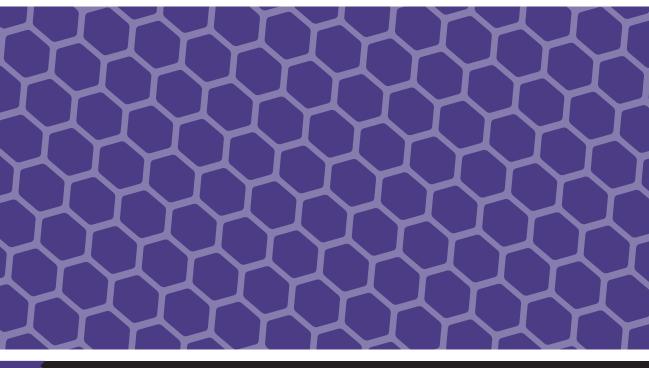# Handbook of Japanese Media and Popular Culture in Transition

Edited by Forum Mithani and Griseldis Kirsch

Handbook of Japanese Media
and Popular Culture in Transition

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Preface

Forum Mithani and Griseldis Kirsch

The Hepburn system of romanization has been used for Japanese terms, including the names of persons and places. Long vowels are indicated by a macron, except for place names and words that are in everyday use in English (such as Tokyo). The Japanese custom of placing the family name first has been followed for the names of Japanese persons. In the case of citations of works in English by Japanese authors, we have deferred to the romanization style and name order given in the original work.

Unless otherwise noted, translations into English from Japanese and other languages can be assumed to be the authors' own.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Griseldis Kirsch and Forum Mithani

Long shunned by academic discourse on Japan, Japanese media are at long last seeing the recognition they deserve. As anyone who has travelled to Japan can testify, media are everywhere—from the ubiquitous adverts on trains, to the *tachiyomi* (literally, reading while standing) of manga volumes or magazines in convenience stores, or the inevitable television sets in bars, restaurants or hotels; it is plain to see that Japan is a country saturated with media.

However, as a discipline, media studies is still relatively new. Having been born out of what was then called Communication Studies in the first half of the 20th century, which was initially almost obsessed with assessing the direct effect "mass-mediated" products had on the wider population, media studies as a discipline came to suffer under the perception that they were somehow not worthy of academic attention. Theodor Horkheimer and Max Adorno (1941) in particular, created a dichotomy between "high culture" (anything that was artistic, original and thus pure) versus "low culture" (anything that appealed to "the masses," was produced en masse, and was essentially formulaic), stigmatizing research on anything "popular." Naturally, this also had an impact on how Japanese media came to be studied—or, respectively, not to be studied, in spite of their prevalence and omnipresence in Japan.

When research on Japanese media started, the focus was very much on how it related to the political landscape. Several (anglophone) studies followed in the wake of the 1993 Tsubaki Incident (see page 9), an instance in which the close relationship between the media and the government became particularly visible (Feldman 1993; Krauss 2000; Freeman 2000). In Japan itself, at around the same time, research tended to focus on the representation of gender, or Otherness, in Japanese advertising and television drama, almost existing in separate spheres. What became evident, even then, were two tendencies that continue to dominate academic discourse up to the present day: a focus on case studies, often without looking at the industries that produce them, and a very clear research rationale about identities and discourses (Muramatsu 1979; Gössmann and Muramatsu eds. 1998; Iwao 2000; Iwabuchi 2001, 2002).

In the early 2000s, the popularity of Japanese television drama and, subsequently, the sudden and unexpected popularity of the Korean television drama *Winter Sonata* (*Gyeouryeonga*, KBS2 2002) and the resulting fandom around its star, Bae Yong-joon, triggered another wave of interest in the workings of Japanese media. It prompted several publications that dealt with the consumption of content, and the impact of that content on fan behavior across East Asia. (Iwabuchi 2002; Mōri ed. 2004; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Hayashi 2005). The focus of these works was very much thematic, again leaving out the industries that shaped and exported or imported these productions, within the region.

As a result, there have been few industry studies, with Jayson Makoto Chun's (2006) volume, *A Nation of A Hundred Million Idiots?*, perhaps being the only one dedicated to Japanese television, and even it only encompasses the formative years up to 1973, offering

nothing on recent trends and issues. Similarly, Jeff Kingston's (2017) more recent edited volume *Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan* contains industry-focused papers, but with a narrow emphasis on how the government influences the media. Not unsurprisingly, this book followed the wake of yet another attempt by the Japanese government to change the broadcasting law to exercise control.

However, by the second decade of the 21st century, Japanese media studies had evolved into a rich field, with an increasing number of rising and more established scholars. One of the explicit aims of this volume is to showcase the richness of the field by explicitly including more junior scholars—and thus the future of the discipline—alongside more established ones. Scholars have come to study the intersection of television and film, manga, anime, social media—the approaches are numerous.

