

Youth and Mass Media in 1930s Modernized Tokyo Reflected in Diary Entries —An Analysis of Book Reading and Movie Going Activities—

昭和初期の東京における若者とメディア
—1930年代の書籍と映画を中心として—

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Abstract... The aim of this study is to discuss Japanese youth and mass media in 1930s Tokyo using diary documents written by one male night time vocational school student representing the lower-middle class. By using discovered diary documents, qualitative analysis of the book reading and movie going activities of the diary keeper was conducted with respect to his way of life and daily activities.

The frequency of the book and film titles mentioned in his diaries totaled 487 over a period of four years. Those records verified empirically that the book publishing and movie production industries attracted a large number of readers and movie-goers in the age of popular mass media in prewar Japan. The record of daily expenditures kept for some years also allowed for statistical analysis of his leisure activities.

Keywords Youth culture, Book reading, Movie going, Leisure activities, Diary of 1930s

1. Purpose of This Study

The aim of this research is to discuss youth and mass media in the early Showa period of Tokyo using previously undiscovered primary documents. A diary for the years 1932-1935 written by a male night time commercial school student living in Tokyo, during ages sixteen to twenty years old, was analyzed in this case. What Ariyama (2013) termed ‘Media history study from the bottom’ which indicates that the ideal way to construct a research hypothesis is from the point view of ordinary people living in the past, is widely shared as a desirable approach among media historians. In this manner this study could be one of the cases that satisfies Ariyama’s notion.

For those four years, the diary keeper used one of the customized annual diary books called “Toyo-Nikki” published by many publishers in which the diary keepers can use one page for each day. It had gained popularity since it was first published by Hakubunkan in 1895 and was widely circulated among Japanese at that time. On any single page, precise

descriptions of his daily activities were written in fountain pen. In addition to analyzing the diary author's media exposure, this data can be used to examine prewar youth culture of the lower-middle class in Tokyo. Furthermore the wide-spread practice of diary keeping and book reading among Japanese at the time is remarkable evidence of the maturity of Japanese print media culture and the high literacy level among Japanese in terms of quality and pervasiveness. Gitleman (2014) presented meaningful insights on the constitutive nature of documents in that any document serves both an institutional and social function not only in terms of information but is shaped as the outcomes of the materialistic and semiotic processes that govern to the way we read and write. From her point of view, the analysis of these diary documents in this case can be sufficient for examining what the past record can mean for us today.

In those diaries he mainly focused on descriptions of his own daily life and relationships with his family and friends. Notably, book reading and movie going activities as pastimes had a significant presence in his diary records as a reflection of his priority on those leisure activities in his mind. In this sense, the data also enabled us to focus on media use by youth during this period. Furthermore the titles of the books he read and the movies he saw at the theatre precisely recorded in his diary and the account book of his daily expenditures also enabled statistical analysis. The total number of book and film titles was 487 and it was also found that he spent almost half of his monthly pocket money for books (17%), movies (12%) and pool bars (19%).

2. Modernized Tokyo and Mass Media

In any modern society, urbanization brings many migrants to the city. The days of the diaries overlap with the prewar period's rapid population growth in the capital city Tokyo, which brought big changes to Japanese society. The changes occurred even though they followed a remarkable period of population growth from 1920 to 1930, during which there was a 53.5 percent increase in the population of Tokyo (Minami, 1992, p. 74). This migration into urban areas continued until war time in Japan. The post-disaster urban planning of Tokyo for reconstruction started after the devastating Kanto Earthquake of 1923 (Taisho 12) and subsequently smooth and comprehensive civic development changed the central part of Tokyo into a modern city with a western-city-like landscape.

In 1932 (7th year of Showa period) the City of Tokyo merged with 82 surrounding cities, towns and villages resulting in 35 wards with a population of 497,2829 (in January 1933) was born. On the high street in front of the major stations the bursting downtown expanded with a variety of stores, restaurants and amusement facilities. It was natural that the mass market for commercial media industries also expanded.

The newspaper industry in Japan started with a small sized newspaper company targeting intellectual readers in the 19th century by pursuing freedom of speech and constructing public opinion. These major Japanese newspaper companies currently remain as nationwide papers drastically increased their number of subscribers due to procurement during two big wars in the Meiji-period (the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 and The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5) and the transition to commercialized industry under the capitalist mode of production by 1920s. In this diary keeper's case, a newspaper subscription was not affordable at his household and it can be presumed that this was common for the majority of lower and

lower-middle class people. According to his records, he mainly read newspapers at his work place and the public bath. He seemed to rarely purchase newspapers himself except for times when he could get some discount coupons for his favorite movie theatres in the newspaper.

