The Japanese Political Cartoon

Development and Decline

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by

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A Note about References and Formatting

In the interests of simplicity and, I hope, readability, I have followed Modern Language Association (MLA) citation guidelines throughout.

A small deviation from this is in my referencing of actual cartoons. Many of the cartoons contained in this paper were reproduced from secondary works, and indeed a number of them may be found in several different sources—though the cartoons themselves, naturally, are the same regardless of which source one reproduces them from. For these I have cited in abbreviated form the work from which I reproduced each cartoon, and have noted the original source whenever possible as well.

Due to the varying sizes of the cartoons, and the positions of paragraph and page breaks, some pages have a line or two of blank space at the bottom. This is unfortunately unavoidable, and I hope it will not cause the reader much difficulty.

KI
Introduction

It is nearly impossible to read a newspaper, or browse a bookstore or, for that matter, ride the subway in today’s Japan without seeing evidence of *manga* (Japanese comics). Children play with the latest *manga* spin-off toys; men in suits read “adult *manga*” during their morning commutes; and practically every corner store sells a broad selection of weekly *manga* periodicals, whose short instalments will eventually be compiled into complete episodes and fill the shelves of the nation’s bookstores. The permeation of *manga* has been likened to that of air (Kinsella). Much has been written about the popularity, implications, and historical development of the genre, and it is clear that in their various and socially pervasive forms they comprise a powerful medium for expression in Japan, one that is surprisingly varied in its subject matter. That this is so is a relatively recent development originating in the years after the Pacific War, but the groundwork, the affinity for visual expression and even more importantly the common knowledge necessary to consistently interpreting that expression, was laid rather earlier.

With the popularity of the medium and the range of topics addressed, from sports to business to government policy, it would seem reasonable that contemporary political themes and commentary would not be uncommon in Japanese *manga* or, to put it another way, that *manga* techniques would be employed precisely to articulate such themes. In the West, for instance, where comics in a general sense have not gained such great popularity, political cartoons have prospered. Since the War Walt Kelly’s classic *Pogo* and, today, Gary Trudeau’s *Doonesbury* have both enjoyed broad
readership, and single-panel political cartoons are ubiquitous on newspaper editorial pages. Even in the 18th and 19th centuries, political cartoons were an important tool in politics in Britain and the United States, both as a voice of independent commentary and as agents for partisan causes. Cartoonists felt few inhibitions in representing real figures—usually officials or government members—in unflattering ways, and the political cartoon came quite rightly to be regarded as a formidable weapon (Duus "Weapons" 966). Today, the distilled, often symbolic messages of political cartoons can carry great meaning and impact and, consequently, their usefulness as ‘windows’ into the social and cultural climates in which they arose has been discussed at some length (e.g. Kemnitz).

Perhaps surprisingly, though, graphic expression of political messages in Japan has never been simple, despite the number of topics seen in modern manga. Strict censorship, invisible or untouchable authorities, and deep-seated cultural characteristics have all played complicating yet formative roles. The political cartoon has led a capricious existence, developing in response to public curiosity, evolving into a weapon, wielded first by liberal and then by militaristic causes, and ultimately toeing the line as a common but easily overlooked agent of the press. The unstable history of Japanese political cartoons thus provides an opportunity for insight into the nation’s equally complex socio-political climate, while constant elements hint at more deeply rooted values and shared cultural experiences. Only a few accounts have been given of the historical development of the Japanese political cartoon while less still has been said about the changing forms of expression which accompanied that development. By performing a preliminary survey of existing literature and
examining several examples, this paper attempts to identify some defining characteristics of Japanese political cartoons in the context of Japanese socio-political history. It is interested in the messages conveyed and the roles played by political cartoons throughout Japanese history, and finds that they have a varied past and an uncertain future. It dwells particularly on the tumultuous years from the late Tokugawa period until just after the end of the War—a seminal time in Japanese political cartoon development—and is by necessity succinct, but I hope that its findings may have broader-reaching relevance and stimulate interest in further studies on the subject.

Background

Today, *manga* generally refers to the highly popular serial comics found in youth-oriented publications like *Jampu* (Jump) or *Sandē* (Sunday), but the word itself is less specific, and indeed the genre is diverse. 漫 (*man*) and 画 (*ga*), the characters which comprise the word, mean ‘aimless’ and ‘picture’ respectively—so rambling, absent minded drawings. It is significant, too, that a secondary meaning of *man* is ‘in spite of one’s self,’ an interpretation which hints at the popularity and ubiquity of the medium today and throughout Japanese history. The origin of the term *manga* is sometimes attributed to the artist Katsushika Hokusai (best known for his woodblock series ‘thirty-six views of Mt. Fuji’), who produced a 15-volume collection of caricatures known as the ‘Hokusai manga’ beginning in 1814, although evidence suggests it appeared even earlier, perhaps during the middle 1700s. Whatever its roots, Shimizu points out that the word only gained broad acceptance in
the first years of the Showa period (1926—1989), and that it means ‘cartoon’ in the most general sense; that is, different forms of manga are generally denoted by adding descriptive modifiers, rather than by dedicated terms (16-17). Hence political or editorial cartoons are known, rather descriptively, as *seiji fūshi manga*—‘political satire cartoons.’ It should also be mentioned that the word *manga*, according to some, connotes generally entertainment- or education-oriented children’s comics such as those associated with the famous Tezuka Osamu, as distinct from more controversial forms (Kinsella 29). Some artists thus consider the term to be slightly childish, and prefer the word *komikkusu*, “comics,” as a blanket descriptor (Schodt, *Dreamland* 33-34). In reality, though, the distinguishing line is blurred at best, and the word *manga* will be used here to mean the full range of Japanese comics.

Though the political cartoon in its modern sense would not appear in Japan until the mid-1800s, satirical or humorous art has deep roots in the nation. The development of *manga* can be traced at least as far back as the re-construction of Nara’s Horyuji temple around 700 CE, when caricatures and lewd images were scribbled onto the building’s rafters, remaining unnoticed until renovations in the 1930s (Schodt, *Manga!* 28). To say that these images, most likely the work of idle or mischievous craftsmen (perhaps doodling ‘in spite of themselves’), represent the germ of today’s popular and political art form, or indeed constitute anything more than an evolutionary development in Japanese artistic expression, would obviously be an overstatement. Rather, it seems a number of cultural and social factors combined to predispose the Japanese to such displays. A discussion of those factors in the context of Japanese history follows.
Early History

One early step on the road to manga might be Japan’s “borrowing” of pictographic characters, or kanji, from China, back in the 5th century CE (Sansom Japan 63). Prior to this, the Japanese language had no known written form and, before knowledge of their meanings spread, kanji were used purely as phonetic representations of the existing language. Their pictographic meanings were soon adopted, however, with two phonetic scripts, the hiragana and katakana, helping to ease the ‘square peg’ of kanji into the ‘round hole’ of early Japanese. Pollman espouses the view that kanji are “a product of artistic activity,” essentially requiring interpretation before their full meaning can be understood (Pollman 12-13). Though examining the relationship between language and culture is best left to the ethno-linguist (the controversial Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, for instance, proposes that language determines both understanding of and behaviour in the world), it is significant that, since the importation of kanji, Japanese have essentially had to create and interpret pictures to communicate. Whereas most Western scripts employ a limited set of characters for their phonetic value alone, the 6000-plus jōyō (“normal use”) kanji are used both phonetically and semantically, and leave plenty of room for subtlety. Moreover, Japanese society, unlike some Western societies, has been relatively homogenous both racially and culturally for hundreds of years. To this end, Ito makes reference to anthropologist Edward Hall in labelling Japanese culture ‘high context,’ or ambiguous and common-context-based, and Western culture ‘low context,’ or explicit, un-ambiguous, and largely devoid of circumstance (457). It is easy to see, then, how the interpretation of kanji in such a ‘high context’ environment
might lay some of the groundwork for the appreciation and common understanding of graphic media such as manga.

