



**Mark Sandler, ed.** *The Confusion Era: Art and Culture in Japan During the Allied Occupation.* Seattle, Wa. and London: University of Washington Press, 1998. 112 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-97646-4.

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## Japan Re-programming Itself: cultural images

The title of the book is a literal translation of the Japanese name for the time in their country after World War II. Nowhere does the book mention that at a glance the title might seem to be *The Confucian Era*. The pun may be in the eye of the reviewer. But the cultural recreation was a philosophical prelude to the economic spurt. As the foreword states of this crucial time, "The Allied Occupation of Japan was the bridge between a period of wartime distrust and carnage and today's productive, culturally rich interdependence" (p. vii).

The book is replete with photos of places, reproductions of posters, and stills from movies. It's a beautiful book, the graphics complemented by the text.

The first chapter, "The Occupied Arts," by Donald Richie, discusses how for those seven years "power in Japan rested with the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) (p. 11)" but that the arts were neglected by the documents that established this authority. "When SCAP did occasionally take notice of artistic endeavor, its efforts were uncoordinated," Richie adds (p. 13). The chapter covers the visual arts, literature, modern drama, the Kabuki, and movies. "The samurai-under-the-bed was soon succeeded by the Red-under-the-bed as the official phobia" (p. 18), Richie comments in explaining why the traditional Kabuki theater was considered "liberated" (p. 18). Painting in the time of "Heavy Hands" by Emiko Yamanashi considers how artists "were forced to accept a new situation and to ponder carefully what steps now might be taken (p. 23)." Yamanashi puts the post-

war change into historical perspective: "From the Paris Exposition in 1867 onwards, Japan participated in virtually every important exhibition ..." (p. 23). The chapter discusses three streams of art in the 1940s and 1950s. The title is from a painting by Tsuruoka Masao which "suggests a state of psychic depression (p. 30)." *Erasing and Refocusing: Two Films of the Occupation* by Linda C. Ehrlich discusses Shinoda Masahiro's 1984 *MacArthur's Children* and Imamura Shohei's 1961 *Pigs and Battleships* as expressing "distinctly Japanese views of the Allied Occupation (p. 39)."

*Whatever Happened to Passive Suffering? Women on Screen* by Keiko I. McDonald is about women in Japan and in Japanese film. "The new constitution of 1947, for the first time, recognized Japanese women as the equals of men" (p. 53) McDonald writes. The Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) [of the Occupation authorities], the agency in charge of film censorship, banned thirteen themes associated with the "nationalism" of the past. Among them was any theme which "portrayed favorably the subjugation or degradation of women" (p. 53), McDonald adds. The cinema recovered quickly from the war, according to McDonald, producing some 160 films in the second year of the Occupation, two of which were about women's new roles. Many movies are detailed, with the conclusion: "Yet it took thirty years for reality to catch up with this film image of the new Japanese woman" (p. 70).

*Don't Sell Salt Illegally: Posters in Occupied Japan* by

James Howard Fraser is a collection with a one-page preface that begins: "In the eerie, quiet weeks following war's end in August 1945, Japan's poster designers and printers showed surprising resilience" (p. 72). Entertainment, domestic press, and lastly, advertising flourished again. *My Work in Japan: Arts and Monuments, 1946-1948* by Sherman E. Lee describes his adventures as adviser on collections of the CIE. The first person tone contrasts with the rest of the book, providing another facet. "The Arts and Monuments Division was set up to inventory and inspect all Japanese art in the country, to determine what works had been destroyed, to assist the Japanese in the protection and preservation of their cultural property, and to encourage the display of Japanese works of art" (p. 92). It is the most subdued chapter in description by words and photos.

The work's stated purpose is the first in a series "Asian Art & Culture." Published by the Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, and the University of Washington Press, *The Confusion Era* demonstrates the intended success of a collection of essays by a variety of writers, art and cultural historians, artists, and literary scholars. Editor Mark Sandler is an independent scholar of Japanese

art history with a PhD from the University of Washington.

Variety is the book's strong and weak point. There is little cohesion in style or content among the chapters. Yet, the chapters complement one another. The complex impression can be developed according to readers' interests. For example, with background of this book, I have enjoyed watching videos of the films mentioned in the book, although some are in Japanese without subtitles and I am an American not yet fluent in Japanese. My Japanese acquaintances readily recognize the actresses, including the cover's Hara Setsuko appearing in an advertisement, as the cultural acme of beauty.

Each chapter has its own source list and the book has an annotated bibliography. The book's eight contributors include a member of the Occupation, Sherman E. Lee, and a researcher at Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, Emiko Yamanashi.

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