

“Rokabiri,” Student Radicalism and the Japanization of American Pop Culture, 1955-60

“ロカビリー”学生の急進主義とアメリカ大衆文化の ジャパナイゼーション、1955-60

FURMANOVSKY Michael

Abstract

In 1958 thousands of Japanese teenagers, heavily influenced by the new “rockabilly” music that had recently swept the U.S., and emboldened by the new post-war consumer culture, fashioned a so-called *rokabiri bumu*, the first popular culture movement of post-Occupation Japan. Centered around the “Western Carnival” concert in Tokyo, the “rokubirizoku” (rockabilly tribes) who made up the raucous audience for the new music were soon targeted by police, local authorities and PTAs as a source of juvenile delinquency. Coinciding with massive protests by student radicals against the staunchly pro-American administration of newly elected Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, the *rokabirizoku* (rockabilly tribe) movement proved short-lived but paved the way for the development of highly developed pop culture industry in the early 1960s.

Keywords: rockabilly, Western Carnival, Japanese Pop Culture

概 要

1958年、占領後の日本ではじめて盛り上がった大衆文化がいわゆる「ロカビリー・ブーム」である。アメリカで一世を風靡した新しい「ロカビリー」音楽がすぐに日本にも広がり、数多くの日本の十代たちがこの音楽に強く影響され、戦後の新しい消費文化に煽られていった。東京でおこなわれた「日劇ウエスタン・カーニバル」のコンサートに集まった騒がしい「ロカビリー族」たちは、たちまち警察や当局やPTAから、少年非行につながるとして敵視されることになった。当時の過激派学生たちは、親米派の岸政権と正面から対決していたが、この学生運動と軌を一にして盛り上がったロカビリー・ブームは短命に終わったものの、60年代初頭に大衆文化産業が大いに花開く道を切り開いたのである。

キーワード：ロカビリー、ウエスタン・カーニバル、日本の大衆文化

Most historians and cultural studies academics looking at post-war Japanese culture have tended to focus on film, and to a lesser extent, literary expressions in order to find insight into the concerns, fears and ideals of those who grew up under the American Occupation. The same is true of cultural historians of post-war Britain and France, both of whose societies were deeply influenced by the visual arts emanating from Hollywood and to a lesser extent Broadway in the years 1948-60. In the case of Japan, historians writing in English have chosen to work almost exclusively on the motion picture art produced by the great early “new wave” filmmakers of the 1950s. There can be little argument that the original, nuanced and often subtly political work of Ozu, Mizoguchi, Naruse, Imai, Ichikawa, Kurosawa, Oshima and Masumura entirely overshadows the output of Japanese artists working in every other cultural genre, whether literature, music or the other visual arts. For the popular culture historian, however, the work of these directors cannot by itself provide much insight into the lives of the new urban middle-class that emerged in Tokyo and other major cities during the immediate post-Occupation period. Instead the latter must engage and take seriously the manner in which those Japanese who came of age during and after the Occupation internalized the numerous manifestations of American culture that they encountered through their direct and indirect exposure to the American military occupation and the entertainment-related infrastructure that was created to cater to it.

Among the most neglected areas of Occupation-influenced popular culture is pop music itself, especially the so-called *rokabiri* (rockabilly) music boom of the late 1950s that predated the birth of a recognizably Japanese pop music industry in the early 1960s. Exploding into national consciousness in February 1958, this musical genre and its fanatical following had effectively burned out by early 1959. In the 12 months in which it blossomed, however, its principal figures—Kosaka Kazuya, Hirao Masaaki, Micky Curtis, Yamashita Keijirou, Moriya Horishi, Sakamoto Kyu and a handful of talented songwriters and musicians around them—collectively reworked and transformed the English language rock ‘n’ roll and rockabilly music that they had heard on the radio or in imported movies, into a new mother-tongue musical song genre. This creation would provide the basis for the recognizably Japanese sensibility found in the so-called “Group Sounds” and “folk boom” movements of the mid-and late-1960s (Morokawa 2005, 282-85).

In an earlier article the author traced the development of American country music in early 1950s Japan using a combination of oral history, fan websites and the very limited Japanese language secondary sources that are available (Furmanovsky 2007). Partly because several of its exponents would go on to considerable success as pop artists, a wider range of primary sources for the account offered here, are available to the researcher. These consist of a book of interviews with fifteen *rokabiri* artists (Morokawa), four full-length biographies (Hirao 1994; Kosaka 2001; Sakamoto 2001; Yamashita 2002) and a compendium of Japanese Pop (Music Life, 1995). These have been supplemented by a few web-based anecdotal-style articles about the *rokabiri*-driven “Western Carnival” concerts held in the capital city in 1958 at the Nichigaki Theater (*Rokabiri ga Yatekita* 2007; Kuroyanagi 2002; Yamamoto 2007; Shima 2007; *The Dragons Roar* 1997). Not surprisingly, these largely personal accounts or purely factual sources lack any historical context or interpretation. An effort in this direction is provided through a close examination of the major events and socio-historical trends of 1968 (or “Showa 33”)—especially those involving radical students—in what was an epoch-making year in contemporary Japanese history (Fuse, 2007).

