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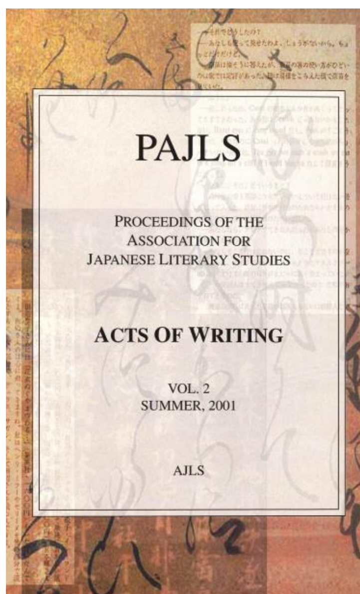

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MASS CULTURE, THE LITERARY ESTABLISHMENT, AND *SEASON OF THE SUN*: ISHIHARA SHINTARÔ'S DEBUT

ANN SHERIF

Even though most of the Japanese public identifies Ishihara Shintarô as a politician and neo-nationalist, and people around the world know him as author of *The Japan that Can Say "No,"* Ishihara regards himself as a novelist. Cultural history points to his influence principally as the author of novels on which significant Japanese films were based. Renowned film director Oshima Nagisa attributes his inspiration for Japanese New Wave cinema to a film adaptation of Ishihara's novel *Kurutta kajitsu* (Crazed Fruit, 1956): "In the rip of a woman's skirt and the buzz of a motorboat, sensitive people heard the heralding of a new generation of Japanese film."[1]

Well-known in studies of post-Occupation cinema is the mid-1950s appearance of the "Sun Tribe" (*Taiyôzoku*) films based on Ishihara's *Season of the Sun* (*Taiyô no kisetsu*), *The Punishment Room* (*Shokei no heya*), and *Crazed Fruit*. Critics such as Satô Tadao, David Desser, and Michael Raine identify these films as significant for several reasons: (1) as with Oshima, their evocation of a new type of hero/anti-hero who is rebellious, violent, and sexually potent spurred the development of Japanese New Wave cinema; (2) these films glorified youth culture, an emphasis which would become a central cultural value in the post-Occupation age; (3) the films had tremendous popular appeal (i.e. sold fabulously) with audiences; and (4) the *Taiyôzoku* film phenomenon spurred citizens' protests and ultimately resulted in the post-Occupation reorganization of Eirin (the film censorship board). The *Taiyôzoku* movies also represent the beginning of the flashy career of actor/"multimedia star" Ishihara Yûjirô, brother of Shintarô. Yûjirô, who

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[1] Oshima, 26. See also Desser, 40; Richie, 128; and Raine, 220.

"epitomized the sensitive tough guy," is said to have been the most famous male film star in Japan during the 1950s and 1960s.[2]

ISHIHARA'S DEBUT AS A NOVELIST

But what about Ishihara's *novel, Taiyô no kisetsu*? Even though it won the coveted Akutagawa Prize in 1956, we generally ignore his work in canonical studies of postwar literature. Many film studies scholars mention Ishihara's novels as if they, though controversial, somehow fit neatly into literary history. But these days, most of us who write about and teach modern Japanese literature seldom mention Ishihara's novels. In retrospect, we usually emphasize the more serious, literary writers who came to the forefront in the fifties, such as Mishima Yukio, Sono Ayako, and Kôda Aya, or *Daisan no shinjin* authors Yasuoka Shôtarô, Kojima Nobuo, and Endô Shûsaku, as well as the twilight of the careers of many respected older novelists.[3] At most, critics mention in passing Ishihara's audacity, "his iconoclastic, self-centered style and his eager association with the journalistic media."[4]

Yet, in the mid-fifties, a huge critical debate raged over the novel *Taiyô no kisetsu* and its author, one that suggests a great deal about the ways that readers' and critics' horizons of expectations would change over the course of the post-Occupation period. In this paper, I suggest that Shintarô's novels and the discourse that swirled around them hold a greater cultural and literary significance than present opinion would have it. The strong reactions that other writers had both for and against *Taiyô no kisetsu* and Ishihara himself became a debate about the class system, about prewar and postwar modes of the *bundan*, about morality, and about the formation of mass culture. Far from representing a passing fad,

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[2] Michael Raine explores Ishihara Yûjirô's career and the "social and aesthetic conditions of...mass culture" in the 1950s in his informative "Ishihara Yûjirô: Youth, Celebrity, and the Male Body in the Late-1950s Japan," 202-225. See also Sato and Desser.

