

A History of Mentalities in Japan in the Early 1970s—Promonitions of Anxiety in Economic Prosperity

Narita Ryūichi and Mark Pendleton

In modern Japanese history, 1945 is most commonly identified as the big break between ultranationalist, imperialist, and repressive Japan and postwar, post-empire, and post-fascist democratic Japan. Yet the era of rapid economic growth (*kōdo keizai seichō*) from 1955 to 1973, when annual growth rates exceeded nine per cent, dramatically changed the mindset of people in postwar Japan. Or rather, we could say that the state of Japanese people's existence within modern and contemporary history was fundamentally transformed. Moreover, in the last few years of rapid growth, people began to realize that they had not truly moved past the attitudes and institutions of presurrender Japan. At first it seemed as though economic growth liberated people from the task of reflecting on the war but it soon became clear that this was not so. In other words, in 1971-73, somehow Japanese society felt more vulnerable than it had since the war years, creating a widespread sense of foreboding. That feeling of impending dread was expressed in a variety of ways through cultural commentary in many genres. Somehow, disturbingly, all roads seemed to lead back to the war era.

Much of the discussion of how to think about Japanese history after defeat in the Asia-Pacific War has actually been a debate about the distance Japan has travelled from the war. The most common periodization is: the Occupation by the US-led Allied powers (1945-52), rapid economic growth to 1973, and then there is some variation about how to describe the period after that through today. The era of "Rapid Economic Growth" and its accompanying social changes are nevertheless generally understood as the zenith of the postwar era, followed by "contemporary Japan" (*gendai Nihon*). Yoshimi Shunya for example, distinguishes the 'narrow'

postwar of 1945-1970 from the 'postwar' of 1970 to 1995, until the onset of what he terms the 'post-postwar' from 1995, by which he means that Japanese people no longer thought mainly in terms of their distance from wartime society.¹ Nakamura Masanori's *Postwar History* delineates several more fine-grained temporal distinctions.² For Nakamura, the years from 1945-60 established the postwar's foundations of recovery within the framework of the Cold War alliance with the USA. This framework became more stable through the 1960s, despite domestic opposition, before a decade of *yuragi* or "tremors" beginning in the 1970s led to a long interval of decline and the end of the 'postwar'.

Nakamura's concept of "an era of tremors" starting in the early 1970s is significant and forms the core of what we argue below. Suddenly the sense of making steady progress away from the miserable last years of the war melted away. These tremors were felt across society, represented in cultural products and discussed in the popular and intellectual press. They revealed cracks in the assumptions underpinning how the postwar state and society were organised. Carol Gluck reframed this discussion by arguing for a multiplicity of postwars that are not purely temporal but, rather, map onto an understanding of the postwar as fundamentally a rejection of Japan's disastrous war.³ She calls one of these postwars the "middle-class postwar, or the postwar of private life," marked by the idea of democracy as "co-equality" in access to material and social goods. Democracy in this view is best understood as a social experience rather than a political one. This postwar amounts to a complete revaluing of

¹ Yoshimi Shunya (2009) *Posuto Sengo Shakai* (Post Postwar Society), Tokyo: Iwanami.

² Nakamura Masanori (2005) *Sengoshi* (Postwar History), Tokyo: Iwanami.

³ Carol Gluck (1997) 'The "End" of the Postwar: Japan at the Turn of the Millenium,' *Public Culture*, 10 (1): 1–23.

“what was called public sacrifice and private life” in favor of the latter. Rapid economic growth was what made private life possible for everyone and so it felt reassuring in even more ways than economic security usually does.

The material transformations of the postwar affected the embedded social values that had shaped modern Japan up to 1945 and had persisted after that, recalling the path to war and war itself. This process has been mapped out by historian Yasumaru Yoshio (1934-2016), who argues that changes in public consciousness about models of popular morality (*tsūzoku dōtoku*) are a good barometer of cultural change. Yasumaru explored the changing understandings of “the people” (*minshū*) across the period of Japan’s modernization. For him, the key social group was the *kokeieisha* (small business operators, or petit bourgeoisie), and in the nineteenth century, their version of moral virtue – diligence, filial piety, frugality, an ‘early to bed, early to rise’ mentality, and so on – became associated with the people as a whole. While these virtues may have originated to sustain small enterprises, their wider distribution gradually came to undergird much of Japan’s social organisation, especially the emperor-centered system in the 1930s and 1940s. This ‘popular morality’ then became embedded as a deep and popular cultural structure across modern Japan. In the decades of imperial expansion and war, a key state priority had been to promote thrift, further entrenching this value set. Both the state and society cultivated austerity in the Japanese population, particularly as the years of war continued; the material deprivation and subsumption of self to nation was at the very heart of Japan’s culture in the war years. After the war, many Japanese still found this mentality useful, and at first, the cultivation of austerity was reactivated for the postwar period in the name of science and rationality continued.

Nevertheless, in reaction to the war, after 1945 many Japanese intellectuals framed their criticism of Japan and themselves as having accepted that morality too easily and believed that doing so revealed Japan's troubled relationship to a stable and desirable modernity. Thus, the idea that consuming things could be virtuous was not only new in the 1950s and 1960s, it felt like a way to both reject wartime values and also retain the commitment to science and progress. This is a major reason why consumerism was popularly embraced.⁴

By the 1970s economic growth had created a mass consumer society and a celebration of abundance, explaining why scholars generally agree that the mid-1970s was a significant inflection point. These new conditions caused the older 'popular morality' to erode and people began to value different things. Social relations among people and between people and nature also began to shift. Most notably, consumption overtook thrift and pleasure-seeking replaced diligence. A new society was coming into being that was disconnected from the idea of participation in a collective project of nation or society.

In fact, it was actually this experience of postwar mass consumption rather than economic growth itself that changed how people felt about themselves and the future of Japan. Moreover, the biggest changes to mentalities were in the last years of high-speed growth and the abrupt moment when it stopped, and intellectual and cultural discourses of this period show that this is the great dividing line between modern and contemporary Japanese history.⁵

⁴ For a discussion of earlier cultures of thrift, see Sheldon Garon (2000) "Luxury is the Enemy: Mobilizing Savings and Popularizing Thrift in Wartime Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 26 (1): 41-78, and for its postwar transformation into consumer cultures, Penelope Francks (2009) *The Japanese Consumer: an Alternative Economic History of Modern Japan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, or Simon Partner (1999) *Assembled in Japan: Electrical Goods and the Making of the Japanese Consumer*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁵ The "history of mentalities" (*histoire des mentalités*, lit. history of attitudes) is most commonly associated with the French Annales School and has its origins in the early twentieth century works of Marc Bloch (1886-

For us, a key point is that modern narratives of progress and scientific development were first uncoupled from the subsumption of the self to a national project and then *both* were critiqued, leading people to feel that they were embarking on an increasingly unstable and atomised existence that forced new modes of thinking and organisation. Neither the comfort of economic security nor of communal belonging seemed certain to continue, and recognition of this vulnerability was felt as a “tremor.”