From Jazz to “Western Band” Boom: The Birth of Japanese Popular Music, 1952-55

Many of the artists who would go on to participate in the *rokokabiri* boom, played in, or were heavily

influenced by, the so-called *Western* “cowboy” or “hillbilly” bands that emerged in the years 1952-54. These groups came together during the final years of the American Occupation and fashioned their identity within the subculture of the military’s after-hours entertainment infrastructure of bars and dancehalls. Indeed for the first post-war generation of musicians playing western popular music, whether the dance-oriented and light vocal jazz that was dominant in the early 1950s, or *Western*-style ballads and later *rokabiri* that came to rival it in the later years of the decade, the performance of music both as livelihood and as hobby, was inextricably linked to the existence of American bases. As such the early musical performances of *Western* groups and singers were naturally quite deliberately imitative, both in terms of playing and singing. Given that many musicians relied for their livelihood and success on an ability to win the approval of the GIs who made up the bulk of their audience, this goal seems unremarkable. While few performers at the time gave much thought to the difficulties involved in performing *Western* or hillbilly music in English, one is struck today by their willingness to take on the enormous challenge involved in enunciating the language in the manner of rural southern whites, an almost inconceivable leap given the cultural chasm involved. Yet, while economic considerations were a factor for some of these performers, many others—including some from wealthy backgrounds who were not at risk of losing their livelihood—exhibited a genuine desire to perform in English. Thus while some cultural historians might dismiss their efforts as inauthentic, it is hard not to be impressed with their efforts to duplicate the emotional and aesthetic dimension of the music that they had come to appreciate, largely as a result of its appearance in popular cowboy movies such as “Wagon Master” and “Blue Canadian Rockies” that were shown in theaters in the early 1950s and the increasingly frequent broadcast of Western songs on the military radio (Furmanovsky: 85; Mitsui 2001: 69).

The post-war jazz boom described in detail by E. Taylor Atkins in his pioneering *Blue Nippon* (2001:165-209), gave way in mid-1950s urbanized Japan, to a variety of imported styles and songs, of which the most successful were light-pop cover versions of mambo, waltz and other novelty-style recordings from the U.S by female artists such as Eri Chiemi (“Come on My House,” “Jambalaya”) and Izumi Yukimura (“Mambo Italiano,” “Indian Love Call”). With the Japanese economy reaching pre-war production levels, largely due to the profits made by the revitalized industrial conglomerate or *Zaibatsu*’s provision of support for the American war effort in Korea, record companies such as Nippon Columbia and the Matsushita-owned Japan Victor Company (JVC) could finally begin to contemplate the development of a record and musical entertainment industry that was not closely tied to the entertainment of American troops (Izumi Yukimura Super Gallery 2007; Eri Chiemi no Jazupopsu no Sekai 2007)

Among those who would play a prominent role in this change was 26 year-old Ihara Takatada, the Gakushuin-educated son of a prominent Mitsui *Zaibatsu* executive. Takatada—a fan of western cowboy movies—had helped form perhaps the first ever *Western* group, the Chuckwagon Boys, with a group of friends who were equally enthralled by the confident and sharp-looking servicemen whom they ran into on a regular basis in central Tokyo. Later forming the somewhat more professional Wagon Masters, featuring lead vocalist Kosaka Kazuya, the group played regular gigs in Yokota, Tachikawa and other bases. Takatada, whose parents had been disappointed by his failure to enter a university, was one of the first musicians to seriously consider the economic potential of recorded popular music in a post-occupation society. Earning 10,000 yen a month at a time when a public servant graduate of a university earned just 3,000 and considerably more within a few years, he nevertheless opted to leave the group in 1954 and take a more secure administrative position with Nippon Columbia. A year later, he signed his former group to the label and discussed with company executives the possibility of recording a set of new songs that would

be sung by lead vocalist Kosaka. The new music style envisioned by Takatada would, he believed, allow the group to connect with young people who were flocking to the city's burgeoning live "jazz kissa" (café) scene as well as to concerts held as part of the so-called *Western Carnival*, an annual music festival held in Tokyo. (BillyBobJoe 2005; Kosaka 2001: 224)

Kosaka Kazuya and Imitation Rock 'n' Roll

The emergence of the Wagon Masters as the first Western group in Japan with an audience outside military bases, was due to a number of factors. These included their musical proficiency, most notably the electric guitar skills of Hori Takeo and the fiddle-playing prowess of diminutive Kihara Matsuko. Kihara was one of a very small number of female instrumentalists, whose playing of the classic fiddle tune "Orange Blossom Special" amazed servicemen and helped make the song into a classic that was, and still is, expected of any country music fiddler in Japan (Mitsui 74). More significant, however, was the impact of the group's new vocalist Kosaka, an unfashionable shy-looking teenage dropout from Tokyo's Seijo High School who, as a boy, had been profoundly influenced by the confident demeanor of American soldiers he encountered. In his autobiography *Made in Occupied Japan*, Kosaka describes himself as growing up with an "inferiority complex to America" that would paradoxically drive him to succeed (Kosaka: 3). Beginning his career in a group that had formed in the late 1940s playing Hawaiian music, but which had changed to *Western* music to better serve the needs of servicemen's clubs, Kosaka and the group were motivated by the good food that they would be served after performances, as well as by the easy access to expensive and hard-to-find musical instruments (85-91).