Nonetheless, handbooks specifically about Japanese media are still few and far between, and the only media genre that receives significant attention from publishers is Japanese cinema—an approach that overlooks the complex, long-standing relationship between television and cinema and thus risks excluding key insights that could be discovered when they are not looked at in separation from each other. The first handbook—edited by Richard G. Powers, Hidetoshi Katō and Bruce Stronach—was published in 1989 and comprises papers on science fiction, popular architecture, new religions and sport, thus employing a very broad view of "popular culture," very much in line with Horkheimer and Adorno. The review on Amazon advertises the book as follows: "The areas explored are those that have proven to be of durable interest to the Japanese, such as sports, science fiction, and popular music, as well as passing fads and fancies" (Amazon n.d.). In 1995, John Whittier Treat edited *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, which featured papers writing either about case studies, or more generally about the phenomenon of "mass culture." A different approach was taken by Dolores Martinez's edited volume in 1998, *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures* which brought together scholars working on sports, anime, magazines and television drama, providing a similar scope to Powers, Katō and Stronach, but more up-to-date insight into Japanese popular culture, with a wider focus than Treat before her. In the year 2000, Timothy J. Craig edited the volume *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture,* with a very similar scope of papers to Martinez's previous book. Since then, countless, more thematic volumes have been compiled and authored which has made the study of Japanese popular culture firmly part of research on Japan.

Most recently, Fabienne Darling-Wolf's (2018) edited volume, the *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Media*, collating twenty-six diverse papers under five different thematic groupings, provides a case-studies-based overview of some aspects of Japanese media, with the notable absence of cinema and popular novels. The *Handbook of East Asian Popular Culture*, edited by Koichi Iwabuchi, Eva Tsai and Chris Berry (2017) comprises papers provided by scholars from East Asia and Europe, looking specifically at transnational flows within the region. While since the advent of the 21st century, East Asian popular culture has indeed become more interconnected, making this collection a valuable addition to the field, to some extent it requires corresponding handbooks looking at national media to be fully contextualized.

Therefore, this handbook aims to close that gap, contextualizing Japanese media within itself, but also within a wider context, of East Asia and its global surroundings, looking at industry constraints as well as content.

What do we mean by Japanese media?

Media is a broad-brush term, often used synonymously with mass media, but in fact referring to any product, printed, filmed or broadcast, that "mediates" a message. In this handbook, we have deliberately opted for a wide definition of the term, using it to mean any product of the creative industries, whether it is a film, television program, magazine or popular novel in order to highlight the full breadth and depth of research on Japanese media.

The wide-ranging array of formats covered by this volume, which encompasses contemporary and classical cinema, television, anime, media mix, popular fiction, advertising, magazines, karaoke and digital media, not only reflects the diversity but also the intertextuality, fluidity and hybridity of media. Manga are adapted into anime (as well as live-action productions) for the small and large screen; novels, such as Kirino Natsuo's *Out* (discussed in Lyle De Souza's chapter in this volume) become the source material for television dramas and feature films; conversely, popular television shows are often novelized. Before even making it on to the screen, novels themselves evolve through a variety of formats, often starting out as a serialized column in a national newspaper, before being collected into hardback *tankōbon*, paperback *bunkobon* and digital editions. As De Souza observes in his chapter in this volume, technological advances have spawned new innovations such as the cell phone novel. Of course, the video games industry has provided the inspiration for some of the most successful media franchises, such as the behemoth that is *Pokémon*. As Rayna Denison observes in her chapter in this volume (112), the complex storyworlds in media mix can be visualized in synchronous adaptations that "burn bright" for a short period of time or diachronic franchises that span decades and multiple media. When fan production and foreign versions are taken into account, the limits of media become unfathomable.

The internet has further expanded the scope and breadth of material to be mined, with online content reworked for various media—see the *Densha otoko* (Train Man) franchise or, more recently, *Tōkyō joshi zukan* (A Tokyo girl's guidebook), which spawned SVOD series and spin-offs. Indeed, SVOD, AVOD and freemium services such as Amazon Prime, Netflix, YouTube, Hulu, TVer, ABEMA and Niconico, have expanded the volume and diversity of content available to Japanese consumers, as well as the ways in which this content is accessed. The number of SVOD paying subscribers reached 44.2 million in Japan in August 2021 (Media Partners Asia 2021), and this growth is set to continue with the recent agreement between BBC Studios and Japanese OTT provider U-NEXT and the expansion of Disney+ services (Veale 2020).

In turn, major streaming services are opening up Japanese content to international audiences with some success—see the popularity of reality show *Terrace House*, screened domestically on Fuji TV and internationally on Netflix. Fans of anime and *dorama* outside Japan will be highly familiar with services such as Crunchyroll, Rakuten Viki and the myriad other platforms for streaming content. Online platforms are also becoming dominant players in film distribution; for example, Japanese feature *37 Seconds* (discussed in Forum Mithani's chapter) received only a limited release internationally—mostly at film festivals—before appearing on Netflix in early 2020, around the same time it was released in cinemas in Japan. As well as buying the rights to screen existing anime, television dramas and films, Netflix and Amazon Prime and others are also producing original Japanese-language content.

Given that the production, distribution and consumption of media and popular culture happens within this complex ecosystem of cross-pollination, no single type of production can be fully understood when viewed in isolation. As Steinberg and Zahlten assert, media should not be understood as an umbrella term comprising individual formats or genres, but as an "emergent system with its own set of dynamics and semiautonomous rules" and thus our focus, as scholars and theoreticians of media, should be trained more on the context and environment in which media are created and operate than on their senders and receivers (Steinberg and Zahlten 2017, 12). In other words, the media is, contrary to how McLuhan put it, not always the message. While it is important to understand media outputs in the context of their production, it is the content that will be consumed—and as such not only provides insight into how Japanese media in its broadest sense function in the third decade of the 21st century, but at the same time also sheds light on societal discourses as shaped by the media.