One way that this transformation in social relations became visible in the late 1960s was through a growing movement to galvanize public opinion against high rates of environmental pollution in industrialising Japan.⁶ Pollution was so severe that in several places industrial waste was poisoning large groups of humans as well as the flora and fauna around them. Two best-sellers were crucial in capturing public attention about this problem. The first, 1968's *Kugai jōdō* (published in English as *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow*) by the writer and activist Ishimure Michiko (1927-2018), was an exposé of corporate dumping of mercury into fishing grounds in the Shiranui Sea of western Japan, causing significant harm to the local fishing community of Minamata. This was followed a decade later by *Fukugō osen* (*Cumulative Pollution*), by Ariyoshi Sawako (1931-1984), which has been described as Japan's equivalent of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* for its enormous impact on understandings of how pollutants pervade everyday life.⁷ These works did much to spark a postwar critique of science and progress.

1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878-1956), which sought to understand historical states of mind. This tradition re-emerged in the 1970s through the work of Annales figures such as Georges Duby (1919-1996) and the emergence of microhistory from the late 1970s.

⁶ See also Yusa Katsuhiko, Misata Tomomasa, Yamane Ichirō, Yamaguchi Seiya, Nishikawa Setsuko, Hayashi Toshio, Iwamoto Tsunemaru (1975) *Shosetsu “Fukugō osen” e no hanshō*, Kokusai shōgyō shuppan.

⁷ Ishimure Michiko (1968) *Kugai jōdō: waga Minamatabyō*, Tokyo: Kōdansha; Ishimure Michiko (1990) *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow*, translated by Livia Monnet, Yamaguchi Publishing House; Ariyoshi Sawako (1979) *Fukugō osen*, Tokyo: Shinchōbunko; Rachel Carson (1962) *Silent Spring*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin

We argue that a single year – 1973 – can reveal the break from the first period of increasingly prosperous ‘postwar Japan’ to form the transition to a new sense of a ‘contemporary Japan’ when people realized that the material basis for the new consumer society might not last forever. To give an example, one that reminds us that these changes occurred within a larger transnational context, in October 1973 members of the Organization of Petroleum Export Countries (OPEC) proclaimed a global oil embargo until they were offered higher prices for their crude oil. By the embargo’s end a few months later, prices had risen nearly 300%. In Japan, this became known as the (first) Oil Shock because it ended the stretch of 9% annual economic growth rates, and in one fell swoop the economic prosperity of the postwar began to waver. This constituted a significant tremor or *yuragi*, to use Nakamura’s term, and was one source of growing apprehension about the future.

The effect of the oil shock on the public mood was obvious when on 1 November 1973, a multi-week run on household necessities culminated in queues of housewives buying up all toilet paper rolls in half an hour at a supermarket in Osaka’s Senri New Town residential complex, a shopping frenzy sensationalized in the mass media as a Toilet Paper Panic, or even a riot. Media-fuelled panics over shortages of washing detergent and sugar followed in the next months.⁸ The expectation of ‘co-equal’ access to material and economic goods that Gluck identified as being crucial to the postwar mentality was now unstable. This reminder that basic

Company. Ariyoshi’s book was first serialized in the *Asahi Shimbun* in 1974 before appearing in a stand-alone published volume in 1975. For more on Minamata, see Timothy George (2001) *Minamata: Pollution and the Struggle for Democracy in Postwar Japan*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center. Ariyoshi’s work is discussed in Christine Murrain (2017) *Ecology without Culture: Aesthetics for a Toxic World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion, see Eiko Maruko Siniawer (2021) “‘Toilet Paper Panic’: Uncertainty and Insecurity in early 1970s Japan,” *American Historical Review*, 126 (2), published online July 2021.

necessities could once again become unavailable resonated with memories of wartime privation in uncomfortable ways. This was just one of the many tremors of 1973 that affected both the everyday lives of people and their thoughts and emotions about the end of rapid economic growth and, we suggest, the stability of the postwar model itself.

The Tremors of the Early 1970s

We can trace other signs of this shift by reviewing the mindset of social critics. Two representative thinkers of this period are Ōe Kenzaburō (b. 1935) and Oda Makoto (1932-2007). In 1973, they published a coordinated set of essays serialised in the progressive journal *Sekai, Jōkyō e* ('Toward the Conditions'), by Ōe and *Jōkyō kara* ('From the Conditions'), by Oda. What Ōe and Oda mean by the *jōkyō* of these titles may be somewhat abstract to those reading in the 21st century, but would have been much less so to contemporary audiences. Ōe and Oda were both writing from the contexts of the Vietnam War – Japan was a key staging ground for the US military effort, which ended officially in 1973 – and of two decades of rapid economic growth. They also both saw these “conditions” as a matter for critique rather than glorification.

Ōe focused on the proliferation of what he called ‘new scientific epidemics’, such as nuclear weapons and corporate pollution, as well as the economic insecurities revealed by incidents like the Toilet Paper Riots. Understanding these developments as epidemics, Ōe titled one essay within this series “Plague Year” and compared Daniel Defoe’s eighteenth-century

chronicle of the spreading infestations of bubonic plague in London with the present.⁹ Ōe notes: 'As the epidemic attacked the metropolis, the inconceivable became real,' and went on to argue, 'We are facing such a Judgment Day.'¹⁰

Ōe was not just drawing attention to the very real threats of 'new scientific epidemics' such as pollution, but also asking if the world was not facing possible human extinction.¹¹ This concern is evident in his other writings of this time. For example, his Noma Prize-winning *Kōzui wa wagatamashii ni oyobi* (*The Flood Invades My Spirit* (1973)) featured a protagonist, Isana Oki, who lived in a nuclear shelter, believing he is a conduit for the spirits of nature. Isana ultimately becomes involved with a radical group reminiscent of the United Red Army, which had by the early 1970s degenerated into internecine violence, as discussed below.¹² A few years later, Ōe returned to similar apocalyptic themes in *Pinchi rannaa chōsho* (*The Pinch Runner Memorandum* (1976)), a story of nuclear family domesticity disrupted by competing visions of politics in a nuclear age.¹³ Ōe notes that while writing both books, he 'was obsessed with a strong premonition of the end of the world.' While *The Flood Invades My Spirit* presented this possibility as tragedy and *The Pinch Runner Memorandum* as comedy, he 'wrote both in a state of real nervousness.'¹⁴ Ōe was by no means alone; in the early 1970s this trepidation was

⁹ Daniel Defoe (1722) *A Journal of the Plague Year*. This was published in Japan as *Pesuto*, a Japanese transliteration of 'pestilence', which came to mean bubonic plague. Ōe Kenzaburō (1973) 'Akuekinen (Pureigu iyaa) (Jōkyo e – 8)' *Sekai*, September, pp. 152-160.

¹⁰ Ōe, 'Akuekinen'.

¹¹ The wider context of this 1970s ecological concern in Japan is explored in Lisette Gebhardt (2001) *Japans Neue Spiritualität*. Wiesbaden: Verlag Otto Harrassowitz.