Much influenced by overseas-educated Kuroda Biji, (also a graduate of Gakushuin University and arguably the first Western singer in Japan), the young vocalist singer was always willing to do whatever it took to improve his English pronunciation and memorize new lyrics (95-97). Frequently asked by southern white GIs to sing certain favorite songs, he would usually answer, "next week, OK," and then ask one of the GIs to write down the lyrics while also hoping to hear the song on the local military radio (111). Despite this dedication to singing in English and his growing repertoire of English songs—over 100 according to his autobiography—the band was soon persuaded to follow Takatada's suggestion and begin performing Japanese translations of classic *Western* songs, especially those from cowboy movies (Mitsui: 76-78; Kosaka: 203, 223). Among the young musicians hired by Columbia at the time was Raymond Hattori, a Japanese national who had studied at a music academy in Hawaii in the 1930s before returning to Japan. In 1954, he wrote the music to the cowboy-style song "Wagon Master" using, according to Mitsui Toru, a pentatonic scale with a flattened third, a musical genre heavily influenced by the blues. The song's Japanese lyric was composed by Okuyama Ai, with the opening English verse being attributed to an unknown American composer, A.C. Haas. Kosaka's enunciation of the English lyric is described by Mitsui as "unnatural," but having learned much from Fujisawa Keiji, the best English speaker in the Wagon Masters, is certainly understandable. More importantly perhaps, his style had become increasingly influenced by American country singer Lefty Frizzell, whose voice, Mitsui suggests, even resembled the legendary vocalist (Mitsui: 65-67).

The use of both Japanese and English lyrics in a non-Japanese song had in fact, been pioneered by the producers of actress and singer Eri Chiemi in her 1952 cover of "Tennessee Waltz," a worldwide hit for Patti Page in the early years of the decade. Kosaka, a genuine devotee of *Western* songs, was ambivalent about singing mostly Japanese translations of famous cowboy movie themes, despite the fact the audience

for the group's *jazz kissa* performances were largely Japanese. In 1956, however, any reservations that he had about singing in Japanese were dropped as a result of the success of the band's recording of Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel," the release of which in June, helped pave the way for the *rockabiri* craze that would emerge two years later. The Wagon Masters had in fact already recorded an English version of Presley's country ballad "I Forgot to Remember to Forget" in mid-1955 (Kosaka: 215). "Heartbreak Hotel," however, released in the U.S in January 1956, was a major departure from the kind of *Western* and cowboy ballads that Kosaka had sung hitherto. Suggested to him by a Wagon Masters member, Kosaka's mostly Japanese version featured cleverly worded lyrics by Raymond Hattori (223-25). The recording is notable too for its almost note-perfect imitation of Presley guitarist Scotty Moore's sound and a reasonable effort to duplicate Floyd Cramer's honkytonk piano. It's overall sound differed from the original however, in a number of significant ways, most notably in its lack of the echo and reverb-laden sound that Presley's producer Steve Sholes had created, in part by recording the song in a hallway. Equally important, Kosaka's Japanese vocal, while successfully capturing the loneliness of a man rejected in love, lacked the despondent-sounding atmosphere and penetrating delivery that was the Presley trademark (Morrison 67; Doll 2007). Far from proving a negative, however, this relatively understated approach allowed the twenty-one year-old to retain most of the boyish charm that was part of his appeal to young women, while still providing his male fans with a more youthful and energetic image than any *Western* group singer had been able to project. By the end of 1956, Kosaka was arguably among the most popular musical entertainers in Japan.

The success of "Heartbreak Hotel" led Columbia to promote Kosaka as a solo artist and although his debut solo record largely featured *Western* style covers of cowboy movie songs, (including "Kaw-Liga," "Ballad of Davy Crockett," and "Yellow Rose of Texas"), its songs were all sung in Japanese (Mitsui 77-78). In most cases the English lyrics were translated by Hattori or Iwatani Tokiko and then skillfully reworked to fit the melody (Kosaka 219). During the recording sessions, however, Columbia executives suggested that the new star record a new non-*Western* song co-written by the well-known and highly successful composer, Koga Masao, called "Seishun Saikuringu" (Youth Cycling). This idea was strongly opposed by Hattori who argued that Kosaka's voice and intonation were unsuited to the standard Japanese-style pop (*kayokyoku*) pentatonic-scale based melody, and Kosaka himself, was ambivalent about recording a song that was utterly at odds with his *Western* singer image (Mitsui 78-79). Despite the advantage of Koga's name, it was, nevertheless a great surprise, when the song—recorded in March 1957 with a full orchestra and no participation by the *Wagon Masters*—became a nationwide wide hit, elevating the young singer into a valuable commercial product. Within a year Kosaka had received an offer to appear in a movie, and a year later, he made his first film ("Kono Ten No Niji") with the director Kinoshita Keisuke and effectively left the music field. Despite this sudden removal from the music scene, however, Kosaka had shown that young Japanese singers could project a youthful and attractive image that was comparable to their American counterparts, and by singing in Japanese, could greatly expand their potential audience (Kosaka: 224-25).

