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Timothy Craig, ed. *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture.* Armonk, New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2000. 360 pp. $58.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7656-0561-0; $90.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7656-0560-3.

ed Timothy Craig. *Japan Pop!: Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture.* Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000. ix + 360 pp.

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Japan Pop! is a newcomer to the growing body of useful edited volumes on the subject of Japanese popular culture. It is aimed at an undergraduate or general audience and will be welcomed by the increasing number of instructors offering courses in this field.

For the sake of readers considering this book for course adoption, I will make some reference in this review to two other edited volumes they might choose from: John Whittier Treat's *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* [1] and D. P. Martinez's *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture*.[2] The strongest aspect of *Japan Pop!* is its choice of essays. Of the books available, it provides the most balanced cross-section of the salient topics in Japanese popular culture. In the area of music, jazz, enka, women in popular music, and karaoke are all covered. Essays on comics (manga) and animation (anime) consider a number of examples of those media and give a sense of the range of materials in these much-talked-about areas.

Another section covers television and film, from television serial dramas to the beloved Tora-san *It's Tough to Be a Man* films. The book ends with a section of four excellent essays called "Japanese Popular Culture Abroad." While some of the other books of this type seem somewhat more random in their choice of subjects, this volume covers most of the major areas one would want to include in a Japanese popular culture course, with the possible exception of non-manga print media (neither magazines nor popular fiction are discussed, unfortunately). Despite many good articles, however, this volume does not have the sort of ground-breaking and academically-important essay to match John Treat's essay on nostalgia, the *shoujo* (girl), and Yoshimoto Banana in *Contemporary Japan*, with which every scholarly work on girl culture or contemporary popular literature now must contend.[3] The focus here is instead on coverage and balance, and it excels in those regards.

Very welcome is the choice to quote and illustrate widely, such that the book provides not only secondary analyses of popular culture forms but also a great deal of primary material to which students and teachers could easily apply their own analytical approaches. Having such a strong body of music lyrics, manga frames, and photographs makes this book particularly useful for instructors trying to teach the subject without going bankrupt developing a manga and CD collection.

A primary weakness of this volume for classroom use is the introduction, which intentionally avoids theory or historical analysis. This is one place where the volume diverges from the Treat and Martinez volumes. D.P. Martinez provides an introduction that clearly introduces and provides references for relevant work on mass culture and to the nation-state in anthropology and Japanese studies. Treat's provides deep reflection on the role of popular culture in Japan and Japanese studies. Craig no doubt took a less academic approach in order to make the book more accessible, but as a result, the introduction fails to provide any tools to students using it as a textbook. It discusses the "bloodlines" of Japanese popular culture in "Edo bourgeois culture," the recent interest in Japanese pop abroad, and the overall qualities of popular Japanese culture in ways that are intriguing but somewhat misleading since they give no historical context.

Trying to generalize broadly in a short introduction without the use of many theoretical tools or reference to Japanese historiography is rather fraught with, and leads to some troubling conclusions. For example, Craig tentatively proposes three qualities of Japanese popular culture today that unfortunately are too general to be useful: that Japanese pop "wholeheartedly embraces life in all its dimensions," has "a strong strain of idealism, innocence,

and what the Japanese call roman," and has

"closeness to the ordinary, everyday lives of its audience" does not particularly distinguish it from other popular cultures.[4] Some of the observations Craig makes to accompany these descriptions are insightful, but from a pedagogical point of view the categories themselves seem counterproductive. There is no interrogation of the category of Japan, the meaning of "popular," or the economic factors at play. Although Edo is discussed as a starting point, the focus is on continuity with little mention of subsequent historical change. Perhaps most bothersome is the sense that the reception of Japanese culture in the United States *does* have a history ("Cartoons and comic books, TV dramas and pop music stars, fashion trends and crooning businessmen–until two decades ago such familiar and fun areas of life would have been unlikely entries in the journal of images commonly associated with Japan") while that culture itself is presented largely in terms of its most unchanging qualities.[5]

The excellent choices of subjects for the contributed essays are also sometimes undercut by the efforts to keep things simple in the introduction. For example, Saya Shiraishi's essay "Doraemon Goes Abroad," Hiroshi Aoyagi's "Pop Idols and the Asian Identity," and Anne Allison's "Sailor Moon: Japanese Superheroes for Global Girls" illustrate the ways Japanese popular cultural products have circulated beyond Japan in places such as the United States, Korea, Hong Kong, and Indonesia; a fan-drawn manga by Kawada Yuka called "Sailor Chemist" also demonstrates this point directly. But the short section of the introduction subtitled "Appeal in Asia, Appeal in the West" states that "Appeal in Asia" arises from "ethnic similarity and from shared values, tastes, and traditions," while the appeal in the West is because "opposites attract" and that provides "a chance to discover and explore mental universes built up from foundations entirely independent of our own."[6] The choice of essays for the volumes including Aoyagi, Shiraishi, and Allison, as well as the E. Taylor Atkins essay on conceptions of "authenticity" in the jazz community ("Can Japanese Sing the Blues?"), provides the opportunity to reflect upon the global circulation of popular culture and its effects in both complicating and reinforcing notions of race, gender, nation, and ethnicity. The essays suggest historical changes in these relationships and the economic forces at work, and thus, fortunately, undercut the statements in the introduction to the volume that would ignore these.