¹² For scholarship on the late 1960s and early 1970s leftist movements and their decline, see Gavin Walker (2020) *The Red Years: Theory, Politics and Aesthetics in the Japanese '68*, London and New York: Verso.

¹³ Ōe Kenzaburo (1994) *The Pinch Runner Memorandum*, trans. Michiko N. Wilson and Michael K: Wilson. Armonk (New York): M. E. Sharpe inc.

¹⁴ Ōe Kenzaburō (1996) *Ōe Kenzaburō shōsestu* [The Fiction of Ōe Kenzaburō], Tokyo: Shinchōsha.

visible across many genres of literature, and into wider popular culture.¹⁵ Ōe was particularly anxious about the nuclear standoff at the heart of international Cold War politics.

Oda's work in this period also provides some important entry points for understanding early 1970s mindsets. He was responding to other events that were also shaping that moment. In June 1972, then Minister of Trade and Industry, Tanaka Kakuei (1918-1993), released a book entitled *Nihon rettō kaizō keikan* (*Remodelling the Japanese Archipelago*), which coincided with the resignation of Prime Minister Satō Eisaku (1901-1975), who had been in office since 1964, and Tanaka's own rise to the premiership. In his book, Tanaka advocated for massive state-backed building projects throughout Japan to spread economic development in all the regions.¹⁶ Oda was particularly disturbed by the fact that this plan for domestic development was intimately tied to the international activities of the Japanese state in the context of the Cold War. He was equally troubled by the state's encouragement of corporate exploitation – both through domestic construction at all costs, and of resources (people and other) across Asia. Oda, who was most famous for his opposition to the US war in Vietnam, was also thinking about the 'return' of Okinawa to Japanese control, and the fact that the US Occupation there had lasted 20 years longer than in the rest of Japan. Oda mounted a spirited critique of contemporary capitalism, that is 'enterprise society' [*kigyō shakai*], and of Japan's place in Asia.

Oda zeroed in on the fact that, as an anti-Vietnam War student movement leader in the previous decade, he and his comrades had called for radical change, signaled by slogans such as

¹⁵ See for example, Susan Napier (1993) 'The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from Godzilla to Akira,' *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, 19 (2): 327-351.

¹⁶ Tanaka Kakuei (1972) *Nihon rettō kaizō keikan*, Tokyo: Nikkan kōgyō shinbunsha. John Sargent (1973) 'Remodelling the Japanese Archipelago: The Tanaka Plan', *The Geographical Journal*, 139 (3): 426-435.

“Down with the (Japanese) Empire!” and “Destroy the Educational-Industrial Complex!” but they had not appreciated the impact of the increasing levels of creature comforts in people’s lives. He highlighted the growing popularity of recreational air flights; one consequence of higher household income was a marked growth of international travel. Between 1969 and 1973, the number of Japanese traveling overseas had increased from less than 200,000 to over two million, with the middle classes from which the student populations emerged being the key drivers of this growth – by 1979 this number had doubled again to over four million.¹⁷ The ‘airplane’ is highlighted in Oda’s essay as a representative image through which these contradictions are visible: “Students shout those slogans, but have not the slightest impact on that separate world inside the airplanes.”¹⁸ In essence, Oda was calling attention to the fact that Japanese corporate capitalism was entwined with the state’s international relations and both were profoundly—and positively—connected to the lived experience of people in new ways.

Oda was troubled by the travelers’ lack of concern for how the Japanese government was using the “power of Japanese money” to turn Asia into a financial stepping stone by, for example, championing Japanese corporate involvement in reconstruction and development in Vietnam after the ceasefire. For critics like Oda, this new (if indirect) Japanese participation in wartime and postwar exploitation in Asia was reminiscent of the extraction at the heart of the Japanese imperial project, particularly since this postwar exploitation was organised around public corporations directly connected to the “national interest”. In this context, Oda called for

¹⁷ Moeran, Brian (1983) ‘The Language of Japanese Tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10 (1): 93-108.

¹⁸ Oda Makoto (1973) “‘Hōjin shihonshugi’no kabe [The Obstacle of Corporate Capitalism]” *Sekai*, 330 (May): 163-177,

direct confrontation with the key organisational base of postwar Japanese capitalism – particularly the main public relations, lobbying, and coordinating organization for big corporations, the Japan Business Federation, or Keidanren, which had close ties to the Japanese government.¹⁹

Oda also pointed out that new forms of social movements had emerged in the previous few years and that they were turning a critical eye on Japanese society in general, not just the government and big business. The anti-pollution movement had by then evolved from a focus on individual cases of pollution seen as primarily local problems, to organizing on a national scale to stop industrial pollution everywhere in Japan.²⁰ That expanded focus also led to a recognition that the new lifestyles of the (primarily urban) Japanese population were inextricably linked to the exploitation of these (typically remote) local communities: “To mount a critique of the wickedness of the Japanese business leaders in Keidanren, one must also face our own wickedness... We must recognize the connections between those leaders and ourselves and strive to cut ourselves loose from them.”²¹

Before 1973, few people had squarely faced the problems inherent in the postwar ‘development’ model that Oda discusses, but the issue of pollution amounted to a substantial challenge to that model. Industrialization and urbanization meant that, increasingly, urban sensitivities and values proliferated, occluding more traditional ones, which had persisted more in rural areas. The new corporate-nationalist model of ‘modernization’ was not just bad for

¹⁹ Oda Makoto (1973) “Keidanren ni demo o shiyō [Let’s Take the Protest to Keidanren]” *Sekai*, 332 (July): pages?

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Asia. It was also changing Japanese society in undesirable ways, eerily making it no better than the old “austerity” model. Oda was one of the key postwar individuals who criticized postwar Japanese society as fatally flawed for allowing such devastating harm. Ariyoshi Sawako, mentioned above, made a similar argument in *Fukugō osen*, and Ishimure Michiko was another important voice in this vein. Her *Kūgai jōdō*, for example, starts from a celebration of pre-industrial viewpoints and develops a general critique of “the modern” that mourns a lost sense of individual belonging to a stable community in harmony with nature. We can see this in the 1972 volume *Waga shimin: Minamata-byō tōsō* [We Dead Citizens: The Minamata Struggle], for example, where Ishimure deploys terminology associated with the spiritual world to suggest karmic bonds between Minamata victims and wider society: “Our individual destinies cannot be cut off from the sense that everyone else shares the same fate.”²² All three of these works acted as springboards for activists fighting to end industrial pollution, and to more comprehensively challenge postwar Japanese society. It was noteworthy that Oda meshed his critique of state and corporate power with this evocation of traditional ways of engaging with nature, because that stance toward tradition had often been merged with fascist romanticism before the Asia Pacific War, and for that reason was rarely invoked in the first postwar decades. One of the most devastating realizations of 1945 was that the people who had most enthusiastically celebrated “Japanese tradition” had also forced the actions most destructive of these traditions. This is why it was so disquieting when Oda, Ishimure, Ariyoshi, and Ōe all

²² The title of the piece is a homophonic play on the Japanese term for citizen, 市民, with the character for city (市) replaced by that for death (死). Ishimure Michiko (1972) *Waga shimin: Minamata-byō tōsō*, Tokyo: Gendaihyōronsha. For a wider discussion of Ishimure’s work, please see Thornber, Karen (2016) “Ishimure Michiko and Global Ecocriticism,” *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol. 14, issue 13, no. 6, <https://apjif.org/2016/13/Thornber.html>

acknowledged that callousness toward human life and the natural environment was still a hallmark of Japanese society, despite the changes since 1945 and the new prosperity of the population.