Another step might be the strict censorship of reports regarding public figures, affairs, and institutions carried out during Tokugawa times (1603–1867). In the 11th century, Toba Sōjō produced a series of cartoons (the chōjū jinbutsu gigakan, or ‘animal scrolls’) depicting anthropomorphised frogs, monkeys and other animals in acts which satirized the Buddhist clergy of the time (Ito 458). Though these works were seen by few, they began a tradition of depictive, sometimes comical art which reached the public in the early to middle Tokugawa period (Figure 1). Ōtsu-e (‘Ōtsu pictures’), named for the town of Ōtsu, near Kyōto, where they were originally sold as souvenirs, and subsequently Toba-e (‘Toba pictures’), named for Toba Sōjō and sold on the streets of Osaka, were published using early block-printing techniques. These drew much stylistically from the enforced ukiyoe tradition of depicting scenery, courtesans and the like, but unlike most ukiyoe occasionally contained hidden, symbolic, meanings (Ito 458). Along with hanjimono (visual puzzles), these comical works gained popularity with the general public throughout the 1700s. A typical
example might be a picture of a sphere or ball (tama) with a picture of traditional Japanese sandals (geta), forming the word tamageta, or ‘be surprised.’ Another example, from a later 1858 print by Utagawa discussed by Duus, shows a woman looking on as papers, evidently images, are blown about by a rogue gust of wind—a punning representation of the place-name Edobashi, or Edo Bridge, formed from the words for picture (e), and ‘to send flying’ (tobasu) ("Weapons" 970). Such examples are intended purely for entertainment, and the images appear to be chosen for their contribution to the pun. But as Duus says, “the meanings hidden in hanjimono prints were intended to amuse, but the concealment of political meanings in visual art had another purpose”—indeed, such concealment was only natural in a climate where political news and views were so strongly censored ("Weapons" 968). This is both a significant factor in the development of the Japanese political cartoon, and a notable difference between Japanese and Western political cartooning.

The Late Tokugawa Period

Where Western political cartooning developed in an atmosphere of visible power, with public displays and processions designed precisely to impress upon the laity a sense of awe, Japanese governments chose to steep their authority in mystery, secrecy, and aloofness. Tokugawa shoguns made few public appearances, and went so far as to clear the public, including local residents, from processional routes (Duus "Weapons" 969). With literacy slowly growing and public curiosity about the mysterious nature of political affairs on the rise, illicit publications of gossip—from anonymous papers to public graffiti—gained popularity (Duus "Weapons" 971). But
where western cartoonists had visible institutions to lampoon, the Japanese authorities provided few tangible images of power-figures, and when they did strict rules prevented their parody or, for that matter, discussion. While few artists or publishers dared outright flout these regulations by brazenly representing political themes—and, to be sure, those who did dare were often if not always subject to punishment—a sort of paradox developed. To take action against artists was, in a sense, to lift a small corner of the veil of authority, and officials tended, therefore, to punish only those who overtly represented actual events and people, while ignoring less direct transgressions. Consequently, a light-hearted but rebellious trend took hold: if the shogunate could effectively imply its authority, then artists could imply humorous or satiric messages without directly stating them or representing that authority (Duus "Weapons" 971). This arrangement also rendered irrelevant the fact that few, if any, knew what the figures and institutions of authority looked like even if they had hoped to represent them. The result was an increase in drawings, many of them politically themed, employing hanjimono-style concealment techniques to placate shogunal censors. This, in turn, was fit into a broader trend, the development of “a delicate aesthetic marked by maximum expression with minimum resources....” (Nakane 229). These subtle, yet to unaccustomed eyes sometimes dauntingly complex, works were characteristic of manga-style art from the middle of the Tokugawa period until at least the 1850s. Artists like Hokusai, Gessho and Bumpo are the best known champions of this style (Bowie 210).
Relatively innocent examples of the practice came at the expense of the samurai class which, from the late 19th century onwards, was the subject of increasing ridicule. Living on stipends and generally without land holdings of their own, samurais’ weak economic foundations had always been compensated by high social standing—so much so that indifference to money and monetary concerns was once a point of pride (Storry 73). But even before the upheaval of traditional social order engendered by the apparition of Perry’s *kurofune* (‘black ships’) on Uraga Bay near Edo in 1853, it was clear that their standing was on the wane, as the fortunes of merchants and capitalists waxed. The persistence of samurai self-importance in these changing times became a topic for caricature. One entertaining and direct panel from Hokusai’s *manga* depicts an obviously high-ranking samurai (though not intended to represent a specific individual) making use of a road-side toilet with a look of great pride and resolve upon his face, while his attendants, waiting nearby, clutch their noses in obvious respiratory distress (Figure 2). Yet there is no sign of disrespect by the aides, no quiet snickering or retreats upwind to betray a more antagonistic commentary on this samurai, or his class as a whole. If anything, there is a sense that the scene has

Figure 2. A Break in the Journey. By Katsushika Hokusai. From Duus, “Weapons.”
occurred before, that noses have been plugged, acceptingly, all along this journey’s path. The servants, clearly, have respect and loyalty enough to stay near their master even in these circumstances. In many ways, then, this is simply a typical scene along a well-travelled road, perhaps a curiosity to some, but little more. Regardless of how premeditated it may have been, it is difficult to ignore Hokusai’s implicit message: that the samurai are deserving of respect but that, in the end, they are not so very different from the rest of society.

Duus mentions a more covert and politically charged piece by Utagawa as well (Figure 3). In it, Utagawa apparently portrays a combination of two well known tales: the story of Minamoto Yorimitsu, also known as Raikō, who travelled across Japan with an entourage including Kintarō, defeating legendary beasts; and the popular ‘parade of monsters’ motif. Yorimitsu is shown resting in the top right with several of his associates standing guard around him. Rumour quickly spread, however, that Raikō was here intended to represent the incumbent shogun Ieyoshi, and the guard closest to him his highly unpopular chief minister, Mizuno Tadakuni. The monsters, or yōkai, were said to represent public unrest over Mizuno’s recent efforts to restrain what he saw as popular decadence, and individual monsters were even taken as metaphors for specific reforms. One creature in the upper left of the print, for instance, which bears a lantern with the character for wealth (富, tomi), was taken to represent a recent ban on lotteries (Duus "Weapons" 972). It is difficult, now, to say how exactly the two scenes are intended to relate to each other. Silk from the ‘earth spider’ (tsuchigumo) appears to separate human from supernatural, or to take the metaphorical approach, government from people, suggesting a possible
contrast between the calm of Raikō and the upheaval that surrounds him. This interpretation is supported by the apparent indifference of the guards, some of whom enjoy a game of Go. Conversely, Raikō/Ieyoshi is clearly vulnerable or at least ignorant, and the relative power of the prospective Mizuno is highlighted. This is certainly in line with public sentiment, though it is worth noting that in the actual legend Raikō was far from vulnerable, and eventually counted the earth spider among his conquests (Piggot 92-95). The depiction of familiar legends was quite a common trait among many print-artists, and the practice served cartoonists well for years to come, for it gave the creator a universally recognized tool with its own history and connotations to add to the overall message. Regardless of whether public interpretations in this case were correct, the print was so popular that numerous copies emerged when the original publisher, fearing sanctions from the government, stopped issuing it (Duus "Weapons" 972). Of course, neither this nor the previous example may correctly be termed ‘political cartoons’ or seiji fūshi manga, but they do represent the stirrings of a dialogue between artist and audience. And it is striking,
from cases like this, just how subtle an artist’s message might be—or, put another way, how sensitive to details its audience.

Such sensitivity, as has been suggested, does not come about by chance. The use of kanji, the relative homogeneity of Japanese society, and the need for great discretion in Tokugawa times would all have had their effect. But a common ability to interpret seemingly obscure themes requires common background knowledge and shared experiences, the existence and awareness of ‘mainstream’ issues, a popular culture. If Tokugawa secrecy incited public curiosity and helped mould the woodblock print into a medium for subtle political commentary, the development of a popular culture provided the understanding and sense of collectiveness which gave it momentum. It has already been mentioned that the reputation of the samurai class suffered toward the end of the Tokugawa period. This trend, which provided an opportunity for artists to test the waters of caricature and satire, also represents the outcome of a slow process of change brought about in part by the very class structure of which the samurai were a part—the development of a true popular culture.