Western Carnival and the Birth of the Japanese Teenage Culture

Beginning in 1953, several Western music groups began performing occasional concerts in a movie theater in Yurakucho, Tokyo. Organized by Wagon Masters guitarist Hori and Kusano under the catchy moniker "Western Carnival," the growing popularity of the *Western* genre led to a move to the much larger

Nichigeki Theater (Nihon Gekijyou) in Tokyo's Chiyoda district. The negotiations for the move were handled by one of the few women in the commercial music business, Watanabe Misa. Watanabe's parents had worked for the Occupation forces in the 1940s, a position that had allowed their daughter to become a competent English speaker. In the early 1950s she had become the manager and interpreter for a jazz band that performed at army bases and, shortly after her marriage, she and her husband Shin set up the Watanabe Production Company. A careful reader of trends and a shrewd business woman who would later be labeled the "Rokabiri Madam," Watanabe had noted the increased interest in the new rockabilly music that was being played on FEN radio in 1955-56, and in the following year, she helped facilitate the rapid rise in the popularity of the genre inaugurating a series of *rokabiri* concert events at the Nichigeki *Western Carnival* that would change the face of Japanese popular music and usher in a new era of teenage popular culture. Indeed the Carnival—usually featuring three or more sets a day for a full week, and held three to four times a year—would become the single most important venue for popular music in Japan until its demise in 1971 (Yoichi 2007; Watanabe 2007).

To a considerable degree, the popularity of the *Western Carnival* concerts was a by-product of the inability of small *jazz kissa* such as the ACB, Tennessee Club and New Mimatsu clubs in central Tokyo, to accommodate the increasingly raucous dancing and excitable behavior of the fans of *Western* groups who were beginning to introduce rockabilly styles to their acts (Shima 2007). Most of these had emerged in 1956 following the release of the American juvenile delinquent movie "Blackboard Jungle" in Japan in late 1955. Featuring a performance of "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and the Comets, news of the movie's ability to spark off dancing in the aisles of theaters in the USA in the summer of 1955, became known to young Japanese moviegoers and provoked a similar response in Tokyo a few months later (Kosaka 215-216). It is perhaps no coincidence too, that the release of "Blackboard Jungle," coincided with that of the controversial and much discussed Japanese movie "Kurutta Kajitsu" (Crazed Fruit) based on young novelist Ishihara Shintaro's sensationally frank "taiyouzoku" stories of materialistic and cynical teenagers and their sexual interests. In its reporting of the phenomena, *Time* wrote of young men in "crew cuts, aloha shirts, zoot coats and pointed suede shoes" wondering the streets with "an attitude of abandonment and deep to-hell-with-it cynicism" (*Time* "The Rising Sun Tribe" 1956). The mainstream society's reaction to the release of the film and the sensationalization of the alleged exploits of the *taiyouzoku* in the new weekly magazines targeted at the middle-class, give additional insight into the influences and attitudes of those teenagers who would, in the following two years, produce the *rokabiri bumu* and help consolidate Japan's developing mass teenager popular culture (Schilling 73).

Performers and Fans: *Rokabiri* Teenagers and the Carnival Experience

Almost totally unknown prior to their appearance at the first Watanabe-organized *Western Carnival* in February 8-15 1958 was a trio of artists under the management of Hori and Kusano. Performing both as soloists and in combination, the stage appearances of Hirao Masaaki, Yamashita Keijirou and Micky Curtis (whose parents were both half English), attracted unprecedented excitement in the audience and led the popular press to take an interest in what it soon described in lurid terms as the degeneration of Japanese youth. In reality, however, the performers often came from well-off families, and were startled themselves at the behavior of fans, most of whom were several years younger than them. Among those already in his early twenties at the time of the *rokabiri bumu* was Hirao. Raised in a wealthy cosmetics company-owning family, he graduated from the elite Keio High School and after a brief flirtation with jazz music, passed

an audition to enter the All Star Wagon, an offshoot of the Wagon Masters. In 1955, the new group became the first *Western* band to use drums onstage and a year later reinvented itself as a *rokabiri* band, adding several new members. Often performing in the Tennessee jazz kissu, Hirao was amazed when an estimated 3,000 fans crowded outside the venue, triggering a fight between fans and club staff. In late 1957, he recorded an English cover of the Diamonds U.S pop hit "Little Darlin" on King Records and during rehearsals for the first 1958 *Western Carnival* met and began working with Yamashita and Curtis (Hirao: 38-42; Time "Rittoru Dahringu" 1958). Taking over Kosaka's mantle as Japan's new Elvis-style performer, he was in fact the most serious musician of the three and would later prove to be an accomplished songwriter who has enjoyed a lengthy and ongoing career (Morokawa: 23-53).

