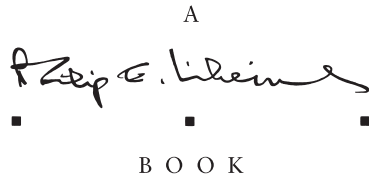


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Beyond the Metropolis

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Beyond the Metropolis

SECOND CITIES AND MODERN LIFE
IN INTERWAR JAPAN

Louise Young



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*In memory of
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PART ONE

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Contexts

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Introduction

URBANISM AND JAPANESE MODERN

THE AGE OF THE CITY

In Japan, the interwar period (1918–37) constituted a time of intensive reflection on what it meant to be “modern.” At a moment of rapid urbanization, as expanding city populations remade the social and physical landscapes of their communities, the Japanese began to link modernity with the urban experience. Popular referents for the neologism *modan*—jazz music, bobbed hair, cafés, automobiles, and multistory buildings—all conveyed the sense that what characterized the “modern” was the novel phenomenology of city life. In an outpouring of commentary, urbanites invented new categories to describe the changes they were experiencing in their everyday life. This new consciousness of the modern tried to make sense of the ways that the economic growth of the teens and twenties dramatically altered urban modes of production and consumption. To chroniclers of the new age, transformation of their built environment into a futurescape of paved roads and electric streetlamps, the rise of “social problems” like labor strikes and unsightly slums, and a mass consumer culture linked to the baseball field and the movie palace, all stood out as defining modernity. The city, in short, assumed the face of “modern Japan.”

How were ideas about modernity produced and circulated? What were their material and ideological effects? To answer these questions, this book looks at both the subjective consciousness and the social structures of “the modern.” Though humanities fields differ in their understanding of this term, historians tend to conceive of modernity as a tale of two revolutions: the political, social, cultural, and economic transformations that attended the advent of the nation-state, and the emergence of industrial capitalism.

The time line of these twin revolutions varied widely throughout the world, as did their particular form; for Japan, the forced opening of the country to the global market in 1853 and the overturning of the feudal regime in the Meiji Restoration of 1868 inaugurated a series of administrative reforms and social changes that ushered in modern times. In the initial phase of this process, industrial capitalism took root through a host of state policies designed to create a national economy capable of securing Japan's independence from the threat of western imperialism. At this moment the nation occupied center stage in Japanese economic thinking, reflected in the popular endorsement of state policies to promote a "rich country, strong military" (*fukoku kyōhei*) and to "encourage production, promote industry" (*shokusan kōgyō*). Throughout the 1870s and 1880s state financial and technical assistance helped to direct private investments into textiles, shipping, and railroads—industries identified as critical to national economic security. The cumulative impact of these policies was to weave together economy and nation: capitalist development served national concerns.

The preeminent symbols of "civilization" to emerge from these years were the emperor and the railroad.¹ Associating the "new Japan" with constitutional monarchy and a national rail grid, such images created an iconography of nationalism for the modern age. But by the early decades of the twentieth century the logics that grounded the identification of modernity as a national project began to change. Ushering in a period of accelerated economic and social change, the economic boom of World War One broadened and deepened Japan's industrial revolution. In the new wave of public and private investments triggered by the war boom, the focus of development expanded into regions and localities. Investments in communications infrastructure added a regional network to the national rail grid built up in the 1880s and 1890s. Factories making consumer products for a domestic market multiplied; a thriving service sector began to anchor urban and regional economies. Prefectural and municipal governments encouraged regional economic development through industrial expositions, the promotion of the tourist industry, local branding, and a variety of other strategies. The cumulative impact of these initiatives amounted to a second phase in the industrial revolution, as provincial development became one of capitalism's new frontiers.

All this brought a new level of engagement with urban centers, which were at once the staging ground and the agents of much of this activity. Rapid expansion of factory production created regional labor markets, and these drew migrants from the surrounding countryside to work the new shop

floors. Factory growth generated unprecedented wealth for a new breed of managers and entrepreneurs, whose leadership in civic organizations and political life enlarged the scope of municipal ambition. Municipalities invested in electricity, roads, telephone lines, and other city services to accommodate their burgeoning populations. They extended communication networks to encompass an expanding zone of suburban development. In all these ways the age of the city signaled both a new importance for the urban economy and a new scope of operations for municipal government.

It also became a vehicle for the rising power of a new middle class of professionals and intellectuals within urban society and politics. Growth of white collar employment in factories and local government, the proliferation of public and private networks of city services, and the expansion of urban commerce and culture industries all swelled the ranks of the new middle class, which grew from an estimated 4 percent of the population in 1915 to 12 percent in 1925. Since these figures reflected national averages, one can assume the percentage was higher in cities.² Though numerically the middle class constituted a small fraction of urban society, it nevertheless exerted enormous influence over municipal politics and administration, key cultural institutions such as the press and higher education, and business organizations. Commentary on the Taishō democracy movement by scholars such as the famous Tokyo University political scientist Yoshino Sakuzō and the eminent Kyoto University sociologist Yoneda Shōtarō vested great expectations in the leadership of the new middle class. Standing at the vanguard of a host of progressive political and social movements, intellectuals and technocrats would lead Japan into a bright and better future.³ As these observers noted, the new middle class cast an oversize shadow on the cities of interwar Japan.

