

A Case Study of Late Twentieth-Century Japan through Art: Tezuka Osamu and Astro Boy

by Mary Hammond Bernson, University of Washington

Introduction:

Teachers are encouraged to read “Late Twentieth-Century Japan: An Introductory Essay,” by historian William Tsutsui, before starting this lesson. The essay may also be assigned to students with advanced reading abilities (grades 11-12). The essay provides a context for this lesson by describing key historic developments in Japan in the years since the end of World War II.

The past 60 years have witnessed remarkable changes in Japan and in Japan’s relations with other countries. Teaching about these decades in Japanese history is complicated by the pace of these changes and the fact that this era is recent enough so that people hold strong attitudes toward it, from the memories of the aging veteran of World War II to the interests of the teenager who loves sushi and manga. Many teachers comment that contemporary Japanese pop culture’s impact on their students makes it simultaneously easier and more challenging to teach about Japan. Some students with passionate interests in popular culture bring powerful images of Japan into the classroom, yet these images may not accurately reflect the Japan of today or of the past eras used as settings for manga, anime, and games.

In reality, the years since 1945 have witnessed the rebuilding of a devastated Japan, demilitarization and political reform, so much economic growth that it seemed to be carrying Japan to the verge of global economic dominance, and then the collapse of the bubble economy. Economic recession precipitated deep questions and concerns about Japanese society and identity. During this same time period, Japanese popular culture was spreading around the world. In the words of journalist Douglas McGray, Japan’s “gross national cool” was reaching new heights even though the gross national product was not.

How are these sometimes contradictory developments reflected in art? Not surprisingly, they are reflected in very contradictory ways. Artists in late twentieth-century and contemporary Japan work in a wide variety of media and genres. Some are producing works that are clearly based upon past subjects and styles, while others are moving in strikingly innovative directions.

Like *Imaging Japanese History* lessons on earlier periods, this lesson uses a representative artist or work of art to help students understand the time period being studied. In this lesson, that artist is Tezuka Osamu, the creator of Astro Boy and many other characters. Tezuka produced both manga and anime, and his influence on the development of both art forms

©2008 Program for Teaching East Asia, University of Colorado. Permission is given to reproduce handouts for classroom use only. Other reproduction is prohibited without written permission from the Program for Teaching East Asia.

is unrivaled. They are considered serious art forms in Japan, a view that is increasingly shared in other countries.

While students are learning about late twentieth-century Japan, the lesson also challenges them to think like historians. They are asked to define or select criteria they would use to choose a representative artist or art form to provide insights into another country and era. Then they analyze whether the author's choice of Tezuka successfully meets the criteria they have established. Through this process, they expand their knowledge about Japan and develop their analytical skills, while becoming acquainted with a remarkable artist, his creations, and the messages they conveyed. Note that two options for teaching the lesson are provided; teachers should select the most appropriate option for their class based on students' familiarity with art as a historical source and the sophistication of their thinking.

Objectives: At the conclusion of the lesson, students will be better able to:

1. Identify some of the key events and trends in the history of Japan since 1945.
2. Recognize the contributions of Tezuka Osamu to Japanese and global culture.
3. Generate or select criteria for selecting an artist or work of art to represent a particular era in a country's history.
4. Analyze whether the choice of Tezuka as representative of late twentieth-century Japan meets the criteria the class has established.

Vocabulary:

akabon: comic books printed on cheap paper and sold on the streets of Japan in the years just after World War II. They were called *akabon* (literally "red books") because of their bright red covers.

anime: short for animation, anime refers to Japanese-style animated stories. In Japan the term is used for all animation. *Tetsuwan Atomu* and *Jungle Taitei* were pioneering anime series on Japanese television.

Astro Boy/Atom Boy/Tetsuwan Atomu: the robot boy created by Tezuka Osamu in 1951, first appearing in Japanese manga as *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Mighty Atom in English). As his adventures appeared in serial form in manga (book-length compilations), television, and film, he came to be known as Astro Boy. His date of birth was set in the then-distant future, 2003.

Hokusai: the famous nineteenth-century artist who is best known for his block prints. In 1814 he adopted the term *manga*, often translated as "whimsical pictures," for the thousands of sketches he made of everything from bugs to bridges and acrobats to people making funny faces.

Jungle Taitei (Jungle Emperor): the Tezuka series about a lion known in English as Kimba the White Lion. Many claim this pioneering manga and anime story was the uncredited inspiration of Disney's *Lion King*.

manga: the term Hokusai popularized is now used to refer to Japanese-style cartoons in print form. Manga tell stories in both pictures and words. A highly regarded art form in Japan, they are bestsellers read by all ages and covering all kinds of material.

Phoenix (Hi no Tori): Tezuka's most ambitious work, encompassing history and the future and exploring deep themes about the meaning of life and humankind's search for immortality. It was serialized from 1954 until Tezuka's death in 1989.

soft power: term coined by Harvard Professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr., in discussing cultural and ideological impacts as forms of national power and influence. His ideas are summarized in “Coping with Japan,” an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine (Winter 1993, Issue 89). The term is often used in reference to Japan.

Tezuka Osamu: the artist, born in 1928 in Osaka, who created many of Japan’s best-known manga and anime. Tezuka deeply influenced these art forms and the millions of people who enjoy them. Although Tezuka was a licensed physician, he preferred to draw, successfully publishing a wide range of work from 1947 onward. He is often lauded in Japan as the father or “god” of manga and anime. He died of cancer in 1989.

Materials and Preparation: In selecting materials, teachers should be aware of a cultural difference that could cause parents to misunderstand this lesson. In the United States, adults tend to view comics as reading material for children, with subject matter appropriate for young people. In Japan, manga are a form of entertainment read by people of all ages, so the subject matter addresses a vast range of material. In this country, we expect books and films, but maybe not comics, to be so wide-ranging. Just as thoughtful teachers choose books and films appropriate for the age of their students, the same good judgment should be applied when choosing manga or anime for classroom use. *Astro Boy* will probably not cause parental concern; some of the examples online or in reference books such as *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* would.

Materials needed for this lesson will depend on the extent to which students have already studied Japan and the length of time you want to spend in grappling with the challenge of developing criteria. You may choose to emphasize either the overall historic content or the development of critical thinking skills. Whichever you choose, you will need copies of Handout L1 (Version A or B) and Handout L2 for all students.

Depending on how you plan to present the key historic events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan, you may need to give the students copies of the Tsutsui essay provided with this lesson or another essay, such as one of the following:

- “Framing Twentieth-Century Japan: A Top Ten List,” by William Tsutsui (a shorter essay than the one presented here), in *About Japan: A Teacher’s Resource* (New York: Japan Society, 2007) http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/framing_twentieth-century_japan_a_top-ten_list.
- “Top Ten Things to Know About Japan in the Late 1990s,” by Carol Gluck, in *Education about Asia* (Fall 1998) <http://www.aasianst.org/EAA/gluck.htm>.

Alternatively, you might give the students an overview of recent Japanese history, using Professor Tsutsui’s essay and the timeline in the **Teacher Background Information** as resources in preparing your lecture. A third approach is to have students gather information from multiple sources including any material covered in class, textbooks, and reference materials. If the class has already studied postwar Japan, students can generate a list of key events and trends, turning this part of the lesson into a review of the whole unit (and requiring no additional materials).