[3] Donald Keene, in his massive survey of modern Japanese literature, does not even mention Ishihara Shintarô. See *Dawn to the West.*

[4] Gessel, 51-52.

Ishihara and his *Taiyô no kisetsu* foreshadowed the mainstream of culture in the post-Occupation era.

I argue that part of Ishihara's significance in 1955 lies in the way that his dramatic debut signals a renegotiation of the interaction between mass culture and preexisting modes of culture, and in particular with literary writing and literary critical practice. By mass culture, I mean the "administered, commodified culture pretargeted and produced for large numbers of consumers."[5] Although the interwar era also witnessed the rise of mass culture, the scale and pace of postwar mass culture vastly exceeded earlier manifestations. Ishihara was at that time, and continues to this day, to be extraordinarily adept at recognizing the potential of burgeoning mass culture. In this brief paper, I would like to discuss two or three aspects of the interactions of mass culture, the bundan (literary establishment), publishers, and Ishihara Shintarô's debut as a writer in the mid-fifties.

A SURPRISING PRIZE-WINNING NOVEL

Looking back at the reactions to *Taiyô* from the fifties, it is evident that much of the outcry came from journalistic sources, which fanned the flames of outrage against a supposedly rebellious generation portrayed in the *films* based on Ishihara's novels. For the film studios, and the publishing houses, in turn, this sensational approach resulted in packed movie theatres and even more substantial sales for the prize-winning novel. Some members of the public lapped up the *Taiyôzoku* cultural products, but others, such as the PTA, turned out on the streets to protest what they perceived as the immorality of *Season of the Sun* and *Crazed Fruit.*

The literary critical reaction to Ishihara's novels pales in comparison, and is notably ambivalent. Indeed, when Ishihara won his

[5] Marilyn Ivy further comments that "Mass culture in this general sense arose together with industrial capitalism itself, for its very possibility is predicated on those technologies of both material and social production that emerged with the development of capitalism...In the postwar period the ascendancy of the electronic media, particularly television, has added new dimensions to this dynamic." Ivy, 240.

first literary prize for *Taiyô no kisetsu*—the *Bungakukai Shinjinshô*—in 1955, no great debate ensued, as I will discuss. It was only when the same novel was awarded the Akutagawa Prize in the following year that controversy arose over the novel. Kawabata Yasunari and Itô Sei noted the extent to which the Akutagawa Prize had become the stamp of literary authority by that time.[6]

Notably, the strong reactions against *Taiyô* also coincided with the appearance of the film version of the novel (also in 1956). According to his publisher Shinchôsha, the enterprising Ishihara pressed the editor to put out a single volume version of the novel *before* the film was released.[7] For the Akutagawa selection committee, however, it was not only the movies that tainted the novel, but also the involvement of the *shûkanshi* (weekly magazines/tabloids) in codifying the *Taiyôzoku* aesthetic and publicizing—or perhaps creating—the *Taiyôzoku* phenomenon/boom. Although Ishihara's novel appeared in elite cultural magazines such as *Bungei shunjû* and *Bungakukai*, the *shûkanshi*'s extensive focus on the films and the Ishihara brothers themselves forged a further link between the novel *Taiyô no kisetsu* and mass culture. Ishihara himself sought to maintain the link between the *Taiyô* narrative and elite literary culture and thus legitimate the work by asserting its status as a novel in book form.

For all the talk of rebellious youth, *Taiyô* reads as a rather conventional story of a heterosexual romance: college student Tatsuya meets Eiko, they fall in love (or is it love? Do they know what love is?). They make love (or, more accurately, have sex) on Tatsuya's sailboat in the moonlight. They get involved with other people; they feel jealous. Eiko becomes pregnant. Tatsuya is confused but ultimately tells her that he doesn't want to have anything to do with the baby. Eiko dies from complications of an abortion. Tatsuya has an outburst at Eiko's funeral

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[6] The lack of controversy over *Taiyô* is evident in the calm delivery of the 1955 Bungakukai Selection Committee's judgments. See "*Bungakukai* shinjin shô." Itô Sei also commented on this in "Shôsetsu no shinjin ni nozomu," 289.

[7] "Kaisetsu," in Ishihara, 1981, 367-68.

and cries out, "None of you understand!" to the assembled adult mourners.