Whereas many societies’ upper classes consisted of the wealthy and intelligentsia, samurai were not particularly wealthy, and scholarship was not a prerequisite of the class. Many samurai were educated and performed limited scholarly roles, but unlike their counterparts in China or Korea, for whom scholarship was tantamount to social ascendancy, their status was hereditary—and, moreover, passed on only to the eldest son, keeping overall numbers relatively static. Beyond the embodiment of Confucian ethics and some bureaucratic or administrative duties,
then, samurai had a limited scholarly impact on their society. Indeed, it has been argued that this may help explain the relative unpopularity of pure scholarship in Japan today. But as Nakane points out, “because there was no specific social stratum assuming responsibility for the furtherance of scholarship, the arts, and culture in general, it was left to the common people to provide the driving force for their development” (228). And this they set about doing, with the increasing wealth of capitalist merchants turning major cities into significant economic and cultural centers whose effects eventually touched farmers in all but the most remote regions of Japan, and with townsfolk pursuing their artistic and scholastic interests under the tutelage of professional ‘masters’ (Nakane 226-31). Inevitably, as Storry asserts, “The rise and efflorescence of this capitalist class was not really compatible with the continued existence of feudal society” (Storry 75).

This is not to imply that all members of all lower classes were caught up in intellectual pursuits, or indeed that all even possessed the opportunity to be so. The government maintained ultimate control over what was and wasn’t accessible to the people. But the central principle holds true: intellectual and cultural activity was not, in Japan, the sole dominion of an upper-class elite. Most samurai lived in the shadows of their lord’s castle in one of the castle towns, necessitating literacy among village leaders in order to conduct daily business, while terakoya, or ‘temple schools,’ and private academies operated by noted scholars, extended basic education to increasing numbers of commoners. The samurai, though elite in status, ultimately had little direct involvement in the development of Tokugawa society, and this void effectively “encouraged those on the bottom to strive to better themselves and thereby
raised the level of sophistication of the masses” (Nakane 230-31). Merchants drove the economies of cities and towns, and cultural and scholarly pursuits became more feasible. The result was relatively high literacy, thriving popular culture, and increasing mutterings, at least in urban centers, about the redundancy of the samurai class by the end of the Tokugawa period. Thus by the time Perry’s four kurofune appeared, it is clear that manga style art was very familiar to the Japanese public, and political messages were not uncommon. More importantly, at least in the urban centers, a context for cartoon art had been created, with an observant and politically curious public broadly familiar with the same legends and cultural traditions, and artists skilled in the concealment of their messages. Perry’s arrival in many ways simply accelerated the development in Japan of political cartoons as we know them today.

Western Influences

For all that their potential to carry political messages had begun to be explored, the ancestors of cartoons were still, before the 1850s, primarily intended and appreciated for their artistic and entertainment values. Ukiyoe artists had long been forbidden from portraying real people or indeed any personages beyond the lower strata of society, and thus tended to depict scenes which were largely devoid of broader context: landscapes, courtesans, sumo-wrestlers, etc. (Ito 459-60). The Ōtsu-e and Toba-e were eventually somewhat more tongue-in-cheek, if only because their proletarian nature made them trickier to censure, but most remained little more than souvenirs or pleasant diversions. Works such as Hokusai’s Manga and their
counterparts by Bumpō, Gesshō and others were noteworthy for the honest and direct portrayal of their subject matter, but even examples like the samurai discussed above are hard to construe as active, pre-meditated commentaries intended to advance a political ideology. Similarly, even after the increased use of *hanjimono* style concealment allowed political themes to be brought more frequently to the public, it is difficult to assess to what extent such pieces can really be termed ‘political’ art. Certainly some artists intended their work, if only subtly, to carry a political message, but it is also true that long years of official secrecy, bustling urban centers, and the weakening of censorship had created great curiosity regarding politics and public affairs. To the extent that cartoon-art satisfied this curiosity, then, it acted as a sort of keyhole in an otherwise shut and bolted door, through which increasing numbers of curious eyes could peep. In a sense, these cartoons were valued because they provided a service—traditionally entertainment or aesthetic pleasure alone, but now also information. It is unclear whether public curiosity accelerated or was accelerated by the depiction of political themes in popular art, but it is apparent that proto-political art drew upon a grassroots relationship of artist and audience (Duus "Weapons" 974). It is also clear that visual art was by this time firmly entrenched in Japanese popular culture.

Perry’s first visit in 1853 had the indirect effect of giving cartoonists freer control over the content of their work. The Tokugawa shogunate was, by the middle of the 19th century “a very creaking governmental structure that was ready to collapse if it were subjected to a really challenging blow” (Storry 77). This was due to a number of factors, not least of which were growing unrest on the part of regional lords
and periodic uprisings by peasants in protest of severe rice taxes which strangled the countryside. So when Perry defied Japanese protestations to deliver President Fillmore’s request for the opening of Japan (and his own demand for same—lest a “return to Edo in the ensuing spring with a much larger force” be required)—the shogunate was understandably further weakened. The existing government was, to use a cliché, caught between a rock and a hard place. Evident Western military superiority made resistance implausible, while regional lords, or daimyō, made conflicting recommendations to the already conflicted government. The samurai now ceased to be the politically-minded cartoonist’s most obvious target, in part because their strength appeared to be returning as they confronted the government over its strategies for addressing the situation. More importantly, though, the government was increasingly unable to enforce its own censorship rules, and political gossip became rampant (Duus "Weapons" 974). As a result, cartoonists were suddenly provided a much broader range of subjects to address, and with fewer potential consequences.

Faced with little alternative the Shogunate did accede to President Fillmore’s request—despite an official policy “to evade any definite answer to [the US] request, while at the same time maintaining a peaceful demeanour”—and signed the Treaty of Kanagawa in March 1854, opening the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to foreigners (Sansom Western 278). The proverbial door thus opened was forced further and further ajar over the coming years, and by the summer of 1857 Townsend Harris, US consul in Japan, had secured extraterritoriality for American citizens in Japan, as well as permanent residency rights in several cities. Similar arrangements followed with
other Western powers, and by 1862 a Briton named Charles Wirgman, a correspondent for the *Illustrated London News* who lived in the new foreign settlement in Yokohama, began to publish *Japan Punch*. This, like the *London News*, was a graphic account of current events using cartoon-like artwork, but was intended for an audience of fellow foreigners. Since he was not bound by Japanese laws, Wirgman was free to publish material on current events, the government, or most anything else, and this he did. In its first years, *Japan Punch* chronicled the Namamugi incident, wherein samurai from the southern Satsuma region killed a Briton for alleged disrespect; the resulting conflict between Satsuma and Britain; the Western bombardment of Shimonoseki, after the Choshu lord blockaded the Shimonoseki Straits; British ambassador Harry Smith Parkes’ meeting with the last Tokugawa shogun, Yoshinobu; and other stories of significance to foreigners in Japan at the time (Ito 461).

*Japan Punch*, which would continue publication for 25 years, became popular in the foreign settlements and, inevitably, soon gained readership among the Japanese (Ito 461). Wirgman’s cartoons naturally betrayed his Western background and tended towards caricature and satire, but more importantly were directed quite unabashedly at real people and real events. His habitual protagonist, Mr. Punch, walked about town highlighting the awkwardness of Japanese donning Western garb, or lampooning the editors of rival publications by setting their likenesses ablaze to light the streets of Edo. Another cartoon likened the fettered Japanese press to a meek Japanese woman in a kimono—from a contemporary Western viewpoint, at least, the imagery of the woman’s shuffling steps, downcast eyes and apparent
fragility would have added to the impact of such a metaphor. The same image would almost certainly have conveyed a different message to Japanese readers, but was of interest regardless. Though some of his pieces might well have been lost on a Japanese audience, the distinguishing features of his craft were not: unabashed parody of actual events and people; advancement of an obvious ‘point’; use of symbolic metaphors. This led to such cartoons—what might rightly be called the first true political cartoons to appear in Japan—being termed ponchi-e, or ‘Punch pictures,’ and to the adoption of the style in numerous Japanese publications. Frenchman George Bigot, who began publishing the shorter-lived Tobae in the 1880s, was also influential, and his highly realistic drawing style also found a place among the growing ranks of Japanese cartoonists (Shimizu).

