

BOOK REVIEWS

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MARKETING AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN RURAL
CHINA, by G. WILLIAM SKINNER

This three-part study—originally published in three consecutive issues of the *Journal of Asian Studies*—has become a classic. It has been used in classrooms for almost forty years. In fact, the current edition represents the sixth time that this compilation has been reprinted by the Association for Asian Studies. This edition has several advantages over other versions, however. Not only has it been composed anew, but it also incorporates the author's revisions, eliminates errors found in earlier editions, and features an attractive new design that makes the book more visually appealing and easier to use. This sixth edition was created to meet the needs of a new generation of Asian studies scholars and students, as well as to ensure that this classic study remains accessible for all those interested in the study of Asia.

ISBN 0-924304-42-1, 2001 Edition, Approx. 154 pages, List Price: \$13 (AAS Member Price: \$10)

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Japan Pop!
Inside the World
of Japanese
Popular Culture

EDITED BY TIMOTHY J. CRAIG
ARMONK: M. E. SHARPE, INC. 2001
360 PAGES
PAPERBACK. ISBN 0-7656-05061-9



Teachers often discover that their students are attuned to the latest trends in popular culture more than to their academic studies. By examining Japan's popular culture, they can capitalize on this student interest, help their students to reflect on cultural concerns, and teach about contemporary Japan. Students will see that Japan has more than ninja, geisha, and samurai. There are also pop star idols, jazz musicians, and *salariman*. Although sumo, the tea ceremony, and cherry blossom viewing are alive and well, the Japanese devote more of their time to reading *manga*, watching "soaps," singing karaoke, or listening to pop music.

Japan Pop! is a collection of seventeen essays (plus an introduction) on contemporary Japanese popular culture divided into four sections—popular music, comics and animation, television and film, and Japanese popular culture abroad. Topics covered include jazz, *enka* (Japanese country music), pop music, karaoke, *manga* (comics), film animation, television drama, the royal family on television, *Sailor Moon* and *Doraemon anime* outside Japan, and pop music idols. The essays vary in style, length, and analytic depth. Some are a few pages of translated comics, while others contain serious analyses of cultural issues. Tim Craig provides a solid introduction and notes the multidimensionality of Japanese pop culture, its closeness to people's daily lives, and the strains of idealism and innocence that run throughout it.

Many of the essays offer valuable insights. The essays on Japanese jazz and enka, by Taylor Atkins and Christine Yano respectively, are superb. Beyond outlining the development of the music genres in Japan, they relate the music to specific features in Japanese culture. In William Lee's essay on three cartoons/anime and Anne Allison's on *Sailor Moon*, we learn how an individual's identification with cartoon characters in Japan differs slightly from the process in the U.S. Jayson Chun in an essay on the media popularization of the imperial family in the late 1950s discusses the co-evolution of Japan's mass media industry and the relationship

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between the mass public and the emperor. Mark Shilling's essay on *Tora-san*, a TV drama about the adventures of an unusual hero (a middle-aged, hapless man) that ran each season from 1969 to 1996, and Hiroshi Aoyagi's essay on Pop Idols, each explains how the Japanese mass media industry operates and why the public often finds the not-so-extraordinary person to be attractive.

Several essays explore how nostalgia for a simple life and for greater interpersonal intimacy runs across the story lines and characters in music, television, and film. Also prominent is the superhero or pop star who remains rooted in a commonplace life, but can periodically transcend the constraints of tradition and ordinary reality. The issue of changing gender roles and family relations appears in almost all the essays. It highlights the close connection between pop culture trends and the changing daily lives of pop culture consumers. An intriguing line of inquiry is why repeated attempts to transplant Japanese pop culture into the U.S. market have failed. Japanese pop culture has been highly successful in spreading across East and Southeast Asia and has become the foundation of a rapidly growing pan-Asian pop culture.

Compared to another recent edited collection on popular culture (*The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture* by D. P. Martinez, Cambridge University Press, 1998), readers may find this work less obscure and more useful for teaching. Several essays are at a level that undergraduates can easily read. Teachers might want to accompany the essays on jazz, enka, anime, or pop music with a short video or audio clip to arouse greater interest among media-savvy students. Elementary teachers will benefit from discussions on *Sailor Moon* or *Doraemon*, and their students may embrace such characters who are related to the more familiar Power Rangers or Pokeman. In sum, *Japan Pop!* has a number of very insightful essays, and it is an excellent resource on contemporary Japan for teachers at all levels. ■

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