As Coates and Ben-Ari argue in the introduction to their volume on the de/politicizing effects of Japanese visual media, media products fulfill multiple roles, "whether these be edifying and enriching, preaching and indoctrinating, or providing escapes from people's everyday lives" (2021, 1). They create "multi-sensory experiences," "evoke emotions and sentiments" and "echo, mimic, and reinforce" other forms of cultural production (Coates and Ben-Ari 2021, 1). Media texts offer a lens through which to analyze, interpret and better understand the socio-political history of a nation. Traversing the length of Japan's modern period, from Meiji-era magazine publishing, through postwar cinema to 21st century digital media, the chapters in the present volume touch on topics that include historicity, memory, politicization, disasters, authenticity, dramatization and adaptation, self/censorship, the "hero" figure, the "lost decades" and social disaffection, discourse analysis, gender, sexuality, class, intersectionality, masculinity, disability, localization, trans/nationalism, audiences and users.

Just as new iterations of media open up the potential for multiple narratives and worldviews, the same might be said for academic and social discourses on media. The political implications of media texts are not immutable (Coates and Ben-Ari 2021, 4); they may be subject to repeated reinterpretations that are influenced by (and thus revealing of) the particular socio-political context of a given time. With this in mind, the chapters in this handbook offer new research and perspectives on popular media phenomena, as well as shining a spotlight on texts that are less well known or studied. Drawing on methods and approaches from a range of disciplines, including screen and media studies, anthropology, sociology, history, area studies, audience studies, gender studies and disability studies, the chapters make explicit the interconnections between these areas of research and map out possible trajectories for future inquiry. As such, we envisage the handbook will be of value to both novice scholars and seasoned researchers, working within and/or beyond the Japanese media studies remit.

Structure of the handbook

The chapters in this volume are grouped into five key themes: Reimagining History; Transitions and Transcultural Flows; Franchises and Formats; Gender and Media; and Audiences and Users. While this method of organization better elucidates the intention of this handbook to emphasize the connections between media that transcend simplistic categorizations by genre or format, the thematic systemization chosen is not meant to be definitive

or prescriptive. We recognize that interlinks exist between individual chapters in different sections. For example, the themes of displacement and repositioning within the transnational context of East Asia are present in both Julia Stolyar's contribution on Japanese remakes of Korean dramas and Xinyu Promio Wang's study of digital media usage among Chinese migrants. Similarly, Rayna Denison's discussion of early media mix practices overlaps with Hiroyuki Kitaura's re-evaluation of the symbiotic relationship that developed between the film and television industries.

Griseldis Kirsch opens the first section on reimagining Japan's history with her chapter on televisual discourses of Japanese imperialism, considering to what extent the media is shaped by political forces and how this influences its output. As Kirsch observes, politically-driven (from the highest echelons of governance) historical revisionism has colored the lens through which many Japanese learn about and perceive the nation's wartime history. Commemorations that emphasize Japan's status as the victim of two atomic bombs can obscure its role as aggressor and perpetrator of brutal atrocities against its colonial subjects. Kirsch demonstrates how television drama contributes to a "memory industry" that avoids controversial depictions of a complicated history some would rather forget. A pervasive medium that is subject to multiple external pressures from various commercially and politically powerful actors, television must tread a fine line in terms of the messaging it sends out. Kirsch makes sense of the entanglement of complex relationships upon which the structure of Japan's mass media industry is formed, focusing in particular on how political interventions might influence broadcast output and create a climate of self-censorship. Her comparison of dramas broadcast from 2005–2007 and 2015 demonstrates how changes in the way Japan's wartime past is depicted on the small screen reflect an increasingly restrictive atmosphere in terms of what can and cannot be said. Dramas from the earlier period showed more latitude in representing the violence of the imperial era. However, by 2015, as the right-wing LDP administration under Abe Shinzō was taking a firm stance against progressive media outlets, these had given way to images of harmony between Japan and its near neighbors. Such narratives not only feed into contemporary conservative/nationalist revisionist rhetoric, they also shape the ways in which Japanese remember, or imagine, their history.

Continuing this vein of research on dramatizations of historical events, Christopher P. Hood's study focuses on films and television dramas depicting the 1985 JAL air crash disaster. His detailed analysis of five productions reveals the extent to which the "truth" is or can be portrayed on screen, in light of the limitations imposed by the conventions of the disaster genre, as well as the practical and financial considerations of depicting large-scale catastrophes, and the sensitive nature of the subject matter, which involves the suffering of real-life people. Up to now, English-language scholarship on disaster narratives has largely been focused on anglophone productions—primarily Hollywood movies. Hood's examination of the hitherto underexplored Japanese disaster genre brings new insights to the fields of visual media studies and Japanese studies, revealing the shared conventions and local specificities of Japanese productions. Utilizing a framework of conventions established in his previous work, Hood offers detailed assessments of what is represented in each production and what is left out, and how these depictions relate to the known facts of the event. As he notes, even heavily fictionalized portrayals can influence the ways in which people perceive and remember events. Thus, dramatizations as a site of academic inquiry offer the potential to shed light on the processing of moments of historical importance, both on a societal and

individual level. Crucially, his chapter provides a template for future research in an area that deserves greater attention.