A defining feature of the relationship between proto-cartoonist and audience in Japan had always been the spirit of political curiosity, but not of advocacy. That is, while the populace naturally shared many common cultural traits, traditions, and beliefs, the formation of groups or factions along any lines of difference had long been actively suppressed, even seen as a sort of subversion (Storry 112). Members of each class concerned themselves with the affairs of their lot, and while upward mobility was not impossible it was uncommon and not actively sought. As a consequence the notion of, say, political organization or indeed political or social advocacy of any kind was relatively foreign. In a sense, this reflects Francis Fukuyama’s notion of Japan being a ‘high-trust society’—farmers, for instance, needed to cooperate with each other to produce the highest yields, and whether or not true trust existed between members of differing classes, what might be seen as a sort of overall trust in the
established social order was strong (Storry 77). Cartoons, when they did contain political connotations, were thus looked upon with curiosity and for the novelty of their portrayals, for they represented a glimpse into an unknown sphere. But they did not generally seek to strongly editorialize the events they portrayed, if indeed they intended to portray real events at all. To this end, the pre-Meiji cartoon’s popularity did not really reflect popular involvement in politics, or even a notion that such involvement could be possible. This role was soon to change.

The Meiji Restoration

Even as Western cartoonists established themselves in the foreign settlements, Japanese cartoonists began to expand their subjects and commentary. As the Shogunate stumbled its way towards dissolution in 1868, prints commenting on the state of the government, business, and public affairs were rife, with many going beyond the traditional bounds and “condens[ing], simplif[y]ing], and clarif[y]ing] the political complexities of the time for their readers” (Duus "Weapons" 974). Factoring in the characteristics adapted from Wirgman et al, these cartoons, now truly seiji fūshi manga, illustrate an important change in the mandate of cartoonists. Before, the cartoonist was primarily an artist, or an entertainer, or some combination of the two. His work did provide a window into another world, and more importantly a fertile ground for speculation, but this latter function was as much the creation of a curious public which eagerly sought political meaning as it was of the artist. Now, the cartoonist gradually became an agent, a conveyer of popular and increasingly factional sentiment, an interpreter and editorializer of daily events. As the Boshin
civil wars slowly ended it was the Meiji leadership, with its goals of modernization, ‘restoration,’ and renewed imperial vitality that emerged victorious in 1868 and set Japan on a course for rapid Westernization. The effects of this process naturally extended to the cartoonist’s pen.

Ito asserts that during the early Meiji period “the antigovernment Freedom and People’s Rights Movement [じゆみんけんうど] and manga played important roles in developing freedom of speech” (462). The government itself, determined as it was to adopt progressive policies befitting its new focus on modernity, actually aided this cause at its outset. In contrast to the secretive Tokugawa shoguns, the Meiji leadership went out of its way to display its political institutions and authority for all to see, beginning with a resurgent emperor who appeared in public as the primary icon and ostensible leader of the new regime alongside a national flag and other symbols of authority (Duus "Weapons" 975). Presented with so much new material to depict, print artists quickly began to take advantage. Duus notes that for a time there was some reluctance to portray current figures or events, and that the Meiji emperor’s assumption of power was at first represented through references to Jimmu, the first emperor, or the ancient emperor Nintoku ("Weapons" 975). Soon, however, the references became more explicit, and a range of illustrated newspapers (e-iri shinbun) and cartoon magazines, many modelled after Japan Punch, appeared. One of the more popular magazines was Nipponchi, founded by a print artist, Kawanabe Kyosai, and a fiction writer, Kanagaki Robun, both of whom were well established even before the Meiji inauguration, and both of whom found much to satirize in Japan’s efforts to reconcile progress with tradition (Duus "Weapons" 975-76). The magazine’s title was
a clever pun, with the characters for ‘Japanese land’ (日本地) paying phonetic homage to Wirgman and his introduction of Punch pictures. Other publications included ex-home ministry official Nomura Fumio’s *Maru Maru Chinbun*, itself using the characters for *chinbun* (珍聞), ‘strange news,’ to suggest the more obvious *shinbun* (新聞), or ‘newspaper.’

As these and other publications became bolder, in the case of the *Maru Maru Chinbun* going so far as to once bring the imperial house and personage onto the satiric stage (though with a pro-imperial sentiment, it must be said), the authorities eventually tried to suppress them. Since the new government was intended to be more visible, it was the obvious messages of some cartoons, rather than the mere representation of political topics, which primarily drew censorship. This was compounded by the development through the 1870s of a true government opposition movement. By this time a system of compulsory education, together with conscription had, as Storry puts it, begun to “[mould] the people into a nation of patriots, and it also furthered a public-spirited demand for some say, however indirect, in the government of the country” (Storry 113). This sentiment was spearheaded by a small but vocal group led by disgruntled former government members and including scholars, landowners, rural manufacturers and others, and formed the basis of the *jiyū minken undō*, and ultimately the *Jiyūtō*, or Liberal Party. Smaller papers and magazines like the *Maru Maru Chinbun*, already testing the limits of official tolerance, became champions of the *minken* movement and incurred further ire. Like the Tokugawa regimes before it, the Meiji government instituted strict censorship regulations—but unlike its predecessors, it enforced them rather rigorously. Where
Tokugawa censors forbade any and all reference to politics and officials, and indeed few potential subjects were visible anyway, Meiji censors were most concerned by direct statements, particularly in writing, and often ignored implied messages even when recognizable figures or events were portrayed (Duus "Weapons" 976). Though concealment in the same sense as before was no longer necessary—the government had, after all, gone out of its way to supply cartoonists with visible images of its authority—the use of satire provided a way around the censors. Cartoonists again turned to traditionally established artistic techniques to successfully convey their point.

Excellent examples of the new relationship between cartoonist, censors and public come from cartoons by Honda Kinkichirō published in the Maru Maru Chinbun. At the more moderate end of the spectrum, Honda established the catfish as a metaphor for government officials (Figure 4). Old legend had it that a giant subterranean catfish resided under Japan which, when irritated by the worldly follies of the mortals above it, thrashed about in disapproval and thus brought earthquakes upon the land (Storry 167). The image of the catfish as a capricious beast was thus well-known to all and would immediately have evoked a sense of mild unease; however, it was also for its whiskers’ resemblance to the moustaches of many officials that the catfish was appropriate (Duus "Weapons" 978). These ‘catfish officials’ were generally depicted in acts of frivolity with public funds, or in other activities which spoke playfully but persistently of the corruption and self-interest of the government. Though Honda did occasionally label certain catfish as real political figures, the metaphorical aspects of such cartoons evoke previously mentioned works of Utagawa,
Hokusai and others. But it is clear that despite their similarities in technique, the cartoonist’s intentions were very different. Honda had actively established the catfish to represent actual politicians, so a catfish cartoon would immediately be assumed to address political affairs. Moreover, the habitual and clearly intentional depiction of catfish/officials in a negative fashion could only serve to reinforce the association of the catfish with government laziness or corruption. In other words, Honda made the catfish synonymous with real, corrupt politicians. However veiled any further message contained within his cartoons might be, his basic message was immediately obvious.

At the opposite extreme, Honda created some cartoons whose direct attacks on politicians are surprising even today. He was particularly harsh in his lampooning of Kuroda Kiyotaka, then head of the Hokkaido Development Bureau and later to become, briefly, prime-minister after Ito Hirobumi (Figure 5). After Kuroda’s wife died in 1878, rumours spread when a small newspaper suggested that Kuroda had in fact murdered her in a drunken rage; this, too, was a sign of changing times, for such rumours would have been very difficult to propagate a few years earlier. Soon after, Honda drew a cartoon showing Kuroda (an almost portrait-like likeness) in bed with

Figure 4. Civil servant catfish receive more than their military counterparts. By Honda Kinkichirō. From Duus, “Weapons.”
another woman, being surprised by a rhinoceros-shaped ghost: the words for wife and rhinoceros are homophones (sai). To address any unfamiliarity of his readership with Kuroda’s physical appearance, in the background is a screen covered in calligraphy, with the first character in each row, from right to left, reading kuro-kai-taku-cho-kan, an abbreviation meaning “Kuroda, Chief, Hokkaido Colonization Bureau.” It is difficult to be more explicit in a personal attack.