If necessary, this lesson could be taught without visuals, although that would make it far less interesting. Visual materials about *Astro Boy* and other creations of Tezuka Osamu are widely available and segments of the anime versions appear on YouTube. Be sure to check the

websites in advance to see if your district blocks them or the sites might be deemed objectionable. The following are good sources of an image of Astro Boy, to be projected or printed out for display, in roughly declining order of usefulness:

- “Tezuka Osamu, Founder of Story Manga,” *Takarabako*, no. 13 (September 2007), http://www.tjf.or.jp/takarabako/PDF/TB_no13.pdf. This article on Tezuka and his creations appears in a manga-focused issue of a newsletter produced by a Japanese non-profit organization for young people studying about Japan.
- *Tezuka: The Marvel of Manga* (Melbourne, Australia: National Gallery of Victoria, 2006), http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvkids/resources/Tezuka_trail.pdf. This Australian government site provides the children’s guide to the Tezuka exhibition that appeared in Victoria and San Francisco. The guide includes a diagram of Astro Boy.
- “Museum Show Spotlights Artistry of Manga God Osamu Tezuka,” *Wired* (May 31, 2007), <http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/news/2007/05/astroboy>. *Wired* reviews the Tezuka exhibit and features images of Astro Boy from the exhibit: http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/multimedia/2007/05/gallery_astroboy?slide=1&slideView=8.
- Astro Boy, <http://astroboy.jp/>. This website has many visuals, but its text is only in Japanese.

Time Required: 2 class periods (for deeper insights into late twentieth-century Japan through manga and anime, 2 class periods plus homework or 3 class periods would be preferable)

Procedure:

Part 1, Option A (for Students Familiar with Using Art as a Primary Source)

1. Tell students that they are going to begin this lesson by applying their analytical skills to the problem of identifying works of art or artists to represent a particular era in Japanese history, late twentieth-century Japan. Reassure them that you are not seeking a single right answer, and that they do not need to know anything about art to be able to contribute to the discussion.
2. Distribute Handout L1 (Version A), and go over the task as outlined there:

Imagine that you are a historian who has just been hired by a curriculum publisher. The publisher is developing lessons to teach high school students about different countries through their arts. The publisher explains that the purpose of the series is to provide insights into several historic periods in each country. There will be one lesson for each time period. Your task is to develop the criteria to use in choosing the works of art or artists that will be featured in each lesson. The work of art or artist should represent or provide insights into the time period in that country. The criteria you develop should be general enough that they can be used as tools in choosing art or artists for all the countries and historical periods in this series of lessons.

Explain that criteria are guidelines or rules. Provide or solicit an example of a possible criterion students could use in choosing someone or something to represent a whole time period. Fame is one example: one of the criteria could be that the artist or the work of that

artist should be famous. If students find it difficult to generate abstract criteria, start by providing examples of people or art works that could be considered representative of a time and place. Some widely known examples are Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, from the period of the Italian Renaissance; Japanese woodblock prints in the Tokugawa or Meiji eras; or Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, representing the American Midwest in the 1930s. Ask students to think about why these might be considered representative of a place and time. Why do these artworks provide a window into a place and time?

If students still have difficulty generating criteria on their own, you may need to give them a list such as the one provided in step 5 below and let them accept, refine, or reject the items rather than generating criteria on their own. If they are developing some confidence about being able to generate criteria, ask them to work individually to develop a quick list of criteria. Remind them that they are not choosing the artwork or artists; rather, they are establishing the guidelines for choosing them. Point out again that there are no right answers to this question, and reasonable people may disagree. When students seem to be running out of ideas, gather them into small groups so they can begin the next step.

3. In small groups of two or three, the students should compare the criteria they listed. Ask them to discuss the pros and cons of each standard proposed. For example, if fame is proposed by one student, another might argue that it is not useful as a criterion because an artist can represent an era even if he or she is not famous.
4. The final step for each small group is to choose the five criteria that the group members think are most important. Ask them to spend a few minutes doing this. Anticipate that they may not be able to arrive at agreement or even come up with five possible criteria.
5. Gather the class back into a large group and lead a discussion to debrief their work. As groups report out the criteria they selected, write them on the board or an overhead. Note differences and commonalities among the proposed criteria. The purpose is not to arrive at one perfect list; rather, the purpose is to encourage students to think like historians. How would a historian go about choosing someone or some work of art to provide a window into an entire era?

Among the criteria likely to be proposed are the following:

- Fame, a person or work of art that is recognizable, both domestically and internationally
- "Genius"
- Beauty of the object (or aesthetic value)
- Subject matter that authentically reflects historic events or the culture of the time
- Value as reflected in the sales price of a work of art
- Influence on other art or artists
- Quality, such as a design or technical breakthrough of some kind
- Mass popular appeal or, alternatively, appeal to a particular audience that was important in the time period under study
- Appeal or popularity that lasts over time
- Work that incorporates social values that were commonly shared

- Techniques and technologies—either new ones that were first used at this time or ones that embody enduring elements of the culture. This can include new ways of reproducing and disseminating art.

With older students, you may wish to probe further. For example, you might ask them to consider the following questions:

- Could an artist's lack of fame actually teach us something significant about the time period when he or she worked?
- Is it even possible for a single artist or work of art to represent a whole era?
- Is there such a thing as a universal definition of genius or beauty?
- Are there criteria that apply very well to one country or era, but not to others?

Opinions on these questions will vary.

Part 1, Option B (for Students New to Use of Art as a Primary Source)

1. Remind students that historians learn about the past by studying primary sources and artifacts, documents and objects created at the time of the events being studied. Ask: What kinds of primary sources and artifacts might people use to learn about the history of late twentieth-century Japan? (*Accept all reasonable answers, but be sure to draw out examples of art.*)
2. Tell students that in this lesson they will be focusing on use of art to study late twentieth-century Japan. One of the challenges in using art to study history is deciding to what works of art attention should be given. Distribute Handout L1 (Version B) and go over the Introduction with students. Next, go over the Directions; you may want to work through the criteria in the table with students, determining which apply to the woodblock prints in the Tokugawa period or to a work of art (perhaps a song or movie) currently popular with students.

You may also want to model the process of analyzing strengths and weaknesses of each individual criterion. For example, for the criterion of fame, strengths might be that famous art works will be easier to locate and that the reasons behind the fame of a work may show something interesting about the time period; weaknesses might be that fame does not go hand-in-hand with quality and an artist or art work that is not famous could represent a period well.

3. Organize students into groups of three and ask them to complete the task as described on the handout—analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of each criterion and then selecting the five that their group thinks will be most useful.
4. Gather the class back into a large group and lead a discussion to debrief their work. As groups report out the criteria they selected, write them on the board or an overhead. Are there commonalities among the lists of criteria selected? What are the strengths of the commonly chosen criteria? What criteria were not selected by any of the groups (or by few)? What weaknesses kept them from being chosen? Remind students that the purpose is not to arrive at one perfect list; rather, the purpose is to encourage students to think like historians. How would a historian go about choosing someone or some work of art to provide a window into an entire era?

Part 2

1. Start the second phase of the lesson by telling your students that the place and time they are studying, late twentieth-century Japan, presents several challenges to historians. The time period is recent and ongoing. Major changes have taken place between the beginning of the era in 1945 and today. In addition, many people hold strong opinions about this era because of the enduring personal and political impacts of events, particularly of World War II.
2. Turn to the subject of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan. If a significant amount of material has previously been covered in class, students can generate a list of key points, turning this part of the lesson into a review of the whole unit. If students are not familiar with contemporary Japan, you may want to assign one of the essays mentioned in the **Materials and Preparation** section as homework, followed by class discussion of the most important points made. Alternatively, you might present the information via lecture, using Professor Tsutsui's essay and the timeline in the **Teacher Background Information** as resources in preparing your lecture notes, or have students gather information themselves from multiple sources including any material covered in class, textbooks, and reference materials.
3. Following the review of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan, point out to the students that they have developed some knowledge about late twentieth-century Japan and a method for choosing an art work or artist to represent the era. Explain to the class that the next step in this lesson does not ask that they choose the art work or artist. Instead, they will use their analytical skills to do something historians are frequently called upon to do. They will critique someone else's work—in this case, the work of the author of the lesson. They will apply their own criteria to the author's choice of a representative artist.
4. Explain that the author chose the artist Tezuka Osamu and his creation, in manga and anime formats, called Astro Boy. After learning about Tezuka and Astro Boy, students will decide if the author met the criteria they consider important.
5. Solicit information about Tezuka and Astro Boy to establish whether your students are familiar with them. Use the vocabulary terms manga and anime in the discussion.
6. Project or display a few images of Astro Boy. Take a few minutes to solicit student observations of his appearance and any visual evidence of his special powers.
7. Distribute Handout L2 and ask students to read it, keeping in mind the criteria they have developed for selecting a representative figure for a historical era, as well as their knowledge of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan.
8. Conclude the lesson by asking students to either discuss or write a brief essay explaining why the choice of Tezuka and Astro Boy was or was not a good one. Their answers should provide evidence that they are using the criteria they generated in the first part of the lesson as well as their knowledge of historical events in late twentieth-century Japan.

