Sounds and Visions of Modernity
When Does an Era End?
Great Power Status

Party Government

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End of an Era

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General Nogi

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September 1, 1923

- Changing Urban Landscape
- Great Kantō Earthquake, September 1, 1923
- Reconstruction boom, 1923-1931
  — Gotō Shinpei
- Tanizaki Jun’ichirō
  — “Now they will make Tokyo a decent city.”

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1905-1937: Overlapping Periods

• Taishō (1912-26), Shōwa (1926-89)
• “Inter-war” (1918-1937/1939 for Europe)
• “Taishō Democracy” vs. “Imperial Democracy”
• Era of “Culture” and the “Modan” (today)
• Converging domestic and global crises (Thursday and next week)
The Landscape of Modernity
Whose Story Is This?

- The “new middle class”
- Highly educated, salaried employees of corporations and government AND their families
- In Tokyo: 6% of those employed in (1908) > 21% in 1920
Two Words

• 文化生活 Bunka seikatsu (‘culture life’)
  —~1926
  —rationality, efficiency, reform

• モダン Modan (‘modern’)
  —1926~late 1930s
  —rapid pace of urban life, new forms of leisure

• Commonality
  —shared experiences with industrial West
  —consumption
Objects of Consumption
Networks: Transportation

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Networks: Mass Media

- Magazines: *Kingu* (“King,” 1924)
- Radio (1926)
- Movie industry
- Record industry
- Growth of media as a “web”
Mass Media: Music

• Victor, Columbia in Japan (1927)
• Massive capital
• New technologies and practices
• “Watashino Aozenora”
  (“My Blue Heaven,” 1928 hit)
• Translated by Horiuchi Keizo
  (1897-1983): MIT, M.S. 1923
• Birth of ryūkōka (“popular songs”)
“Tokyo March” 1929

Longing for the past when the streets in Ginza were lined with willow trees
A young beauty becomes a nobody with age
Dance to the jazz music and down liquor into the night
And the rain that is the tears of the dancers will sprinkle at the break of dawn.

Maru building, the center of love
There are people writing letters in tears near that window
At least keep the rose you found left behind during the rush hour
As a memorable token of your girl.

Love makes the vast city of Tokyo small
Secret dates in the chic town of Asakusa
You come on a subway and I by bus
You can't put breaks on love.

Go to the cinemas? Or for some tea?
Why not we run away on the Odakyu train?
With the ever changing Shinjuku
The Moon in Musashino shines over the rooftop of the department store.
Modan Gāru

• Modernity as gendered phenomena
• Symbol of social, cultural, sexual liberation

Source: Shiseido Co., Ltd. Used with permission.
Media Construct? Or Reality?

• “Professional women”
  – Café waitress
  – Dancers
  – Office workers
  – Bus conductors
  – Doctors
  – Etc. etc. etc....
Anxieties

• Critique of *Modan Gāru* as critique of modernity itself
• Gender crisis
• Decadence, delinquency, and general moral decay
• Westernization/Americanization
• Political radicalism
More Anxieties

• Image of modernity vs. reality
• Shaky economic foundation of the “new middle class”
• Ambiguous gain for women
• Concern for urban “underclass”: poverty and social chaos
• Breakdown of imperial democracy?