Another catastrophic event that has provided inspiration for cultural production is the triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown that afflicted the Tōhoku region in March 2011. Hilaria Gössmann's chapter reveals the ways in which television dramas and films have approached a calamity that had (and continues to have) wide-ranging repercussions and is surrounded by fear and controversy. With a specific focus on the most contentious element of the disaster—the meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and its aftermath—Gössmann analyzes the possibilities and limitations of film and television representations of the incident, the characters and attitudes that appear in these media and pays careful attention to the issues that are not addressed. As well as investigating narratives that directly reference nuclear accidents, her examination also considers indirect representations that touch on topics such as grief and "survivor guilt," which affected many in the aftermath of the disaster. Gössmann's study, which incorporates intertextual references to interviews with creatives working in film and television, literature and other media, as well as academic discourse on the topic, reveals the reluctance of the film and television industry to directly address the nuclear accident in dramatic depictions of the disaster. Her careful analysis finds that a few television dramas have made oblique references to the impact of the radiation leak that may be regarded as implicit criticism. Nevertheless, many of the narratives offer happy endings in which the characters overcome grief and adversity, reflecting the wishes of those involved in the productions to offer solace to victims and viewers alike. In relation to films made outside of the major studio system, Gössmann notes a greater willingness to offer a critical, anti-nuclear message. Rather than provide solace to the audience with an uncomplicated, optimistic ending, these films serve as a "dystopian warning" that, Gössmann observes, would have been impossible to air on television, signalling the greater critical potential of the film industry.

Part 2 of the volume, "Transitions and Transcultural Flows" brings together four authors that share an interest in moments of transformation and flux in Japan's socio-cultural history. Irene González-López uses Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) concept of "contact zones" to analyze the representation of the *panpan* in Taniguchi Senkichi's 1953 film *Red-Light Bases*. *Panpan* was a derogatory term used to refer to the female sex-workers that catered to foreign servicemen in Occupation-era Japan. Noting the role of the *panpan* as an "intermediary" between the occupying forces and the Japanese, González-López sees representations of the *panpan* as fertile ground for exploring the power asymmetries between the US and Japan through the lens of gender and sexuality. Building on existing scholarship, she convincingly argues for the film to be viewed as a "cross-temporal contact zone" that reveals the anxieties and experiences of occupation in a nation reckoning with itself in the aftermath of defeat. González-López's careful, intertextual analysis, situated within the socio-political context of the time, offers alternative readings of the film, shedding light on the contradictory perspectives of the *panpan* and the political implications of its handling of a controversial subject. Her detailed visual examination unpacks the use of various cinematic strategies employed in the film to expose the constructed notions of ideal womanhood, female sexuality and the fine line between the "respectable woman" and the "whore." González-López makes a convincing case for reading *Red-Light Bases* as an exposition of the interrelationship between imperialism, patriarchal ideology and the policing of women's bodies. At the same time, her probing reveals that, despite privileging the perspective of women, the film also

ultimately validates militarized masculinity. She argues that in doing so, the film reflected the ambiguous position of post-Occupation Japan, offering multiple sites of identification for an audience contending with conflicting feelings and experiences at a time of uncertainty and upheaval. Its optimistic ending also offered a cathartic fantasy of a Japan leaving behind the Occupation and its traumatic past.

Marcos P. Centeno-Martin explores further sites of transcultural and transnational interaction in postwar Japanese cinema in his chapter on the youth star system. Focusing on Nikkatsu's pivot towards youth cinema and *mukokuseki eiga* (films without nationality) from the mid-1950s onwards, his intertextual examination reveals the complex strategies the studio employed to create a new genre influenced by Hollywood films. His chapter questions the concept of a "national cinema" and encourages a critical discourse analysis approach to film scholarship that takes into account multiple contexts and is not restricted by national or textual boundaries. Centeno-Martin reveals that this new, niche cinema targeted at a young audience was driven by demographic changes and followed a precedent set by American studios. He follows the journey of this film genre from its earliest iterations, the *taiyōzoku* (sun-tribe) films, as Nikkatsu pursued a strategy that capitalized on Japanese youth's fascination with the West. Through this new genre of action films, the studio made stars of young actors, including Ishihara Yūjirō, Kobayashi Akira, Akagi Keiichirō and Wada Kōji, who epitomized a new postwar masculinity that blended Japanese and foreign elements of speech, dress, demeanor and values. Centeno-Martin points to the Japanese Western as a genre that was particularly influenced by its US counterpart, exemplifying the ways in which narrative styles and codes of visual representation can transcend not only national borders but also boundaries of cultural and historical contexts. He notes the recycling and reappropriation of cinematic tropes (thus the "lonely wanderer" becomes the "wandering *rōnin*") and demonstrates the process of localization that occurs when these stories migrate from one context to another. He demonstrates how the analysis of such films offer the potential to reveal contemporaneous structures of power and ideological expressions. In the case of youth cinema and the Japanese Western, Centeno-Martin argues that these genres reimagined a new, postwar Japan with stronger political, economic and cultural ties to the US. This symbiosis also extended to the transmedia practices of Japanese stars, which included collaborations with the music industry and appearances on television and radio, a practice that has not only continued but intensified to this day. Furthermore, Centeno-Martin suggests that echoes of the transcultural personas of the youth stars of the postwar era can be found in the popularity of entertainers from multi-cultural and multi-ethnic backgrounds today.

