food and drink
3. Devotion to jazz records, dancing, smoking
4. Knowledge of the types of Western liquor
5. Willingness to flirt to get those liquors for free
6. Devotion to fashion and cinema from Paris and Hollywood
7. Interest in dance halls and interactions with modern boys
8. Strolling the street of Ginza every Saturday and Sunday night
9. Pawning things to get one to buy new clothes for each season
10. Offering lips to any man who is useful, but keeping one’s chastity

Hanga paintings: cultivated nudity and subtle eroticism

(e.g. Hashiguchi Goyō, Natori Shunsen)



NEW CULTURAL FORM: KAMISHIBAI

- “paper theater” (*kamishibai*) popular in Japan since late 1920s (existing until the early 1970s)
- Form of street theater for labouring classes, typical of naïve simplicity and countryside mentality
- The direct ancestor of today’s manga and anime (performing latest instalments of a serial narrative)
- *Kamishibai* produced the space of *machikado* (street corner), but it was also used for wartime propaganda



NEW CULTURAL FORM: TAKARAZUKA

- established in 1914 near Takarazuka station
- significant site of Japanese musical modernity
- Cross-dressing, cross-gender, all-female performers



NEW CULTURAL FORM: ERO GURO NANSENSU

- Imaginary cultural world of the “erotic, grotesque, nonsense” (from 1920s to 1930s)
- Motivated by the upheavals of politics and society during turbulent times
- Content: decadence, rebellion, hedonism, irrationality, “primitivism”
- Roots in late *ukiyo*e (Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Hokusai)
- *Ero Guro* came to be “symbolized” by the Abe Sada Incident (1936)



(MEANWHILE IN EUROPE)



P. Picasso's Ladies from Avignon (1907)



M. Duchamp's "Fountain" (1917)



R. Magritte's "This is Not a Pipe" (1928)

LATE ERO GURO MOVEMENT

female exploitation and twisted sexuality (*ijō seiai*)
(e.g. Suehiro Maruo)



LATE ERO GURO MOVEMENT:

dark female fantasies

(e.g. Takato Yamamoto)



ERO GURO TODAY

(e.g. Saseki Toshio, Aida Makoto, Sono Shion)

