

Sun Tribe: Cultural Production and Popluar Culture in Post-War Japan

Deborah Shamoon

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.01. INTRODUCTION (Return to Index)

In Japan in 1955, 23-year-old writer Ishihara Shintaro created a sensation with the publication of *Taiyo no kisetsu* [Season of the Sun], a novel which seemed to both reflect and define the idleness, casual sexuality and aimless violence of the first generation to grow up in the aftermath of World War II. By 1956, Nikkatsu Studios had made the novel into a successful movie, and the generation of teenagers depicted in the novel and the movie became known as the “taiyozoku,” or sun tribe. The summer of 1956 became known as the heyday of the “taiyozoku boom” (Harada 38). In the same year, Shintaro wrote another novel about the taiyozoku, *Kurutta kajitsu* [Crazy Fruit], which was also made into a film, this time starring his younger brother, Yujiro. Although it was controversial for its depictions of sex and violence, the film was a huge hit. Even more than his older brother, Yujiro became a new ideal of young male identity. In this article, I will examine these two novels and the accompanying films as a series of related cultural events that addressed a specific audience, namely, teenage boys in post-Occupation Japan.

Because of their explosive popularity, the taiyozoku novels and films attracted the attention of many different types of readers and viewers, some enthusiastic and some hostile. The novels and films held different meanings for different audiences, such as for teenage boys and for their concerned parents. While these two audiences may have arrived at conflicting interpretations, it is not my intention to argue which is correct and which is incorrect. The reactions of both the engaged, receptive audience and the hostile audience are not merely interpretative but also productive in that they all contributed to the taiyozoku boom. In reading *Taiyo no kisetsu* and *Kurutta kajitsu* as popular culture texts, I am not interested in assigning to these texts a single, fixed meaning, which would necessarily be arbitrary. Rather, I will look at them in their historical context as cultural events. In an essay on reception theory, “Texts in History,” Tony Bennett argues for a method of studying literature beginning with the audience, not with the critic’s own close reading of a text. This method of analysis, he writes, “would consist, not in the study of texts as self-contained givens, but in the study of texts as constituted objects-to-be read

within the different reading formations that have modulated their existence as historically active, culturally received texts” (69). In other words, the text itself does not contain a single “correct” meaning, not even the critic’s interpretation of the text. Rather, Bennett advocates examining how certain reading formations or audiences use these texts, and how the same texts can have different meanings for different audiences.

This article will examine *Taiyo no kisetsu* and *Kurutta kajitsu* in light of the responses of three different groups: the teenage fans, the media, and the highbrow literary world, or *bundan*. Readers who perceived themselves as part of the *taiyozoku* saw the texts as a celebration of youth culture, and in particular the new ideal of Japanese masculinity, encouraging identification and imitation by teenagers. Although the *taiyozoku* novels and films strove to create a sense of authenticity, of spontaneously mirroring real trends in society, they were also a product of media and critical attention, both positive and negative. While newspapers and magazines provided a forum for older audiences troubled by the new youth culture, by the perceived decline of morals and by the crisis of Japanese identity in the post war period, their attention only contributed to the rising fame of the novels and films. Attention from the *bundan*, and particularly the award of the Akutagawa prize, was also instrumental in *Taiyo no kisetsu*’s rise to fame, even though critics tended to emphasize its cultural rather than literary merit. From the teenage fans to the concerned PTA to the highbrow critics, all participated in the creation of the idea of the *taiyozoku*. My aim in this paper is to explore the ways in which audiences appropriate texts as sites of cultural production.

Before looking at these audience responses, let us take a brief look at the background surrounding the appearance of the novels and films and the Ishihara brothers’ rise to fame. Ishihara Shintaro was born in 1932 to a wealthy family and survived the war years with relatively little hardship. In 1952 he entered Hitotsubashi University, where he published fiction in the school magazine. In 1955, *Taiyo no kisetsu* appeared in the July issue of the literary journal *Bungakkai*, which also awarded him a prize as a promising new author. In January of 1956, the novel won the Akutagawa prize, beginning the year of the *taiyozoku* boom. By May, Nikkatsu studios had produced a film version of *Taiyo no kisetsu*, directed by Furukawa Takumi and starring Nagato Yukihiro. Shintaro’s influence helped to land his younger brother Yujiro a small role in the film as a boxer. The movie was a hit, and in the space of one year, the book version sold 260,000 copies (Harada 38). After the success of the first film, Nikkatsu rushed other *taiyozoku* films into production. By July 1956, they had released *Kurutta kajitsu*, featuring Yujiro in his first starring role, at the request of his brother. According to film critic Sato Tadao, filming started before Shintaro had even finished writing the manuscript (322), although *Kurutta kajitsu* did appear later in 1956 in book form. The filming was rushed and the director, Nakahira Ko, and his actors were novices, but in spite of, or perhaps because of the film’s amateur qualities, *Kurutta kajitsu* became an even bigger hit. This time it was the film that attracted more attention than the novel, sparking calls for censorship and launching Yujiro’s 30 year career as a film and TV star.