A year or two younger than Hirao and from a well-known rakugo (traditional storytelling) family, Yamashita had in fact moved with a gang of "bad boys" as he describes them, before being discovered by leading producer Nabase Nobuko (Yamashita: 37). Dressed in a red shirt with tight pants and blue or white suede shoes, Yamashita's onstage gyrations and overall performance style was in fact much closer to the stereotypical Presley-like delinquent image loved by the press than that of Hirao. Both men however received a rapturous welcome from fans at the frenzied concert "Grand Finale" in which all the artists sang and danced on stage. At this time Hirao, Yamashita and Mickey Curtis, found themselves the target of teenage boys who would drag them from the stage, as well as the attention of hula shirt-and-black-slacks-wearing girls—arguably Japan's first "groupies"—who would throw colored streamers or toilet rolls stolen from local department stores onto the stage and attempt to kiss and touch them once off stage. Such scenes naturally were the subject of shocking and exaggerated descriptions in Japan's rapidly expanding popular press, with the emphasis on alleged sexual promiscuity, truancy and the chaos caused by crowds of garishly dressed *rokubirzoku* (rockabilly tribes) lined up outside musical venues (Yamashita: 59, 70-71; "Rittoru Dahringu"; Kuroyanagi; The Dragons Roar: 1997).

Reflecting on the events many years later, Mickey Curtis and Yamashita Kejiro suggest that the initial popularity of the *Carnival*, which attracted an estimated 45,000 fans during the week, was due to its ability to accommodate teenagers, including those under 16, who could not easily enter crowded *jazz kissa* at night. The ease with which these teenagers—many playing truant from school—could attend concerts, would also be a major factor in the subsequent media and police-led backlash against the *rokabiri* movement. School-age fans, Curtis reminisces, would arrive outside the Nichigeki Theater before 7 a.m., in order to get a ticket for the late morning and mid-afternoon performances. Well aware of this, school authorities in the area would arrange for buses to park outside the theater and teachers would then cajole students to go to school. Despite this extraordinary action, however, many students would secretly leave classes after a few hours and return to the theater to catch the morning or early afternoon shows. Yamashita and Curtis claim that they both repeatedly exhorted fans not to get into conflict with their parents and teachers. However it is difficult to imagine that this message would have carried much weight in the frenzy of the atmosphere created by their performances (Kuroyanagi).

Although Hirao, Curtis and Yamashita began their careers singing *Western* music, many of the musicians in the groups had had considerable experience performing in either Hawaiian or jazz bands. Among those that had been playing the increasingly out-of-vogue Hawaiian music in Tokyo's *jazz kissa* clubs, prior to the *rokabiri bumu* were the seven-member "Paradise Kings" led by Iida "Danny" Mizuhara, Hiroshi and Sano Osamu (Morokawa:156). Iida and Mizuhara were among the audience at the first *Carnival* and the unexpectedly excited reaction of the fans prompted an almost overnight change of style by the group. The newly-energized "Danny Iida and the Paradise Kings" would go on to perform at subse-

quent Carnivals held in May, August and December, 1958, and their performances would, in turn, attract the attention of Sakamoto Kyu a 17 year-old jazz fan who had become interested in rockabilly after seeing Elvis Presley on the screen. Performing Presley songs for his Yokohama Gakuen classmates using a broom as a microphone, Sakamoto had dropped out of school in 1957 and found a job as a so-called “bandboy” in a jazz band called the “Sons of Drifters.” A year later, in August, 1958, he made a brief performance at the *Western Carnival* and the positive reception he received—despite lacking the good looks of many other singers—led to an invitation to join the Paradise Kings and a year as a leading *rokabiri* artist.

Student Radicalism and ‘Juvenile Delinquency’

It is perhaps not surprising that none of the leading *rokabiri* artists posit a clear explanation for the media and local authorities’ backlash against *rokabiri*, and the subsequent decline of the larger *rokabirizoku* phenomenon in the years 1959-60. More unexpected, however, is that there are few attempts by western-based or Japanese historians to examine the socio-political dimensions of this hostile response, a topic explored at length by American historians of rock music’s origin such as Glenn Altschuler. Altschuler connects the birth of rock ‘n’ roll to the civil rights movement for racial integration and other political and social changes. Rock ‘n’ roll he argues in *All Shook Up: How Rock ‘n’ Roll Changed America*, “unsettled ‘mainstream’ values...deepened the divide between the generations, [pushed] sexuality into the public arena [and] helped teenagers differentiate themselves from others,” thus permanently transforming American popular culture. At various times between 1955-58, rock ‘n’ roll’s detractors linked it to communism, racial mixing, drugs, sex and even the mafia (Altschuler: 34). If this part-musical and part-cultural expression could be perceived as a dangerous and disruptive force by commentators and politicians in an affluent and stable democracy such as the U.S in 1956-57, it could hardly have been expected to be brushed aside as a minor and harmless cultural phenomena in a Japan that, in 1958, was wracked with political conflict as well as unprecedented economic and social upheaval (Fuse).