Critical Views of *Season of the Sun*

Let us look at the various ways that the contemporary literary critical establishment (and publishers) reacted to Shintarô's early *Taiyôzoku* novels. This dynamic can be read in a variety of ways: by looking at the awarding of literary prizes and the pronouncements of the selection committee judges, the critical judgements of other writers and critics, and journalistic performances such as *zadankai* that serve to promote the works in the marketplace as well as to generate critical judgements. Something extraordinary and unprecedented happened when *Taiyô no kisetsu* won the Akutagawa Prize, and it was not simply the matter of the enormous number of volumes that flew off the bookstore shelves. Older critics condemned Ishihara's arrogant youthful rebellion and his novels but still gave him the prize. What was behind these seemingly contradictory attitudes?

The initial reaction to Ishihara's novel in 1955, as mentioned above, was unremarkable. The *Bungakukai* selection committee members evaluated the novel as fresh and entertaining. For all of its flaws, the novel does deserve the prize, the judges concur. None of them, however, even comment on the fact that in the novel Tatsuya and Eiko both have sex with multiple partners (including Tatsuya's own brother). None of them bother to mention the subsequently controversial "erection thrust through the *shôji* paper" passage. Yoshida Ken'ichi insists that "morality" is an inappropriate evaluative category to *Taiyô no kisetsu*, because generically, the novel doesn't concern such matters. Rather, Yoshida writes, *Taiyô* should be considered a hardboiled novel about sporting youths, of the genre one often encounters in British or American fiction.[8] Similarly, for Hirano Ken it is the exotic setting and props that distinguish the novel. He puts it this way: "this decrepit old-fashioned

[8] "*Bungakukai* shinjin shô," 134.

student" has never seen wrestling or boxing and has never ridden on a sailboat, so the novel "opened up a new world for me." [9]

But the very next year—by which time the film version of *Taiyô* had debuted—the Akutagawa Prize committee also picked *Taiyô* as its winner—although, this time, not without controversy. What is most remarkable about the Akutagawa selection committee members' comments is their polarized attitudes toward mass media and mass culture. Satô Haruo, for one, despises the novel as "the lowest type of the literary arts (*bungei*)," and, while he acknowledges Ishihara's "astute grasp of the times," he complains that this sensitivity "is no greater than that of journalists and entertainers." *Taiyô* is not, Satô Haruo asserts, something written by a literary man.[10]

In contrast, Itô Sei recognizes the active role of journalists in creating contemporary culture: "Of late, much of the fiction that won literary prizes were confessions or exposés about growing up during the war. Journalists have a great interest in what younger people [who came to age after the war] have to say. So Ishihara [who wrote about something other than youth during the war] came in like a ball of fire just when they were waiting for someone like him...But young people around the age of twenty have a very narrow set of interests...and so the novel holds the readers' attention as an expression of youthful angst [*wakamono no sakebi*]."[11]

Among the Akutagawa judges, Uno Kôji objects most vigorously to awarding the prize to *Taiyô*, and even exposes what he views as the publisher's skewing of the voting so that the prize would go to Ishihara's novel. Uno takes note of Ishihara's selection of "unusual topics" such as boxing, but, unlike Hirano Ken, Uno condemns this focus, as well as Ishihara's inclusion of "sexually graphic passages" as mere "pandering to the age and to journalism."[12] Of course, we can find

[9] *Ibid.*, 137.

[10] "Akutagawa shô kettei happyô," 284.

[11] Itô, *et al.*, 290.

[12] "Akutagawa shô," 285.

much more graphic description in many prewar and Occupation period novels—and a greater focus on the body (*nikutai*)—but Uno fails to mention that. The "erection thrust through the *shôji*" is the only genital organ mentioned in Ishihara's novel, and the slow sex/love scene on the sailboat is extremely cinematic in style, with lips reaching for lips and saltwater streaming down foreheads. Tatsuya's sexual/romantic fantasy life is remiscent of something out of a D.H. Lawrence novel: "His only notion of [love] was limited to an image of himself and a woman in the forest somewhere, where they played about naked among the trees."[13] Thus, in Uno's comments, we detect a fear of contamination of literature by mass culture that journalism and the cinema signify.

MASS CULTURE AND REBELLIOUS YOUTH IN 1950S JAPAN

Lurking beneath the surface of the debate over *Taiyô no kisetsu* is the question of socioeconomic class. Nakamura Mitsuo identifies Tatsuya and his group as spoiled kids ("*amattareta seinen*").[14] The novel focuses exclusively on the moneyed class of people to which Tatsuya and Eiko belong—a segment of the population still vastly in the minority at a time that would prove to be the blast-off point of Japan's era of high speed economic growth. Although Tatsuya mouths off about his disagreements with the older generation, he is ultimately connected to them by what has been termed the "golden umbilical cord."