Both *Taiyo no kisetsu* and *Kurutta kajitsu* feature wealthy but directionless college boys who spend their time dancing and drinking in jazz clubs, hunting for girls in the Ginza, and sailing around Sagami Bay. The story of *Taiyo no kisetsu* concerns a university student named Tatsuya, who joins the school boxing club, attracted to both the violence and the foreign cachet of the sport. However, the majority of the novel is not about boxing, but about his love affair with an independent, wealthy girl named Eiko. Both Tatsuya and Eiko are examples of wild youth: they engage in casual sex with each other and with other people, and Tatsuya gets in as many fights outside the ring as in it. Even Eiko's sudden death from a botched abortion fails to change Tatsuya's wild ways. The novel ends with Tatsuya's violent outburst at Eiko's funeral—an image of disaffected youth and the failure of love to bring redemption. Like *Taiyo no kisetsu*, *Kurutta kajitsu* is set in jazz clubs and on sailboats along the coast near Zushi. The plot concerns the romantic rivalry of two brothers, Natsuhisa and Haruji. They both fall in love with a mysterious young woman named Eri, who is in fact married to an American officer. Eri seems to be in love with both brothers and unable to choose between the two, but Natsuhisa (the tough older brother, played by Yujiro in the film) attempts to make the decision for her by taking her away on his sailboat. Haruji finds out at the last minute and chases them in a motorboat, which he smashes into the side of the sailboat, killing his brother in a jealous rage. Here again we see an image of disaffected, amoral youth. The characters of both *Taiyo no kisetsu* and *Kurutta kajitsu* live with reckless abandon, indulging in casual sex and drunken brawling while living the high life in Tokyo and Zushi.

The success of the *taiyozoku* novels and films among teenagers seemed to reflect a major shift in mood since the end of World War II, and signalled the appearance of a new generation. The American Occupation had officially ended in 1952. Although most people still lived in straitened circumstances, the chaos and privation brought on by World War II at last seemed to be nearing an end. Within days of *Taiyo no kisetsu* winning the Akutagawa Prize, an article by Nakano Yukio appeared in *Bungei Shunju* bearing the title, "The 'Post-War' Is Already Over" [*Mohaya "sengo" de wa nai*], a phrase which became a slogan for the optimism of the late 1950s (Harada 68). The publication later the same year of a government "white paper" showing the growth in the Japanese economy had returned to prewar levels only confirmed the general mood of optimism (Dower 559). Furthermore, by 1956, an entire generation had attended school in the new post-war education system, and having escaped the compulsory military service and nationalist education of their parents' generation, they represented a significant shift in Japanese identity. Writer Sugiura Akihira said of *Taiyo no kisetsu*, "Educated under the ideals of freedom, democracy and pacifism. . .and with the return of economic prosperity and the increasing availability of material commodities, already the *taiyozoku* were raised with high expectations[. . .] *Taiyo no kisetsu*, for better or worse, was the voice of young people who had grown up in the post-war education system" (quoted in Harada, 38). The *taiyozoku* novels and films were the expression of the first post-war generation.

.02. THE POPULAR RESPONSE (Return to Index)

The fact that both Ishihara brothers were themselves part of the taiyozoku gave the novels and films an air of authenticity, to which fans responded enthusiastically by imitating them. Shintaro still a senior in college when he first published *Taiyo no kisetsu*. He portrayed himself publicly as a member of the taiyozoku. In an essay that appeared in the September 1956 issue of “*Chuo koron*”, he refers to the taiyozoku as “my generation” [wareware no sedai] using a term usually reserved for speaking of “we Japanese” in a nationalistic sense. Although he was later overshadowed by his brother, at the beginning of the taiyozoku boom, Shintaro was the public icon of the lifestyle he described in his novels. In 1956, he tied for first place with Rikidozan in a magazine popularity poll (Raine 210). Shintaro’s elevation to celebrity status and his public persona reinforced the idea that he modeled his characters on real teenagers, and the lifestyle and mannerisms he depicted were authentic. But Shintaro did not simply describe the taiyozoku. By living the taiyozoku lifestyle himself, he set the trend for thousands of teenagers eager to live the same way.