Beyond its directness, several features of the cartoon are noteworthy. Perhaps most striking is that, even in such a personal and unambiguous attack, Honda employs a range of hanjimono inspired techniques as well. The cleverly hidden title in the screen, for instance, could easily go unnoticed with a cursory read. The ghost, meanwhile, appears to emanate from an overturned bottle of sake in reference to the alleged circumstances of Kuroda’s wife’s death. And the rhinoceros, in addition to bringing a note of humour to the piece, relies on the audience’s knowledge and puzzle-solving ability to connect the image with Kuroda’s ex-wife. Yet very likely none of these hidden clues would have presented much difficulty to Honda’s readers, for the search for such morsels had been integral to the reading of cartoons for years. A further point of interest here is the writing to the right of the cartoon. Despite the

Figure 5. The writing is on the wall for Kuroda. By Honda Kinkichirō. From Duus, “Weapons.”
highly damning content of the cartoon itself, it is the text, which could hardly be more explicit than the artwork, which has been censored with black lines to obscure statements that were evidently considered unacceptable. It is difficult to understand the rationale behind this, but it surely reinforces the power cartoonists held in expressing messages which would in most media be forbidden. Indeed, one of the few recorded cases of the Maru Maru Chinbun being censored was when one of Honda’s cartoons suggested the government collectively was besieged by troubles from all sides, rather than attacking individual politicians (Duus "Weapons" 978).

It is tempting here to imagine a Meiji populace long deprived of a voice in government which, seizing upon its new liberties, fans smouldering aspirations into irrepressible flames with the aid of invective cartoons. Such would, however, be grossly overstating the facts. The reality was that the driving forces behind the minken movement were, at least initially, motivated more by self interest than by true devotion to liberal principles, and in any event were a relatively small group of ex-officials, land-owners, scholars, and the like (Storry 113). Some were motivated purely by the desire for modernization that would make Japan the equal of Western powers, viewing political representation as another rung on the ladder of new technologies. This is not to suggest a basic notion of human rights, freedom of speech, and other liberties was unknown, but after years of such thoughts being tantamount to subversion, they required the efforts of interested parties to gain momentum. The Maru Maru Chinbun, which had itself been established by a former member of the Meiji leadership who supported the anti-governmental movement, championed the cause on its pages. Sympathetic publications appeared and added their voices, and as
the cartoon became a battleground for public opinion conservative publications also appeared. The important point here is that cartoons were increasingly becoming agents for expressing the opinions of a particular faction, and that those factions, more often than not, sought to give direction to, rather than receive it from, the populace. As time passed and the Meiji leadership grew more accustomed to ridicule—and as the opposition movements spearheaded by the Jiyūtō, the more conservative Kaishintō, and others became more established and less radical—the political cartoon finally became a “legitimate vehicle for political commentary and critique,”(Duus "Weapons" 980). It continued in this capacity into the 20th century, with new and more sophisticated publications like Tōkyō Puck appearing and covering a range of issues from the Russo-Japanese War to the early rise of militarism.

**The War Years**

Rube Goldberg, famous for his eccentric Professor Butts character but active in political cartooning as well, summed up his craft by saying that “The successful cartoonist deals principally in emotions. His work cannot be pleasing to everyone. Editorial Cartooning is essentially destructive. It is an art of protest” (qtd. in Darracott 57). The role of publications like the Maru Maru Chinbun and, later, Tōkyō Puck certainly fit this bill for some time, and the political cartoon was a formidable force in Meiji and Taishō political commentary, usually championing the liberal or moderate cause. To this end Storry states that “although they were often scurrilous, usually irresponsible, and almost always sensational, Japanese newspapers did express in a crude way the force of public opinion” (150). Japan’s victory over Russia
in 1905 proved both to Japan and the rest of the world just how quickly the nation had progressed in its quest for a place among the Western powers. The US, Britain and others viewed the Japanese success with some benevolence as a sort of underdog story; the British, in particular, were pleased that Japan’s naval victories had come with the aid of British training and vessels. In Japan, strong nationalist sentiments understandably came with the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, but these were actually incited less by Japan’s success than by what were perceived as her failings in the war (Storry 141-42). Unaware that the nation’s war energy was all but spent—for such information was not relayed by the authorities—and following eighteen months of unwaveringly positive reports from the battleground, popular expectations demanded more than Japan received, and the blame was directed squarely at the government. The military, meanwhile, was hailed for its victories. After awards were given for service and valour, Tōkyō Puck published a premonitory cartoon in 1906. In it, a Japanese officer is shown revelling as winged alcohol bottles surround him and a female manifestation of temptation steals his wallet. Onlookers are shown to be frightened and aghast, while the Japanese caption states that with the granting of generous military rewards, the era of an all-powerful army had arrived (Duus, “Weapons”).

The prediction was, in many ways, to be proven accurate over the coming years. The late 19th and early 20th centuries had seen Japanese political cartoons break free somewhat from the shackles of censorship, and for some time the only definite taboo lay in depicting the Emperor (Duus "Weapons" 980-81). In fact, artists were occasionally able to satisfy censors with cartoons sympathetic to the imperial person
and institution, for it was to preserve the symbolic importance of the Imperial house
that critical views were suppressed: the Meiji restoration relied on the Emperor as a
rallying cry for the building of a nation. An attack on the Emperor, therefore, could
only be an attack on the state and nation as a whole. Consequently, cartoonists were
free, as we have seen, to lampoon the actions and habits of certain people or groups,
and this they did with sometimes startling invective. But in general they were
discouraged from addressing the larger goals of the government and the nation—the
keepers of the ideal were fair game, but the ideal itself was not. Such sentiment was
echoed by the populace, for even those who were not entirely in agreement with the
government were at a fundamental level sympathetic to the nation-building cause. In
the years before Japanese aggression led the nation into World War II, something like
a reversal of these rules took place.

Nearly a decade after the Meiji regime was established, Saigō Takamori, a
Satsuma samurai who had fought in the Boshin wars, led a sizeable southern force in
a revolt that in some ways was the last stand of old feudalism. Though it was
instigated by the announcement of rice-stipend cutbacks, in a broader ideological
sense the rebellion was about the policies of the Meiji leaders, reclaiming the Imperial
institution from those who used it as a mouth-piece for their cause, and setting the
nation on its ‘rightful’ course towards expansion in Asia and expulsion of Western
influences. The rebellion stirred ultra-nationalist sentiments which would cast their
shadows far into the future; Saigō himself became a folk hero for his loyalty to
principle (Storry 109-12). Indeed, such tragic heroes are quite common in Japanese
history, as (Morris) elaborates. In the wake of Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese
War, it was these sentiments which were once again directed at politicians, ostensibly for denying the Emperor and Japan, by their incompetence, Saigō’s goals. And over the next decades, it was the discrepancy between the real actions of politicians and state—which, due to dishonesty, bickering and economic woes did little to earn confidence—and the alluring notions of what the state and Emperor should be, as espoused by increasing numbers of ‘patriotic’ nationalists (many of whom had close ties to the army), which helped pave the way to war. The army and government were essentially parallel structures, both taking Imperial orders but with little power over each other, a situation which ultimately allowed the army to make its own plans for the nation. It is true that the Emperor might have stopped this trend by directed edict, and indeed there is some evidence of Imperial inclination to do so (Storry 183). But such action would almost certainly have brought about unrest, perhaps even civil war, which the government feared still more. The forces of militarism, under the banner of patriotism, thus rendered legislators all but powerless: for if the army’s demands were not met, who could guarantee order and discipline in society?

As a logical corollary to this, the traditional ban on satirizing the state implicitly became a ban on satirizing the designs of those who purported to glorify it. Darracott points out that “No national press is free in times of war.... The Second World War was no exception. Cartoonists did not have a choice about whether to follow national policies if their work was to be printed. Indeed, one role for cartoonists was to act like government spokesmen” (Darracott 8-9). This was certainly the case in Japan leading up to and during the War. Tōkyō Puck continued publication throughout the war, and a new publication called Manga, edited by the
famous Kondō Hidezō, appeared as well, but cartoonists themselves were often grouped into ‘patriotic organizations’ which dictated to a large extent the content of each magazine. Other cartoonists were recruited by the army and drew propagandist cartoons, both to advance the Japanese cause and to demoralize the nation’s enemies. Because of this the line between cartoons in a general sense and political cartoons, which had for some time been easily discernable, was once again blurred; the satiric seiji fūshi manga all but ceased. In their place, though, most cartoons took on a political, if propagandist dimension. Cartoonists were forced to operate in a climate not unlike that of Tokugawa times, where accurate political information was severely limited. Schodt quotes Ienaga Saburō as saying that “officially sanctioned ‘information’ during the war years turned Japan into an intellectual insane asylum run by the demented” (Schodt Manga! 59). Such strong sentiments aside, the wartime cartoons do present some interesting cases, especially where traditional techniques are employed alongside more recently acquired Western styles.

