

Postwar Japan's Cultural Policy, Consumption and Nationalism

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After emerging from U.S. Occupation in 1952, Japan enjoyed decades of rapid economic growth from the mid-1950s to the 1970s as Japanese manufactured goods became highly sought after in international markets. The “Japan boom” around the world is said to have persuaded the Japanese populace that they were no longer a defeated nation, and had even become a world economic leader. This renewed confidence, however, did not arise spontaneously in step with increased international attention to Japanese affluence. Rather, this distinct historical experience derived in part from sustained efforts to remobilize nationalism by attributing Japan’s accomplishments to its cultural power. It was no mere coincidence that successive economic booms were hailed as the “Jimmu boom,” “Iwato boom,” and “Izanagi boom,” directly linking economic prowess with neo-nationalistic imagery of Japan’s divine origins.

The paper investigates the Japanese government’s promotion of cultural policy as a strategy to facilitate economic expansion internationally and political stability at home, within the context of the Cold War. Japan did not portray itself a world power but instead proposed a more ambiguous role as an intermediary between developed Western and developing Asian nations. I demonstrate how Japan’s attempts at cultural propaganda toward the United States and Asia, particularly in the field of popular culture, relied on collaboration between producers, consumers, and the state, and were thus highly interdependent with the populace’s nationalistic perceptions of their own culture at a time when national energies were increasingly turning from ideological disputes toward a new culture of mass consumerism.

About the Presenter

Dr. Sang Mi Park is Associate Professor of Waseda Institute for Advanced Studies at Waseda University. After receiving her Ph.D from Princeton University, she taught at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Tokyo. As a specialist in Showa Japan’s cultural policy, her research interests lie broadly in cultural policies, state-society relations, performing arts, and film studies. Her publication includes “Presenting ‘Modern Japan’ to the World: Wartime Overseas Cultural Policy and the Performance by the Takarazuka Girls’ Revue in the West” (2009), and “The Making of a Cultural Icon for the Japanese Empire: Choe Seung-hui’s U.S. Dance Tours and ‘New Asian Culture’ in the 1930s and 1940s” (2006).