

Foreword

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FOREWORD

Evelyn Schulz

The papers collected in this volume were originally written for the international and interdisciplinary workshop "Rethinking Urban and Mass Culture in 1920s' and 1930s' Japan: Representations, Politics, Identities, and Subject Formations," organized by Evelyn Schulz, University of Zurich, Institute for East Asian Studies, Section of Japanology, in October 1998.

As the last decades of the 20th century are shaped by the push for globalization and universalistic criteria on the one hand, and a fundamentalist interest in preserving ethnic and racial purity on the other, Japan is similarly reworking its past. An important part of this procedure is the attempt to change the image of Japan's modern history from an imitation of the Western project of modernity to an authentic culture which found its own path to modernity. In this discourse the formation of an urban and mass culture, in particular that of Edo (the former Tōkyō) plays an important role. Research on urban and mass culture in Japan therefore has to be conscious of the role Tōkyō plays in the historical trajectory of building Japan as a nation and forming a national identity in cultural terms. As cities as well as societies are always in a state of flux and therefore cannot be frozen into a fixed identity, so in Japan the material and discursive formation of an urban and mass culture has produced a diversity of often opposing identities. The analysis of these identities will help answer the crucial question of how Japan has attempted to appropriate modernity in its own terms. This dynamic process is not unique to Japan; rather, it is occurring in almost all nations and is increasingly important in the face of globalization, a process which not only affects economics and politics but also the sciences.

One could ask, however, if "globalization" is really only a recent phenomenon, as at least some of its features can be traced back to the late 19th century, when modernizing countries had to struggle with migration, urbanization, and industrialization, while discourses on social reforms and city planning spread around the world. The 1920s and 1930s, too, show striking traits of "globalization." As Suzuki Sadami pointed out at the workshop, modern societies of the present are still under the influence of this period. At that time in Japan, as well as in the West, the economic crisis, social and cultural conflicts, and rising nationalism were counterbalanced by the emer-

gence of a new urban mass culture. The “Golden Twenties” of Japanese cities such as Tōkyō, Ōsaka, and Kōbe share important similarities with developments in metropolises such as Berlin, New York, and Shanghai. They make evident that the emergence of an urban mass culture is not limited to a specific cultural entity, but rather marks the modern city as well as industrialization and modernization in general. In this respect, the experience of Japan echoes that of other industrialized countries.

The workshop was mainly intended for two purposes:

- 1) We aimed to bring scholars from Japan, the USA, Germany, and Switzerland together in order to create a scientific forum for the exchange of questions of methodology and research material in the field of cultural studies on Japan. The emphasis was on direct communication and, given the participants’ different cultural and scientific backgrounds, we had to enable a high level of mutual understanding. Accordingly, Japanese was chosen as the conference language and the papers were mainly presented in Japanese, as of course were most of the discussions. In this sense, the workshop was also a kind of test case for research in multicultural and multidisciplinary interaction.
- 2) Focusing on deconstructing “orientalizing” / “colonialist” perspectives on Japan and their respective methods, the workshop was intended to examine the characteristics of urban and mass culture in 1920s’ and 1930s’ Japan and thereby to probe the limits of decontextualizing as well as contextualizing approaches.

In order to fulfill these aims, most of the contributions share a cultural studies approach, i. e., they work to evolve new cross- and interdisciplinary methods of analysis for complex cultural phenomena. This approach requires that one explores new types of source materials, which until recently were ignored by scholars as objects for research, such as city guides, mass literature, photographs, the material goods of everyday life, etc. Areas of particular concern include the formation of subjectivity in different genres of emerging mass culture, the relationship between nationalism and the formation of collective as well as individual identities, images of the city and of the self, and conceptualizations of urban space.

The articles by Suzuki Sadami, originally a lecture held at the workshop, and Steffi Richter, originally the introduction to the *zadankai* (round table) discussion at the workshop, discuss general questions of methodology and research materials concerning the study of urban and mass culture in

1920s' and 1930s' Japan. As at the workshop, the other contributions are thematically divided into three sections:

- 1) Rereading Japan's colonialism
- 2) Textual representations of the city
- 3) Urbanization, mass culture, and the formation of identities.

The workshop clearly showed that (mass) cultural features produced and consumed in an urban environment that is marked by the past as well as the present can be regarded as a distillation of the problematic relationship between nationalism, identity, and modernity. In this sense, the study of the structure and the development of "urban" and "mass culture" highlights many concatenations and conflicts that may resurface as not only Japan but the rest of the world nears the end of this century. As there is a need for cross-cultural, multidisciplinary and synthetic studies of the past and present role of the (urban) culture of Japan and other Asian as well as Western countries, this workshop was organized to spur the creation of an international network of scholars in the field of cultural studies on Japan, thus hopefully becoming a starting point for similar events. As most of the papers concentrate on the analysis of "mass" cultural phenomena rather than on "urban" phenomena or "urban culture," the latter could become a challenging topic for further workshops.

Although this workshop was organized at very short notice, the University Foundation (Hochschulstiftung) of the University of Zurich very generously provided the necessary financial support. This was made possible by the efforts of Eduard Klopfenstein, Professor of Japanology, and a short-time decision of the Faculty of Philosophy. I am very grateful to Professor Klopfenstein who encouraged me to organize this workshop at the outset. I also want to thank Livia Monnet, University of Montreal, who originally brought up the idea of this workshop and helped bring the participants together. Furthermore, I want to thank the participants, who not only contributed to the workshop with presentations and very lively intense discussions, but also through their publications helped publicize the results of the workshop. And finally, I am very grateful to Horst Joachim Plambeck who prepared the layout of this volume.

Zurich, January 1999

