

Monsters from Environmental Pollution:
Visions of Nuclear, Junk, and Ruins in the Post-Industrial World
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Several popular cultural works in the post-war period in Japan have a distinguish characteristic in terms of its concerns with the destruction of natural environment mainly caused by the rapid industrialization of the society. The 1960s is also the same time when the boom of “juvenile culture” such as comic magazines or TV shows including animation works of Astro Boy (Tetsuwan-Atomu, 1963-66) or Gigantor (Tetsujin-28-go, 1963-66). The consecutive successes of Tokyo Olympic (1964) and Expo '70 (a World's Fair in Osaka) symbolically indicated the drastic change of the social structure and technological advancement, which eventually brought about the somewhat optimistic image of the future and also a hope for the next stage of the scientific age.

It was in this period that the genre called “juvenile sci-fi” with special effects (toku-satsu) was born such as Ultraman (1966-) series and other monster (kaiju) shows. This genre is a representative of the new technology in itself as well as a response to the new industrial environment and its negative effects.

With this tendency, the destruction of natural environments also means the loss of “Old Japan.” In this historical transitional period, there were three symbolic electric appliances: Television, washing machine, and refrigerator.” The government also boosted the economic growth by the policy called the “Income Doubling Plan” and, in those days, “The Bigger, the Better” was a fashionable phrase on the media. It was in 1969 that the word of “economic animal” appeared on the foreign media, and it is the same time when the image of the “workaholic Japanese businessmen” was registered in the mind of foreigners. However, the “successful” development of Japanese society also has another side: Environmental pollutions.

As some of the sociological studies have already shown, the TV series of Ultraman can be read as a response to the issues of the power relation of US and Japan, discrimination, and other social and environmental problems. Moreover, those juvenile TV shows with “special effects” and monsters (kaijyu),

deal with environmental problems such as photochemical smog, water pollution or waste problems by presenting some of those issues through the rendition of monsters. Notably, *Godzilla* (1954) is one of the famous examples and there is a critique of nuclear experimentation behind the story. Among *Godzilla* series, *Godzilla VS Hedorah* (1971) examines the water pollution problem of Tagoura harbor in Shizuoka Prefecture. As another example, in a TV Series, *Space Apeman Gori* (later the title was changed into *Spectreman*, 1971-72), Gori who already lost his native planet, tries to conquer the Earth. In this show, a main character, who transforms into *Spectreman*, belongs to a government-run group called the *Pollution G-Men*, which suggests the intense concern with the environmental problems. As *Spectreman*, his task is to protect the Earth against the invaders such as Gori and his monsters such as *Hedoron* or *Dustman*.

My presentation will examine how Japanese popular culture, especially for juveniles, which articulates the problems of environmental problems throughout the post-war period when Japan experienced the rapid economic growth and industrial development. The creators of these works give social messages toward young audience who will play an important role in the future Japan. I will also mention some of documentary film produced in the same period such as *Minamata: the Victim of their World* (1971) or *Minamata Disease, 20years* (1976): Noriaki TSUCHIMOTO (1928-), who explores the possibility of Japanese documentary styles in his reportage about the *Minamata disease*. By dealing with both fictional and non-fictional visual / cinematic works, I will re-examine the dystopian vision behind the image of the bright scientific future promoted by the rapid economic growth in the post-war Japan.