

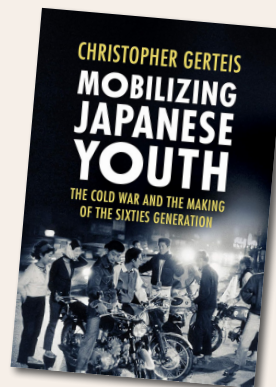
## BOOK REVIEW

### *Mobilizing Japanese Youth: The Cold War and the Making of the Sixties Generation*

By Christopher Gerteis

Cornell University Press, 2021  
192 pages.

Reviewed by Ran ZWIGENBERG\*



*Mobilizing Japanese Youth* examines how figures and movements on both the left and the right tried to mobilize and “shape the political consciousness” (p. 1) of the generation that came of age in the 1960s. The focus is on “non-state institutions,” labor and the new left on the progressive side and, on the right, “cold war warriors” like Sasakawa Ryōichi and Kodama Yoshio (pp. 2, 100). All these actors were as much a part of the Japanese domestic scene as they were part of the bigger global struggle and the “transnational flow of ideas” of the 1960s (p. 2). Building on the work of Oguma Eiji, Chelsea Schieder, and Setsu Shigematsu, Gerteis examines how ideas of class and gender operated within the “generational consciousness” of the sixties, and shaped generational conflict with older figures who sought to mobilize the rebellious youth.<sup>1</sup> The book details the failure of either political extreme to inspire this new generation, and as such explains the dominance in Japan of the “moderate” political center, as the sixties generation rejected the ideas of those seeking to mobilize them.<sup>2</sup>

The first part of the book examines the left’s efforts. Chapter 1 makes a convincing case for a disconnect between labor leaders and younger workers, and examines the way wage hierarchies and outdated ideas of gender and class hindered any successful mobilization of the youth by the labor movement. Chapter 2 focuses on the Japanese Red Army (JRA) and the way the group’s “titillating and terrifying” (p. 76) political violence was packaged and presented by the JRA and their collaborators in the arts. Gerteis argues that Shigenobu Fusako’s appeals were framed mostly through a gendered lens, the major reason for their ultimate failure, and critiques the framing of Shigenobu and other women as “sexualized vehicles for revolution” (p. 66). Gerteis sees the JRA as a manifestation of a transnational movement that, within the particular matrix of class and gender present in Japan, ended in failure.

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1 Oguma 2009; Schieder 2021; Shigematsu 2012.

2 I thank Nathan Hopson for this insight.

The latter part of the book focuses on the right. In between, chapter 3 presents a survey by the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) on social mores and values. The surveys “indicate the rise of a cynical generation” and show increasingly conservative tendencies among the sixties generation. There are multiple problems with this chapter. The survey data starts in 1973, while the rest of the book covers events in the decade prior to the start of the survey; the language and methodology of the chapter are completely out of sync with the rest of the book, discussing, for instance, “multiple linear regression analysis of the aggregate survey data” (p. 82). Furthermore, the chapter seemingly highlights a lack of generational identity as “the NHK data point to significant differences in political attitude that . . . correlate more strongly with gender and class than with age” (p. 99). One wonders if there is in fact a coherent “sixties generation” to examine in the first place.

Gerteis does a much better job in the chapters on the far right, however, which are excellent surveys of a topic, postwar right-wing activism, little covered in English. The main actors are Kodama Yoshio and Sasakawa Ryōichi, both of whom reemerged after the war as leaders of the far right, seeking to save Japan’s youth from communism and armed with extensive connections to U.S. intelligence, the Yakuza, and the ruling LDP (p. 100). Both wanted to achieve a “revival of prewar values through purity of youth” (p. 103). Yet they gained little traction with right-wing students, unhappy with their pro-American tendencies, with the *bōsōzoku* (bike gangs), or with other groups. Sasakawa was more successful in getting his message to the wider public through his media and philanthropy campaigns, funded through his motorboat gambling empire. To do so, however, he had to water down his prewar nationalistic message and focus instead on promoting repackaged traditional norms and morality.

The basic thrust of Gerteis’ argument is convincing and the evidence he brings for it is mostly persuasive. Generational conflict is an excellent way to frame the clash of ideas that happened in the 1960s. It brings into focus the conflict between the various actors, and how the image and message of younger figures like Shigenobu Fusako were shaped by the goals and values of older actors. It is ultimately a study in the failure to mobilize Japan’s youth rather than of mobilization by non-state actors, which did not take place on a large scale after ANPO.

The book largely makes for an enjoyable and entertaining read and raises a number of interesting questions and insights. Yet, it is ultimately only partially successful. Gerteis throws his net wide, looking at pink films, song lyrics, labor posters, advertisements, public surveys, and a number of other sources, but, apart from the labor posters, he does not really engage with these materials in depth, and relies excessively on secondary sources (much of it, admittedly, excellent, like the work of Nathaniel Smith in English and Till Knaudt in German).<sup>3</sup> A great deal of the book deals with various groups on the margins—bike gangs, revolutionaries, and musicians—but it is unclear how these constitute the sixties generation as a whole. The argument would have benefited from being more tightly focused through Gerteis’s excellent gender and class analysis, and venturing less into bike gangs, music, anime, postwar fascism, and other marginalia. Nevertheless, Gerteis is a gifted writer and narrator, and the argument regarding gender norms and their centrality is key, meaning that this book will be immensely useful for those of us who teach and study the era.

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3 Smith 2011; Knaudt 2016.

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