Hiroyuki Kitaura unravels the relationship between the two dominant forms of visual media during the twentieth century, cinema and television. Focusing on the business strategies and technologies employed, he reveals how these competing Japanese industries have managed to coexist through a complex process of negotiation. Cinema audiences reached a record high in 1958, with the six major film companies producing large volumes of output to meet public demand. Yet, within little over a decade, audience numbers had fallen to a quarter of the peak and a number of companies had folded or withdrawn from mainstream film production. Meanwhile, just as cinema was beginning its precipitous decline, the emerging medium of television, boosted by the coverage of events of national importance, was moving rapidly in the opposite direction. Kitaura reveals that the film industry response to this new threat was to bring in a number of countermeasures to distinguish the cinema screen from its rival, including the adoption of color film and the introduction of the widescreen

format, as well as preventing broadcasters from using the major studios' talent and content. However, they were unable to stem the growth of the rival medium and soon changed their approach to one of integration. Kitaura's chapter uncovers the mutual benefits each industry enjoyed from their close cooperation, which expanded opportunities for both mediums and established the basis for the current production committee system, which has become almost universal as a means of financing films, spreading both the risk and the rewards. As Kitaura argues, the close partnership between film and television that we see today has evolved through a process of conflict and negotiation. He suggests that in the age in which the internet has emerged as the dominant platform to access visual media, a new path of coexistence may need to be found.

Julia Stolyar brings this section on transitions and transcultural flows up to the present day with her chapter on South Korean-Japanese transnational adaptations. As Stolyar notes, during the late twentieth century, pop cultural exchanges between the two countries eventually overcame the lingering bitterness over their former colonial ties, first surging one way, then, with the advent of the Korean wave, reversing course. Whereas some scholars have situated this development within the context of creating a shared regional identity based on mutual understanding, Stolyar questions this assessment, arguing that the very existence of local remakes appears to challenge such notions. Through Stolyar's examination of the remaking of South Korean television drama *Mawang* (*Maō/The Devil*), we learn that, despite overlap in terms of themes and issues that interest and concern audiences in both countries, the process of adapting a drama for a local audience requires significant alterations that not only fit broadcasting conventions, but can also have implications for the narrative structure and the meanings made by the viewer. The process of relocating the story of *Mawang* to Japan presents, as Stolyar argues, a "complex picture of negotiation of ideas, styles and messages," and in doing so, exposes differences in the levels of trust in the justice system, notions of good/evil and attitudes towards revenge in South Korea and Japan. As such, it pushes back against simplistic conceptions of a "pan-Asian identity." Now that Korean pop culture is making waves on a global scale—see the rise of K-pop icons BTS and the Netflix megahit *Squid Game*—such nuanced readings of non-Anglophone cultural phenomena are needed more than ever.

Separately and together, the three contributions in the third part of this volume, "Franchises and Formats," reveal the ways in which different forms of media are never isolated from each other or their social, cultural, political or economic contexts. Rayna Denison's chapter offers a concise yet thorough overview of the complex, multifarious and diffuse concept of media mix, referencing key literature on the topic, including the work of Marc Steinberg, Henry Jenkins, Mizuki Ito, Anne Allison, Matthew Ogonoski, Bryan Hikari Hartzheim, Ōtsuka Eiji, Azuma Hiroki, Alexander Zahlten, Thomas Lamarre, Jonathan Clements, as well as her own extensive research in this area. As she succinctly describes, media mix encompasses a wide range of movements and practices, across and between texts, boundaries (geographic and otherwise), cultures and languages, infiltrating every part of the media landscape and, arguably, society. Her discussion takes in a number of theories that assist us in understanding the industrial, social and cultural processes responsible for the formation, evolution, participation in and consumption of media mix, including theories of media convergence; product portals; narrative consumption and subcultural databases. As a phenomenon that is constantly evolving to embrace new technologies, creative innovations and changing trends in participation and consumption, the journey of media mix has been

accompanied by developments in the way it is (re)conceptualized, theorized and discussed. Denison's detailed evaluation of the academic discourse notes the subtle differences as well as the more significant departures in theoretical and discursive approaches. The second half of the chapter provides some historical context to the development of media mix as a practice as well as concept in Japan, tracing its roots in the cross-media practices of postwar marketing companies, through the media-mix strategies of Kadokawa Publishing, to the role of the *keiretsu* system and other industrial practices of integration and conglomeration, including the production committee system, in facilitating the proliferation of transmedia production. She also notes the pivotal role of the television and gaming industries in the production and consumption of media in Japan and beyond, as well as the shift in focus from discrete media to platforms as hubs for delivering multiple forms of media. As Denison concludes, it is this flexibility and transmutability that forms the crux of what makes and enables media mix to flourish.