Note that the **Teacher Background Information** includes a discussion of why the author chose Tezuka and Astro Boy for consideration in this lesson.

Assessment:

If late twentieth-century Japan is a major unit of study, this lesson can serve as a review of the entire unit. If the students have successfully developed criteria they believe are valid, those criteria can be applied to earlier lessons in the *Imaging Japanese History* series or to the history of other countries. The teacher can assess whether students are successfully applying the criteria they developed to a different time period or country.

If students write individual responses in Part 2, Step 8 of the **Procedure**, the best work will show that the student is aware of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan and systematically applies the class's criteria to the question of whether Tezuka and Astro Boy are representative choices. The actual answers to this question will vary depending on the criteria the class chose. Students might decide that Tezuka is not a good choice. Since this lesson is open-ended, some students may say they do not know enough about Tezuka or more recent Japanese history to be able to decide whether he and his work represent the era. Part of the assessment process could be to ask students to identify what more they would need to know to be able to answer the question to their own satisfaction.

Extension/Enrichment:

Manga has deep roots in earlier Japanese traditions, any of which can be explored as a fun way to review earlier lessons or introduce new material. See the **Teacher Background Information** below on roots of manga. Taking time to look at manga as art can improve students' visual literacy skills. Invite them to apply concepts such as line, color, shape, and balance and ask them to articulate how these elements add to the impact of manga.

Soft power is a concept that is widely debated, although there is no doubt that cultural and ideological influence can be one form of national power. Involve students in a debate or discussion about whether "soft power" will assume greater or lesser importance among nations as the twenty-first century continues.

Teacher Background Information:

Roots of Manga

Contemporary manga and anime have deep roots in Japanese arts and history. Although scholars and critics have their individual interpretations, many see connections to:

- The format of *emaki*, the hand scrolls that are unrolled to tell a story scene by scene.
- The spirit and style exhibited in *Chōjū jinbutsu giga* (the *Frolicking Animals* scroll), the animal scroll highlighted in the Heian lesson and referenced in many later art works.
- The way words and pictures are often interspersed in Japanese paintings and prints. At the Seattle Art Museum site, you can see a great example of this in the images and translation of the early seventeenth-century *Poem Scroll with Deer* by the artists

Sōtatsu and Kōetsu.

<http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/exhibit/interactives/deerscroll/enter.asp>.

- The style, realism, and humor of Hokusai's manga.
- Mass-produced books of earlier eras that included prints of multiple pictures, often divided into boxes like manga scenes.
- Other inexpensive art that was sold to the masses, especially in the cities, such as block prints in the nineteenth century and postcards in the early twentieth century.
- *Kamishibai*, the storytelling format popular up until the arrival of television in Japan. Traveling storytellers sold candy and then displayed a series of pictures to illustrate the story they were telling. The stories often ended with cliffhangers to attract young customers to return another day.
- Comics, political cartoons, and film from the United States and Europe. Tezuka spoke of the influence of European film technique on the way his manga were designed and moved from frame to frame.

Japanese Language

Unlike English, Japanese is written using a combination of multiple writing systems. Japanese writing is not a series of pictures, but some of the characters used in Japanese are originally based upon pictures. To write Japanese, a person uses characters called *kanji*, two syllable systems called *hiragana* and *katakana*, and *romaji*, the “Roman” alphabet used in English and many other languages. Students will encounter all of them in looking at manga. The graphic below says *Tetsuwan Atomu*, combining *kanji* meaning “mighty” with a – to – mu in *katakana*, to spell the English word *atom*.



The Japanese language has a rich vocabulary of onomatopoeia. Many examples show up in manga, often with bubbles around them that reflect that sound and meaning of the word within. For example, a noise for a crashing sound might appear in a jagged distorted shape suggesting the aftermath of a crash.

Author's Reasons for Choosing Tezuka and Astro Boy

Tezuka is widely known, his work continues to be popular, and other artists credit him as a pioneer. Key events in Tezuka's life parallel major developments in post-war history, including the hardships of the war, the opportunities and challenges of the occupation years, and then later success and influence.

Many of the messages underlying Tezuka's work reflect values widely held in Japan, including his opposition to war and his desire for better communication among people.

Tezuka led his studio to innovative developments in manga and anime design and production. Anime and manga are now widely considered to be “art,” reflecting the blurring of old distinctions between high art and popular culture.

Tezuka's creations reflect the flow of cultural influences back and forth between Japan and other countries, resulting in new transnational hybrid art forms. For example, he was influenced by Disney productions and, in turn, influenced Disney productions. Cultural exports are widely discussed as "soft power," a new form of national power and influence.

Images drawn from manga and anime are displacing some older images of Japan, and are widely identified as being Japanese.

Timeline of Selected Events

Year	Historic Events in Japan	Year	Events Related to Tezuka
1928		1928	Tezuka Osamu born in Osaka
1945	Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombed World War II ends Japan occupied by U.S. troops	1945	<i>Manga</i> , the first post-war cartoon magazine, resumes publication
1946	Japan adopts a democratic constitution	1947	Tezuka's <i>New Treasure Island</i> is published and becomes a best-seller; Tezuka is a 19-year old medical student
1950	Korean War begins	1950	Tezuka moves to Tokyo; Japan's first serialized story manga is published: Tezuka's <i>Jungle Taitei</i> (Kimba the White Lion)
1951	U.S.-Japan Security Pact signed	1951	Tezuka develops the character Tetsuwan Atomu (Atom Boy/Astro Boy)
1952	U.S. occupation of Japan ends	1952	Tetsuwan Atomu is serialized in manga, appearing from 1952 to 1968 and later reappearing
		1963	Fuji TV starts broadcasting Japan's first animated television series, <i>Tetsuwan Atomu</i>
1964	Summer Olympics are held in Tokyo	1964	Tezuka meets Walt Disney at the New York World's Fair
		1965	<i>Jungle Taitei</i> becomes Japan's first animated television series in color
1973-1974	Japan experiences "oil shocks" from the OPEC oil embargo		
1980s	Economic growth and prosperity		
1989	Mitsubishi Estate Co. buys a 51% stake in Rockefeller Center Emperor Hirohito dies	1989	Tezuka Osamu dies
1990s	Economic recession and vanishing wealth	1990	Tezuka Osamu retrospective art exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo
		1994	Tezuka Osamu Manga Museum opens in Takarazuka, his home town
		2003	April 7, 2003, is celebrated in Japan and abroad as the fictional birth date of Tetsuwan Atomu

Teacher Resources:

- Astro Boy, <http://astroboy.jp/>.
- Bouquillard, Jocelyn, and Christophe Marquet, *Hokusai, First Manga Master* (New York: Abrams, 2007).
- Brophy, Phillip, editor, *Tezuka: The Marvel of Manga* (Melbourne, Australia: National Gallery of Victoria, 2006).
- Craig, Timothy, *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Pop Culture* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000).
- Gluck, Carol, "Top Ten Things to Know About Japan in the Late 1990s," in *Education about Asia* (Fall 1998), <http://www.aasianst.org/EAA/gluck.htm>.
- Gravett, Paul, *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2004).
- Kelts, Roland, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)
- Levi, Toni, "Anime and Manga: It's Not All Make-Believe," in *About Japan: A Teacher's Resource* (New York: Japan Society, New York, 2008), http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/anime_and_manga_its_not_all_make-believe
- "Manga: Japan's Favorite Entertainment Media," *Takarabako*, no. 13 (September 2007), http://www.tjf.or.jp/takarabako/PDF/TB_no13.pdf.
- McGray, Douglas, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2002), <http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~ikalmar/illustex/japfpmcgray.htm>.
- "Museum Show Spotlights Artistry of Manga God Osamu Tezuka," *Wired* (May 31, 2007), <http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/news/2007/05/astroboy>.
- Schodt, Frederik L., *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2007).
- Schodt, Frederik L., *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996).
- Schodt, Frederik L., *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1983).
- Tezuka: The Marvel of Manga* (Melbourne, Australia: National Gallery of Victoria, 2006), http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvkids/resources/Tezuka_trail.pdf.
- Tezuka Osamu World, <http://en.tezuka.co.jp/tomm/index.html>.
- Tsutsui, William, "Framing Twentieth-Century Japan: A Top Ten List," in *About Japan: A Teacher's Resource* (New York: Japan Society, New York, 2007), http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/framing_twentieth-century_japan_a_top-ten_list.
- Tsutsui, William, "Popular Culture and Japan's Gross National Cool," in *About Japan: A Teacher's Resource* (New York: Japan Society, New York, 2008), http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/popular_culture_and_japans_gross_national_cool

Late Twentieth-Century Japan: An Introductory Essay

by William M. Tsutsui, University of Kansas

Until recently, Japan's history since World War II was told as an inspiring fable of success. According to this story, Japan pulled itself out of the physical devastation, spiritual bankruptcy, and abject defeat of 1945 through wise leadership, hard work, and a partnership with the United States. It became one of the world's richest, most stable, and most widely respected industrial democracies. Historians now realize that this narrative does not capture Japan's postwar experience. What once seemed like a buoyant path of growth and recovery, termed a "miracle" by some patronizing Western observers, is now seen as a more nuanced story. Japan experienced downturns as well as booms, discord as well as consensus, and serious problems as well as elegant solutions. This short essay charts the history of Japan from the end of the war to the present day. It sketches the rapid and profound changes the Japanese people have enjoyed, endured, and embraced over the past 60 years.

The Occupation of Japan (1945-1952)

The occupation of Japan was called a joint allied operation. In fact, the United States dominated, as its forces had borne the brunt of the fighting in the Pacific theater during World War II. The occupying forces were led by the charismatic General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur was styled the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (or SCAP, a term also applied to the occupation administration as a whole). The American occupiers wanted to remake Japan as a peaceful, democratic, and modern nation. They wanted to ensure it would never again threaten the world militarily. The occupiers approached their former foes not with bitterness or a thirst for revenge, but with compassion and generosity. The Japanese public, meanwhile, had suffered from extreme wartime deprivation as well as crippling allied air attacks. Exhausted, stunned, and defeated, Japan's hungry masses showed no hostility to the Americans. Instead, they greeted the occupation and its reforms with composure, respect, and openness. Thus, victors and vanquished worked together in the remaking and rebuilding of Japan.

The occupation is often compared to the Meiji Period (1868-1912), which was a time of rapid modernization. Both are seen as watersheds in Japanese history. U.S. forces entered Japan with grand visions of change. They sought to root out militarism. They also wanted to build democratic institutions and tutor the Japanese in the superiority of the American way of life. The occupation agenda was often naïve, heavy-handed, and condescending. Democratization was equated with Americanization. Japan was perceived (as MacArthur himself once put it) as a nation of 12-year-olds. Scholars have debated the extent of the change actually accomplished by the occupiers. Many have noted that SCAP's fervor for reform cooled after only a couple years. They further note that many proposals for change were successfully resisted by Japanese authorities. Nevertheless, the occupation had a formative impact on postwar Japanese society, the conduct of political and economic life, and Japan's place in the Cold War world.

Demilitarization was the occupiers' first priority. It was accomplished quickly. Imperial army and navy units were disarmed. The far-flung Japanese empire was dismantled. People

©2008 Program for Teaching East Asia, University of Colorado. Permission is given to reproduce this essay for classroom use only. Other reproduction is prohibited without written permission from the Program for Teaching East Asia.

important to the war effort, especially military officers, were barred from positions of public responsibility. The top leaders of the wartime Japanese state, including former prime minister Tōjō Hideki, were tried by an international military tribunal. Seven of those convicted were executed. Significantly, the Shōwa Emperor (Hirohito) was not charged. American officials opted to use the monarch as a tool to influence public opinion rather than punishing him as a part of the wartime regime.

Democratization was the occupation's other major goal. This goal was far more complicated and difficult to accomplish. Political reform was considered essential to Japan's recasting as a peaceful member of the community of nations. After a Japanese commission failed to produce a new national constitution sufficiently progressive for the occupation, SCAP staff wrote a new draft in just a week's time. This new draft was presented to the Japanese government for translation and enactment. The Japanese had no choice but to comply. The new constitution was promulgated on November 3, 1946. Many scholars have noted the irony of SCAP installing democratic political institutions in Japan through authoritarian means. The Japanese, it has been said, were "forced to be free." Still, the Japanese people embraced the "MacArthur constitution" (as it is often known). It has endured (with not a single amendment) as a sound basis for Japan's postwar democracy.

Unlike the old Meiji constitution of 1889, the new document gave sovereignty to the Japanese people, not the emperor. The imperial institution was limited to a symbolic role. Shintō, which had been used to support wartime mobilization, was disestablished as a state religion. Both houses of the Diet, Japan's parliament, were to be elected democratically. The prime minister and cabinet were to be selected on the standard British parliamentary model. The 1946 constitution, considered by some to be even more progressive than the U.S. constitution, guaranteed the Japanese people a wide range of civil rights. These rights included freedoms of assembly, "thought and conscience," and the press. The equality of women was established explicitly. Indeed, in the April 1946 general election, the first in Japan to allow women the vote, 39 women were elected to the lower house of the Diet. That total has not been exceeded since.

The occupation tried to extend reform deeply into Japanese society and the economy. Land reform, one of SCAP's most popular and successful efforts, broke the hold of large landlords. Tenant farmers could purchase the property they worked. SCAP believed organized labor was a necessary counterweight to business and a fundamental part of a healthy democracy. They therefore encouraged unionization in industry. The educational system and police force were also reformed. Structures were decentralized, made more responsive to local communities, and recast on American models. An ambitious antitrust program was also launched. The occupiers feared that the *zaibatsu*, Japan's financial and industrial conglomerates, would inhibit competition and stifle new business. Thus, sweeping antitrust legislation was passed. SCAP laid plans for the break-up of several hundred large corporations.

The reformist flurry of the early occupation proved short-lived, however. SCAP's sweeping programs threatened many influential groups in Japan. They were also worrisome to many U.S. policymakers. Japanese corporate interests complained that occupation policy was crippling the nation's economic recovery. Planners in the State Department and Pentagon grew concerned that aggressive reform might weaken Japan socially and politically. They believed it needed to be built up as a stable Cold War ally in Asia. Wall Street bankers and Congress, anxious that Japan might become a long-term financial drain on America, argued for a quick end to SCAP's experiments. In 1947, General MacArthur canceled a general strike organized by

militant unions. This act marked the beginning of the occupation's moderation of its reformist agenda. It even rolled back some of its high-profile policies.

The change in policy became known as the "reverse course." Democratization took a back seat to stabilization, economic recovery, and rehabilitation of Japan as America's dependable partner in East Asia. Antitrust programs were muted. Occupation support for labor evaporated. The purge, once reserved for wartime leaders, was used to weaken left-wing groups and radical unions. The occupation also began to pressure the Japanese government to begin remilitarizing. Article 9 of the 1946 constitution rejected any military capability for Japan. But American planners were soon eager for the Japanese to take up arms in the Cold War defense of the Free World. Although pacifist feelings in Japan ran deep after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the first step toward remilitarization was taken not long after the Korean War began in June 1950. That first step was creation of a 75,000-man National Police Reserve. The Reserve was well supplied with American arms.

