

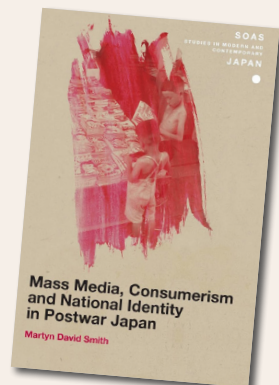
BOOK REVIEW

Mass Media, Consumerism and National Identity in Postwar Japan

By Martyn David Smith

Bloomsbury Academic, 2018
vi + 165 pages.

Reviewed by SUZUKI Takane



At times, an unexpected coincidence occurs in reviewing a book. Martyn David Smith's new book attempts to clarify how the Japanese reestablished their national identity after the Occupation, in the period 1952 to 1972. Smith's recurring focus here is on the year of the Olympics, 1964. As Smith notes, the accepted narrative is that the success of the Olympics allowed postwar Japan to join the free, democratic world in a spirit of "global modernity" (p. 61). Japan was hoping to repeat in 2020 the triumph of 1964, with a strong sense that it would enjoy a second Olympic bounce, recalling the glories of 1964, as opposed to the horrors of 1945. But what really constituted the glories of 1964, which have become part of Japan's collective memory? Martyn Smith attempts to address this very slippery question. He offers substantial insights into how Japan tried to recover its self-esteem and rediscover its identity in the two decades under review, and he examines how popular culture both surrendered to and resisted the allure of Western, and particularly North American, culture.

In recent years numerous studies have mined the popular culture of the period of high economic growth in mid-1950s–1960s Japan. Smith not only takes such studies into account, but complements them from a geopolitical viewpoint, examining, particularly in chapters 3 and 4, the growth of Japanese popular culture during the Cold War and the Vietnam War. His main interests lie in the transition and growth of mass print media. He focuses on popular magazines such as *Heibon* and *Heibon Punch*, whose content and readership were far more elusive and ephemeral than middlebrow publications.

Satō Takumi and Sakamoto Hiroshi have published standard works on popular magazines and propaganda in modern Japan.¹ For Smith, too, popular magazines constitute functional representations of the hopes and desires of ordinary working people in the face of unbearable experience. He broadens this notion with an examination of the postwar emergence of a far more individual subjectivity driven by a massive growth in consumerism.

Smith discusses how perceptions of postwar democracy came to frame postwar Japan's notion of national unity. In his introduction, he quotes Ishihara Shintarō, former Tokyo governor (1999–2012) and a frequent contributor to *Heibon Punch*. Ishihara repeatedly urged his readers to indulge in consumerism, highlighting his generation's opposition to

¹ Satō 2002; Sakamoto 2008.

ethics and the parsimony of those who had come through the war. His contributions were perhaps ephemeral, but they did expose young male readers to regular, weekly, critical commentary on the bright new life they were turning to.

The great accomplishment of the 1964 Olympics was to demonstrate the possibility that there could be a brighter side to postwar Japan. At the same time, many young political activists tried to draw attention to what they saw as Japan's over-dependence on U.S. diplomacy. Japanese society today seems to believe that there is no need for Japan to depart from its 1960s and 1970s models. Smith's observations regarding Japan's belief in the norms fostered in these years raise more questions than he can hope to answer but the questions are still worth asking.

Heibon, which Smith draws on for his interpretation of the desires of the younger generation, has been researched in detail by Sakamoto Hiroshi. Sakamoto points out that such magazines helped grow workers' awareness of their potential. Eventually, however, they served to structure a new individual subjectivity alongside high economic growth, another factor empowering young Japanese people's sense of national identity.

As Smith sees it, the success of the Tokyo Olympics brought about three changes that helped Japanese citizens to construct both a national and an individual subjectivity: depoliticizing U.S. and Cold War influence on domestic policies; encouraging a younger generation to participate in a consumer society increasingly connected to the outside world; and the normalization of middle-class culture. From the mid-1960s to the 1970s, ordinary working-class people believed that fulfilling individual hopes and gaining financial stability could best be achieved as a white-collar worker, a salaryman. Belonging to a company, an ordinary Japanese could engage fully in consumer culture. However, within this popular faith lay an irony: that to fulfill individual desire, to find love and then marriage, a fundamental commitment to a good company and a life-long devotion to labor were needed. This in turn required Japanese adherence to U.S. diplomatic policies, "under the shelter of the US-Japan alliance" (p. 109).

As Smith's study comes to an end, his arguments become more definitive. In 1979, when Ezra Vogel published *Japan as Number One*, Japan seemed to have recovered its status as an advanced nation but without debating ambiguities and difficult issues, such as how Japan should deal with Okinawa and the ANPO treaties. In chapter 4, Smith observes the younger generations who participated in anti-Vietnam war activities. Known as Beheiren (Betonamu ni Heiwa o Shimin Rengō, the Citizen's League for Peace in Vietnam), there were two major representatives, Oda Makoto and Iida Momo.² Iida urged the Japanese to be conscious of the fact that they are part of Asia. As he saw it, postwar Japanese democracy forced the younger generation to study harder, the better to reproduce the middle-class North American culture in which they grew up. It is still quite common for Japanese to stay with their parents until they are financially independent. Iida even proposed that the time had come to rethink the relationship between mothers and children. Iida clearly implied that it was time for Japan to rethink its relationship with the U.S.

2 Oda Makoto is the author of the 1961 bestseller, *Nandemo mite yarō*, based on his experience in the U.S. as a Fulbright student. Iida Momo is a well-known Marxist intellectual who, with Oda and Tsurumi Shunsuke, established Beheiren as the major anti-Vietnam War movement in Japan.

Mass Media, Consumerism, and National Identity in Postwar Japan also extends its scope to the theories of *Nihonjinron*. This departure is thought-provoking, but our author needed to examine and reference many more studies, such as those of two Japanese sociologists, Mita Munesuke and Minami Hiroshi.³ Nevertheless, none of the above detracts from the importance of this work. Has postwar Japan accomplished a truly subjective identity? Smith's fine study cannot offer a definitive answer to this all-important question.

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³ See, for example, Mita 2011 and Minami 2006.