As for radio broadcasting, three stations launched in major cities in 1925 in Japan. They were combined into NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai) in 1926, the only public service broadcast system and it extended its network over the nation within a few years. From the start it was under government control that was changed into the useful agency under the totalitarian system of the state as well as the newspapers. The radio made a debut as a social media star at first since it could spread a news story promptly all over the nation, provide fascinating moments with talk and music and relay the progress report of sports events in real time to share nationwide excitement to every household over the air waves. However it had to be changed into the messenger of solemn announcements from the Imperial headquarters (established in 1937) to combine the sentiments of the nations all together until the end of the Asia-Pacific War. Unfortunately his diary records did not provide enough evidence on his exposure to the radio to determine whether or not his household had a radio.

Documents written by other people familiar with this era show that book reading and movie going were the dominant pastimes in Japan. According to Sansom (1936 p. 37), who lived in Tokyo from 1928 to 1936 with her diplomat husband from the UK, there were many book stores and stalls for used books in Kanda and those stores were crowded with children and youth during the daytime. She wrote about how much those Japanese book lovers of all generations and crowded bookstores in Tokyo amazed her. Regarding movie going, in a retrospective account of his childhood days Yoshimura (1985) describes the popularity of movies shared among his neighbors of all generations. According to him, the silent movies on Japanese swordplay with eloquent film interpreters at the local movie theatre were not only an amusing pastime but the most accessible way of destruction for the West ends (west part of Tokyo called 'Shitamachi').

During those four years, many social affairs occurred that were evaluated as historical turning points if traced back from the Asia-Pacific War. However, not many descriptions of those socio-political topics were found in his diaries. Rather what he wrote down tended to be limited to the media events he willingly participated in or encountered to share mass sentiment in each occasion. Those were the Lantern Parade celebrating the birth of the Crown Prince on 23 December 1933, the National Funeral of the Admiral Togo in 5 June 1934, the extra newspaper edition of the Shanghai Incidents delivered on 28 January 1932 and the welcoming crowd of the Manchurian Emperor Fugui's visit to Tokyo on 6 April 1935.

3. Profile of the Diary Keeper

The diary keeper seemed to have moved for educational purposes from the provinces and lived with his grand-mother in Itabashi-ward. During the daytime, he worked as a hall staff at the fraternity clubhouse of one national university built by its alumni association in Kanda-ward and situated in an area where many book stores and stalls selling used books were concentrated. Book hunting at a bargain price and movie going on his way home were recorded on a regular basis in his diaries. His preference for those activities indicates that the print media industries with circulation systems and the audio-visual media system such as motion picture productions for the mass leisure were already established and provided

amusing content for diversified people in 1930s Japan.

After graduation in April 1934, he started to work at a stock brokerage company (which later became a major firm). This enabled a comparative analysis of his activities for changes following this life stage transition. Table 1 indicates the number of books and movies from his diary for each year. This data does not show any numerical change for either activity and thus indicates his leisure activities continued after his big change in his life-style. Although he was still in the lower-middle class, his status as a full time worker considerably increased his income and it brought some changes in his method of book acquisition and movie going activities.

Table 1: Number of Book and Movie Titles Appearing in the Diary in Each Year

Media Year (Age)	Book	Movie	Total	Affiliation
1932 (16)	29	73	102	Night Time School Student
1933 (17)	55	98	153	Night Time School Student
1934 (18)	30	87	117	Work for Company/Clerical
1935 (19)	29	86	115	Work for Company/Clerical
Total	143	344	487	

4. Book Reading for Pleasure

According to Nagamine (1997, 2001, 2004) ‘the Book Reading Nation (Dokusho-kokumin)’ or ‘the Sphere for Book Reading Public (Dokusho-kuukan),’ consisted of the following three components: ① diversified book readers from wide backgrounds who could afford to purchase media products, ② an established print media industry with a widely spread distribution system and ③ the literary education to promote reading nation-wide and the diffusion of public facilities for reading such as libraries accessible to everyone, which had been established by the beginning of the 20th century in Japan. In this section, Nagamine’s theory, ‘a book reading nation in modern Japan’ was verified based upon the diary data of reading activities.