With no secondary sources dealing with the socio-historical aspects of *rokabiri*, the cultural historian must look for clues in a wide range of conventional and non-conventional areas, including interviews and autobiographies. Read in conjunction with recently published historical analyses of both political and economic changes in the years 1957-60, including the activities of the radical student movement, the biographies and autobiographies of *rokabiri* artists can help uncover a number of possible factors that contributed to the decision by city and national authorities to aggressively restrain the *rokabirizoku* that could be seen in the streets of Tokyo from mid-1958. Among these was the increase in juvenile crime, which after a decline from 1951-55, reached a postwar peak in 1958 (“The Rising Sun Tribe” 1958). This trend, widely reported in the press, may have been a factor in the growing public support for the Liberal Democratic Party. An alliance of the two conservative groupings formed in 1955, the new party was led, from 1957, by former war-time cabinet member Kishi Nobusuke, head of the most pro-U.S faction of the grouping. Secretly funded by the CIA in order to block the reconstituted Socialist Party, Kishi and his supporters had included a highly controversial educational reform platform in the party’s April 1958 election campaign (Schaller 1995: 4; Bix 2000:). The proposal not only mandated the singing of the Japanese national anthem, but even more provocatively, outlined a system of teacher evaluation that was clearly aimed at punishing radical teachers and promoting nationalism. In a commentary on the new party’s platform, *Time* magazine noted that if the Kishi government had its way, Japanese schoolchildren would “soon find themselves doing playground drill in the militaristic prewar fashion, and will be subjected to

regular doses of “moral education” (*Time* “The Rising Sun” 1958).

The LDP’s educational proposals were of course strongly opposed by the left-wing Japanese Teachers Union (*Nikkkyoso*). They may have resonated, however, with Tokyo-based PTA members (Samuels 2001). These parents and officials were, according to media accounts, shocked by the spike in truancy triggered by daytime rockabilly concerts during the *Western Carnival* as well as the burgeoning *rokabirizoku* street culture associated with the crowded *jazz kissa* venues. It seems likely too that their fears were also based on alleged reports of the loose and open sexuality of the fans of the music, a complaint that mirrored those made of rock ‘n’ roll fans by their American contemporaries in the southern U.S. The allegedly disruptive and outlandish behavior of *rokabiri* fans may have been enough in itself to provoke a backlash of some kind by the Kishi administration, whose LDP won the election of May 1958 in a landslide. The likelihood of a clampdown against *rokabiri* was much increased, however, by the coincidental timing of the *Western Carnival*’s third series of concerts with a mass campaign against the LDP’s post-election Police Bill. The bill had been proposed in mid-1958 by Prime Minister Kishi, as a preemptive measure to prepare for an expected Socialist Party, union and student-led mass movement against the new government’s plan to amend the Japan-U.S security treaty (*ANPO*) in a manner that would solidify Cold War ties and make Japanese neutrality in the U.S-Soviet conflict impossible (Schaller: 4-6). While mainstream union and Socialist Party-led protests could be expected to be relatively peaceful, the LDP and the Tokyo police were particularly concerned about the possible actions of student radicals. Many of these student radicals had lost faith with the Communist Party following its decision (at its 1955 “Rokuzenkyo” conference) to eschew mass struggle towards revolution in favor of building broad support in the wider population. By 1957-58, the threats made by these students in their speeches and publications had led them to be regarded by the new Kishi administration as a potential source of mass violence. To a considerable degree, the fears of the Kishi administration were well founded as the Communist Party’s alleged betrayal of the working class cause had in fact led student radicals at Tokyo University and other major public universities to consider the formation of a new militant vanguard organization. The decision to go ahead with such a plan was taken, after lengthy debate, in response to the perceived failure of the Communist and Socialist Parties to effectively oppose Kishi’s extension of the Diet session in early November 1958, an extraordinary action taken in order to push through the Police Bill. Immediately after the bill was passed, however, student leaders met to establish a new organization—the so-called “Bund”—and pledged to oppose both the new powers given to police, and more significantly, the revamped U.S-Japan treaty (Hasegawa 2003: 80-84; *Time* “The Rose and the Thorn” 1958).

While radical students at elite universities may seem distant from *rokabiri* fans, there is some evidence to suggest commonalities that might have caused the government to conflate the chaotic scenes at the *Western Carnival* and overcrowded *jazz kissa* (most of which had become *rokabiri* venues) with the activities of student radicals. In his pioneering article on the student left in the 1950s, Hasegawa Kenji points out that members of the Bund “did not subscribe to the theory of middle-class alienation like some western New Left groups.” After fifteen years of poverty it is hardly surprising that many students were also at ease with the new consumerism. As Bund leader Shima Shigeo later argued, younger Communists, unlike the 1940s generation were not interested in a dour lifestyle or in martyrdom, but wanted to “revive [their] own humanity” through an optimistic life affirming self-emancipation. This ideology—one not unlike that of the early 1960s American Students for a Democratic Society—led some commentators to label the Bund radicals as “aka (red) taiyozoku,” an epithet that Hasegawa regards as “suggestive of the convergence of consumerism, counterculture and the student movement.” As he further suggests, govern-

ment authorities and scholars had a misguided fear that student revolutionaries—the first generation educated under the American model “6-3” system—could use protests against the ANPO treaty as a vehicle for major disruption of the rapidly developing corporatist political and economic system. Yet as a contemporary survey of student opinions in 1960 show, fully two thirds of those most likely to be idealistic or interested in political change, identified themselves as generally apolitical and mostly concerned with everyday concerns and self-fulfillment. While 10-15% claimed to be committed to eradicating injustice, even some of those who participated in Bund-led actions or demonstrations may have done so because of the latter’s “bright” or even fashionable image as well as the light-hearted atmosphere at its meetings (Hasegawa 86-87).