Yujiro, however, eventually outstripped his brother in popularity and as a model of the taiyozoku boy. Yujiro was a student at Keio University during his brother’s rise to fame, and originally appeared on the set of *Taiyo no kisetsu* not as an actor, but as a model and dialog coach for the actors playing the main characters (Sato 322). Even after he became a star, he insisted that he was not an actor, that he was just playing himself. With his uneven teeth, clipped, indistinct manner of speech, and aggressive, libidinal presence, he certainly seemed different on screen from the more refined trained actors (Sato 322). In interviews, he claimed, “I never learn the lines. I’m just myself on the screen” (quoted in Raine, 215). Although, as we shall see, his image softened a bit from the ruthless self-interest he displayed in *Kurutta kajitsu*, he essentially played himself in film after film. As with Shintaro, the weekly entertainment magazines described in detail his glamorous personal life: he drove the same expensive cars and engaged in the same leisure activities as his characters on screen. Together, the brothers sailed in the Transpacific Yacht Race and came in second in their class. In 1960, in a further combination of his onscreen and off-screen persona, Yujiro married Kitahara Mie, who played Eri in *Kurutta kajitsu*, and who starred opposite him in a dozen subsequent films (Schilling 74). While it is hardly unusual for a movie star to lead a glamorous lifestyle, in Yujiro’s case, not only was there a close connection between his character on and off screen, he had led the same lifestyle even before he became a star. In this regard, fans recognized his performance on screen as natural, unaffected, and authentic. Young audiences responded to this sense of authenticity. The taiyozoku lifestyle was seen as something arising naturally from the conditions of the new post-war generation, and as proof, here were the lives of two brothers displayed publicly and available for imitation.

In the novel *Taiyo no kisetsu*, Shintaro describes the youth of his day in terms that emphasize both their newness and their identity as a group:

A new generation brought forth new sentiments and a new code of morals, and these youths were growing up in such surroundings[. . .] The young unconsciously tried to destroy the morals of their elders--morals which always judged against the new generation. In the young people's eyes, the reward of virtue was dullness and vanity. While the older generation thought it was growing ever more broad-minded, but actually grew narrower in outlook, the young looked for something broad and fresh to build on. (28) In a sense, this description of inter-generational conflict is universal. However, the relation between generations was more complex in the immediate post-war period. The traditional morality of the older generation carried with it the specter of ultra-nationalism, and as Dower notes, the speed with which many older people had rejected fascism in favor of democracy cast doubt on their integrity (241). Thus, the morality of the older generation was open to severe criticism. In an interview with John Nathan, Shintaro sums up his cynicism about the older generation after the war in the following terms: "While we were at war, we were taught the glory of dying for the Emperor. The next thing I knew, it was all about remorse. Adults seemed shallow and hypocritical" (111). The younger generation represented a hope for a better society, but even though the youths Shintaro describes have abandoned the responsibilities of citizenship in favor of hedonism and self-indulgence, they are at the same time expressing the freedom of the new post-war society. The political situation in the immediate post-war period exacerbated the universal conflict between generations. The younger generation's criticism of their elders became an important part of their group identity. As Sugiura said, for better or worse, this was the new generation, and in making the book a best seller, they signaled their affinity with the characters Shintaro describes. *Taiyo no kisetsu* was the first novel to define the post-war generation in a convincing and appealing manner.

Taiyo no kisetsu addressed the new generation and elicited from them a sense of recognition, even while the lifestyle of most teens was quite different from that of the Ishiharas. Many of the pastimes celebrated in the novels and films were in fact unavailable to the average teenager, but reserved only for the very wealthy. Rather than simply a mirror of real life, *Taiyo no kisetsu* and *Kurutta kajitsu* are fantasies of wealth and privilege. The film version of *Kurutta kajitsu* in particular features ostentatious display of wealth. The boys lay about luxurious summerhouses, sail their own yachts, and drive around in sporty convertibles. This was not how most people lived: even by 1959 only one person in 131 owned a car (Schilling 37). Also, in the film version of *Kurutta kajitsu*, many of the objects associated with everyday life in Japan are replaced with Western objects, also symbols of wealth; the boys sleep on beds, not futons, their houses have wood floors and carpets rather than tatami, and they eat off fine china using forks and knives. The jazz clubs the boys frequent also cater to Americans, but the boys are not out of place there. Recalling the early days of the *taiyozoku* boom, Shintaro said, "Outside Tokyo, Japan was incredibly provincial in those days. Most kids had never seen yachts or water-skiing or motorcycles, and they certainly never carried on with girls the way we did." (Nathan 108). The lifestyle that Shintaro represented was something new to Japanese teens, and one that was out of reach for most of them.

But while many aspects of the Ishihara's lifestyle differed from those of their fans, teenagers still responded positively by adopting other markers of style and identity in the novels and films that were more available for imitation because the novels and films fostered such a strong sense of authenticity. Shintaro's GI style haircut became known as the "Shintaro cut," and especially after Yujiro appeared in the movies sporting the same style, it became extremely popular (Harada 38). In fact, fans eagerly imitated everything about Yujiro, from his Hawaiian shirts and "mambo pants" to his fast, clipped speech, to his swaggering gait (Raine 216). Shintaro remarked, "We bought fabric in bright colors and patterns and had one of Yujiro's girlfriends sew it into shirts—they knocked everybody out. Yujiro came back from Honolulu wearing a bracelet, and that created another fad. I was amazed" (Nathan 108). The film version of *Kurutta kajitsu* offers many shots that display Yujiro in a variety of outfits, from swim trunks to suits, posed as if he were in a clothing advertisement, and in a way, he is. While not every viewer could spend the summer water-skiing, anyone who wanted to be a part of the taiyozoku could get a "Shintaro cut" and wear a Hawaiian shirt. The encouragement to imitation extended beyond the film itself. Weekly entertainment magazines offered numerous photo spreads of Yujiro, as well as detailed descriptions of the clothing and habits of the taiyozoku (Raine 206). The emphasis on fashion in *Kurutta kajitsu* provided the means for any fan to become part of the taiyozoku boom by adopting at least the outward appearance of the taiyozoku lifestyle.