At the time diaries were written, Japan had already experienced the age of mass sales of books and magazines. Kodansha (since 1897) had already gained a large market share and Iwanami-Shoten (since 1927) also had established a stable brand identity among well-educated and intelligent readers. A big wave called ‘The Enpon-boom’ (from 1926 until around 1930) was a very successful sales promotion launched by Kaizo-sha. It increased the number of books in circulation and was followed by many other publishers. It is said that this boom changed the business model of the whole book publishing industry. By reserving a full literary series set in advance, each subscriber received one book every month at a low price until his/her shelves were filled with a variety of well-known best-selling books. The monthly magazine King (from 1924 to 1957) tagged by the phrase “magazine for all nations” became the first commercial periodical to reach the circulation of a million copies. The mass production and mass sales under the age of popular print media also allowed more circulation of used books in the used book market that could be more beneficial for lower-middle class book lovers like the diary keeper of this study.

The diary keeper read various types of books as a pastime during those four years. Some are literary pieces by Soseki Natsume and western writers whilst the genre of popular novels, such as the pieces by Kan Kikuchi, were also his favorite. Walking around the book stores in Kanda and walking along the used book stalls on his way to the station were recorded as his daily routine. He also shared expenses for some books and magazines with his friends to save his pocket money for his next purchase. After he became an office worker, he started to purchase more standard price books from the book store and he started to focus on novels and literary book reading for pleasure since he was freed from the textbooks of his school days.

The big change in his literary activities was that the diary keeper himself started to write some short essays to submit to magazines after he became an office worker. He started to buy a magazine that contained the call for submissions and he tried to write some pieces to contribute to some competitions. He also published small private magazine (Dojinshi) by a group of like-minded amateur writers.

5. Movie Going at the Age of Technological Transformation

The total number of movie titles the diary keeper wrote down during these four years was 351 (51.3 percent Japanese movies and 38.7 percent imported movies). On days when he listed a movie, he wrote the title of the movie, the names of the main actor, actress and director, and the name of the theatre on the upper blank margin of the diary page. He sometimes wrote a review and became a critique on the film of the day. As the result, the entries in which he referred to his movie going activities and his movie-related preferences occupied much more space than entries devoted to other daily activities during those four years.

The theatres he mainly visited were near the major railway station from which he commuted or on his way to school. He most frequently visited the movie theatres in Ikebukuro, one of the biggest amusement areas in Tokyo and the nearest to his house in Itabashi-ward. The total number of the movies he saw in Ikebukuro was 132 (37.6%) during the four years. His second most frequently visited area was the Kanda-ward during his schooldays and this changed to Ginza/Marunouchi near his office or his commuting route for the latter two years. The movies produced by the Shochiku Co. Ltd. were the most frequently mentioned in his diary, reflecting his preference.

Moving pictures, namely imported silent films from the west, made their debut at the traditional playhouse during an intermission and quickly gained tremendous popularity. The first movie theatre in Japan, the Denki-Kan, was opened in 1903 in Ueno. As its popularity grew, the Japanese silent movie established a unique performing style with a film interpreter (Ktsudo-Benshi) and live music. In terms of popularity, the interpreter's art of narration and the character of the storyteller was more influential than the motion pictures on the screen itself to the sales record of the box offices. In this sense, the transition from silent movie to sound film was a significant change for the movie industry in Japan. It was a serious blow to the interpreters who lost their jobs in Japan.

The diary keeper's four years overlaps with a technological transformation period that took place in Japanese movie theatres called "Tohki-ka," the sound film system replaced the established silent systems. According to Tanaka (1981) this big transformation to sound films took place from around 1930 to 1935 in Japan. Facing these changing processes in the movie

theatre, it was natural for him to record some impressions in his diary. As reflected in his expectations of the new system, he sometimes expressed his opinion about the technical problems of the sound film systems of the movie theatre at this early stage. However his comments in the later years suggest that the newly adopted devices gradually improved and he enjoyed the new system. As the time the new system appeared throughout Japan, he stated that the age of the silent movie system had ended.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the mass media and youth in 1930s Tokyo by the analysis of discovered diary documents written by a lower-middle class night time school student who enjoyed book reading and movie going as a pastime. It was demonstrated that the mass leisure apparatuses of print media and audio-visual media had already been established and had distributed plentiful amusing contents for youth in Japan. The daily activities described in his diary also shows that major changes took place in the popularization of mass media in modernized urban areas in the capital city during this time period.

Furthermore his diaries represent diary keeping and book reading customs among Japanese at that time. They also serve as remarkable evidence of the maturity of Japanese mass media based upon the literacy affluence enjoyed by diversified people in prewar Japan. The popularity of movie going at this time was also proved and suggests that it was the early stage of the prosperous audio-visual culture that would make a great progress later in Japan. (Tomoko Hasegawa)

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