In the classic US youth film *Rebel Without a Cause* (also 1955), hypocritical middle class parents mistake materialism for love, and that partly leads to the rebellion of Jim Stark (the James Dean character). In contrast, *Taiyô's* characters' motivation for rebellion and for amorality is less clear. Tatsuya and Eiko both come from fairly well-to-do families—Tatsuya's father buys him a sailboat and Eiko has a "big car." Both have a ready supply of cash. But, significantly, it is not the money itself that has steered these kids from respectable homes wrong—it is

[13] Ishihara 1966, 29-30; Ishihara 1981, 347.

[14] "Akutagawa shô," 284.

something suggested only abstractly and in passing by the narrator as related to the emptiness of postwar society ("barren soil"[15]).

While *Rebel Without a Cause* finds fault with the neuroses and materialism of individual parents, Ishihara's novel highlights the family dynamic. Tatsuya and his buddies behave like spoiled children with their mothers; but with their fathers, they show a very different face.[16] In a key passage, Tatsuya happens to run into his father on the train on his way home and joins him in the first class seats. Tatsuya mutters:

> "I think I'll get a first class train pass during training [for boxing]. It's so much more comfortable."
>
> His father heard him and lowered his paper noisily.
>
> "What's that? Where did you get such silly ideas? You're still in college, you know. If your training tires you so much, you'd better give it up. In any case I haven't got money to waste on a pass for you."
>
> "Money to waste?"
>
> For a moment, Tatsuya felt nothing but hatred for his father.
>
> [*"Daiichi, papa wa sonna kanemochi janai zo."*
> *Kane mochi ja nai?*
> *Kare wa sono shunkan chichi o kokoro kara nikunda.*][17]

Why does Tatsuya feel hatred for his father at this point? The logic of the novel points to his desire for limitless consumption, and a glorification of materialism and consumerism. Readers and critics in 1955 may have found Tatsuya's attitude "spoiled" but also attractive—a lust for prosperity, a consumeristic promiscuity that could negate the dire

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[15] Ishihara, 1966, 29; Ishihara 1981, 346.

[16] Although the characters in *Taiyô no kisetsu* rebel against the adult world they don't regard their mothers as part of the adult world, leaving themselves the option of depending on their mothers when it is convenient to do so. Awanaka, 111.

[17] Ishihara, 1966, 29; Ishihara, 1981, 346.

scarcity of earlier postwar years.[18] By the logic of postwar consumer society around the world, too, Tatsuya's desire to ignore his father's frugality and his proper place as a student struck a chord. As W.T. Lhamon has noted, many adults in 1950s America saw as threatening Elvis and other promiscuous and emphatically materialistic expressions of youth culture, but their disapproval masked the compelling qualities of 1950s youth culture that made up a part of the cultural fabric. Again, quoting from Lhamon, "Clearly this perceived threat militated against calm appraisal. Otherwise, critics would have seen that a culture living under the fear of nuclear annihilation could be expected to fetishize cartoons of vitality. A consumer society without precedent could be expected to celebrate among its members those with the readiest energy for fulfilling its values."[19] The ambivalent view of rebellious youth as both dangerous *and* as standing for a robust, voluptuous, promiscuously democratic time is not, of course, limited to Japan during this decade. Mixed with these pointed criticisms of *Taiyô* as being about "wild boys from good homes" is a tinge of envy. Ishikawa Tatsuzô, one of the judges, hinted at this: "Perhaps the danger is what makes him a new face" (*kiken dakara koso shinjin da to ieru ka mo shirenai*).[20]

Gender also adds tremendously to the allure of the novel for certain readers. This youth Tatsuya confirms the homosocial yet strappingly heterosexual virile male (as opposed to the emasculated masculine images prominent in the Occupation period fiction that Sharalyn Orbaugh and Mike Molasky have written about, and even in contrast to the confused *daisan no shinjin*, still enmeshed in wartime or downtrodden by the family). Thus *Taiyô* seeks to assert new gender

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[18] Readers regarded *Taiyô no kisetsu* as fresh and exciting because it restored literature to the present forward-looking and potentially prosperous moment. As Michael Bourdaghs has noted, the Hawaiian strains of Yûjirô's song "Kurutta kajitsu" (Crazed Fruit) rendered the Hawaiian islands an exotic tourist destination, and functioned to distance memories of the South Pacific as a place where many died in battle.