Continuing with the theme of manga and anime, Artur Lozano-Méndez and Antonio Loriguillo-López identify a new archetypal protagonist in the genre, the nihilistamina hero/ heroine (NH), so-called because of their incessant levels of nihilism and stamina. These characters differ from regular protagonists of the *shōnen* genre in their inability to recover from past trauma, which continues to affect their outlook and sense of self. Nevertheless, these gloomy characters are tasked with performing equally fantastical feats of heroism. As Lozano-Méndez and Loriguillo-López observe, the pessimism and fatalism they exhibit has done little to dampen readers/viewers' enthusiasm, with renowned NH-led titles such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Attack on Titan* amassing global fandoms. Lozano-Méndez and Loriguillo-López make the case for considering nihilistamina stories (NS) a genre of its own, with distinctive and consistent patterns of narrative modality, characterization and a dark psychological complexity. Their chapter sets out a descriptive framework for the genre, examining the key factors that distinguish the category, including trauma, despondency, sacrifice and bleak endings. They propose a possible explanation for its rise in popularity in a post-capitalist, post-disaster Japan and beyond, linking the phenomenon to increasing levels of anxiety caused by socio-economic instability, which, although exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, can be traced even further back to the liberalization of the labor market in the 1990s. As the authors note, it is in the context of the era of precariousness and precariatization that we fully comprehend "the emergence of cynical and (literally) selfless heroes." The NS genre may offer a cathartic outlet for the lost generations, but they note, somewhat ominously, it also prepares an already victimized audience for further trauma and sacrifice. While the NH's unrelenting perseverance against all odds might echo traditional heroes of Japanese history, Lozano-Méndez and Loriguillo-López recognize that such archetypes are not limited to the Japanese context, which may explain the genre's transnational success. As the world contends with multiple challenges with significant economic and socio-political implications, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the rise of populism and extremist political movements, the NS genre will no doubt continue to grow and evolve to capture and offer relief from the anxieties of the current generation.

Another genre that is reflective of changing circumstances, hopes and anxieties in Japan is the television drama. Elisabeth Scherer's chapter reveals that even a veritable institution such as the *renzoku terebi shōsetsu* (serial televised novel), which is commonly referred to as the *asadora* and has been broadcast on NHK for 60 years, has made adaptations in an attempt to stay relevant to a contemporary, social media-connected audience. Scherer begins

by giving us an overview of the format, explaining how its scheduling, female-centered narratives, function as an institution of a collective Japanese memory and role in connecting the local to the national, all contribute to its status as an important fixture in the modern cultural landscape and a vehicle for nation branding. She explains how the series embedded itself within the daily routine and social consciousness of Japan in its heyday, achieving record ratings in the 1980s and producing active fans who discussed the series, emulated the eating habits of the characters and created content and artworks. As Scherer observes, such interactive practices continue today through social media, which has served to further connect the audience in an online community and has become an important tool in the promotion and measurement of the genre's success. Scherer elucidates the *asadora*'s role in (re)producing a national discourse by presenting the country as a harmonious collection of regions, each with its own dialect, specialities, customs and heritage, which nevertheless coalesce to form the "real Japan." She points out that while such idealization of rural Japan belies reality, it has brought significant economic benefits to local communities and increased the visibility of their cultures, which has been particularly important to the areas affected by the triple disaster. However, Scherer argues, while the *asadora* is keen to promote regional diversity, other forms of diversity only receive a superficial treatment, and are often used to further emphasize the national discourse of Japanese unity and uniqueness. Her study, which updates research on the *asadora* to the COVID-19 pandemic era, reemphasizes the importance of the genre as an agent of unity, a producer of collective memory and a site for clarifying the concerns of contemporary Japanese.

Media and popular culture are highly gendered spaces in Japan. As the four papers in the section dedicated to "Gender and Media" demonstrate, they offer multiple sites for (re) producing, (re)articulating and (re)negotiating iterations of femininity and masculinity. One of these sites, as Lyle De Souza recognizes, is the popular fiction novel. Popular fiction writing (*taishū bungaku*) is often considered not serious enough to merit the academic inquiry bestowed upon its literary sibling, *jun bungaku* (lit. pure literature). Yet, the lines between literary and popular fiction have become increasingly ambiguous, as the global acclaim and fandoms of authors such as Murakami Haruki attest. Nevertheless, De Souza takes on the challenge of defining and delineating the category of popular fiction. The first part of his chapter gives an overview of the popular fiction market in Japan, discussing the key genres that make up this category, its formats and offering a brief socio-history, which reveals that, much like the developments in other media forms discussed in this volume, trends in popular fiction have often been driven by technological innovations. The second part of De Souza's chapter focuses on one particular novel, celebrated crime writer Kirino Natsuo's *Out* (1997), that encapsulates many of the key social concerns and public discourses of post-bubble Japan. Utilizing a framework of dualisms, male/female; passivity/violence; freedom/constraint, he analyzes the dynamics of gender, class and ethnicity within the novel, demonstrating the ways in which Kirino's marginalized characters challenge or succumb to hierarchies of power against a backdrop of significant socio-economic change. As De Souza's examination reveals, *Out* not only depicts the ways in which women, ethnic minorities and those in the lower socio-economic stratum are oppressed by these hierarchies, but more importantly, how these circumstances can force them to seek escape. By inverting certain dualisms, hierarchies and dynamics, De Souza argues that Kirino forces the reader to reexamine their own preconceived notions. As he notes, the upending of gender conventions also relates to the world of Japanese literature, where women have recently dominated

prestigious awards. The visibility of Japanese women authors has also increased in the international context, with writers such as Kawakami Mieko and Murata Sayaka finding global readerships through translation. Their narratives touch on class, unconventional women, the female body and sex, and have a particular resonance with female readers, demonstrating that the demand (and, thus, the need) for female voices that challenge conventional norms is as robust as ever.