Taiyo no kisetsu and *Kurutta kajitsu* became popular with young people in part because they represented the mood of the times. Specifically, they addressed young people who were eager to rebel against the hypocrisy of adults and to indulge in newfound freedom and prosperity. Teenagers imitated the Ishihara brothers and their novels and films not simply because their associations with wealth and status, but because they were responding to the sense of authenticity surrounding the taiyozoku boom. In his novels, Shintaro defined his generation, and young fans demonstrated their membership in this newly defined group by imitating fashions they saw on screen.

.03. MEDIA RESPONSE (Return to Index)

The response to the taiyozoku boom in the popular press was of two varieties: the hostile response, which saw the taiyozoku as a threat to morality and Japanese identity, and the enthusiastic response, which sought to capitalize on the Ishiharas' popularity by running photographs and stories about them and the taiyozoku lifestyle. Both these responses affected the taiyozoku boom, not only by drawing attention to the taiyozoku novels and films, but by influencing a change in the taiyozoku films after 1956. The media was not merely reflecting a popular phenomenon, but actively shaping the taiyozoku culture.

With thousands of teenage boys copying the Ishihara brothers' clothing and mannerisms, it is easy to see why parents worried that their children might also copy some of the more unsavory

aspects of the taiyozoku. Shintaro's novels from 1956 to 1960 are rife with sex and violence. His characters divide their time between brawling and girl-hunting. *Shokei no heya* [The Punishment Room], also written in 1956 and made into a movie by Daiei, is about a college student who drugs and date-rapes a girl from his school. In revenge, his classmates beat him to death as she looks on. In *Taiyo no kisetsu*, even the girls who seem on the surface like proper young ladies display a shocking sexual precocity and penchant for violence. In one scene early on in the novel, Tatsuya realizes he is in love with Eiko, and demonstrates it in the following way: After his bath, Tatsuya sluiced himself down with cold water. Suddenly he made up his mind how he felt toward Eiko.

He covered the upper part of his body with a towel and went in and stood beyond the *shoji*, the paper-covered lattice door that divided the hall from the other room.

“Eiko!” he called out from outside, and sensing her turn round towards him, he thrust his erection through the thin white paper.

There was a dry snap as the paper ripped. Eiko looked startled, then she flung the book she had been reading at the screen door with all her might. The book hit its target and fell to the floor. (31) Eiko's gesture, however, is not fearful but flirtatious; the scene is a prelude to sex. While sex itself was hardly a taboo topic in Japanese literature, the characters in such novels were for the most part prostitutes, racketeers, and other marginal figures. That college students, supposedly Japan's best and brightest, might be engaging in such behavior seemed to indicate a shocking decline in morals. Given the perceived authenticity of the novels and films, and the widespread imitation by teenagers, many adults saw the taiyozoku boom as a threat.

While the novels and films were very similar, public outcry tended to concentrate on the films, *Shokei no heya* and *Kurutta kajitsu* in particular. Fearing that such films were having a negative effect on children, the PTA and housewives' societies launched a campaign of public protest against the movie studios and succeeded in having students banned from viewing the films in two prefectures and four cities (Harada 38). On August 3, 1956, the *Asahi Shinbun* reported, “‘taiyozoku’ films have become the target of intense criticism [. . .] housewives' associations and others have taken the initiative in restricting young people's access to such films, and have expressed to film companies the strong hope that they cease making movies that are only aimed at adults” (38). The studios responded quickly to this pressure, promising that they would be more responsible in the future; only a few weeks later, even the president of Nikkatsu, Hori Kyusaku, vowed to cease production of taiyozoku films (38). Although Nikkatsu went on to produce dozens of films starring Ishihara Yujiro, both the content of the films and Yujiro's persona underwent a fundamental shift that made taiyozoku films seem less threatening. Public protest had the effect of changing the very nature of the taiyozoku films.

Among those who responded negatively to the films, however, the problem was not simply the depiction of sex and violence, but that Yujiro and the world of the taiyozoku was “*nihonbanare*”

(not Japanese) or more colloquially, “dorai” (dry). In his essay, “Ishihara Yujiro: Youth, Celebrity and the Male Body in Late-1950s Japan,” Michael Raine explains that Yujiro’s popularity continued because of a calculated media campaign that reasserted his Japanese identity while maintaining the masculinity that had made him a star. As we have seen, the taiyozoku lifestyle was associated with a glamorous affectation of Western culture, and Yujiro was displayed leading that lifestyle both on and off screen. He peppered his speech with English words and compared himself to Marlon Brando. Raine writes, “According to the shukanshi [weekly entertainment magazines], sengo in the taiyozoku entailed a cynical, ‘dry’ rejection of so-called traditional, wet human relations. Part of a larger discourse on the gradual desiccation or Americanization of Japanese culture, readers of the shukanshi could check their own humidity by taking questionnaires that asked them to choose between whiskey and nihonshu, carpet and tatami” (205). Following his appearance in *Kurutta kajitsu*, Yujiro became known as a “dry boy” and it was this apparent rejection of traditional Japanese culture, and more specifically morals, that threatened mainstream society.