The popular image of the occupation, at least in the United States, has generally been very positive. In that view, MacArthur and his forces benevolently led the transformation of a former enemy into a modern, peaceful democracy. Skeptics argue that the role of the occupiers has been exaggerated. They say that SCAP's reforms were only successful because they built on existing trends in Japan. Some in Japan (especially those on the political left) take a much more negative view. They assert that the occupation betrayed the Japanese people. The Americans promised thoroughgoing reform and true freedom. But SCAP compromised its ideals in the "reverse course." According to this view, the occupation bolstered the conservative status quo in Japan. By not trying the emperor as a war criminal, by backtracking on labor and antitrust policy, and by working to rehabilitate Japan as a Cold War ally, the occupation confirmed existing power relationships in Japan. Whether or not one believes that the occupiers delivered on their promise of democratization, MacArthur and the SCAP staff clearly had a profound role in establishing the foundations of postwar Japan's social stability, democratic political institutions, and dynamic capitalist economy.

The High-Growth Era

With the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty on September 8, 1951, Japan regained its sovereignty. The occupation came to an end. Still, a significant American presence remained in Japan. Hand-in-hand with the peace agreement went a new U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. This document allowed America to station troops in Japan. The stated purpose of the troops was to defend the islands. But, as many Japanese suspected, another purpose was to ensure internal stability. Some pundits tagged Japan's status as "subordinate independence." Japan rejoined the community of nations in 1952. Yet it remained reliant on America for its security. In a way, it was still occupied by the U.S. military. To the conservative elites in Japan, this was hardly a bad thing. Tying the nation's fate to the United States had many potential benefits. Sheltering under the American nuclear umbrella during the Cold War allowed Japan to evade many of the costs and controversies of full-scale remilitarization. Japan did develop "Self Defense Forces." This military establishment was vaguely named in order to tiptoe around Article 9. In addition, Japan hosted American operations during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. But MacArthur's pacifist constitution spared Japan from active participation in these conflicts. In general, in the decades following the occupation, Japanese governments were content to maintain a low political and military profile internationally. They deferred to the United States in most

matters of policy. More highly prioritized were economic development and the expansion of overseas trade.

Domestically, the 1950s were a time of divided and contentious politics. The left-wing parties challenged the conservatives. The conservatives enjoyed covert support from the United States and a steady plurality in the Diet. In 1955, the two leading conservative parties merged, forming the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). According to its detractors, this party was neither very liberal nor very democratic. The LDP would be a dominant electoral force for almost four decades. It held a majority in the lower house of the Diet and a lock on the prime ministership from 1955 until 1993. Critics complained that Japan had become a one-party state. They claimed that the rise of the Liberal Democrats stifled political debate and gave voters no real choice at the polls. To the majority of Japanese, however, the political stability the LDP offered was welcome. In addition, the economic benefits that LDP rule seemed to deliver were appealing.

A number of factors contributed to the long-term success of the Liberal Democratic Party. First was an imbalance in the allocation of electoral districts for the lower house of the Diet. Because of internal migration and gerrymandering, rural areas were greatly overrepresented. Support for the LDP was strong in the rural areas. Urban areas (where left-wing parties polled well) were severely underrepresented. The LDP consolidated its base of power in the countryside by pursuing policies that helped farmers. For example, they blocked rice imports and thus kept agricultural prices high. They also targeted pork-barrel projects to small towns and villages. In addition, the LDP remained pragmatic and flexible ideologically. It was conservative in general outlook. Yet it never became doctrinaire like its left-wing rivals. Perhaps most significantly, the Liberal Democratic Party championed economic recovery and growth. This issue resonated with all Japanese in the wake of World War II. The LDP prioritized industrial and financial development. Through policies like Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato's popular "Income Doubling Plan" of 1960, it also promoted the sharing of economic gains broadly among the Japanese people. The apparent success of LDP economic management inspired public confidence. It also created the widespread impression that the Liberal Democrats were the only party with the experience and qualifications necessary to govern the nation.

Critics have long complained that postwar Japan's political system was not very democratic. Single-party dominance was one issue. Beyond that, detractors claim that political decision-making has been shaped less by the democratic process than by backroom deals among unelected elites. Scholars have written of an "iron triangle" in Japan. This triangle is a loose coalition of three groups—LDP politicians, big business leaders, and central government bureaucrats. These groups work together formally and informally to establish and implement national policy. Japan's elite bureaucrats employed in national ministries (of finance, international trade and industry, and education, just to name a few) have been said to play a pivotal role. These professional civil servants enjoyed substantial power and independence, especially in the postwar decades of high-speed growth. The bureaucracy was little altered by the occupation's reforms. Its influence was retained (and even enhanced) after the war. Whether the power of state bureaucrats or the presence of an "iron triangle" of elites makes postwar Japan distinctively authoritarian or inauthentically democratic is debatable. Skeptics note that similar coalitions have also been common in the democracies of Western Europe and North America.

From the end of the occupation to the early 1970s, one-party rule, bureaucratic elitism, and "iron triangle" governance seemed to bother few Japanese. The people seemed content with the status quo. The 1950s were, on the whole, a very good decade for Japan economically. The Korean War was an important catalyst. U.S. military purchasing pulled the Japanese economy

out of its postwar funk and gave much-needed impetus to the manufacturing sector. Japan's reentry into international trade proceeded smoothly, largely under American sponsorship. Many of the overseas markets lost during World War II were regained. Investment in new productive capacity and introduction of the latest industrial technology from the West proceeded briskly. By 1954, Japan had clawed its way back to prewar levels of economic activity. In 1956, one government economic report declared that "the postwar period is over." In the latter half of the 1950s, Japanese national income grew at an average rate of 9.1 percent a year. By the 1960s, annual growth averaged well over 10 percent. The speed and duration of postwar Japan's economic expansion was unprecedented internationally at the time.

Many elements contributed to Japan's high-growth economy. State "industrial policy" was charted largely within the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. It was carried out cooperatively with major corporations. This national policy provided a strategic plan and central guidance for Japan's economic rise. Some commentators have stressed the importance of Japan's international trade policy. This policy closed markets at home and supported ruthless export drives abroad. Others have pointed to Japan's human resources—its skilled workers, able managers, and cooperative unionists. A few have accused the Japanese of getting a "free ride" to prosperity. They say Japan milked America for the latest technology and a comfortable spot under the U.S. nuclear umbrella during the Cold War. In recent years, however, many scholars have acknowledged what may have been the most important factor in Japan's economic boom. While the Japanese are usually depicted as the world's greatest savers, they have also proven to be some of the world's foremost spenders. This was never truer than in the decades after World War II. In those years, Japan's consumers, apparently compensating for the hardships of the war years, bought at unprecedented levels.

The rise of consumption and soaring standard of living were captured well by a series of catchy slogans, made popular in the Japanese media. These slogans revolved around consumer desire and the intense social pressure in middle-class Japan to "keep up with the Tanakas." In the late 1950s, the acquisitive dream of the average Japanese family was the "three S's": *senpūki*, *sentaku*, *suihanki* (electric fan, washing machine, and rice cooker). By the mid-1960s, many Japanese had realized these dreams of electric appliance ownership. Expectations had to be redefined. Hence the "three C's": *kā*, *kūrā*, *karā terebi* (car, air conditioner, and color television) became the goal. By the 1970s, only the "three J's" would suffice: *jūeru*, *jetto*, *jūtaku* (jewelry, overseas vacations, and a house of one's own). Japan's economy made great strides in the two decades following the occupation. Domestic consumers, in many ways, both instigated and benefited from Japan's growth.

