

Americanization: English Lessons, Cartoons, and TV in the Japanese Psyche

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Abstract

While Pre-World War II government-mandated censorship was a familiar practice in Japanese press outlets, it can be argued that post World War II censorship by the American GHQ had a long-lasting affect on national consciousness. With a brief historical introduction starting with Perry's ship landing, this short paper explores the role that American-produced English textbooks, cartoons, and dramas, played in molding Japan into a country aligned with United States ideals.

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To understand the framework of this essay, it is essential to look at the *Sakoku Edict*, issued in 1636, which can arguably be considered the most significant turning point in the modern history of Japan. *Sakoku*, meaning *country in chains*, was a governmental policy intended to eliminate foreign influence and international trade relations. During this period of isolation, which lasted more than two centuries, outsiders—except for a handful of Dutch and Chinese traders on a southern island of Japan called Dejima—were forbidden to port in Japan and no Japanese ships were allowed to leave the country. This intentionally limited contact with outsiders for over 200 years firmly established Japan's unique national cultural character.

This rigid foreign policy lasted until the arrival of American Commodore Matthew Perry's black ships at Edo, or Tokyo, Bay in 1853. The allure of a coastline a stone's

throw away from China with a high potential of coal deposits, which could double as a refuelling station for whaling crews, stewarded motivations for the opening of Japan to American trade. With a letter from U.S. President Millard Fillmore addressed to the Emperor in-hand, a variety of gifts for the Emperor, and a small squadron of U.S. Navy ships, the Japanese were aware of the weight of Perry's presence. Perry's appearance the following spring with an even bigger show of force in the form of a larger squadron initiated the opening up of Japan to the outside world with signing the Treaty of Kanagawa on March 31, 1854. In those days, it could be argued that the Japanese had a sense of national pride that has remained to this day. As soon as the country was open, several thousand European and American experts were recruited to work in Japan to advise on Western systems, military science, finance and banking, economics, and education amongst other things, while Japanese professionals from various industrial backgrounds began sailing to Europe and the U.S. to catch up with the outside world in search of new knowledge to bring back and build up Japan's strength and wealth. Subsequently, Japanese nationals quickly started adapting their newfound knowledge and inventions towards the modernization of the country (Nimmo, 2001, p. 6).

The United States and Japan's cordial relations went awry with the build-up to world war II. Japan's loss dominated national perceptions. When the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the destruction was not only physical but also spiritual and psychological. Japanese emperor worship, a practice commonplace and nation-wide during the time, subsided. Both the U.S. and Japanese governments saw two urgent problems that needed to be addressed: how to fill the spiritual vacuum of the people and how to cope with Japan's vulnerability to communism (Matsuda, 2008, p. 3). The seeds of communism were already sown amongst intellectuals in Japan as it was under the influence of German philosophy since the opening up of the country.

Matsuda claims that culture was among the three main pillars of post-war U.S.-Japan relations, along with security and economics. The United States government realized how important an overseas information program was implemented not only through the media, including radio, press, publications and motion pictures, but also through libraries and information centers operating abroad (Matsuda, 2008, pp. 2-3). Various attempts were made to solidify enduring shifts in attitudes and perspectives among local people.

Censorship, Breaking Down and Building Up

Both press and radio codes, censoring acts of dissent, were imposed upon Japan in September 1945 by occupation authorities. For example, writings criticizing the

General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers was banned, as was criticism of the atomic bombings. Consequently, the GHQ started preliminary censorship of five major newspapers, as well as phone calls and letters. Because of these codes, media reports focused on the inefficiency of the Japanese military and the weakness of militarism. Media outlets were, in essence, not allowed to report on positive stories about Japan or its people, and instead only on the U.S. and Americans. In consequence, freedom of thought and expression were erased from Japanese people. The consequence of this erasure was an implanted sense of low self-worth, doubt and uncertainty about self and country, ultimately resulting in an evident post-war inferiority complex.

Correspondingly, radio and TV programs that could promote certain Japanese qualities such as *Chushingura* (stories of *samurai* warriors), were all banned in Japan by the GHQ. And while the previous generation (the ones who fought in the Second World War) had memorized Emperors' names in the name of militarism in school, the existence of such programs that aim to increase national pride after the post-war period, similar to the recitation of the American Pledge of Allegiance in school, is little seen today (Yamada, 2013).

Evidence suggests that propaganda cartoons were widely available throughout Japan during the post-war period. The use of propaganda was an effective tool in spreading various messages to a vast audience in the United States as was seen throughout the country's history to increase patriotism in times of war and uncertainty. In post-war Japan, the heroes of stories were Americans, and bad and/or weak characters typically depicted the Japanese. Such propaganda justified the actions carried out by the U.S., which firmly instilled itself in the minds of young and old alike during the post-war era.

Cartoonist Kobayashi Yoshinori, author of *Analects of War*, described the sentiment: 'We were brainwashed by the military, but the Americans and the GHQ saved us! Thank you for giving us democracy! Please execute those responsible for war crimes quickly! I'm sick of war! War is evil! We don't need an army! Peace is more important than anything! Give me chocolate! Give me the Japanese Constitution!' (Clifford, 2004, p. 18).

First Contact

Hershey's Chocolate was also strongly associated with American soldiers as Hershey's Chocolates were part of military rations in occupied Japan that were routinely given to hungry Japanese street children. However, it also provided a substantial wartime

legacy and a form of humiliation as “Give me chocolate” (Downer, 2010, p. 338) was the among the first English phrases that local children learned and repeatedly used when they saw soldiers. Japanese children ate not only chocolate but also other American foods such as bread and similarly imported food products at school. In the same way, American-imported agricultural products were consumed throughout the country.