[19] Lhamon, 8.

[20] "Akutagawa shô," 281.

configurations in the post-Occupation order and offers a promise of restored masculinity.

"DELIBERATE SPEED" AS CULTURAL STYLE

In retrospect, *Taiyô* also articulated a cultural style that became an important aesthetic in post-Occupation culture: the cultural style of speed, deliberate speed, a speed that accompanied "the excitements of electronic speed, [the rush to] face down nuclear anxiety, and incorporate newly aggressive demands and examples from...youth culture."[21] In *Taiyô*, Tatsuya rushes away from basketball to take up boxing; the boys and girls fall into bed with each other almost instantly. Eiko's former boyfriend, we learn, died in a car accident on the way to a rendezvous with her: "he had sped along in his car and then crashed into a train."[22] Tatsuya, Eiko, and their agemates are always on the move, fast in their cars and boats and trains. On Tatsuya's sailboat, Eiko switches on her portable transistor radio to provide instant mood ("a slow dance perfect for lovers"[23]). Even the dynamic of Tatsuya and Eiko's relationship is described with the term *supiido* ("he lost his own pace in her speed and intensity").[24] Again, Lhamon is instructive: "Each of the several reasons for the new deliberate speed in culture is deeply connected to the illusion of what came to be known as 'post-scarcity state' energy and the arrogance of its consumption. The implicit aesthetic of a deliberately speedy style matches the consumer economics of the period."[25]

In Ishihara's novel, Tatsuya and his brother Michihisa become embroiled in a fast and furious betting match, a buying and selling scheme over whom Eiko will sleep with, and then Eiko starts trading too, furiously laying out money to buy herself the man she wants. The

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[21] Lhamon, xi.

[22] Ishihara, 1981, 350.

[23] *Ibid.*, 354.

[24] This is my translation. *Ibid.*, 349. See also Ishihara, 1966, 32.

[25] Lhamon, 7.

novella itself rushes forward at a fast pace, except for the occasional very slow love/sex scene. Of the Akutagawa selection committee members, Funabashi Seiichi hints at this speed in slightly different terms: "*kairaku*" or pleasure (or, perhaps, instant gratification). Funabashi comments that "the *kairaku* that Ishihara depicts is different from that of the postwar *buraiha* [the so-called early postwar "Decadents" such as Dazai Osamu and Sakaguchi Ango]. *Kairaku* is not something you can buy with money. You don't need money to buy the pleasurable sensation of ripping through *shôji* paper with a youthful erect penis. The purer the pleasure the farther it is from money."[26]

CONCLUSION

Precisely a decade after Japan's surrender in World War II , Ishihara Shintarô's debut as a novelist echoed the rapid rate of change in postwar culture. Rather than apprenticing himself to the literary establishment and working his way up to the big time, Ishihara rose almost instantly from his status as a college student who dabbled in literature to the bright lights of fame. His novels found their way onto the silver screen with impressive speed. He sped his way onto television, and quickly embraced every opportunity to model his trend-setting short haircut for magazines and newspapers. Ishihara even raced around on motor boats—in short, he moved and worked with great speed. Among the Akutagawa prize judges, Kawabata Yasunari expressed his admiration for Ishihara's energy and youthful talent (though not for much about the novel!).

Readers should also keep in mind the Cold War context of the huge controversy over Ishihara Shintarô's *Taiyô no kisetsu*, and in particular the mid-1950s disillusionment with communism, in light of Stalinism. Even as a young man, Ishihara Shintarô was acutely aware of the Cold War dynamics of the domestic scene. In *Taiyô no kisetsu*, Ishihara's narrator tells the reader, "If the adult world feared them as a dangerous force, second only to communism, this fear was

[26] "Akutagawa shô," 287.

groundless..."[27] In other words, Ishihara presents youth as a "privileged Cold War trope, as a healthy sign of domestic culture and economy, rather than as a looming threat from without."[28] Ishihara's eager embrace of the possibility of mass cultural forms and his aggressive self-promotion embodied the promise of a prosperous mass culture and a bright future. Ishihara Shintarô and his forays into novel writing and filmmaking signified a bold step away from the wartime and the desperate recovery.

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[27] Ishihara 1966, 29; Ishihara 1981, 346.

[28] Medovoi, 257.

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