Striking, again, is the use of traditional myths and values to convey political messages. Amidst the nationalist fervour of the war it is perhaps not surprising that these themes would be popular, but it is impressive just how effectively such imagery could convey both explicit and implicit meaning. One cartoon, which appeared in early 1942 shortly after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, targets Roosevelt and Churchill \( \text{(Figure 6)} \). In it, Japanese aircraft have swooped in and lifted up each man’s coattails, revealing Roosevelt to possess the hindquarters of a horse and Churchill those of a badger. Moreover, Roosevelt’s garment is lined with $-signs, while Churchill’s is adorned with the skull and crossbones of death. It is not hard to
comprehend the explicit message of such a piece: the Japanese air force had exposed the two Allied leaders as mercenary and murderous, and in any event not what they pretended to be. But there is more to this than at first meets the eye. Roosevelt’s equine underpinnings, for instance, refer to the Japanese word bakyaku (馬脚), which means ‘to give oneself away’ or ‘reveal one’s true colours.’ Churchill’s badger, meanwhile, evokes the tanuki, a traditional symbol of cunning and artifice. Roosevelt also brandishes a dagger, which pales both physically and metaphorically beside the traditional samurai sword—daggers speak of ulterior plans and backstabbing; swords of valour and bushidō—and which also bears a suspicious resemblance to the Christian cross. The entire composition, therefore, plays on the traditional notion of outward demeanour (omote) and inner reality (ura), to suggest to the Japanese public in a very natural and culturally intimate way that these men were not to be trusted. Likewise, Manga magazine featured several covers of Roosevelt depicting him as a sort of ogre with grotesquely large hands, sunken eyes, and protruding vampire teeth. Though the portrayal of leaders in unflattering ways was a staple of propagandists the world over (and in Japan the legacy of Wirgman), there is a certain beastly, otherworldly quality about the image that inextricably suggests the yōkai of Japanese lore.
Another example taken from *Manga* magazine is entitled ‘ridding oneself of Anglo-Americanism,’ and shows a Japanese maiden combing her hair as what at first appears to be dandruff falls to the ground before her (Figure 7). On closer examination, though, we see that the ‘dandruff’ is actually representative of so-called Western values: ‘Anglo-American thought;’ ‘individualism;’ ‘selfishness;’ ‘hedonism;’ ‘money worship;’ ‘liberalism;’ ‘extravagance;’ and ‘materialism.’ Again, while the values being purged are in some measure deterrents in their own right—for who would contrive to be selfish or extravagant in time of war?—the chief impact of the piece comes from its subtle allusion to values near to the Japanese heart, chief among them the notion of purity. In a sense the girl in the picture is a sort of everywoman, an example of an upstanding citizen doing her duty to the land. But she is also consummately modest, and her features can only evoke images of the maidens in *ukiyo* prints of old—she is, in effect, an allegory for the essential, rightful Japan, modest, diligent, obedient and above all, with her snow white skin, pure of spirit and intention. Indeed, this spirit of purity is not uncommon in Japanese cartoons, often expressed with images of maidens or, referring to traditional warrior values, swords. About the latter Darracott makes the point that “a bayoneted figure in a Japanese cartoon has not just a bodily significance, but a spiritual one too” (137).
In addition to general commentary on the war, a new class of *manga*, known as *zōsan manga*, or ‘production comics,’ also appeared. These were intended to increase morale and output in the labour sector, and took the form both of panel cartoons not unlike editorial cartoons, and serial comics intended for workers to read for entertainment (Ito 465). A typical example of the editorial variety, by Katō Etsurō from 1944, shows a row of young workers being shielded by another worker from a walking bottle of alcohol which bears the name *yūwaku*, or ‘temptation’ (*Figure 8*).

Once again, it is easy to understand the general message of this cartoon, but it is in the subtleties that its full impact is conveyed. The bottle, for instance, bears the limbs of a traditional monster akin to those which caused such speculation in the Utagawa print discussed above. More significantly, the young workers are shielded from temptation by an older co-worker—a reference to the *sempai/kōhai* values of senior and junior, and to the need for teamwork and co-operation, even (depending on the bottle’s intentions) self-sacrifice. Cartoonists thus drew upon strongly ingrained traditions and values to remind viewers of their duties to the true spirit of the nation, and hence to the militaristic regime which used those values as its banner. Moreover, in contrast to the cartoons of the late Tokugawa period, which contained few references to state or individual, and to those of the Meiji and Taishō periods, which freely depicted

*Figure 8. ‘An Older Brother’s Duty.’* By Katō Etsurō. From Schodt, *Manga!*. 
individuals and factions but avoided editorializing the state, war-time cartoons often addressed the ideals of the nation without representing a more specific individual entity.

As we have seen, many propaganda cartoons aimed at the Japanese people sought to encourage and reinforce values which might be considered integral to the nation’s culture. Similarly, cartoons which aimed to denigrate war-time opponents often relied on exposing the targets’ deviance from Japanese ideals (Friedman). In either case the technique was effective both because with popular knowledge of traditions and fables nearly ubiquitous it was ensured a very broad understanding, and because by its very nature it evoked the essential Japan promised by its issuers. But the propaganda war was not fought solely on the home-front. The same cartoonists who produced pieces for domestic consumption—many of whom had been critical of the military before the war and would revert to liberalism in its aftermath—also produced pamphlets and postcards designed to be dropped behind enemy lines (Schodt *Manga!* 57-58). This practice was not uncommon and was also practiced by the allies, but it is interesting to see how Japanese cartoonists attempted to convince their enemies of the messages they conveyed.

Many of the leaflets dropped over American troops, for instance, sought to instil fear in soldiers that they had been forsaken by their leaders, their positions were indefensible, and their wives were being unfaithful (Schodt *Manga!* 57-58). These are noteworthy chiefly because there is little, aside from a reversal of flags and hair-colour, to distinguish them from similar messages conveyed by US propaganda leaflets.
Aside from suggesting that the fear of abandonment was perceived universally on both sides of the Pacific, what is of greatest interest is just how perfectly Japanese cartoonists had been able to mimic Western cartoon techniques—the ‘punch picture’ had come full circle (indeed many cartoonists complained after the war that they had forgotten how to draw Japanese-style cartoons). Beyond those leaflets designed to sow doubt, many play off soldiers’ assumed desire to return home to their wives and homes. Many of these—though not all, to be sure—are not particularly convincing: “Don’t die, it’s terrible to be dead!” pleads one wife to her husband, while another, whose man has apparently heeded Japanese warnings to leave the war, coos “Oh yes, kiss me hard. Let’s enjoy life more” (qtd. in Friedman). Yet another, titled “Ticket to Armistice,” has a drawing of what appears to be a sliced ham, presumably to remind the reader of home cooking. Regardless of how many US soldiers were actually swayed by this material, however, it is significant that the themes of sex, women, and food were used repeatedly, and that many targeted personal desires more than principles. While cartoons within Japan called upon the public to believe in and embody the spirit of the nation and to steel themselves against the temptations of life, propagandists clearly believed US troops to be susceptible to just such pitfalls.

It is noteworthy, too, that even during the war Japan never established a definite symbol for itself. The British had the lion and in a more general sense the goddess Britannia, while the US likewise had the American eagle and Uncle Sam. Austria and Germany had eagles of their own; Russia a bear; and the list goes on (Darracott 13). These symbols are very common in cartoons from around the world, and many are still used. Foreign cartoonists did establish some general trends in
representing Japan, frequently portraying the Emperor or imperial chrysanthemum crest, or a samurai, or the hinomaru sunburst, but little consistency was shown by Japanese cartoonists in representing their nation. Some years earlier Tōkyō Puck and other publications experimented briefly with the sun goddess Amaterasu as a national symbol, and produced some effective cartoons (Duus "Weapons" 985). Despite its familiarity to nearly all Japanese, though, the image did not become established. During the war, Japan was a well-covered Sumo wrestler who stared down a comparatively feeble Chiang Kai-shek, and a hand reaching up from the deep to sink American warships (Duus; Friedman). Somewhat more strangely, it was also a small, red, almost cute crab poised to sever the air-line of an American scuba diver—a reference to Japanese efforts to block allied supply lines in south Asia (Figure 9).