At the same time, city growth altered existing social arrangements and generated new ways both of dividing people and, conversely, of bringing them together. Modern institutional structures such as the higher educational system and the publishing industry privileged cities and urban dwellers over the countryside economically and culturally; within cities they helped constitute hierarchies of class. They also produced an ideology of urban-centrism—the idea that modern cities possessed a kind of manifest destiny to expand their territory, power, and resources. Urban-centrism celebrated urban growth and measured the value of cities in terms of their size. It portrayed urban expansion as the diffusion of progress and modernity to the countryside and justified the resulting disparities in the distribution of power and resources. This process did not displace the nation but rather

upstaged it, for now urban centers seemed to present the most pressing problems, the most dramatic changes, the most alluring possibilities. The Japanese discovered the city.

They were not alone in this discovery. Indeed, the early twentieth century was a global moment for urban growth, as an international fixation with cities in mass culture, philosophy, literature, and the arts attested. From Baltimore to Moscow, from Paris to Buenos Aires, from Tianjin to Dakar—cities became the staging ground for wide-ranging social, cultural, economic, and political transformations. As in Japan, the rise of social problems, the formation of a consumer marketplace, the proliferation of streetcars and streetcar suburbs, and the cascade of investments in urban development reinvented the city as both sociospatial form and set of ideas. Throughout the world, discourses on social change associated the city with modernity and the future.

This book centers its story on the age of the city in the interwar period, a global moment when the material and ideological structures that constitute “the city” took their characteristic modern shape. As elsewhere in the world, the foundation for much of this was laid in the late nineteenth century, when the spread of industrial capitalism and the nationalization of the masses transformed urban space. For Japan, the political lineaments of the modern city were created in the administrative reforms of 1889 that established the “city, town, village” (*shichōson*) system. The design of a national school system and railway grid provided institutional anchors for cities and connected them with one another. War booms accompanying the Sino-Japanese (1894–95) and Russo-Japanese (1904–5) Wars spurred the spread of urban-based factory production and modern industry, as well as new forms of wealth and poverty. The war booms also stimulated the growth of the publishing and newspaper industry, core elements in the cultural fabric of the modern city. In all these ways the rise of the modern urban form rested on the foundations of the Meiji city. Nevertheless, as the following pages will show, the World War One boom ushered in a new age of the city, accelerating urban expansion to an entirely different level of intensity.

THE VIEW FROM THE PROVINCES

Historians have overwhelmingly told this story from the vantage point of Tokyo, newly designated, in 1868, as the national capital of the empire of Japan. Standard narratives assume that from 1868 on, government and civic

leaders in Tokyo invented modern institutions and dispatched them to the provinces. They suggest, moreover, that the diffusion of Tokyo models created a dynamic of imitation that placed localities in a condition of perpetual catch-up with the capital. This is particularly true of interwar urban history, which portrays Tokyo as the center and most active site of the modernist social and cultural movement.⁴ In many ways the historiographic tendency toward Tokyo-centrism speaks to a deeper conviction about the homogenizing effects of modernization that shoehorns a wide world of experience into a single mold. However, a closer look at provincial cities challenges such beliefs. In fact, as scholars of regional studies have pointed out, cities outside the metropolis generated distinctive cultures of modernism that often referenced Tokyo models but also influenced new cultural and social forms in the metropolis.⁵ And contrary to assertions of homogenization, the history of different localities reveals enormous variation in modern urban forms. By centering the story on Japan's provincial cities, this study breaks apart the assumption that the metropolis can serve as the defining lens for a history of Japanese modernity.

In the history of Japanese urbanism in the teens, twenties, and thirties, much of the action took place outside Tokyo. Beyond the metropolis was the world of the provincial city—*chihō toshi*. Since it included all cities outside the “big six” major metropolitan centers (Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Kobe, Kyoto, and Nagoya), the category of “local city” encompassed cities of a wide range of shapes and sizes.⁶ While the World War One boom fed the growth of the big six, equally striking was its impact on the small and medium city. In the regional turn of interwar Japan, local cities rose to prominence as centers of burgeoning regional economies. If the late nineteenth century was the age of the metropolis, the interwar years belonged to the city more generally.

This study focuses on second-tier cities, tracking the discourse on the modern in the four provincial cities of Sapporo, Kanazawa, Okayama, and Niigata.⁷ As prefectural capitals, these cities constituted the economic, political, and cultural centers of their respective regions. They were seats of municipal and prefectural government, centers of regional industry, and major transportation hubs. They held a concentration of institutions of higher learning and provided a platform for regional publishing. All four, like the metropolitan giants, grew at an enormous rate in the teens and twenties. Yet with populations in 1920 ranging from 50,000 to 150,000, they not only represented a scale of city different from that of the metropolis of Tokyo (with a population in 1920 of 3.3 million) but also maintained peripheral relationships with the capital of the Japanese empire.

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