Forum Mithani continues the theme of intersectional feminist inquiry, introducing the category of disability to her examination of contemporary Japanese visual media. Adopting an approach utilized by Rosemary Garland-Thomson and others, Mithani argues that analyzing representations of disability through a feminist lens opens up the potential for revealing new insights and interpretations. In turn, incorporating theories and methods from disability studies into research on gender adds an additional layer of complexity, allowing for more nuanced and inclusive readings that recognize the diverse experiences of women. This is particularly relevant to the Japanese context, where women have conventionally been viewed as a homogenous group, both inside and outside academia. To demonstrate the synergies between feminist studies and disability studies, Mithani applies the theory of the gaze (from feminist film studies) and the concept of "staring" (disability studies) to her examination of the television drama *Perfect World,* showing how it works to reproduce and reinforce both ableist and patriarchal perspectives of disability, gender and male/female relations. However, her analysis of two films featuring disabled protagonists, *Perfect Revolution* and *37 Seconds*, reveals an alternative viewpoint that challenges normative discourses of disabled people as passive, innocent and asexual. Mithani argues that the involvement of disabled creators and actors in the production of these films allows for realistic portrayals that act as a counterpoint to the "inspiration porn" that dominates media representations of disability. Her examination of *Perfect Revolution* reveals the film's critical stance towards the exploitation and objectification of disabled people, while her analysis of *37 Seconds* demonstrates the ways in which representations of disabled women can expose the limitations and expectations placed on all women. Viewed together, both films also reveal that the experiences of disabled people in Japan are by no means uniform, impacted as they are by factors including, but not limited to, gender and visibility.

As James White demonstrates, visual media depictions can have a long-lasting influence on conceptions and articulations of gender. His chapter reveals the impression left by one depiction—Sapporo Beer's 1970 advertising campaign, "*Otoko wa damatte*…," starring Mifune Toshirō—that continues to resonate in 21st-century Japan as an image of idealized hypermasculinity. He offers a critical discourse analysis of the campaign, including a detailed reading of the gendered images it produced and the layers of context that fed into its construction of masculinity, not least the persona of its star, Mifune. In a departure from previous analyses of gender representation in advertising, White contextualizes his readings with broader discourses from the industry and the public realm to offer a more nuanced examination that recognizes multiple perspectives. His analysis of the ways in which the "*Otoka wa damatte*…" slogan has continually been appropriated, referenced and reused since the original campaign, in a variety of contexts, demonstrates the ongoing relevance of interrogating this type of historical cultural messaging. The chapter highlights the significant role beer, both its consumption and its advertising, played in challenging as well as reaffirming normative models of masculinity and femininity in postwar Japan. White observes that the hypermasculinity projected by the Sapporo Beer and similar campaigns of the time stood in

contraposition to the embodiment of masculinity considered to be the dominant (and thus often referred to as hegemonic) model of the time, the salaryman. White argues that linking beer with this image allowed the salaryman to vicariously experience the freedom Mifune embodied through the consumption of beer while preserving the integrity of the salaryman model. His reading also connects the reference to silence in the slogan with militaristic and imperialistic models of masculinity, an association that was not unnoticed at the time. The inclusion of a diachronic discourse analysis of commentary on the campaign is significant not only for what it reveals about contemporaneous social concerns, but also for demonstrating what the evolution of the discourse, including the privileging of certain messages over others, tells us about how a society sees itself and what it wishes to remember or forget.

In the final chapter of this section, Ronald Saladin discusses an alternative discourse of masculinity reproduced in contemporary men's lifestyle magazines. While there is a considerable body of scholarship on Japanese women's magazines, men's magazines remain relatively under-researched, emphasizing the importance of Saladin's study. As he observes, print magazine culture in Japan is highly segmented, catering to a diverse range of readerships, and its enduring appeal is indicative of its reach and influence within Japanese society. The first part of Saladin's chapter offers a historical overview of the development of the modern magazine (*zasshi*) in Japan. One particularly significant development was the genderization of the market, with magazines specifically (and explicitly) targeted at a female readership emerging during this period. As Saladin observes, the subsequent appearance of lifestyle magazines specifically catering to a male readership during the latter half of the 20th century only underlined the degree to which Japanese society itself was gendered. Thus, argues Saladin, magazines offer a unique perspective on the way codes of gender are reproduced, reinforced or renegotiated. A case in point is the development of the men's lifestyle genre, which boomed during the 1990s, at a time when notions of gender and masculinity were being questioned and reconceptualized. Saladin's case study on one title of this era, *BiDaN*, illustrates the changing perceptions regarding manliness, which was no longer limited to the image of the rugged, hypermasculine beer drinker White discusses in his chapter. This new masculinity embraced what was previously considered only of interest to women: fashion and beauty. Nevertheless, Saladin finds, this focus on outward appearance is constructed through a heteronormative lens, reaffirming to some extent the hegemonic masculine ideal. Thus, Saladin sees this apparent "feminization" of men not as an undermining of masculinity, but rather as the emergence of a hybrid masculinity that has expanded to accommodate shifts in attitudes without endangering the existing gender order. As we learn from his chapter, men's lifestyle magazines play a key role in reflecting, shaping, reproducing and reaffirming these social dynamics.