Ends and Beginnings in the Realm of Ideas

Another seismic upheaval occurred in the world of knowledge in 1973 with the arrival of two new publications – *Gendai Shisō* (Contemporary Thought) and *Shūmatsu kara* (From the End Times.)²³ Both journals were launched with the promise of interrogating the contemporary moment (*gendai*) and problematizing it through an engagement with and critique of postwar thought. The key development was that they set up the “contemporary” (*gendai*) in direct contrast with the “modern” (*kindai*), making it easier to see exactly what constituted “modernity.” Crucially, the contention that only “the contemporary” was a springboard to the future was a sharp break from earlier postwar intellectuals who had thought of “the modern” as a future-oriented concept. This was not just about periodization. Through these publications we can see a significant shift in what was valued as knowledge by intellectuals, a shift that was in part a response to the social changes mentioned above. The new journals searched for “evidence of the endpoint” of modernity and the emergence of something categorically new. In other words, they were thinking through the same issues as were the historians mentioned above who used the labels postwar and post-postwar.

²³ The Japanese term *shūmatsu* here means end or termination, but is also used in terms associated with apocalypse. When the suffix *-ron* (thought) is added, the term *shūmatsuron* can refer to eschatology, apocalypticism and doomsday theories.

Gendai Shisō's intellectual origins can be traced to the global political upheavals of 1968, a year marked by numerous student and youth movements around the world, including in Japan, as many scholars have documented.²⁴ Yomota Inuhiko has emphasized the large scale and intense revolutionary fervor of the protests, which were characterized by innumerable and incessant outbreaks of radicalism and challenges to established orders of all kinds.²⁵ It seemed then as though these revolutionary movements were the beginning of something new but actually they were the last moments of the modern order.

In fact, what Yomota describes as the 'Rebellious state of the year 1968' actually persisted for several years, lasting until 1972 when it came to a sensational end.²⁶ As that year began, the United Red Army had retreated to Asama, in the mountains north of Tokyo and begun internal purges, which resulted in nine members dying from beatings and six others freezing to death after being tied up outside. Several of the Red Army leaders were arrested but a small number escaped, holing up in a mountain lodge for twelve days while police besieged the site. The final showdown on February 28 was broadcast live for nearly eleven hours on the state channel NHK.²⁷ The United Red Army had been Japan's highest-profile radical organization

²⁴ See for example the monumental multi-volume work from the Japanese 1968 – Yomota Inuhiko (2018) *1968*, Tokyo: Chikumashōbō, particularly volume 1 *Bunka* (Culture), and the chapter "1968 nen" ni wa nani ga okita ka (What happened in "1968"?). See also Gavin Walker (ed) (2020) *The Red Years: Theory, Politics and Aesthetics in the Japanese '68*, London: Verso. For a helpful reflection on the origins and politics of *Gendai Shisō*, see Yoshihiko Ikegami (2001) "Gendai-Shiso: making use of postmodernism," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 2 (3): 369-371.

²⁵ Yomota, *1968nen*.

²⁶ Gavin Walker argues that "we ought to think of 1968 in Japan as a period of nearly thirteen years, from the experience of the first mass movement against the renewal of the United States-Japan Joint Security Treaty (Anpō, in its Japanese abbreviation) in 1960 through to the bloody and grim end of the United Red Army in the mountains of Nagano prefecture in 1972." Walker, *The Red Years*, p. 2.

²⁷ For popular memory of these events, see Christopher Perkins (2015) *The United Red Army on Screen: Cinema, Aesthetics and The Politics of Memory*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

so this set of events shocked the nation and marked a dramatic end to that period of social revolution.

Looking back at that year, social critic and essayist Tsubouchi Yūzō titled his 2003 volume *1972* to stress an abrupt transformation at just that moment, symbolized by the Red Army's collapse. He divides his book into sections on 'The End of the Beginning' and 'The Beginning of the End,' and argues that the events at Asama marked a break for Japanese society, revealing 'a change in historical consciousness, or what could even be called a historical rupture.'²⁸ In 1968 overtly revolutionary political action had briefly seemed productive but by 1972, it was being replaced by a new seismic upheaval. Yomota's key contribution was to argue that instead of thinking that "politics" is separable from other aspects of society, as 1972 drew to a close, Japanese intellectuals were beginning to see culture as something that could never be anything other than political.²⁹ In other words, they were moving from a modern understanding of the relationships among culture, politics, and society to a contemporary, i.e. post-modern, one.

The postwar ideas leading up to this point had been oriented to national questions directly associated with Japan's war responsibility and its defeat. This is why, for example, Oda was so concerned with the ways that the alliance with the US disadvantaged the areas of Asia that Japan's armed forces had once devastated. It is also why Ōe foregrounded the issue of

²⁸ Tsubouchi Yūzō (2003) *1972nen: Hajimari no owari to owari no hajimari* [1972: The End of the Beginning and the Beginning of the End], Tokyo: Bungei shunjū.

²⁹ Yomota, *1968nen*. See also: Yoshikuni Igarashi (2021) *Japan, 1972: Visions of Masculinity in an Age of Mass Consumerism*, New York: Columbia University Press.

moral subjectivity. Although these authors argued that the material base had allowed a new way of thinking, they were still grappling with postwar questions.

But *Gendai Shisō* emerged from a new global intellectual context that argued against making modernity itself the paramount goal for societies. This was liberating because, as this shift took place, Japanese intellectuals no longer had to grapple with the paradigmatic postwar assumption that Japan alone had a troubled relationship to a stable and desirable modernity.³⁰ On the other hand, it was also unsettling because it meant that no one anywhere could have such a relationship. Figures like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze challenged the structuralism of modern thought, and introduced post-structuralism as a critical alternative to Marxist and Cold War-grounded ideas. An important example of the new knowledge circulating in Japan at this time was the work of the cultural anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao (1931-2013). Yamaguchi developed a concept of ‘anthropological thinking’, shifting the horizons of modern thought in two major essays – ‘The Premises of Anthropological Thought’ (1966) and ‘Restoring the World that was Lost’ (1968) – that bookend his most influential work, the collection “Anthropological Thinking”.³¹ “Restoring the World that was Lost” introduces the idea of the ‘everyday’ (*nichijōsei*). Yamaguchi develops a critical rejection of rationalist explanations for the everyday world, instead offering ‘that we can understand the world through an empathy grounded in the objective reality of daily life.’ Yamaguchi developed a critical antidote to the ‘historical thinking’ about the nature of time itself that he argued had

³⁰ This general framework is summarised in Kosaka Shūhei, Takeda Seiji and Shiga Takao (1984) *Wakaritai anata no tame gendai shisō nyūmon* [An Introduction to Contemporary Thought for a Curious You], Tokyo: Takarajimasha.