In the aftermath of the controversy over taiyozoku films in the summer of 1956, the studios produced more conventional teen films, and Yujiro appeared in less controversial roles. In 1958, he starred in *Arashi o yobu otoko* [The Man Who Started a Storm], a taiyozoku film made more palatable in the final scene with Yujiro’s weepy reconciliation with his mother, and it was this film that made him the biggest star in Japan. According to Raine, this final scene made this movie significantly different from *Kurutta kajitsu*, and asserted Yujiro’s inherent “wetness.” He writes, “He arrived with a nice body and a bad attitude: both together made up his impersonation of a new kind of modern young masculinity associated with the taiyozoku. But with the attacks on the taiyozoku, he lost the attitude and kept the body [. . .] Even though he still often plays ‘dry’ types, those hard exteriors covertly reveal depths of inner liquidity” (213). Although Yujiro continued to play tough guy types, by showing his sensitive side as the filial son or dutiful older brother, he reasserted his connection to Japanese society.

In accordance with the close connection between his public persona and the characters he played, Yujiro began to emphasize in interviews that this type of role was a reflection of his true self. Raine quotes from an interview in *Shin joen* in which Yujiro insists on his love for traditional Japanese culture and values (214). A photograph from the July 1957 issue of *Kindai eiga* shows the Ishihara family relaxing at home in an ordinary-looking kitchen. Shintaro holds an apple, while Yujiro takes a drink of beer, and their mother appears wearing a kimono and white smock, looking every inch the good housewife. The caption reads, “‘Mom, is there any beer?’ is Yu-chan’s greeting upon returning home. Open the refrigerator, and let’s have one!” (reproduced in Harada 10). The photograph is typical of the attempt in the media to portray Yujiro as a regular Japanese guy, relaxing at home with his family. The combination of the roles he played and his appearance in entertainment magazines served to neutralize the threat of Yujiro’s earlier appearance in *Kurutta kajitsu* by asserting his Japanese identity while maintaining a veneer of toughness.

This shift in Yujiro's identity was not just the result of overt public pressure, but was crucial to his continued popularity. Raine contrasts Yujiro's transformation with the career of Kawaguchi Hiroshi, who starred in the Daiei production of *Shokei no heya*, a far more violent and shocking *taiyozoku* film. He continued to star in controversial films, such as *Kuchizuke* (Masumura Yasuzo, 1957) and *Kyojin to gangu* (same, 1958), and as a result he never reached the same peaks of popularity as Yujiro (Raine 223). In spite of his arresting performance, this same intensity and aura of danger prevented him from being embraced by the masses. Not even a popular movie star can simultaneously challenge mainstream society and be accepted by it. Yujiro's carefully managed domestication ensured him starring roles in film and television until his death in 1986.

Whether condemning the *taiyozoku* or celebrating them, the reception of the *taiyozoku* films and books within the mass media served to keep up public interest. Obviously, the photo spreads, interviews, and popularity polls appearing in the entertainment magazines were part of a direct and purposeful effort to make both Shintaro and Yujiro into celebrities. However, reportage on the protests against *Kurutta kajitsu* and the editorials criticizing the *taiyozoku* were still a part of the *taiyozoku* boom of 1956, informing people who might otherwise never have read the book or seen the movie of their existence. While Shintaro's novels spoke to young people in a way they found meaningful and appealing, the protests surrounding the movies expanded interest in the *taiyozoku* beyond teenagers to society. Moreover, the studios responded to the public criticism by toning down the sex and violence and by repackaging Yujiro as a less threatening figure. Although the opinions diverge, within the realm of public discourse in the mass media, both criticism and publicity helped to create the *taiyozoku* boom.

.04. THE LITERARY RESPONSE (Return to Index)

In spite of its appeal to a popular, young audience, the *taiyozoku* novels and films did not escape the notice of the literary elites. In particular, it was through the publication of *Taiyo no kisetsu* in *Bungakkai* and the subsequent award of the Akutagawa prize, both organs of the *bundan*, that Shintaro's writing first gained critical and popular attention. The *bundan*'s response to *Taiyo no kisetsu* forms yet another level of discourse surrounding the *taiyozoku* booms. At least initially, the *bundan* was instrumental in creating Shintaro's popularity.