Audiences and users are, of course, crucial to the media ecosystem, not only as the ultimate financiers but also for their active participation in the processes of reception, production and reiteration. As Jennifer Coates observes in the opening chapter to this final section of the collection, academic interest in media usage and its impact on consumers is once again burgeoning. Coates begins by discussing the value of studying audiences of media as a way of uncovering narratives of consumption, diverse audience behaviors and what these tell us about a particular moment in history. In particular, she notes the usefulness of audience studies when evaluating the extent to which censorship and other strategic media-shaping policies are successful. Coates then provides a historical analysis of the development of the field in relation to Japanese screen studies, from its roots in the cinema audience

surveys carried out in the early 20th century, through the wartime and Occupation-era surveys carried out for commercial as well as academic purposes, to the late 20th century shift towards studying home viewership and an eventual resurgence of reception studies focusing on postwar cinema audiences, where Coates locates her own area of research. Crucially, she supplements her theoretical and historical overview of the field with findings from her ethnographic study into the memories of Kansai-based cinema goers. The chapter outlines her methodological and analytical approaches, which are drawn from memory studies as well as audience research. Informed by questionnaires, written and electronic communications and interviews with cinema viewers and those connected to the industry, the case study reveals new insights into the memories of cinema-going practices in Occupation-era Japan, including the gender and age profiles of audiences, and how this might have challenged the censorship practices of the time. In doing so, Coates demonstrates the potential for such research to reverberate beyond audience studies, bringing new perspectives to fields such as history, anthropology and gender studies.

Laurence Green continues the theme of probing audience behavior and what this can reveal about wider cultural and social practices in his chapter on karaoke in Japan. Through a discourse analysis of existing scholarship, Green proposes a new approach that views karaoke as a "lubricant or service, enabling an interconnected web of social systems to thrive by virtue of a body of knowledge" and focuses on the value participants gain through their interaction with these systems of practice. His examination takes in the works of a number of scholars that have investigated karaoke engagement both in Japan and further afield, including William H. Kelly, Zhou Xun and Francesca Tarocco, Kevin Brown and Rob Drew. His analysis distills the essential components for a comprehensive understanding of the karaoke "system" in Japan, not only through summarizing key arguments but also by critically engaging with the scholarship. For example, while he concurs with Drew that karaoke offers a space for performing, testing and validating "personal and social identities," Green departs from the view of karaoke as a "short-lived fantasy" to emulate one's idol, seeing it instead as a conduit through which individual performers transpose from the local to the national stage. In other words, by engaging in karaoke in their masses, these individuals become part of the national music scene themselves, an argument that gains more traction when one considers how karaoke bolstered the music industry and shaped its output by creating a demand for songs an ordinary person could sing. Green's suggestion that karaoke "thrives in a nested layering" of manifestations of the self that co-exist both within oneself and the wider social context also offers a new perspective on discussions of authenticity and simulation. Finally, acknowledging that advances in technology have rendered previous attempts to define the nature and scope of the karaoke sphere, Green proposes a "Karaoke 2.0" that would move the conversation beyond discussions focused on the mechanisms of delivery, to the user experience, to how karaoke "seamlessly integrates itself into a person's life, how it might systematically (and continuously) deliver value and drive consumer habits."

Concluding this section, and the volume, on user experiences and behaviors, Xinyu Promio Wang investigates digital media usage among migrants to Japan. As Wang notes, the migrant community in Japan is highly complex and diverse, both in its multitudinous aggregate, citizenship-based forms and on the level of individual, personal experiences, predispositions and motivations. Digital media offers a fruitful site for investigating this complexity and diversity because it not only facilitates a transnational network that connects migrants to their homelands and each other, it also mediates their diasporic experiences and

self-identifications. This is particularly the case for Chinese expatriates in Japan who, Wang observes, report significantly higher levels of digital media usage than local citizens or US/UK migrants. Drawing on previous scholarship, Wang argues that studying digital media usage through a transnational lens shifts the focus from an "essentialist notion of homeland, nation, locality, race and ethnicity to a focus on transnationality, imagination, hybridity and heterogeneity that takes shape and is activated through diasporic mobility and connectivity." The findings from Wang's ethnographic study of Chinese migrants exemplifies the benefits of this approach, not only confirming the crucial role technology plays in facilitating their day-to-day lives, but also revealing how these media influence the construction and positioning of their identities vis-à-vis the homeland and the host society. As Wang's research uncovers, access to a diverse range of digital media allows Chinese migrants to question existing narratives and ideologies and renegotiate their identification within Sino-Japanese socio-political dynamics. Furthermore, it lends additional weight to Wang's proposal to move away from definitive understandings of Chinese transnationalism as uniformly exclusionary in ethnic terms to one that recognizes its heterogeneity, acknowledging the importance of context as well as notions of racial community.

The thematic structure of this handbook visualizes these connections and intersections of the media and aims to convey the richness of the field that research on Japanese media has become. It has progressed beyond the observation of "passing fads and fancies" and is now firmly in the territory of theoretically grounded and methodologically sound research.

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