³¹ Yamaguchi Masao (1971) *Jinruigakuteki shikō* (Anthropological Thinking), Tokyo: Serika shobō. This volume has been reprinted multiple times.

formed the core model of postwar thought in both positivist and 'ailing' Marxist forms. His central concern is that abstract models of historical change and human actions fail to capture the inconsistencies and ambiguities of lived experience. His perspective also meant that "Japan" itself became an object of critique because if everyday human existence is the unit of analysis then the key question becomes "why do we organize ourselves into a group that we call Japan?" rather than "what is the nature of Japan?"³²

If we apply to the real world theories that understand truth only as that developed from that always abstract place of what is logically consistent in their own models, they become unitary weapons of conceptual classification – of certainty, predictability, logical causality and efficiency. This in turn leads to the instrumentalist erasure of meanings that should be multiple. Anything outside of a model's internal logic is successively disavowed. But the world is not built on a basis of the rationality (or omniscience) of the human mind. Instead the human mind can be transformed in accordance with the coherence (*seigōsei*) of the world.³³

This is Yamaguchi's intellectual departure point. His recommended response to an oppressive society was a search for shared 'origins' (*shigensei*) as one mechanism for overcoming the alienation of everyday life. This stance involves both rejecting critiques of the everyday world that emerge purely from theoretical imagination and also not averting our eyes from actual

³² Henri Lefebvre, Christine Levich trans. "The Everyday and Everydayness," *Yale French Studies*, 1987, no 73, pp. 7-11.

³³ Yamaguchi Masao (1971) "Ushinawareta sekai no fukken" [Restoring the World that was Lost], pp. 525-6.

contemporary realities. This is also an appeal to open-ended solutions, in which we could imagine other worlds that offer fulfilment while rejecting the certainty of theories that prop up our existing societies. In a sense, what Yamaguchi is proposing here is a rejection of the application of abstract theories to observed realities, and the embrace of the reverse.

Yamaguchi chooses this interpretive strategy because he believes in a shared humanity that cuts across cultures and societies, originating in a reading of Claude Levi-Strauss. In *La Pensée Sauvage*, Levi-Strauss argued for a distinction between the ‘cultivated’ mind, ‘domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return’ and the mind in an untamed state, or a contrast between “modern” and “premodern.”³⁴ In contemporary manifestations of this ‘uncivilised’ (*mikai*) state we can see an opportunity to grasp hold of a deeper inner experience.³⁵ Yamaguchi says, “those ‘uncivilised’ elements that stick out prompt us to ask what was lost, making us aware of our contemporary reality [*gendai*], or in other words, suggesting the uncivilised as a method,” for living ethically in a post-modern contemporary world.

This idea of a fundamental deep structure of all human societies – evident in those moments of ‘wildness’ – is a key element of the body of work after Levi-Strauss that became known as structural anthropology. In this view, social forms and systems of knowledge are manifestations of underlying deep cultural structures. Levi-Strauss explored this model through comparing manifestations of similar mythologies that emerge in very different locations. A central

³⁴ Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) *The Savage Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 219.

³⁵ The Japanese term *mikai* here means ‘uncivilised’ or ‘primitive’. Yamaguchi is drawing on similar language and concepts that appear in the work of Levi-Strauss, most notably *La Pensée Sauvage*, originally translated into English as *The Savage Mind*, which missed some of the nuance of the original French title. In Japanese, this was rendered as *Yasei no shikō* [Wild Thinking], and the term *mikai shakai* (“uncivilised society”) also appears in Japanese translations. *La Pensée Sauvage* was recently re-translated into English as *Wild Thought* by Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt in 2020, Harvard University Press. Thanks to Jamie Coates for this observation.

assumption is that these binary structures (self vs. other, pure vs. polluted, etc.) contain internal cultural conflicts. Yamaguchi says about this: “structures of the world we perceive as highly stable and don't regularly question are, at core, combinations of fundamental antagonisms.”³⁶ Structural anthropologists believe that humans not only establish various social rules and order to resolve these conflicts, these conflicts and their reactions are what makes human meaning possible. The exploration of these binarised positions and their theoretical distinctions forms the basis of this school of thought, which also influenced several other post-structuralist thinkers, from Derrida to Deleuze and Guattari.

Yamaguchi also used this form of analysis to attack the idea that Japan had achieved a fundamentally different kind of modernity from the rest of the world, rather than joining the argument over whether Japanese difference was positive or negative. If one culture has a feature that is comparable with that in another, Yamaguchi argued that this too reflects an underlying structure of humanity. Applying these ideas to history allows him to treat history as multi-layered and to stress the similarities of deep history. Yamaguchi explores the manifestations of androgyny, intersex conditions and cross-dressing in different locations, amongst a number of such examples. For him, these suggest similar binarised ideas across cultures around the sex/gender distinction that also shape attitudes about individuals who do not conform to those binaries. Identifying similarities across cultures and positioning these as manifestations of a shared deep structure thus breaks with the mythologies of Japanese uniqueness that re-emerged in the postwar.

³⁶ Yamaguchi, “Ushinawareta sekai no fukken,” p. 528-9.

Gendai shisō and its intellectual milieu, then, became a space in which these kinds of ideas were introduced, and modern thought from Karl Marx to Sigmund Freud to Georg Hegel was reinterpreted and recomposed. These reinterpretations drew on a wide range of disciplines from linguistics to biology in addition to the structuralist ideas of Levi-Strauss in order to critique classical Marxism and introduce new ideas. Rather than seeing Japan as “having taken the wrong path” or as best understood through its political economy, or as the site of class struggle, these analysts of the modern condition focussed on the impossibility of finding a “correct path” and the futility of believing that national political leadership was the key actor for improving contemporary life.

Apocalypticisms Abound

Anxiety about change and instability was also evident in the launch, also in 1973, of *Shūmatsu kara* (From the End Times). The magazine appeared in June with a special issue entitled *Hametsugaku no nyūmon* (An Introduction to Ruinology), featuring contributions from a range of prominent thinkers, including artist Yokoo Tadanori, playwright Inoue Hisashi, writer Nosaka Akiyuki, journalist and activist Ishimure Michiko, and author Tanabe Seiko, amongst others. The issue opened with the following address to its readers:

Where do we go ‘from the end times’? We don’t have the answers. Only you readers can say. You readers, all of us editors, we all have to find our own departure point.³⁷

³⁷ *Shūmatsu kara*, 1 (June, 1973) “Hametsugaku nyūmon [An Introduction to Ruinology], pp. 18-112.