The award of the 34th Akutagawa prize in 1956 not only brought Shintaro to national attention, but indicated that at least some in the *bundan* felt his writing ought to be taken seriously. The purpose of the Akutagawa prize is to reward and recognize promising young writers, and while some of the prize recipients later sink into obscurity, many others continue on distinguished literary careers. For example, the winner immediately previous to Shintaro was Endo Shusaku, for "*Shiroi hito*," [White People]; two years later the prize went to Oe Kenzaburo for "*Shiiku*"

[The Catch]. The prize is an important means of cultural production, encouraging canonization and recognition of literary talent. However, in the case of *Taiyo no kisetsu*, the prize committee was at least as concerned with the social import of the novel as with its literary merit. As Sato Tadao notes acerbically, the prize committee did not want to seem old fashioned (323). While this remark may be overly cynical, there is some indication among the committee that they were aware of their role in the production of culture, and not just simply rewarding good writing.

The prize committee itself was deeply divided over *Taiyo no kisetsu*. Of the nine-member committee, only two, Funabashi Seiichi and Ishikawa Tatsuzo were strongly in favor of giving the prize to *Taiyo no kisetsu*. Sato Haruo, Uno Koji, Takii Kosaku, and Niwa Fumio were strongly opposed to it, while the remaining members, Nakamura Mitsuo, Inoue Osamu, and Kawabata Yasunari seemed to think the novel had some merits, but also some serious flaws (Akutagawa sho zenshu vol. 5, 446-457). Regardless of how they felt about the novel, all the committee members remarked on its newness, freshness, and youthfulness. It clearly stood out from the other entrants. Inoue remarks, “Ishihara Shintaro’s “*Taiyo no kisetsu*” contains many problematic points, but after all I can’t close my eyes to the skill and freshness of this work” (448). Ishikawa wrote that Shintaro expresses clearly what all the other young entrants can only hint at, and described him as having “all the characteristics of a newcomer” (447). If the purpose of the prize is to recognize new talent, Ishikawa argues, then clearly the prize should go to *Taiyo no kisetsu*. On the other hand, Niwa clearly states that he thinks that merely being new and different is not enough to warrant a prize. He writes, “Ishihara Shintaro-kun’s *Taiyo no kisetsu* has youthfulness and newness which is why it was nominated, but it would not do to rely on this youthfulness and newness to openly flatter this novel” (449). In fact, the main point of contention between those in favor of *Taiyo no kisetsu* and those opposed to it is the relative importance of this youthful, fresh quality.

Those committee members opposed to the novel found its youthfulness threatening. Takii admits that in awarding the prize to *Taiyo no kisetsu*, “I have conceded to the young people” (452), indicating that against his better judgment he has bowed to the tastes of the new generation. He says that in reading it, he found the novel too “clever” [takumisugi] and too “tricky” [hinerisugi], adding, “I was captivated by its youthful passion, but after reading, I was left with a bad feeling, as if it were a dirty trick” (452). In fact, Takii does not know what to make of this novel at all. In a desperate attempt to give the novel some sort of context, he enlists the aid of a neighbor, who is a professional tennis player, to give him the “sportsman’s” perspective on the novel. The neighbor criticizes Shintaro for misuse of various sports-related English loan words, and for portraying such an unsportsmanlike protagonist. The neighbor concludes, “I wish he would not write of sports in this way,” to which Takii adds, “I’d like to tell this young writer that from now on he should rely less on his skill and talent, and study more” (452). Takii’s attempt to read *Taiyo no kisetsu* as a novel about sports indicates how unfamiliar he is with the youth culture to which the book speaks. For those who responded most enthusiastically to the novel, boxing was only a minor part of Tatsuya’s taiyozoku lifestyle. Takii’s final comment sounds like a teacher

reprimanding a smart-aleck student (after all, Shintaro was still a college student at the time). Takii seems like an out of touch literary reader threatened by new youth culture represented by *Taiyo no kisetsu*.

The only committee member to attempt to concretely define what was new and threatening about this novel and to provide some literary context was Funabashi Seiichi. Funabashi praises the novel for its frank portrayal of pure pleasure [*kairaku*] (456). The pursuit of this pleasure marks Shintaro as part of a new generation. Funabashi writes, “The time has come when people realize that they must once again seek out pleasure in a radically different way” (456). Funabashi praises Shintaro for pursuing pleasure honestly and vigorously, without worrying about what the rest of society might think. Funabashi does not simply map *Taiyo no kisetsu* onto lines of inter-generational conflict, as Takii does. Instead of dismissing Shintaro as a young upstart, Funabashi places him specifically in the context of post-war Japanese literature by pointing out that Shintaro is significantly different from the first wave of post-war writers, the *Burai-ha* (456). For *Burai-ha* writers such as Sakaguchi Ango, Tamura Taijiro, and Dazai Osamu, decadence and carnality was a direct challenge to wartime ideals, born from the experience of defeat. By 1956, people were less concerned with defeat than with prosperity and freedom. While for the *Burai-ha*, decadence a means of coping with the despair and confusion of defeat, for the *taiyozoku*, decadence was an end in itself--a solipsistic, adolescent hedonism. As Funabashi explains, pleasure-seeking in *Taiyo no kisetsu* is born of a life of privilege (456). It is no coincidence that the only committee member to place *Taiyo no kisetsu* in a larger context was also one of the few who enthusiastically praised the novel.

