

Andrew McKeivitt. *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2017. Pp. 276.

In the field of American foreign relations, few works examine such issues as anime or sushi. Andrew McKeivitt's *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America* addresses both as part of an effort to understand how Americans came to terms with a globalizing world in which Japan seemed poised to eclipse the United States' economic and cultural hegemony. *Consuming Japan* traces the interactions of ordinary Americans with Japanese goods and ideas, beginning in the 1970s. Most of the text focuses on the 1980s, when an economic reversal of fortunes cased Americans to reevaluate earlier conceptions of Japan as exotic but harmless. In this anxious decade, Americans both resisted and facilitated the inroads made by Japanese businesses and culture. By the late 1990s, yet another reversal devastated Japan's economy, leaving Americans free to enjoy the fruits of globalization without scrutinizing its consequences. In tracing the disparate strands of public opinion throughout these tumultuous years, McKeivitt recovers Japan's ubiquitous, yet largely unquestioned role in the creation of modern America.

McKeivitt contends that the American consumption of "all things Japan helped create a globalized America" (2). Rather than treating globalization as a totalizing force of amorphous change, McKeivitt historicizes this process of consumption, which he defines as "the production and reproduction of cultural meaning through the acquisition and/or use of goods," through analyses of the public discourse surrounding Japan's cultural penetration into American life (4, 11).

For instance, in 1975 Americans enjoyed exotic depictions of Japan in popular novels as James Clavell's *Shogun* and later that same year welcomed the emperor to the quintessential American spectacle of football. Yet in 1992, Michael Crichton's *Rising Sun* portrayed the Japanese as adversaries who stole America's capital, land, and women (48-50). This marked regression of Japan's popular depiction from Cold War ally to World War II enemy reflected new anxieties about America's place in the world, which McKeivitt links to the emergence of postmodern thought in America. In the ideological struggle of the Cold War, Japan's purported lack of moral absolutism made its usurpation of America's value-laden soft-power all the more frightening (12-13, 50-56). In this context, Japan represented a cultural threat for some and an economic threat to others.

Complicating this shift, McKeivitt looks beyond the binaries of a globalizing force and instead locates "an intensification of multiple forms of global interconnectedness" in communities throughout the United States (11, emphasis added). In Marysville, Ohio, for example, the Japanese car maker Honda established a new manufacturing plant at a time when General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler shuttered plants and laid off workers. More than jobs, Honda brought distinctly-Japanese manufacturing practices and opportunities for workers to continue their training in Tokyo. A complicated web of changing global realities ensued as out-of-work plant workers in Detroit blamed Japan for taking jobs, while the Ohioan plant workers rejected nationalist xenophobia and union representation which they feared might threaten their new American jobs.

Concentrated on the coasts, but present throughout the country, other communities formed to share in their appreciation for Japanese animation or “anime.” These groups grew at a time where many Americans feared Japan’s economic growth but coveted the goods it produced, such as the new video cassette recorder (VCR), which promised to free Americans from the rigid imetables of broadcasting companies. Beyond enabling Americans to watch television at a time of their choosing, this new technology allowed anime club members to record and exchange programming with fans across the Pacific who exchanged un-dubbed Japanese animation for Stark Trek and other American programming. *Consuming Japan* thus explains the ways in which Americans accommodated new, global realities into their existing world view.

McKevitt divides his monograph into case studies, each addressing a distinct aspect of Japanese expansion in America. The introduction and first chapter dispense with theory and historiographical jockeying. The remaining chapters take a much different tone, addressing popular depictions of Japan through books and film, the establishment of a Honda plant in Ohio, the VCR, sushi as part of Yuppie food culture, and anime clubs.

McKevitt places his work in conversation with such works as Lizabeth Cohen’s *A Consumer’s Republic* and T.H. Breen’s *The Marketplace of Revolution*. Much like Victoria de Grazia’s *Irresistible Empire*, McKevitt’s blend of cultural and diplomatic history is representative of larger trends within the field. In justifying his botton-up approach, Meckevitt notes that formal Japanese-American relations

displayed none of the animosity or concern that characterized American sentiment during the 1980s. As might be expected in such an approach, *Consuming Japan* eschews the traditional archival sources of traditional, top-down diplomatic histories in favor of unexpected and creative sources. For instance, McKevitt looks to archived blog posts from the early days of the Internet, anime journals, and food critic’s reviews of their first encounters with Japanese cuisine. He also relies on an interdisciplinary body of secondary texts written by sociologists and literary scholars.

Unifying *Consuming Japan*’s distinct case studies, McKevitt repeatedly emphasizes authenticity—both how producers and consumers perceived and constructed authenticity, and how people used the pretense of authenticity to legitimate their perspectives. The perception of a film’s accuracy or of a sushi restaurant’s quality depended upon whether or not the respective experiences comported themselves to American expectations of authenticity. That *Shōgun*’s TV adaptation included untranslated Japanese dialogue enhanced the film’s authentic feel and its reception as an accurate depiction of Japanese life (58). Likewise, one food critic dismissed a sushi bar not for its food, but for the cramped atmosphere which lacked the spacious garden rooms of authentic Japanese dining—a hallmark which McKevitt wryly dismisses, noting the population density of the archipelago (173-174).

## Strategic Visions: Volume 18, Number I



A few minor quibbles detract from this otherwise excellent monograph. The brevity and compartmentalized nature of the text at times leaves the reader uncertain of the interconnection and larger ramifications wrought by the consumption of Japanese goods. The two-part analysis of Honda in Ohio, for example, better contextualizes globalization's consequences in the U.S. than does the twenty-two-page chapter on VCRs which attempts to explain the effects of the new technology in both the United States and the world.

It is fitting that McKevitt ends his introduction with the hope that readers might find a nostalgic moment somewhere in Consuming Japan—that most readers will find such a personal connection demonstrates the degree to which Americans have consumed Japan.

Taylor Christian  
Temple University Graduate Student