Given the enormous generation gap between government bureaucrats, police, high school and PTA officials on the one hand, and both the *rokabirizoku* and the modern culture-embracing “Bundist” wing of the Zengakuren (National Student Union) on the other, it would be reasonable to assume that both manifestations of dissatisfied or rebellious youth would have been regarded as part of a larger menace or threat to social stability and traditional Japanese values. As the timeline below clearly shows, the *rokabiri* popular culture explosion and resultant clash with school authorities, Tokyo police and PTAs coincided with an extraordinary and relentless series of confrontations between various socio-political and generational groupings during the course of just ten months in 1958.

Timeline of Events, February 1957-June 1959

- Feb 1957: Prime Minister Kishi becomes head of LDP and forms pro-U.S cabinet
- June 1957: Kishi visits U.S and receives warm reception for pro Cold War stance
-
- Feb 1958 *1st Western Carnival (featuring rokabiri artists. 45,000 attend over 7 days)*
- April 1958: LDP announce educational reform proposal as part of election campaign
- May 1958: *2nd Western Carnival with three sessions per day*
- June 1958: Election landslide of LDP under Kishi triggers left-led campaign against revision to U.S-Japan (ANPO) treaty and perceived right wing resurgence
- July 1958: Diet debates bills for new Self Defense Force and “dotoku” (moral education) in schools
- July 1958: Student Radicals break with Japanese Communist Party for lack of militancy
- Aug 1958: Right wing organizations hold first Yasukuni Shrine Memorial service
- Aug 1958: Police Bill to strengthen powers against anticipated demonstrations proposed
- Aug 1958: *3rd Western Carnival*
- Nov 1958: Trade union organized mass strikes against Police Bill forces LDP to drop proposed legislation
- Dec 1958: Radical Bundist student radicals take control of Japan National Student Movement
- Dec 1958: *4th Western Carnival*
-
- June 1959: LDP consolidates political strength in elections and Socialist Party splits

Clearly this timeline cannot prove that the Kishi administration and political establishment considered student radicals and *rokabiri* to be related parts of a single or united threat to the consolidating political-economic order represented by the LDP and the Zaibutsu. At the same time, it is impossible to imagine that the older generation of politicians could have easily distinguished between two major street-level challenges and disruptions to the status quo involving high school and university students. As such it

makes sense to view the subsequent decline of the free-spirited *rokabiri* movement and the establishment of a new style of hierarchical entertainment business model in a broader political context.

Watanabe Misa and the Triumph of Homegrown Japanese Idol Pop

In the face of such animosity from local and national authorities and the potential conflation of rebellious teenage pop culture with political protest, the apolitical organizers of the *Western Carnival* as well as record companies such as the Watanabe Production Group may have seen the writing on the wall and realized that the *rokabiri bumu* could not expect to continue. Anxious to protect their newly developed musical properties and expand the teenage and early 20s fan base for popular music that had emerged in the years after Kosaka Kazuya's pioneering Japanese covers of American rock n' roll, producers and music business executives moved to soften and sweeten the sound of their young male artists and further develop their appeal to female consumers. By so doing of course, these business-oriented behind the scenes figures were following the lead of their American counterparts. The latter had responded to scandals involving rockabilly artists such as Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry; the deaths of major artists such as Buddy Holly (1959) and Eddie Cochran; the retirement of Little Richard and the 1958 induction of Elvis Presley into the army, by grooming a wide array of so-called "idol singers" under the direction of professional producers, musicians and songwriters to create the highly commercialized pop culture industry of the early 1960s (Altschuler:159-173).

The transition to a more pop-oriented and family-friendly image in Japan does not seem to have been difficult one for the music business to make, and it was no coincidence that it came at a time of a rapid economic growth and (following the resignation of the polarizing Prime Minister Kishi in 1960), a significant decline in active opposition to the political establishment. While 1960 saw the biggest ever demonstration in Japanese history against the ANPO agreement, it also marked the beginning of a noticeable falling off in the kinds of student radicalism and rebellious teenage behavior that had so scared the establishment just two years earlier. At the end of 1958, during an interview with newspaper journalist Abe Shinichi, *rokabiri* star Hirao Masaaki was advised to consider singing new pop songs rather than just American covers. To his surprise, the *rokabiri* artist found that Abe himself was a talented songwriter in his own right and shortly after this meeting, he recorded Abe's pop-oriented "Hoshi wa Nandemo Shittieru (The Stars Know Everything)". The song, on King Records eventually sold 500,000 copies, becoming the first genuine home-grown Japanese pop hit. Its success—greater than any enjoyed by a *rokabiri* song—ensured that professionally-written and produced "pop" rather than a harder-edged "rock," music would be the focus of the major record companies. Within a year Watanabe's agency had initiated a new streamlined system of marketing in which both songs and artists became products to be marketed to radio and magazines. This was soon followed by a TV production division that focused on grooming and promoting pop artists such as The Peanuts, Fuse Akira, Nakao Mie and numerous other unthreatening and "kawaii" (cute) singers. For all of Watanabe's scouting, however, it would be the rival Manase Production group that would produce the biggest star of the new era—former *rokabiri* singer Sakamoto Kyu. Never really suited to the aggressive and rebellious aspect of *rokabiri* it would be Sakamoto's television performances of two pop ballads, the original "Ueo Miute Aruko" (1961) and "Ashitaga aru Sa" based on a Johnny Cymball pop song "Pack of Lies" (1963) and their subsequent domestic sales of over a million copies, that would reshape the Japanese music business and create the top down talent agency and idol-singer based infrastructure that dominates the industry today (Sakamoto 2001: 20-33; Schilling: 216).