The social context of *Taiyo no kisetsu*, and in particular, its description of a new generation seems to have been the reason it won the prize. In fact, not even Ishikawa and Funabashi attempt to argue in favor of the novel’s literary merits, which all the committee members agree are negligible. Ishikawa writes, “As I understand it, the Akutagawa prize is not something awarded to perfect works, but to newcomers with outstanding qualities” (447). In spite of its flaws, Ishikawa thinks *Taiyo no kisetsu* deserves the prize for its newness, and for capturing the voice of a new generation. Those who oppose the book deplore this use of the prize. Nakamura mentions in an aside that the *bundan* may object to giving a literary prize to a mere student who misuses *kanji* (449). Although he claims to like *Taiyo no kisetsu*, Kawabata does not evaluate the novel in detail but instead uses his commentary to complain that in recent years the media has given the prize too much attention, and this is actually detrimental to the purpose of finding new literary talent. He writes, “There is no reason to think that there are no promising new authors other than those who win the Akutagawa prize” (455). Although the Akutagawa prize is a literary prize, *Taiyo no kisetsu* won less for its literary merits than its social importance.

In fact, Shintaro himself, in his commentary on winning the prize, also seems aware of the cultural, rather than literary, status that the prize confers upon him (*Akutagawa sho zenshu* 527). Rather than reflecting on the work or himself as a writer, he responds like someone winning the

lottery. First, he describes his excitement at getting the phone call, and the attention from the press. He says, “With this novel, on the smallest investment I got the biggest reward” (527). The rest of his essay is a characteristically sports-related metaphor, comparing his future writing career to mountain climbing. But somewhere in the metaphor, the details of his career as a novelist become lost in the description of mountain climbing, which clearly holds more appeal for him. This essay is neither a reply to the bundan, nor a reflection on his relationship to the highbrow literary world (as many of these essays are, such as Endo Shusaku’s, 526), but once again a display of Shintaro’s persona as a taiyozoku boy.

Considering that even the strongest supporters of the novel admitted it had serious shortcomings as literature, and that Shintaro himself had few literary aspirations, how did the novel come to be published and nominated? The answer seems to be partly through coincidence and partly through privilege. Although Shintaro had attended Hitotsubashi University, a business school, intending to become an accountant (Nathan 111), coincidentally, his choice of school put him in touch with the literary world.

Two graduates of the school had become members of the bundan: Asami En, a columnist at Bungakkai, and respected novelist Ito Sei. Ito’s second son was also a classmate of Shintaro. In an addendum to a 1960 collection of Shintaro’s fiction and poetry, titled “Shin’ei bungaku soshō” [The New and Powerful Literature Series], both Ito and Asami have short essays detailing their association with Shintaro. Ito writes that he gave a lecture at Hitotsubashi, and afterward Shintaro and another student approached him and asked his permission to revive a school literary magazine called Hitotsubashi Bungei [Hitotsubashi Arts] that Ito himself had started as a student many years previously (1). Although Ito joked that he could not approve of business students writing literature, he not only gave them permission but also gave them money to cover publication costs.

The first issue featured Shintaro’s first attempt at fiction, a story titled “Haiiro no kyoshitsu” [The Grey Classroom], based on his brother and other high school delinquents he knew in Zushi (Nathan, 111). At the same time, Asami had just begun a column in Bungakkai in which he reviewed independent magazines [dojin zasshi]. He gave Shintaro’s story a very favorable review, praising him for his raw vitality and holding him up as a remarkable writer of the new generation (4). Encouraged by this praise, Shintaro submitted Taiyo no kisetsu to Asami, who immediately published it and nominated the story for the magazine’s New Writers award. The awards committee included Inoue Osamu and Ito Sei (5). This award led to the nomination for the Akutagawa prize.

In his essay, Ito seems aware of the incestuous nature of these proceedings, and vigorously protests that he is not guilty of favoritism. He claims that he only met Shintaro twice, once at the lecture and once when he asked for more money for the magazine, and that when he read Taiyo no kisetsu he did not realize who the author was until after he had awarded the prize (2). He even

carefully points out that Shintaro and his son were not friends (1). Whether Ito consciously tried to advance the career of a student from his alma mater, or whether it was all just a coincidence, it is clear that Shintaro's writing would never have achieved the widespread readership that it did without Ito's and Asami's help and support. While Shintaro was not a member of the bundan, his connections to the bundan helped his novel to reach a wide audience.

In a curious reversal, the literary elite, through publication in its magazines and the award of literary prizes, promoted the popularity of the novel among a lowbrow audience ushered in the decidedly unliterary taiyozoku boom.