That now familiar theme that endings contain the possibilities of (multiple) new beginnings continued with the third issue in October 1973 juxtaposing ruin (*hametsu*) with revolution (*henkaku*) to insist “Ruin or Revolution? Still not the time to resign ourselves [to anything being inevitable]”. The fifth issue was published in February 1974 after the first Oil Shock with the title “The Revolt that Begins with Me”. Endings, in these constructions, are not passive but are the impetus for a subjective revolutionary consciousness, albeit one that in that moment may not have been easily defined. This idea was extended even further in issue #6, which carried the title “Say Goodbye to Japan, A New Way of Life is About to Arrive.”

These writings wrestled with the question of how postwar society related to the wartime one by explicitly considering their authors’ personal wartime lived experience. They turned a critical eye on economic growth itself and developed a critique out of the mainstream of postwar thought. As with Yamaguchi above, these authors rejected singular national narratives, whether those of state developmentalism or theoretical enclosure, and displayed an orientation towards openness and uncertainty.

These various authors conveyed this message in a variety of ways. To illustrate this, we will briefly introduce the wider writings of three regular contributors to *Shūmatsu kara*. The first, Nosaka Akiyuki (1930-2015) won the Naoki Prize awarded for the best work of popular literature in any format by a new, rising or (reasonably young) established author in 1968 after publishing in 1967 *My Vietnamese Sister* (*Betonamu nēchan*), *American Hijiki* (*Amerika hijiki*), and *Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaru no haka*).³⁸ The most relevant of his works for us are a series

³⁸ Very little of Nosaka’s work is available in English. Two exceptions are *American Hijiki*, in Jay Rubin (ed.) (2017) *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories*, London and New York: Penguin, and the extremely famous *Grave of the Fireflies*, known primarily through the 1988 Studio Ghibli animated adaptation, directed

of essays published in 1973 and 1974 – collected in *Wandering Ideas (Hyōhaku no shisō)* and *Ideas of Carnage (Shura no shisō)* along with the essay ‘Postwar Prosperity Appears as a Nightmare’ (*Sengo no han’ei nite akumu de gozasōrō*), published in the literary journal *Chūō kōron* in August of that year.³⁹ His theme was that, somehow, despite the great effort to escape from the poverty and coercive environment of the war years, Japanese people found themselves once again intensely committed to something that destroys life:

Over the last couple of years, as the second generation to dwell in the burnt-out ruin that is Japan, we are approaching its second defeat. With the proliferation of pollution, the collapse of the ‘economic animal’ [a term coined in South and Southeast Asia to describe the rapacious, profit-oriented, and single-minded focus of Japanese economic actors] and revaluation of the yen, we can only observe that Japan, reincarnated as an economic powerhouse, has been defeated [again] [*Keizaikoku nihon no haisen*].⁴⁰

by Takahata Isao. A translation of the story by James R. Abrams appeared in *Japan Quarterly*, Vol.XXV No.4, Oct-Dec. 1978. A new translation in book form is rumoured from Pushkin Press, which published several short stories by Nosaka in two collections ‘The Whale That Fell in Love with the Submarine’ (2015) and ‘The Cake Tree in the Ruins’ in 2018, all translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori. See also David C. Stahl (2010), “Victimization and ‘Response-ability’: Remembering, Representing and Working Through Trauma in *Grave of the Fireflies*,” in David Stahl and Mark Williams (eds) *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 161-202.

³⁹ Chūōkōronsha Publishers published 7 volumes of collected Nosaka essays between 1969 and 1974. These constituted volumes 4 and 5 in this series. The article appeared as Nosaka Akiyuki (1973), ‘Sengo no han’ei nite akumu de gozasōrō,’ *Chūō Kōron*, 88 (8): 263-272.

⁴⁰ Nosaka Akiyuki (1974) *Kasabuta-kui no shisō: Nosaka Akiyuki Essei-shū* 6 (Scab-eating Thought: Volume 6 of the Nosaka Akiyuki Essay Collection), Tokyo: Chūō-kōronsha. For a useful discussion of Nosaka in relation to other members of this generation, see Roman Rosenbaum (2007) “The ‘Generation of the Burnt-Out Ruins’”, *Japanese Studies*, 27:3, 281-293. For the 1970s origins of Japan’s Overseas Development Assistance programmes, see Mitsuya Araki (2007) “Japan’s Official Development Assistance: The Japan ODA Model That Began Life in Southeast Asia”, *Asia Pacific Review*, 14:2, 17-29.

Having grown up during the war, Nosaka often drew on wartime metaphor and allegory to explain postwar Japan. His work is also characterised by its critiques of the United States and of technocratic culture. As this passage shows, Nosaka defined himself as a member of the ‘burnt-out ruins generation’ [*yakeato yamaichi ha*]. This group was too young to directly participate in the fighting but were old enough to be assigned to factory labor, so they were not evacuated to the countryside as were primary school children, and therefore lived through the horrific urban experience of aerial bombing as defeat grew closer. Nosaka’s deployment of the “language of war”, given his memories of starvation, is a critique of the superficiality of taking pleasure in postwar economic growth, which was jarringly apparent when he drew on 1945 when Japanese society collapsed, to understand 1973. Was Japan doomed to end the postwar at the same spot where it began?

Next we turn to playwright and novelist Inoue Hisashi (1934-2010). His most representative piece in *Shūmatsu kara* was the serialised novel *Kirikirijin* [The People of Kirikiri], in which he develops a narrative of utopian desire from the story of a small village that secedes from the Japanese state.⁴¹ In 1973 he also produced the script *Chinyaku seishō* (“The Strange Bible”) a striking story of a long-awaited Messiah who was suddenly stabbed to death, ending hopes of redemption. The play explores human anxieties through both war memories and the transmission of infectious disease through sexual contact. Unlike other postwar works of ‘new theatre’ (*shingeki*), *Chinyaku seishō* is characterised by an abundance of laughter and vulgarity,

⁴¹ See Tomoko Aoyama and Joel R. Cohn (1998) *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center. Inoue’s representation of a small village of secessionist minded rebels in Kirikiri has also served as a reference point for wider critiques of postwar Japanese institutions, including James A. Fujii (1998) “Internationalizing Japan: Kirikiri and the international Research Center for Japanese Studies,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 19 (2): 149-169.

a structure that incorporates twist after twist, and the inclusion of a complex ‘play within a play’. Inoue uses this form to create discomfort in his audience and so captures the sense of foreboding evident in 1970s Japan.

The most representative work of this 1973 apocalyptic consciousness, however, is science fiction classic, *Nihon chinbotsu* (Japan Sinks) by *Shūmatsu kara* contributor Komatsu Sakyō (1931-2011).⁴² In this novel, a catastrophic earthquake—a mega-tremor—causes the Japanese archipelago to begin to sink. Released in the last days of the postwar economic boom, it became a huge bestseller and won several awards, including the Seiun Award for the best science fiction work and the 27th Mystery Writers of Japan Award. Total sales for the two volumes of the novel exceeded four million copies. The novel has also been reimagined in various media, including two feature films (1974 and 2006), a fifteen-part manga, and a television drama series. A 2020 animated series directed by Peyon-Gang Ho and Masaaki Yuasa was released globally on Netflix with its setting updated to the aftermath of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which in the anime took place as originally scheduled. An iconic piece of disaster culture, it is also possible to read *Japan Sinks* as a commentary on the growing apprehension caused by rapid economic growth and expectation of its imminent decline.