Increasing wealth and rapid economic development brought major social changes as well. Japan, an agrarian society through World War II, urbanized in the high-growth era. In 1950, only one-third of the population lived in cities. By 1975, over 75 percent did. Japan's increasing postwar wealth was distributed remarkably evenly. Thanks to progressive tax policies and government programs to keep rural incomes rising as steadily as urban ones, income distribution was relatively egalitarian. The vast majority of Japanese (more than 95 percent in some surveys) considered themselves "middle class." Medical care and public health standards improved rapidly after the war. Average life expectancy increased steadily, eventually becoming the highest in the world. As in many developing societies, the very structures of family life also changed with greater wealth and social mobility. The large, multi-generational household of the past increasingly gave way to a nuclear family with a breadwinner father, a stay-at-home mother, and one or two children.

By the 1970s, social scientists had begun to comment on the unusual stability and order of Japanese society in a time of sweeping change. Much of the credit for this resilience went to the core institutions of Japanese society. The family, for instance, was hailed as a model of strength. Divorce rates in Japan were among the world's lowest. The educational system was widely praised for demanding high levels of literacy and numeracy from all students. Discipline was the rule both in the schools and in society at large. Juvenile delinquency and overall crime rates were extremely low. The police were renowned for their efficient, community-based methods. Some protests did flare during the high-growth era. People rioted against the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in 1960. That same year, the violent Miike coal mine strike occurred. University students demonstrated against the Vietnam War. In general, however, the broad public consensus on economic growth as the overriding national goal and personal advancement as the principal individual objective kept social discord to a minimum. The stereotype of Japanese society as safe, polite, orderly, middle class, well educated, healthy, and still traditional despite the rapid modernization took shape and began to be embraced globally in the optimistic postwar decades of high-speed growth.

From the Oil Shock through the Bubble Economy

Pride ran high in Japan when the nation's postwar achievements, from the rebuilding of war-scarred cities to technological marvels like the Shinkansen bullet train, were showcased at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and Expo '70, held in Osaka. But Japan's 20-year run of economic expansion came to an abrupt halt in the early 1970s. The OPEC oil embargo of 1973-74, known in Japan as the "oil shock," brought the high-flying but resource-poor Japanese economy back to earth. Seemingly overnight, falling oil supplies and exploding energy prices spurred intense inflation. Economic growth ended. Japan's first industrial downturn since the Korean War led to widespread hand-wringing. The nation felt a heightened sense of its own vulnerability.

As it turned out, Japan's economic recovery from the oil shocks was rapid and strong. The engine of Japanese resurgence was exports. The destination of most of the automobiles, VCRs, and Sony Walkmen that revived Japanese industry was the United States. U.S. consumers, also reeling from the oil crisis, clamored for fuel-efficient Japanese cars. Buyers worldwide came to appreciate the high quality, sophisticated design, and good prices of Japanese electronic goods. In 1974, Japanese-U.S. trade was more-or-less in balance. By 1976, America's trade deficit with Japan was about \$4 billion. By 1978, the deficit was \$10 billion. By 1985, it was more than \$40 billion. The annual growth rate of Japan's national income slowed in the late 1970s, yet hovered consistently around 5 percent, a more than respectable figure.

Japan's economic rebound thus proceeded briskly. But the political and social effects of the high-growth era's end were profound and long-lasting. Many new concerns, interests, and agendas rose to the surface in 1970s Japan. Mass protests and new social movements became common. Many protests expressed outrage at the long-overlooked costs of Japan's high-speed growth and the government's feeble response to mounting social and environmental problems. Young people protested pollution and corporate irresponsibility. Urbanites frustrated by poor housing conditions and public infrastructure also spoke out, as did disgruntled farmers displaced from their land for the construction of Narita Airport. All challenged the establishment. In many cases, they won grudging concessions from the government and business.

The oil shock and this rising chorus of discontent also took the shine off LDP political rule. The party faced declining electoral results from the 1960s. Still, it managed to cling to

power. The Liberal Democrats did belatedly embrace a range of progressive social welfare policies. But many Japanese continued to see them as unresponsive, out of touch, and corrupt. Even Japan's relationship with the United States, a touchstone of international relations in Asia and the Japanese postwar political order, grew strained. The so-called Nixon shocks (the floating of the dollar on global currency markets in 1971 and the opening of diplomatic relations with China in 1972) caught Tokyo off-guard. Japan's export successes later in the decade prompted intense pressure from Washington to open Japanese markets to more U.S. goods.

After the tensions of the 1970s, the 1980s were exhilarating times in Japan. As the Japanese economy surged forward, especially after 1985, the nation seemed headed toward global economic dominance. The Japanese, it seemed, were the world's wealthiest, best educated, and longest-lived people. Many commentators heralded the end of the *pax Americana*. They foresaw the start of the "Pacific Century," with Japan in the lead. As the Berlin Wall fell and the former superpowers took stock of decades of military spending, pundits declared that Japan had, in fact, won the Cold War. Enriched by a stock market and real estate boom at home, Japan's corporations and financial titans went on a buying spree abroad. Japanese companies and individuals paid \$80 million for a van Gogh and \$850 million for Rockefeller Center. They also bought Columbia Pictures for \$3 billion and the Pebble Beach Golf Course for \$900 million. Japan's banks were the largest in the world. Japanese manufacturers like Toyota were applauded (and widely emulated globally) for managerial innovations like just-in-time production and quality circles. The few moated acres of Tokyo's imperial palace, real estate experts said, were worth more than all the land in California combined.

The late 1980s were a dazzling and exuberant moment in Japanese history. To some, the affluence of the time led to excess. Critics bemoaned the conspicuous consumption and luxurious lifestyles of the urban elite. They pointed out the corrosive effects such wealth was having on Japanese youth. Social polarization also became an issue for the first time since the end of the war. Fortunes made overnight on the stock market or in real estate speculation meant that Japan was no longer the relatively egalitarian, middle-class society of the high-growth era.

Japan's stature on the world stage seemed to rise as quickly as the skyscrapers being built in Tokyo. Japan was criticized during the First Gulf War of 1990-91 for its "checkbook diplomacy," contributing money rather than troops. But Japan's economic might and its generosity with aid funds in the developing world earned it increasing global clout. This unaccustomed international influence and the nation's mounting wealth seemed to go to the heads of some Japanese commentators. In widely read books like *The Japan that Can Say No* (1989), by Sony founder Morita Akio and conservative politician Ishihara Shintarō, opinion-leaders celebrated Japan's cultural heritage, championed a foreign policy independent of the United States, and stoked nationalist sentiments. Morita and Ishihara were not alone in encouraging the Japanese to flaunt their nation's success. Japan, it seemed, was on top of the world.

As would only later become apparent, the prosperity of those times was built on the shakiest of financial foundations. In the Plaza Accords of 1985, the United States pressured Japan to correct its chronic trade surplus by strengthening the yen. In the wake of that agreement, the Bank of Japan pursued an expansionary monetary policy. This policy led to a speculative boom in real estate and equities, which gave rise to fierce competition in the banking sector. That competition, in turn, fueled reckless lending practices. In short, the Japanese boom of the late 1980s was little more than a financial house of cards or, as it has since come to be known, a

“bubble economy.” When the bust came, and Japan’s bubble popped, the impact on Japanese politics, society, and culture, not to mention its economy, was little short of devastating.

The Lost Decade and Millennial Japan

Hirohito, Japan’s Shōwa emperor, died on January 7, 1989. His death set off a wave of remembrance and reflection in the Japanese media. Hirohito first assumed the throne in 1926. Thus, he had overseen Japan’s rise as an imperial power, its defeat in 1945, the occupation and ongoing domination by a foreign power, and Japan’s economic resurgence. In the emperor’s last years, Japan enjoyed unprecedented wealth and international esteem. Hirohito did not live to see his country humbled once again. Starting in 1990, Japan’s overheated economy, as well as the fabric of Japanese political and social life, rapidly began to unravel and fail.