Works Cited: Books and Articles

- Altschuler, Glenn C (2003). *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America*. Oxford University Press.
- Atkins, E. Taylor (2001). *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- "BillyBobJoe" (2005) "American culture influences Japanese during occupation" Interview with early *rokabiri* and pop music producer Takatada Ihara in 2005, Cited in Japan Addicted. (n.d) (Website Related to Japanese Culture) <<http://www.japanaddicted.com/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2934>> Accessed October 12, 2007
- Bix, Herbert P (2000). "Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan". PRI Occasional Paper No. 17, September.
- Doll, Susan (n.d) "Elvis Presley's Songs" <<http://people.howstuffworks.com/elvis-presleysongs4>> Accessed November 3, 2007.
- Furmanovsky, Michael (2007) "American Country Music in Japan: Lost Piece in the Popular Music History Puzzle." *Popular Music and Society* Vol 31. No. 4 (2008) forthcoming.
- Fuse, Katsuhiko (2007) *Showa 33*, (Tokyo, Chikuma Shobo)
- Hasegawa, Kenji (2003) "In Search of a New Radical Left: The Rise and Fall of the Anpo Bund, 1955-60." *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*. Vol.3 No 1, Spring.
- Hirao, Masaaki (1994). *Kimama Jinsei Uta no Tabi*. Kousaidou Shuppan.
- Kosaka, Kazuya (2001). *Made In Occupied Japan*. Kawade Shobou Shinsha
- Mitsui, Toru (2001) "Far Western in the Far East: The Historical Development of Country and Western in Post-War Japan." *Hybridity: Journal of Cultures Texts and Identities*. Vol 1. No 2.
- Morokawa, Billy (2005). *Showa Roman: Rokabiri Kikikaki Jazz Kissa Kara Western Carnival e* Heibonsha.
- Morrison, Craig (1999). *Go Cat Go: Rockabilly Music and Its Makers*. University of Illinois Press.
- Music Life (1995) . *Roots of Japanese Pops, 1955-1970*. Burn Corporation, 1975
- Youichi, Matsuo (n.d). "Rokabiri Ga Yatekita" in "Showa Kayo 19XX" (Website documenting cultural and political change in Japan during the post war Showa years). <http://www.ringohouse.com/cover_folder/03.vol_2.html> Accessed July 14, 2007
- Sakamoto Kyu (2001). *Ueo Muite Arukou*. Nihon Tosho Center.
- Samuels, Richard J. (2001) "Kishi and Corruption: An Anatomy of the 1955 System." *JPRI Working Paper* No. 83, December 2001
- Schaller, Michael. (1995) "America's Favorite War Criminal: Kishi Nobusuke and the Transformation of U.S.-Japan Relations," *JPRI Working Paper* No 11 July 1995.
- Schilling, Mark. (1997) *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture*. Weatherhill Books, 1997
- Shima, Tochimitsu "Western Carnival" From <www.oldies.jp/katudou_Folder> Accessed August 28, 2007
- Yamamoto, Kenji. (n.d) "Zakkan Sengo Nihon no Sesou to Ryuukouka" (Anecdotes about 1950s popular culture) <http://www.asahi.co.jp/call/diary/yamaken/essay_15.html> Accessed October 18, 2007
- Yamashita, Keijiro 2002. *Reset* (Ningen Relkishi)
- Time Magazine Online "The Rising Sun Tribe" *Time*, November 17, 1956
- Time Magazine Online "Rittoru Dahring" *Time*, April 14, 1958
- Time Magazine Online "The Rising Sun" *Time*, April 21, 1958
- Time Magazine Online. "The Rose and the Thorn" *Time*, November 17, 1958

Works Cited: Websites

- Eri Chiemi no Jazupopsu no Sekai. (n.d) <http://www.geocities.jp/chiemi_eri> Accessed August 28, 2007
- Izumi Yukimura Super Gallery (n.d) <<http://www.jvcmusic.co.jp/yukimura>> Accessed December 6, 2007
- Kuroyanagi Interview (2002). Interview by Kuroyanagi Tetsuko with Mickey Curtis and Yamashita, Keijiro <<http://www.h2.dion.ne.jp/~kinki-bc/z14-1-21.htm>> Accessed October 23, 2007
- The Dragon's Roar (1967) "*Bad Boys Bad Boys*" (Personal recollections of a teenage boy living at a military base housing Office of Special Intelligence personnel in Tokyo between 1958- 60 1997) <<http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Bunker/5921/badboys5.html>> Accessed August 3, 2005
- Watanabe Group. (n.d) "Main Achievement of Misa Watanabe" <<http://www.watanabe-group.com/english/archive/index.html>> Accessed December 12, 2007