Like Nosaka and Inoue, Komatsu’s wartime experience was also central to his writing. Komatsu’s debut piece, the science-fiction short story *Chi ni wa heiwa o* (Peace on Earth,

⁴² An English translation by Michael Gallagher appeared as Sakyo Komatsu (1976) *Japan Sinks*, Harper & Row Publishers. A UK edition was published in 1977 by New English Library and Kodansha published an abridged English version in 1995, after the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Dover reissued the original Gallagher translation as an e-book in 2016. For more on Komatsu see William O. Gardner “Narratives of collapse and generation: Komatsu Sakyō’s disaster novels and the Metabolist movement.” *Japan Forum* 26.3 (2014), 306-324 and “From parody to simulacrum: Japanese SF, regionalism, and the inauthentic in the early works of Komatsu Sakyō and Tsutsui Yasutaka.” *Paradoxa: Studies in Literary Genres* 22 (2010).

written in 1960 and published in 1964), imagined that the war had not yet ended and featured a central character preparing Japan against invasion by Allied forces. This work won an honourable mention in the inaugural Scientific-fiction Contest of Hayakawa Publishing's *SF Magazine*. This was one of many works in the 1960s that explored critically the legacies of war, including *Shōshū reijō* [Draft Papers, 1964], *Sensō wa nakatta* [There was no war, 1968], *Haikyo no achira* [Beyond the ruins, 1968], *2010 nen 8 gatsu 15 nichi* [August 15, 2010, 1968], *Koi to yūrei to yume* [Love, ghosts and dreams, 1968], and *Kudan no haha* [The Aforementioned Mother, 1968]. Komatsu had been very close to one of the standard-bearers of the postwar literary scene – the novelist and scholar of Chinese literature Takahashi Kazumi (1931-1971) – and that friendship was the basis for his sympathy with postwar thought as evident in his writings of the 1960s. That sympathy waned in the early 1970s as Komatsu became disquieted about postwar rigidities, such as the strictures of orthodox Marxist dogma, which seemed less and less compelling in the context of rapid economic growth. This discomfort was soon evident in the themes in his science fiction.

In contrast to Nosaka and Inoue, however, Komatsu was much closer to government and business worlds and was also far more comfortable with the technocratic culture that was a subject of critique for the other two. This can be demonstrated in the key role he played in developing the thematic blueprint for the 1970 Japan World Exposition in Osaka. The futurist themes that were central to the Osaka Expo emerged when Kansai-based scholars, primarily the "Thinking the Expo" study group (*Bankoku-haku o kangaeru kai*) engaged with state planning for the event. This group was founded in July 1964 and spearheaded by anthropologist Umesao Tadao, communication scholar and media theorist Katō Hidetoshi, and

Komatsu. As William Gardner has shown, they should be characterized as ambivalent rather than unreservedly enthusiastic about the official Expo narrative of futuristic progress and “Harmony for Mankind.”⁴³ Komatsu in particular had mixed opinions and his perspective can be summarized as a generalized alarm about postwar Japanese society, which intersected with critiques drawn from science fiction, leading him to rethink the meaning of civilization.

Komatsu carried these themes into *Japan Sinks*. While on the surface a disaster narrative that drew on Japan’s unstable geology, Komatsu also grounded the work in the moment of its publication. For example, he used emerging technology such as recently released electronic calculators to calculate the weight of the Japanese islands and the “amount of energy required to make the Japanese archipelago sink.”⁴⁴ The book also contains critiques of Japanese politics and suggestions about a better way to imagine Japan’s future in the world. In the novel, for example, the Japanese Prime Minister holds a series of meetings with learned advisers, one of whom points out that since Japan relies on international goodwill, they need to express some humility: “[T]he Japanese people, dispossessed of their homeland, will have to ask the nations of the world for corners in which to live. But if we treat this as our right, we will not get it, so making demands is out of the question.”⁴⁵ The novel also explores how various characters plan to use the safe haven, and introduces an opposition-party politician who politely but firmly criticizes the government response to the crisis: “It seems to me that you

⁴³ William O. Gardner (2011) “The 1970 Osaka Expo and/as Science Fiction,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, vol. 23, special issue on Expo '70 and Japanese Art: Dissonant Voices, pp. 26-43. Gardner points out that the adoption of the central theme ‘Progress and Harmony for Mankind’, was not universally loved, was seen as inherently contradictory by the Theme Committee, and was actually lampooned by other SF writers including Tsutsui Yasutaka.

⁴⁴ Komatsu Sakyō (2008) *Komatsu Sakyō jiden: jitsuzon o motomete*, Tokyo: Nihonkeizaishinbun shuppansha, p. 226.

⁴⁵ Sakyō Komatsu (1976), *Japan Sinks*, New York: Harper & Row, p. 125.

gentlemen, while giving lip service to the worth of human life, have in fact been most concerned with planning for the continuance of the financial and industrial life of this nation, and are committed most of all to the eternal nation itself and its structure.” This relative lack of concern for the fate of ordinary citizens is explicitly identified as a continuity with “bureaucratic thinking that goes back to the prewar days.”⁴⁶

The novel features much discussion about what Japaneseness might mean without Japan. This concept is most fully explored through the figure of the mysterious puppet-master who attempts to intervene to save the Japanese people. ‘Old Man Watari’, or The Ancient Wanderer, proclaims, “Once this Japan of ours is gone forever, once it is taken from the Japanese, then our identity will be simply that of human beings, it would seem. But in truth the problem cannot be reduced to such simple terms. For we have our karma – our culture, our language, our history. And that karma will be resolved [only] when this nation called Japan and its culture and its history – when all alike are swept away with the land itself. But the people of Japan will still be a young people, a people uniquely gifted. And this other karma, a living karma, is the one that will go on.”⁴⁷ At the peak moment of rapid economic growth and Japanese hubris, then, Komatsu was presenting a Japan forced to be more open to and reliant on the world, recognizing that such a shift would change the nature of Japaneseness in some fundamental ways. It could also be said that Komatsu was anticipating a debate about exceeding the nation-state frame and celebrating the difference between nation (*kokumin*) and the people (*minzoku*), although he links Japan’s “culture, language, and history” with the state

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 139-140.

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 125-126.

rather than the people in the above quote. We later discover that Old Man Watari's father was Chinese, intensifying the suggestion that dissolving the utopian/dystopian future may involve dissolving the boundaries of Japanese society as well as of the nation-state.