Some will prefer this rather sparse introduction to those found in other edited volumes that are more difficult and argued. But it would be a mistake to think that Craig's is somehow neutral even though I think that is what is intended here. Statements in the introduction about the propensity of Japanese for innovation in artisan crafts, their tendency to "'borrow' foreign things" or Japan as "a land of poets and artists as well as warriors and businessmen" are statements with histories of their own that are hardly neutral ones; instructors who assign this part of the book will need to consider how they will frame these ideas in the classroom.[7]

I expect that many instructors will rise to the occasion and use the essays in the book together with supplementary theoretical and historical readings or lectures to move beyond these ideas. It would even be a productive exercise late in a course to analyze this introduction alongside those of Treat and Martinez. But without such efforts, this introduction is in danger of simply reinforcing vague stereotypes.

Readers of this volume are likely to be divided over its approach to critical theory more generally. There clearly has been a concerted effort on the part of the editor to avoid jargon and to keep the introduction and all of the essays accessible. The book is based on a conference on popular culture at University of Victoria in 1997. The editor notes that the academics, fans, and producers of Japanese popular culture attended, but communication between these groups was often difficult. He hopes in this book to "bridge the gap between academic and non-academic worlds" and to "lure readers" at all levels to venture further into the subject.[8]

These are noble goals at which the book succeeds in many respects. The book could be read by a layperson with little knowledge of either Japan or theories of popular culture, and I foresee little need for explanation of theoretical concepts by an instructor using it in an introductory undergraduate course.

At the same time, there are moments when the editor has gone too far in avoiding theoretical questions. The very best of the essays do provide cogent and readable discussions of their subjects without sacrificing the opportunity to introduce theoretically important issues. The essays by Anne Allison (on *Sailor Moon*) and E. Taylor Atkins (on jazz) are superlative in this regard: with perfect lucidity, they provide material on which sophisticated discussions could be based without supplementary reading. Most of the other essays, however, are rather heavy on description and basic categorization of the primary material. The materials themselves evoke important issues but the authors stop before pursuing them.

Such essays contrast greatly with many of those found in Treat's volume and a few of those found in

Martinez's book, where teachers must guide students through such concepts as postmodernism, nostalgia, and late-model consumer capitalism. Personally, I would prefer to have that material in the essays to encourage students to deal with sophisticated academic arguments head-on. Rather than applying separate theoretical readings to descriptive material on Japan, and thus implying some inherent separation between the two, I would prefer to work with writings where they are integrated. For these reasons, I have made the choice to offer my popular culture class for undergraduates at an advanced rather than introductory level. But some with different pedagogical styles or a different student body may find the essays in *Japan Pop!* more workable in their classrooms than the other choices.

As an aside, not one of the major edited volumes on Japanese popular culture, including this one, has provided a bibliography (although some of the individual articles in *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture do have bibliographies). I hope that an editor and publisher of a future book of this sort will consider developing one. It would be particularly useful for students researching papers in this field where most materials are still in articles rather than book length. Although one disgruntled Amazon.com reviewer suggested that there were too many footnotes (and too much writing by academics) in* Japan Pop!_, the footnotes are a strong resource on current work in the field [9].

The effort *Japan Pop!* makes to "take the reader *inside* Japan's pop culture world" is achieved effectively through the editors' essay choices and the contributors' rich descriptions, lengthy quotes, manga excerpts, and other illustrations.[10] It is these that make this an invaluable resource for the teacher of Japanese popular culture. Any library at a college with a Japanese program of any sort should own this book. Although no single volume stands out as the best choice among the possible textbooks on the subject for all Japanese popular culture courses, I expect that many instructors will find that is the one that best suits their needs.

Notes

[1]. John Whittier Treat, ed., *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

[2]. D.P. Martinez, ed., *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[3]. John Whittier Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home," in Treat ed., *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, pp. 275-308. Another version of this piece that focuses on gender issues is "Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen*," in Lise Skov and Brian Moeran eds. *Women Media and Consumption in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), pp. 274-298. This edited volume would also be one to consider for a popular culture class.

[4]. Craig, pp. 12-14.

[5]. Ibid., p. 4.

[6]. Ibid., pp. 15-17.

[7]. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[8]. Ibid., p. 21.

[9] D M P Al-Badri, Editor, Kansai Time Out from Kobe, Japan. Amazon.com review, December 6, 2000 http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0765605619/qid=1022011366/

[10]. Craig, p. 17.

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