Propaganda was extensively used at school. The two atomic bombs dropped on Japan were described in textbooks as an effort to stop the war for a righteous cause, and to save Japan (Wainstock, 1996, p. 90). This U.S.-biased curriculum and the absolute power of the U.S. to dictate policies and curricula thoroughly instilled an inferiority complex on the Japanese citizenry. In essence, a hierarchy of power was established as the Japanese endured a campaign of admiration for everything U.S., as their beliefs that Japan was an inferior country were solidified.

A particularly poignant example was an English textbook published in 1944 called *Jack and Betty*. Japanese schools adopted this textbook as a reflection of the modern age. According to a survey that Japanese scholar Shigeki Iwamoto conducted, this school textbook was the most unforgettable memory embedded in the memory of many people who grew up in the post-war period. Iwamoto analyzes how the English textbook was revised: After the war, the characters in the textbook became ‘I am Jack’ from the previous version of ‘I am Taro.’ This suggests that learners will learn things through the eyes of Americans, rather than the eyes of Japanese. And its focus was on ‘the amazing things Americans have that didn’t exist in Japan.’ (Iwamoto, 1999, p. 109) As Japan lay in ruins from the devastation and destruction of war, the luxuries of middle-class America portrayed in the textbook functioned as a tool to escape from reality. Comments from a survey include:

“In those times, we only had steamed sweet potatoes, but there is a tennis court at Betty’s house, she has cake and tea, her father and sister each have a car. What is this? What is going on here? I was so envious and at the same time I was so fascinated”; “Jack wears a shirt and tie, Betty wears a stylish dress, I didn’t even have a clue how those washing machines and vacuum cleaners worked.” (Iwamoto, p. 110)

The goals of the textbook were clearly aimed at disseminating the life of the typical American middle class—with its abundance of electrical goods and freedom that were unseen in war-torn and occupied Japan. It had a singular purpose that worked two-fold; propaganda to show the Japanese American technological prowess as well as showcase what America was fighting for in a materialistic sense. The U.S. was depicted as a rich and democratic country of advanced science and technology. Iwamoto reiterates that this even made the Japanese believe the U.S. won the war because they had refrigerators.

The book was a perfect tool to Americanize the whole population. Thus, the mentality that was established during this post-war period became an internalized value system. The American spirit and ideals worked its way into Japanese lives through English textbooks like *Jack and Betty* since it made it seem that the things that the Japanese fantasized about in the aftermath of the war were part of the American way of life (Iwamoto, 1999, p. 103). However, this was a “biased image of America rather than real life” (Iwamoto, p. 110). Nonetheless, it was clear that *Jack and Betty* gave a lasting impression on young people who were to be part of the “miracle” economic boom of the 1960s known today as “salarymen”.

Soap for All

The U.S. effectively used psychological strategies to influence the local population through a wide array of media as it has done across the world. Japanese historian Takeshi Matsuda highlights that the U.S. has been carrying out psychological warfare and programs of gradual cultural infiltration in Japan and elsewhere (Matsuda, 2008, p. 1). The author of *Analects of War*, echoes the sentiment that guilt has substantially planted itself inside the Japanese mind. Clifford (2004: 16) argues that war crimes committed by Japanese commanders and soldiers during WWII were transferred to an innocent Japanese public introduced by the *War Guilt Information Program* via the American GHQ. Through this program, damaging critiques of the Japanese military saturated movies, radio, newspapers, and books and gave the populace the portrait that Americans had no choice but to drop the bomb.

The first post-war Minister of Education, Tamon Maeda, announced that the Japanese government was focusing on disseminating the importance of science and technology in newspapers and ultimately looked up to the U.S. for guidance. For this reason, broadcasting American TV programs such as dubbed soap dramas, set in large houses equipped with cars and the latest electrical goods carried hidden messages about American superiority. Moreover, American culture, especially in the form of Hollywood movies, played a persuasive role in implanting positive images of the former enemy. One of its most successful films was *Gone with the Wind*, which opened on September 3, 1952 in Japan. Matsuda argues that films like these effectively erased negative images of America and promptly planted positive seeds (Matsuda, 2008, p. 6). The implications of the Americanization of Japan are long-lasting and are still evident today with the popularity of American theme parks such as Disneyland and Universal Studios and Hollywood movies. However, the general psychological effects of trauma and propaganda can have negative consequences in the long term. Clifford (2004, p.

1) argues that the author of *Analects of War* indicates that modern Japan's inability to take pride in the history of World War II has eventually lead to a crisis of national consciousness. Taking pride in the history of WWII has its problems, however.

Germany, following the ending of WWII, had a different experience. In public discourse the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, originally referring to the embarrassment about and remorse for Germany's complicity in war crimes of the Wehrmacht, Holocaust, and related events including WWII shows a collective willingness to grapple with a culpable past. The German *Duden* lexicon defines *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as "public debate within a country on a problematic period of its recent history—in Germany on National Socialism, in particular. Contrast that with a Japan that is almost forgetful and upset when the issue of apologies and reparations arises for the forced sex labor of Korean and Chinese women during Japan's imperial era. However, like Germany, the Japanese should not be proud of WWII, just as Americans need to come to terms with slavery and its lasting effects, as the dismantling of confederate monuments takes place.

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