In fact, such examples of what at least to Western eyes seem strange symbolic choices are not uncommon. A small, red crab certainly lacks obvious swagger or menace, but the reality is that the image would most likely have raised few eyebrows in Japan. The metaphor of diver, lifeline and pincher was, after all, a valid one which conveyed its point succinctly. The crab figures in a number of Japanese folk stories, one of the better known of which, ‘the monkey-crab war,’ finds a highly principled

Figure 9. Japan’s deep-sea forces. The text warns of the vulnerability of allied supply lines. From Friedman.
crab striving to avenge its father’s honour against an unscrupulous monkey, so the metaphor would, in fact, make perfect sense to many Japanese, and would actually convey a sense of Japan’s righteousness. A cartoon depicting the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, on the other hand, makes its own symbols, without any obvious relation to established icons (Figure 10). In the cartoon, Hitler and Stalin appear to shoot at one another, but the ‘bullets’ turn out to be hands which clasp in friendship under the text ‘Russo-German Pact.’ Meanwhile, a peculiar little figure with a desk-globe for a head—replete with support-bar—observes the proceedings with a look of utter shock. Again, the intended message is clear enough: Hitler and Stalin surprised the world by signing their pact. But both the clasping-bullets and the desk-globe character have little symbolic background—rather, it is simply for their utility in the circumstance that they are employed. Though most cartoons of the day did rely on imagery familiar to their audience, these examples confirm that Japanese cartoonists felt little need to adhere to established symbols for their subject matter.
Indeed, when representing their nation, Japanese cartoonists during the war most frequently employed a human being appropriate to the situation, and it is precisely this flexibility which gave the symbolism strength. An athletic young boxer with the Japanese flag about his head easily vanquished his Western opponents in the ring; an impressively muscular soldier proved the benefits of eating unpolished rice; a young girl, as mentioned above, showed how to deal with the threat of Western values (Darracott; Duus, “Weapons;” Darracott). Without an all-encompassing symbol like Uncle Sam, it might seem that Japanese cartoons lacked a tool to unify their readers. But Duus makes the astute observation that, in a culture with so many shared traditions and values, the use of an ‘everyman/everywoman’ symbol is likely a greater force in identifying people with nation than an unchanging icon (Duus "Weapons" 986). In a comparatively heterogeneous nation like the US a universal symbol is needed, for no obvious ‘everyman’ or ‘everywoman’ exists. Universal symbols, however, represent what a nation stands for, not what its people actually are—so, in its affinity with real people and changing times, and in its incorporation, instead, of unchanging elements of tradition and legend, Japanese symbolism holds much power.

Post War

In the years immediately following the War, Japan once again set about plotting a course for modernization. Many had their confidence in leadership deeply shaken when wartime realities, hidden for so long behind official propaganda, became apparent (Duus Modern 254). For a time leftist voices were strong, calling for adherence to Article 9, the non-aggression clause of the US-penned constitution, and
for Japan to pursue peace with its Asian neighbours while dropping the dreams of Western style ascendancy that had led it into the ‘dark valley’ of the War years. In reality, though, most Japanese were chiefly concerned with putting food on their tables. With unification of the Liberal and Democratic parties into the LDP and the consolidation of influence that accompanied it, Socialist movements were gradually weakened. Ideological confrontations between progressives and conservatives had been relatively common, but the student protests and Miike Coal Mine strike of 1960 “marked an end to the politics of confrontation, which were soon to give way to the politics of complacency” (Duus Modern 289). Prime Minister Ikeda’s tolerance of the Left effectively undercut its impact, while his Income Doubling Plan pacified—some say anesthetised—the public. In the meantime, the Diet had throughout the 1950s passed various laws that gave government comprehensive control over private investment, reorganized the electoral system to weaken radical influences, and generally consolidated its powers. This led to the so-called “iron triangle” relationship between constituencies, government bureaucracies, and the Diet, which would hold major influence over the affairs of the nation and its people. Whatever the particular factors, the results are undeniable, as the soaring economic figures and growing industries attest. But in a very real sense, even after the government scandals, the bubble economy, the collapse of the bubble, and the advent of a new Imperial reign, the postwar order persists today (Buruma Inventing "epilogue").

Though the political cartoon played a fairly prominent role throughout the War, any trend towards real popularity had been derailed by 1945. The function of political cartoons had changed drastically from subverting to supporting authority, and serial
comics, which had only begun to gain readership before the war, were still in relative infancy. The end of the War heralded the rise of the *manga* genre seen today, and this growth ultimately aided in the marginalization of the political cartoon. *Manga* and political cartoons alike did for a time champion the cause of the liberal movements, though this was relatively short lived. In a sense, the majority of post-War *manga* became popular, especially with youth, precisely because they provided a means of escape from reality: amid the ruins and uncertainty, any diversionary tale was a chance to dream of better times. Duus, in his introduction to Ishinomori’s *Japan Inc.*, says that “While the culture of the intellectual elite—the ‘Iwanami’ culture of the general and critical monthly magazines—was swept up in debates over ‘peace,’ ‘democracy,’ and ‘feudalism,’ mass culture was called on to answer a deep yearning for cheap and accessible escape” (Ishinomori "introduction"). A generation raised on these new, popular *manga* created new opportunities for cartoonists as it grew older, and progressively more adult-oriented genres sprang up to meet demand. The excitement of escape, meanwhile, remained acute, even as mass consumerism proliferated with the nation’s rapidly improving economic fortunes. The *manga* boom had begun.

But as this trend progressed, Schodt points out, “A major side effect of the rise of story comics [was] the decline of the cleverly constructed single-panel “editorial” or satirical cartoon as known in the newspapers and magazines of the West” (Schodt *Manga!* 151). He notes a clear decline in the quality of modern political cartoons, perhaps the result of the most skilled cartoonists opting to enter the lucrative serial *manga* trade, and the resultant demise of publications that once showcased more
politically themed comics. It has been suggested, too, that modern Japanese politicians have become increasingly indecisive and, at least for the purposes of the cartoonist, weak—that is, real politicians and politics pale in comparison to the fictional characters of the *manga* world. It would seem that a sort of dichotomy has emerged between the ideals expressed in *manga*—determination, perseverance, etc.—and the reality seen in everyday life. Meanwhile, cartoonist and critic Ono Kosei complains that “Japanese raised on the fast-paced, cinematic style of story-comics are just not used to trying to figure out what a clever cartoon says—they have no patience” (Schodt *Manga!* 152).

Most Japanese dailies do contain one or two serial comic strips, generally of a humorous, broadly innocent, and in any event relatively apolitical vein. A common theme in these is domestic life, especially situations that would be quite familiar to many readers, such as the tribulations of a perennially flustered ‘salaryman’ and his household in *Nono-chan*. At some level these strips might be seen as comments on the average Japanese life, but their main aim is clearly to amuse, to provide a chance for real-world analogs of *Nono-chan*’s family to chuckle as they set about their daily routines. Political cartoons, not unlike their counterparts in Western papers, are usually featured on the editorial page, are generally comprised of a single panel, and address current events. Occasionally, too, a cartoon will accompany a particular editorial article, and its content will be tailored accordingly. In these latter cases, though, the cartoon becomes more an illustration than a self-contained statement, an aid to understanding rather than a product of free opinion. In his study of election-time political cartoons, Feldman found the Prime Minister to be the “long lasting,
readily available target of the press,” and the “perennial loser in the editorial cartoons of the Japanese dailies” (579). Of course many political cartoons do depict officials other than the prime minister, but Feldman’s research raises some noteworthy points. In particular, modern political cartoons often seem to lampoon certain ‘designated’ targets as much out of habit as legitimate editorial necessity, and “portray and reflect political reality,” rather than commenting, say, on how a situation should be (Feldman 579). A survey of recent issues of the Asahi Shinbun certainly supports these findings, as recognizable political figures are generally shown facing the very issues that fill the current events columns alongside. The employment of the ‘everyman’ remains common, but the hanjimono concealment of the past is not nearly as evident. Artists’ names are often given prominently below each piece, with the effect that a cartoon’s message may more easily be seen as individual opinion. Metaphors, meanwhile, are frequently simple, and often do not draw on much beyond the reader’s common sense—one cartoon from 25 April, 2004, which appears just below an article on changes to the pension system, represents pensions as a once stately but now withering tree, being ‘watered’ with a reform bill by a disinterested bureaucrat. The cartoon is effective, but is in obvious contrast to the complexity of

Figure 11. The text at the bottom reads “What happened to all the ‘self-responsibility’ that caused this?” From the Asahi Shinbun.
some of its ancestors. Yet it is quite likely that the modern cartoonist has little choice in the matter.