The inevitable collapse of the “bubble economy” was sudden and stunning. On the Tokyo Stock Exchange, the Nikkei index had soared to 39,000 in the last heady days of the 1980s. By 1991, it had withered to 14,000. It bottomed out at 8,000 just over a decade later. Real estate prices traced a similar path. In the early 1990s, over the span of just 30 months, Japanese investors and landowners saw the value of their assets shrink by \$2.5 trillion. Commentators described the 1990s as Japan’s age of “vanishing wealth.” The crisis, which began in the financial and real estate markets, quickly sent shock waves through the entire economy. The growth rate fell sharply. It dropped from 3.1 percent in 1991 to 0.4 percent in 1992 and 0.2 percent in 1993. In 1998 and 2001, Japan actually experienced negative growth. Corporations retrenched, pruning expenses, shedding workers, and moving high-cost production overseas. (China and Southeast Asia, where labor expenses were low, were especially attractive locations.) The ranks of unemployed workers swelled, something unheard of in Japan since the tough days of the occupation. The official unemployment rate topped 5.5 percent in 2003. Economists estimated that the actual rate was closer to 9 percent. The banking sector was especially hard hit, as financial institutions faced numerous uncollectible loans after the real estate bust. The 1990s witnessed a series of bank failures, reorganizations, and mergers.

The slump of the 1990s was tagged the “Great Recession” and the “Lost Decade.” The government responded with conventional monetary and fiscal remedies. Interest rates were slashed in the hopes of encouraging consumption and investment. There was little response from either individuals or corporations. At the same time, the state pumped money into the economy. For example, the government ramped up public works spending with the construction of hundreds of new bridges, dams, and highways. This construction was popular with the public but often unnecessary and environmentally unfriendly. Such fiscal stimulus did have positive short-term effects. It did not, however, jump-start the economy. Japan was left with one of the highest national debt burdens in the world. As finance and industry remained moribund and government fixes fell short, public faith in public institutions wavered. Much blame fell on the elite bureaucrats of Tokyo. Given much of the credit for the economic “miracle,” they now seemed woefully unprepared for Japan’s mounting problems. The LDP, racked by scandal, internally fragmented, and vacillating on recovery policy, finally imploded in 1993. It lost the prime ministership for the first time since 1955, ushering in a period of political instability just when Japan needed a firm hand on the helm of state. Between 1989 and 2001, Japan had 11 different prime ministers. Though the LDP limped back into power after two-and-a-half years, the political terrain was profoundly altered. Many Japanese found it disturbingly volatile.

The “Lost Decade” also brought social worries. Japan suddenly was beset by unfamiliar problems. Suicide rates, historically relatively high in Japan, soared in the 1990s. Personal

bankruptcies hit new peaks, lay-offs (especially of middle-aged workers) overwhelmed families, and youth faced narrowed opportunities. Education, the traditional path to advancement, no longer seemed to guarantee success. Increasing numbers of young people grew alienated and cynical. Analysts predicted the collapse of the Japanese family as divorce rates increased, delinquency spiked, and the media reported disturbing stories of schoolyard murderers and teenaged prostitutes. 1995 was a particularly trying year. The doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyō released deadly sarin gas on the Tokyo subway, revealing the depths of discontent in Japanese society. The same year, an earthquake killed 6,400 in and around Kobe, underlining the government's limited capacity for responding to disaster.

Amid the crises of the 1990s, basic questions of national identity seemed distressingly fluid. What qualities define being Japanese? The answer was no longer clear. The fundamental truths of postwar Japanese life—the passion for economic growth, the trust in elected and bureaucratic elites, the faith in social institutions—appeared to crumble. Would Japan ever again be fired by a sense of national purpose or united by a sense of common identity?

With the new millennium, Japan seemed poised to break free of its “Lost Decade” gloom. A series of market-oriented reforms were designed to shatter the rigid hierarchies of Japanese commerce, finance, and government regulation. These reforms finally seemed to bear fruit after 2003. The economy began to rebound. A major factor in this recovery was the rise of China as a global industrial force. Japan benefited from its huge neighbor's surging economic growth. The LDP was able to reconsolidate much of its political dominance, thanks in large part to the leadership of Koizumi Jun'ichirō, prime minister from 2001 to 2006. The media continued to obsess about the decline of traditional values and the failings of contemporary youth. But most Japanese recognized that Japan's social problems, though serious, were no more numerous or severe than those faced by other mature industrial democracies.

Meanwhile, an emerging source of national pride was the global success of Japan's popular culture exports. International audiences have enjoyed the products of the postwar Japanese entertainment industry since the first Godzilla film arrived in America in 1956. In the closing years of the twentieth century, however, Japanese forms like *manga* (comic books), *anime* (animation), and character goods (Hello Kitty) became full-fledged global phenomena. Consumers around the world discovered Japanese creations (from *Iron Chef* and sushi to Super Mario and Pokémon) to be imaginative and refreshing alternatives to America's globalized pop culture of Hollywood, Walt Disney, and the golden arches. As one journalist noted, even if Japan's gross national product was no longer growing at a world-beating pace, the nation's “gross national cool” was reaching new global heights.

Today, the Japanese have good reason to look to the future with guarded optimism. Yet they face many issues of lasting significance. In Northeast Asia, China is ascending and North Korea is an unpredictable wild card. The changing balance of economic, political, and military power provides challenges for Japanese policy in the region and in its relationship with the United States. Rising nationalist sentiments in Japan, which have become increasingly mainstream over the past three decades, seem certain to cause ongoing friction with Japan's Asian neighbors. They are also likely to worsen divisions within domestic society. The question of remilitarization (including revision of Article 9 of the constitution) continues to cause debate. With Japan's birth rate very low and immigration negligible, the costs of a long-lived and rapidly aging population will fall on a shrinking workforce of young Japanese in the years ahead. This coming demographic crisis has focused attention on the role of women in Japanese society. Career options for women have increased in recent decades. While female participation in the

Japanese workforce is comparable to rates in Western Europe and the United States, barriers to advancement in fields like business and politics remain high. Government policies are contradictory. The government promotes motherhood to boost the sagging birthrate while simultaneously encouraging women to stay in the dwindling work force. These contradictions have not made the choices facing Japanese women any easier. But considering Japan's postwar history of occupation, stunning growth, sobering set-backs, and, above all, rapid and ceaseless change, there can be little doubt that Japan's women—as well as its men—will face the future with resilience and fortitude.

Copyright © 2008 Program for Teaching East Asia, University of Colorado. Permission is given to reproduce this essay for classroom use only. Other reproduction is prohibited without written permission from the Program for Teaching East Asia.

Criteria for Selecting Representative Art or Artists

Imagine that you are a historian who has just been hired by a curriculum publisher. The publisher is developing lessons to teach high school students about different countries through their arts. The publisher explains that the purpose of the series is to provide insights into several historic periods in each country. There will be one lesson for each time period. Your task is to develop the criteria to use in choosing the works of art or artists that will be featured in each lesson. The work of art or artist should represent or provide insights into the time period in that country. The criteria you develop should be general enough that they can be used as tools in choosing art or artists for all the countries and historical periods in this series of lessons.

On the chart below, list as many criteria as you can think of in the lefthand column. When the teacher asks you to stop writing, you will form small groups to look at each others' criteria, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, and then choose the five that seem most useful to the members of your group. Mark those five so that you can use them later.

Criteria	Reasons to Use This Criterion	Reasons Not to Use This Criterion

Criteria for Selecting Representative Art or Artists

Introduction

Art is one type of primary source useful to historians. Often, historians pay particular attention to works of art or to artists they believe represent a certain period in history. That means that the art or artist conveys important ideas or information about a period.

Consider one example—woodblock prints. Woodblock prints are often regarded as representing the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) in Japanese history. Why? Woodblock prints developed as a Japanese art form during that period. They convey a lot of information about life during the period. They were cheaply reproduced using new printing technology better than what was available in Europe at the time. Woodblock prints were very popular, reaching even people who were not wealthy. Because so many people owned and enjoyed the prints, they played a role in unifying the Japanese people. Depiction of landmarks like Mount Fuji in numerous woodblock prints made those landmarks symbols of a shared culture. Thus, the prints not only reflected the culture of the time, they helped shape it.