The supplement containing the essays by Ito Sei and Asami En also include contributions from Eto Jun and Tanikawa Shuntaro, and here too we can see the unliterary response to Shintaro's writing, even among these highbrow writers. In all four essays, the writers make direct connections between Shintaro's dashing, reckless public persona and the characters about which he writes. In fact, in all four essays, the writers seem rather star-struck, bragging that they knew Shintaro before he was famous, and that they were invited to his wedding in 1957. It is a mark of Shintaro's status as a celebrity rather than as a writer that even the highbrow intellectuals are more concerned with his fame and persona than the literary merits of his work. In fact, Eto Jun, who attended junior high school with Shintaro, argues for a re-evaluation of the unpleasant characters in his books in light of Shintaro's real-life personality, claiming that what may seem unpleasant in his novels is simply part of his "charm" [miriyoku] (5).

Accordingly, the short essay hardly mentions his writing at all, in favor of recounting Shintaro's accomplishments as a varsity soccer player. Eto asserts throughout that he knew, even as a boy, that Shintaro had potential and would someday become famous. Tanikawa similarly describes Shintaro as a sort of artistic genius who is unaware of literary technique but whose very life is art. He describes Shintaro in his double-breasted suit as looking like an actor who has just come off the stage (8). He says that Shintaro is larger than life and lives with his whole spirit (7). Finally, he writes, "To tell the truth, I am more interested in Ishihara's 'way of living' than in his 'literature'" (8). Even for those whom literary concerns were paramount, in Shintaro's case, his lifestyle was more remarkable than his novels.

There was a quite different response within the highbrow world of film. While Taiyo no kisetsu and most of the later taiyozoku films were B-grade teen exploitation films, Nakahira Ko's innovative direction of Kurutta kajitsu attracted quite a bit of attention from other directors. Raine writes, "The more important shifts in editing rhythms, ranges of shot scales, and antimelodramatic irony soon returned at other studios in the work of Masamura Yasuzo, Okamoto Kihachi, and (somewhat belatedly) Oshima Nagisa" (224). While compared to the average Hollywood film today, Kurutta kajitsu seems rather slow; compared to films by directors such as Ozu and Mizoguchi, which had become the norm for Japanese national cinema at the time, the pace of cuts between scenes is somewhat faster and there are more close-ups, which

encourages a more intense emotional involvement for the audience. In addition, *Kurutta kajitsu* was made in just 17 days, and instead of polished, professional actors, most of the cast was amateurs, young people playing themselves (Sato 322). In the final cut the rough edges still show: the actors, especially Yujiro, speak quickly and indistinctly and move with a kind of frenetic energy. Sato Tadao credits this film, and especially its roughness and energy, with inspiring the Japanese New Wave films of the 1960s (323). The same youthful energy that made the *taiyozoku* novels so threatening to the literary world, when translated to film became a positive attribute embraced by even highbrow auteurs. Given the low-culture status of film relative to literature, it is not surprising that what is shocking and threatening in the literary world is refreshing and innovative in the film world.

The highbrow literary world's relation to the *taiyozoku* boom is yet another example of the way in which audience response can be culturally productive. In a concrete sense, Shintaro's novels would probably not have reached a wide audience without the initial support of the *bundan*. The popular perception was that Shintaro arose spontaneously from the social conditions of late 1950s Japan and that his writing was an accurate, authentic mirror of real youth, and in a sense that was true. However, Shintaro was not a complete outsider—his links to the *bundan*, through Ito Sei and Asami En made his rise to fame possible. Furthermore, the award of the Akutagawa prize not only began the *taiyozoku* boom of 1956, but in labeling his work as unliterary, the prize committee contributed to the perception of Shintaro as an outsider to the *bundan*, which was a key part of his authenticity as a *taiyozoku* boy.

.05. CONCLUSION (Return to Index)

The explosive popularity of *Taiyo no kisetsu* and *Kurutta kajitsu*, both the novels and the films, occurred in large part because young people responded enthusiastically, not only by buying the books and watching the films, but by striving to emulate the characters in their dress and lifestyle. They responded in this way not only because the novels and films seemed to capture the mood of teenagers in the late 1950s, but also because the Ishihara brothers seemed to be authentic representatives of that youth culture. But the response of the audience that the novels and films specifically targeted made up only one part of the mechanism of cycle of cultural production. The popularity of *Taiyo no kisetsu* and *Kurutta kajitsu* owed as much to the public protest against them, and to the ambivalent attention of *bundan*, as to the more enthusiastic response of the fans. Although the appearance of authenticity was an important part of the Ishihara brothers' acceptance by their fans, their celebrity would not have been possible without the attention of the popular press and the literary world.

Clearly there is room for more research into the *taiyozoku* boom and the relation between the texts and their various audiences. Moreover, this is just one example of cultural production in post-war Japan. Since 1956, there have been countless booms and fads, and the media has used

the suffix “-zoku” to describe dozens of different identities. Further examination of the formation of other identities will undoubtedly shed more light on the process of cultural production in post-war Japan.