It has already been mentioned that politics is seen by many contemporary Japanese as uninteresting, or at least insufficiently interesting to warrant puzzling through the nuances of a detailed political cartoon. On this point alone, it is understandable that modern political cartoons would often take a back seat to their more entertaining *manga* counterparts, and that political cartoonists would have to cater to a lower denominator than before. Yet there are more factors at play here. To deny exceptions would be overstating the case, but the censorship faced by modern political cartoonists—and indeed journalists of all stripes—is reminiscent of that faced by their Meiji counterparts. The imperial house and other traditional and cultural taboos remain strong, yet organizations like the monolithic Dentsu advertising agency also play major roles. The formation of a vibrant popular culture during Tokugawa times was, as we have seen, vital to the early appreciation of political art. Today, according to some, “Dentsu does more than any single corporation, anywhere in the world, to mould popular culture, both directly and through hordes of subcontractors” (van Wolferen 176). This influence reaches all forms of Japanese media, and the content of newspapers, or at least the politically sensitive content, is carefully monitored and adjusted. With the close relationship of Dentsu and the LDP, it is not unreasonable to assume that truly damaging cartoons might have some difficulty making it to press. Gone is the public curiosity that drove late Tokugawa and Meiji cartoonists to test the limits of censors, and justified whole publications devoted to political *manga*. With a reduced audience and restricted subject matter, the
mainstream modern Japanese political cartoon thus fulfills a prescribed role, but as an editorial weapon is rather blunted. Indeed, one might even make the argument that such a state is fairly ‘natural’ in Japan—it was political authority, after all, that chose what aspects of Chinese culture to adopt fifteen centuries ago; that closed the door to Western influences in Tokugawa times; that selected what to accept in Meiji times and clamped down on subversive ideas in deference to the emperor-centric values of the restoration. It was again the power-holders that until 1945 kept a dedicated police force to restrict ‘dangerous thoughts’ (van Wolferen 19). Political arrangements have always played a notable role in determining the limits of Japanese expression. With this in mind, perhaps the real surprise is not that political cartoons have seen a reduction in influence, but that they ever enjoyed significant power at all.

Conclusion

It is easy to see that graphic expression has long been an important part of Japanese society. From the earliest graffiti-like images to the souvenir Ōtsu-e to the action-packed manga periodicals prevalent today, the course of Japanese history is limned by pictures. And the changing roles of these pictures, beginning as aesthetic morsels for the wealthy and gradually, over the centuries, filtering down through society to form one of the most ubiquitous forms of popular entertainment, offer useful insights into the equally dynamic paradigms of Japanese socio-political order. So too political cartoons, whose growth, efflorescence, and ultimate relegation to the margins of public and political discourse illuminates deeply rooted facets of Japanese
culture—for though graphic expression may be endemic, the channelling of that expression into pointed, invective messages has always had its complications.

Various aspects of Japanese society aided in the appreciation of popular imagery and by extension political cartoons, and allowed artists to create commonly understood and culturally powerful messages. The adoption of kanji may have fostered a collective affinity for graphical expression, and the popularity of visual puzzles taught the people to seek meaning in complex images. The development of a strong popular culture meant that familiarity with traditional legends and other knowledge was relatively uniform, and cartoons throughout the ages show that artists took advantage of these facts with great effect: traditional avatars of virtue and morality are extremely common, at least until the end of the War, and significantly enhance the artist’s message. Meanwhile the employment of ‘everyman/everywoman’ imagery had the subtle but powerful effect of reinforcing and making more intimate that relationship of people to nation. Van Wolferen alludes to this when he says that “Japanese show an unusually strong tendency to take remarks about any aspects of their country as remarks about themselves” (van Wolferen xii). At their most powerful, Japanese political cartoons were capable of conveying a very personal message, one that could be interpreted uniformly but with great nuance.

The first politically themed art, as we have seen, arose more from the speculations of a curious public than from any concerted attempt by the artist to make a particular point, or arouse popular sentiment. This should perhaps come as little surprise in a society where each social class tended to keep to its own affairs, and
where authority—the habitual target of political cartoons—was largely invisible. True, public interest did grow as the Tokugawa period came to a close, and cartoons became a popular source of news and political gossip, but it is difficult to say whether this represents a fundamental shift toward political involvement, or simply an idle and temporary curiosity that expanded as the government grew less and less able to maintain traditional order. Wirgman and his associates later did much to promote the development of the political cartoon in a Western form, and pointed political messages did eventually become common—we might say this period was the heyday of the Japanese political cartoon. But here, again, it is unclear whether this role ever became established as a truly popular method of political expression, and indeed whether it was due to anything more than a fortuitous coalescence of social and political factors. Political cartoons played a significant part in championing the cause of the People’s Rights Movements, to be sure, but it is debatable to what extent those movements were actually of the people. This is not to suggest that pro-democratic sentiments did not ring true among the populace, but the cause was led by a relatively small group of vested interests, and it was these that established the political cartoon, through publications like the *Maru Maru Chinbun*, as a mouthpiece for their views. The years before World War II saw the press in general, political cartoons included, become an instrument of government propaganda, and the years since the war have seen steadily falling public interest in the affairs of an entrenched political system. Today, political cartoons fulfill an informational role not unlike their late Tokugawa ancestors, but without the degree of popular curiosity: today’s Japanese have seen their institutions of authority, and found them rather bland. So it seems the Japanese political cartoon has yet to become established as a fully independent medium of
expression. The groundwork is there—a graphically inclined and relatively homogeneous popular culture, with a diverse set of common cultural experiences and icons—but the political cartoon’s fortunes have always been linked to the causes which wielded it, and to public interest in those causes.

Patrick Smith calls modern *manga* “...a prevalent addiction because they are an outlet for people whose social codes are rigid and confining,” and goes on to state that “This makes them a kind of inverse image of the Japanese, a way to gather and explore the collective wishful thinking” (Smith 316). In a way, many *manga* do express deeply rooted cultural values, the same values political cartoons employed to such effect—loyalty, bravery, stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity, etc. But often they express these values in aestheticized, exaggerated, almost visceral terms. Though it has been suggested that *manga* are gradually succumbing to the same bureaucracy and neutrality that plague political cartoons, the appeal of this expression remains large. Buruma points out that in Japan the interplay of *tatemae*, the public façade of how things ought to be, and *honne*, an individual’s true feelings, often leaves the Westerner, “raised in a tradition that regards the Truth as something sacred,” unsure of what is real and what isn’t (Buruma *Mirror*). Looked at this way, the stylized content of so many *manga* might be seen as “ritual explosions of *honne* played out according to the aesthetic rules of *tatemae*” (Buruma *Mirror* 225). If this is so, then modern *manga* might be a sort of stimulant, a drug to satisfy popular cravings for an exciting, morally impulsive world it cannot find in reality. Political cartoons, which at least by Western standards should express the *honne*, the Truth, of
socio-political truth, are forced into the *tatema* required of any critical voice in Japan, and have difficulty competing with the escapism of their more fantastic sibling.

Perhaps this will change if political and cultural inertia can be overcome. The political cartoon remains, after all, a capable medium, needing only to capture once again the public’s imagination to regain its influence. But this, it would seem, must wait until Japanese socio-political reality becomes more dynamic, and gives the public some reason to think it might change. Of course, whether the public really cares, and whether this situation is anything out of the ordinary for Japan, is open to continued debate.
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<http://www psywarrior com /JapanPSYOPWW2.html>.