Directions

Imagine that you are a historian who has just been hired by a curriculum publisher. The publisher is developing lessons to teach high school students about different countries through their arts. The publisher explains that the purpose of the series is to provide insights into several historic periods in each country. There will be one lesson for each time period. Your task is to develop the criteria to use in choosing the works of art or artists that will be featured in each lesson. The work of art or artist should represent or provide insights into the time period in that country. The criteria you develop should be general enough that they can be used as tools in choosing art or artists for all the countries and historical periods in this series of lessons.

On the chart on the next page are some criteria or guidelines that might be used in choosing works of art or artists to represent historic time periods. In a small group, go over the list of criteria; if your group can think of others that are not listed, add them to the table. Then discuss each criterion's strengths and weaknesses. Then choose the five that seem most useful to the members of your group. Write those five below so that you can use them later.

Criteria Our Group Thinks Are Most Useful

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Criteria	Reasons to Use This Criterion	Reasons Not to Use This Criterion
Fame		
Popularity (Who liked it—many people or an important few? Has its popularity lasted?)		
Beauty		
Value (as reflected in sale price)		
Influence on Other Art or Artists		
Influence on Society		
Subject Matter that Represents Historical Events or Culture		
Subject Matter that Reflects Cultural Values		
Created/Reproduced via New Technologies or Ones that Embody Enduring Elements of the Culture		

Tezuka Osamu and Astro Boy

When World War II ended in 1945, Japan had endured unprecedented devastation. Tezuka Osamu was a teenager at the time. He witnessed the effects of the war, including the firebombing of Osaka, the city where he was born in 1928.

The war had interrupted Tezuka's childhood in a well-to-do family living in Takarazuka, near Osaka. As a child, he had pursued many interests. He collected insects, went to plays with his parents, and viewed films. He particularly enjoyed Disney classics like *Bambi*, which he reported seeing 80 times. Tezuka loved to draw and was strongly influenced by the cartoons and films that were imported from Europe and the United States before the war. By war's end, he had drawn 3,000 pages of pictures even though he was busy studying to be a doctor.

In 1945, the hardship and deprivations resulting from the war were very real. Food, fuel, and money were scarce. Japan was occupied by U.S. troops, and the people and ideas that had led Japan into war had lost their power. Artists, writers, and cartoonists who had supported the war effort, either voluntarily or not, now had to rethink their past work and set new directions for the future.

In this time of social and cultural change, Tezuka was hired at the age of 17 to write a four-panel cartoon for the Mainichi newspapers. By 1947, he had written an *akabon* called *New Treasure Island*. *Akabon* literally means red book. The term referred to affordable books with red covers, printed on cheap paper and sold on the streets like newspapers. People were hungry for inexpensive entertainment. *New Treasure Island* became a bestseller, selling 400,000 or more copies and launching Tezuka's fame and career. It was a manga, a book that told a story primarily through pictures, and it was an exceptionally long manga.

The term manga was popularized by the artist Hokusai in 1814 when he used it to describe some of his drawings. "Whimsical pictures" is one translation of manga, a term that now refers to comics or cartoons.

Manga were not new in the 1940's, but Tezuka was making bold changes in this art form by expanding its length and subject matter and introducing new styles. The drawings were vivid and the captions were written in boxes that had different shapes to enhance the mood of each scene. He added special effects that he had seen in films from other countries. A reader no longer saw the pictures from one viewpoint, like the audience watching a play. Tezuka's drawings included scenes drawn from many different angles, zooming in or panning across a scene like a film camera.

In 1950, the Korean War began, once again changing the world around Tezuka and Japan. By the next year, the United States and Japan were no longer bitter enemies. They were now allies joined by the U.S.-Japan Security Pact, tied together by fears of spreading communism. Meanwhile, Tezuka was laboriously drawing page after page of manga, including the first story that appeared in serial form, *Jungle Taitei* (Jungle Emperor, later known in English as Kimba the White Lion). In 1951, Tezuka introduced Tetsuwan Atomu (Mighty Atom), a robot boy best known in English as Astro Boy.

Tezuka's manga carried a message that he wanted to send to the world. Tezuka summarized his message when he wrote the introduction to *Manga! Manga!* by Frederik L. Schodt many years later: "My experience convinces me that comics, regardless of what language they are printed in, are an important form of expression that crosses all national and cultural boundaries, that comics are great fun, and that they can further peace and goodwill among nations" (Schodt 1983, p. 11).

Tezuka's creations were not limited to the printed page. By 1963, *Astro Boy* appeared on Japanese television as the first animated television series. Two years later *Jungle Taitei* became Japan's first animated television series in color. Japan's economic recovery was bringing televisions into homes for the first time. Many Japanese today remember the powerful impact these series had in the 1960s. Anime, short for animation, was to become a booming industry in Japan. *Astro Boy* and *Kimba* soon appeared on American screens, too.

Tezuka continued producing *Astro Boy*, created many other characters, and took on monumental tasks like drawing manga of the life of Buddha and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. He also worked on a series called *Phoenix* most of his adult life. This sprawling series probed the meaning of life and humankind's search for immortality.

By the 1980s, Japan's products were selling world-wide, and Japanese businesses were investing in high-profile companies and real estate in the United States. News articles were sometimes accompanied by manga-style images of a powerful Japan, wielding great economic power.

Tezuka died in 1989, the same year the Emperor of Japan died. According to the studio Tezuka founded, he had drawn 150,000 pages of manga, published more than 500 titles, and produced more than 70 animated works in his lifetime. An editorial in the *Asahi* newspaper noted: "Foreign visitors to Japan often find it difficult to understand why Japanese people like comics so much. . . . One explanation for the popularity of comics in Japan, however, is that Japan had Tezuka Osamu, whereas other nations did not. Without Dr. Tezuka, the postwar explosion in comics in Japan would have been inconceivable" (Schodt 1996, p. 234).

In 1990, the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo held an exhibition of Tezuka's work. This exhibition was the museum's first one ever granted to a cartoonist. Tezuka's hometown, Takarazuka, opened a museum in honor of its famous citizen in 1994. New generations of artists, many of whom had worked with Tezuka, carried manga and anime forward. These forms of popular culture spread around the world. In 2003, people in many countries, not just in Japan, commemorated the date Tezuka had projected as *Astro Boy*'s birth date when he created *Astro Boy* in 1951.

Manga and anime styles and content are reflected in games, fashion, and character goods. Scholars now study Tezuka's role in laying the foundations of Japan's "soft power"—Japan's influence on other countries through its contemporary arts and popular culture. Other artists continue to create new styles of manga and anime and explore their expressive limits in new digital media.

What was Tezuka's core message? Is it even possible to find the core message of such a prolific artist? Looking at *Astro Boy* is a good place to begin. He is a little boy robot with special powers. He can fly, speak 60 languages, and detect whether a human being is good or bad. He is powered by an atomic reactor in his chest and has a computer for a brain. He fights to protect the world from people and robots who harm others. Tezuka repeatedly said that *Astro Boy* stories are about discrimination and miscommunication.

In the year before he died, Tezuka summed up his work to a Japanese interviewer: "My manga have a wide variety of themes—they are a paean to life, they are antiwar and they are antinuclear, and they advocate the preservation of nature—but ultimately they are all one thing. They are the following appeal to young readers, to think objectively about this fragile Earth: When you grow up, don't forget to look at both Earth and mankind objectively. And always think about what it means to be human" (Schodt 2007, p. 144).

References

- Schodt, Frederik L., *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2007).
- Schodt, Frederik L., *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996).
- Schodt, Frederik L., *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1983).

Copyright © 2008 Program for Teaching East Asia, University of Colorado. Permission is given to reproduce this module for classroom use only. Other reproduction is prohibited without written permission from the Program for Teaching East Asia.