The origins of the novel are interesting here. Komatsu began writing it around the time of the 1964 Olympics. At that point, Komatsu had planned a story about Japan's downfall, but it ultimately took him nine years to gather material, plot and write *Japan Sinks*. He would later say that his motives for writing the novel included his belief that the war had been a disturbingly popular terrible idea, and the sense that a similar mistake was being made again: 'Japan had become drunk – intoxicated even – on rapid economic growth.'⁴⁸ The novel functioned as a warning for Japanese people to think harder about pushing ahead with that growth, and asking what "Japan" and "the Japanese people" were becoming.⁴⁹ Through these constructions of a Japaneseness beyond Japan, he asked whether "Japan" itself could or should exist, turning *Japan Sinks* into a novel alive with warnings and critiques about the state of contemporary society.

In Komatsu's novel, these warnings materialise through earthquakes and volcanic eruptions occurring across every part of Japan. While "taken individually, none of them are major things," collectively they amount to an existential threat to the islands (and nation) of Japan. Komatsu chose a non-linear narrative and there are many moments of frustration for the reader at the lack of synthesis or conclusion. Nevertheless, the sense of impending doom is

⁴⁸ Komatsu, *Komatsu Sakyō jiden*, p. 76.

⁴⁹ Komatsu had already sketched out a devastated and occupied Japan, which he equated (somewhat simplistically) to the Apache nation, in 1964's *Japanese Apaches* [*Nihon Apacchizoku*]

pervasive. Early in the novel, Komatsu describes the Cabinet members discussing their commitment to endless economic growth and economic planning:

Small as Japan was, she [sic] was laden with plan upon plan – construction plans, regional plans, municipal plans, plans for the reorganization of industrial areas. This year, however...within the space of the first four months of the calendar year, the vague, somber shadow of something heretofore unknown had begun to darken all of these plans.⁵⁰

For the reader, this shadow is uncanny, and is described at one point as causing a feeling that ‘something is just a little off’ (*nani ka iyō datta*). In its presentation of a mysterious shadow haunting Japan, *Japan Sinks* also frames 1973 as a watershed moment akin to its transposed numerical twin 1937: “This country’s politics has developed less from rational and clear programmatic will and more from a set of involuntary, sensory responses.” Japan entered into an unwinnable war with China in 1937 out of a similar emotional cocktail of injured pride, simmering resentment, and bravado. Had this emotion-driven atmosphere returned? Or was it more like 1945? Either way, Komatsu suggests that the postwar model must change. And in mounting his critique of ever-advancing rapid economic growth, Komatsu suggests that further development will only come about through the demise of contemporary Japan – “from the End Times” if you will.

⁵⁰ Komatsu, *Japan Sinks*, pp. 47-8.

The novel became a bestseller because Komatsu captured a widespread anxiety about rapid economic growth. Interestingly, the novel was written before the Oil Shock but its immediate popularity shows that its tone of foreboding resonated with the consciousness of people in Japan. To put it simply, although people were enjoying the comforts that came with rapid economic growth, they were also registering the significant transformations of Japanese society and gradually developing a sense of dismay at the effects of that growth.

The subsequent cinematic interpretation of *Japan Sinks* – released in December 1973 – hints at this collective emotional turmoil. In production before the oil shock but released afterwards, the film too struck a chord with audiences experiencing the sudden commodity shortages and price increases caused by the embargo – and the subsequent psychic compulsion and government exhortations to economise. More than the novel, the film was experienced in the context of these new tremors. Celebrating economic expansion as the central achievement of postwar Japan meant that when its inherent instability materialised, its fragility could not be ignored. Phenomena like the runaway-popularity of *Japan Sinks* shows that the history of mentalities in 1973 should showcase this sense of impending doom. The same can be seen with other books and films made at this juncture point, including *The Prophecies of Nostradamus* (*Nosutoradamusu no daiyogen*) by the writer Gotō Ben (1929-2020), who introduced Nostradamus to mainstream Japanese audiences in November 1973, and after it became a bestseller, a film version was released the following year.

Conclusion

How does one approach the writing of a history of mentalities of rapid economic growth and its end? We explored this question by connecting the material conditions of the early 1970s to some of the fiction, essays, and films that represent major intellectual and popular attempts to shape understandings of those changes. They document the new disconnects between the postwar popular morality that had been a reinvention of pre-war social mores and the intellectual traditions that responded to the war and its aftermath on one hand, and the social transformations in Japan's postwar economy and society on the other. And although rapid economic growth ended, the mores of consumer society continued to flourish, intensifying these disconnects. These disconnects also reflected the instability and uncertainty of a period we might identify, as Nakamura Masanori did, as marked by *yuragi* or, along with Komatsu, by a feeling of sinking and impending doom.

Our argument then is that this instability was itself a key shaper of a mentality of the period of rapid economic growth, particularly as it drew towards a close in the early 1970s. It manifested in many areas of culture and ideas, from popular and intellectual explorations of the end times to what it means to transition from the modern to something else. In upending the notions of stability and security that had framed the immediate postwar decades, 1973 constituted a year in which ideas of the 'postwar' and of 'Japan' itself became increasingly uncertain. In such moments of uncertainty, anything is possible. But this is a history, so we know that that moment of possibility was resolved in a specific way.

To be brief, as the instability of the 1970s moved into the bubble of the 1980s and its ultimate bursting, the tremors identified by the writers and thinkers discussed in this chapter solidified into larger ruptures. And the economic basis on which the postwar boom was built –

permanent growth – revealed itself to be a myth. Nonetheless, the trends that had accompanied economic growth, that is, the rise of consumer society -- individualization, atomization and social fracturing -- intensified, as was evident in various social crises, leading to public concern and panics about moral decline in the 1980s and 1990s. The war too resurfaced through an increasingly fractious memory politics in the decades that followed. Komatsu's image of a literally sinking Japan was a dystopian vision reflecting the fears and concerns of its early 1970s moment, and today it also serves to show us the vision of Japan as conceived in the postwar economic boom beginning to sink beneath the waves.

Bibliography:

Periodicals:

Gendai Shisō, 1973, January-December

Shūmatsu kara, 1973, June, August, October, December; 1974, February, April, June, August,

October

Other Consulted Works:

Asada Akira (1983) *Kōzō to chikara*, Tokyo: Keisōshobō.

Hasumi Shigehiko (1979) *Hyōsō hihyō sengen*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō.

Kamei Hideo (1982) *Shintai / hyōgen no hajimari*, Tokyo: Renga shobō.

- (1983) *Kansei no kakumei*, Tokyo: Hitsuji shobō.

Karatani Kōjin (1980) *Nihon kidai bungaku no kigen*, Tokyo: Iwanami.

Kishida Shū (1977) *Monogusa seishin bunseki*, Tokyo: Seidosha.

Kurimoto Shinichirō (1981) *Pantsu o haita saru*, Tokyo: Kōbunsha.

Maeda Ai (1983) *Toshi kūkan no naka no bungaku*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō.

Nakamura Yūjirō (1979) *Kyōtsū kankaku ron*, Tokyo: Iwanami.

Ueno Chizuko (1982) *Sekushii gyaru no daikenkyū*, Tokyo: Iwanami

Yamaguchi Masao (1975) *Bunka to ryōgisei*, Tokyo: Iwanami.