

The Impact of Economic Development and Change on Popular Culture: A Case Study of Japan's Bubble Economy

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Abstract. The illusion of prosperity causes by the soaring Japanese currency exchange rate and stock price during the Bubble Economy period is always full of extravagance, dreamy feelings and praise of materialism in the popular culture of that period. 'City Pop' music is a style combining western pop music, retro and nostalgic, which is formed during the Bubble Economy period of Japan in the 1980s. This style of music conveys the enchanting Japanese urban life to the audience, reflecting Japan's vanity and luxurious popular aesthetics. As well as taking the classic anime Mobil Suit Z Gundam (1985) and Astro Boy (1980) as examples, this paper analyzes the creative elements of robots, superpowers, and utopia in the anime, reflecting the creator's confidence in social development and outlook for the future. According to create the tables of the typical lyric of 'City Pop' music, this study proves the relationship between economic development and the emergence of popular culture.

Keywords: Japan, Japanese Bubble Economy, popular culture, City Pop music, anime.

1. Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japan's export economy grew excessively due to the massive export of Japanese cars, printers, and other manufactured goods to complex economies such as the United States. This led to an excessive cash flow in the Japanese banking system, the relaxation of lending practices, and inflated prices in stocks and real estate [1]. These factors contributed to a historic era of economic expansion known as 'the bubble economy'. There is a tight bonding between the economy of a society and its popular culture. Against the backdrop of the bubble economy, Japanese young people gradually developed a 'consumerist supremacy' [2], which allowed Japanese people to integrate art and entertainment aesthetics into their daily lives. The booming economy drove the rapid development of the music and anime industries to satisfy the public's cultural demand [3].

The most iconic music genre born from the bubble economy was City-Pop, which was rounded up various music styles, including Western-Pop, Jazz, Soul, Funk and Disco Rhythms [3]. It represents a kind of 'new' city-music combined with western culture which always celebrated materialism [4], fashion and glamorous city life, offering an escape from the stresses of daily life [3]. Apart from the City-Pop, the Japanese anime industry also grew at an astonishing rate. Since the 1980s, the techniques and styles of Japanese anime advanced significantly, with production growing to 926 titles and sales reaching 28.4 billion yen in just seven years [2].

This paper aims to critically evaluate how the Japanese imagination of life in the bubble economy period is reflected in popular culture. By analyzing the music style of City-Pop, characterized by vitality, bustling urban life, and elements such as utopia, punk, and mechanics from Japanese anime in the 1980s, this study explores the tension between the vanity of the empty economic state and the extremely complicated aesthetic. It further illustrates how pop culture can, to some extent, reflect the superficial growth of the Japanese economy and the void beneath it at the time.

2. The Causes and Results of Japan's Bubble Economy in the 1980s

After Japan became a defeated country in World War II, the United States implemented direct military occupation of Japan and aided with Japan's post-war economic reconstruction. Therefore, the relationship between the two countries improved and eased [1]. In the 20th century, the United

States was the most developed economy in the world, ranking among the top in both manufacturing and industry. To revive its economy in the short term, Japan exported a large amount of manufactured goods to the United States. These types of finished products were all copied by Japanese industry from Western products, and then underwent secondary processing and improvement to gain a competitive advantage at a lower price than the Western market [1]. They sold a large number of Japanese made products to Western consumers, disrupting the balance of the economic market and making it difficult for local Western brands to survive.

Japanese industry mainly increased the exchange rate of the Japanese currency by exporting cars and electronic products to the United States. Japanese made cars were smaller in size and consume less fuel which better met the economic and convenient needs of the general public. In addition, Japan had also made breakthrough innovations in electronic products, such as Sony Walkman, pocket transistor radio, etc. [1]. The continuously growing export revenue made Japan's per capita GDP surpass many Western countries by the end of the 20th century, becoming the second largest economy after the United States [1]. However, Japan's excessive dumping in the global market had caused dissatisfaction among other countries, and at this time, the unwise measures of Japanese banks had led Japan step by step towards long-term economic recession.

Another factor promoting Japan's bubble economy was the commercial banks' misguided decision to adopt a loose monetary policy and relaxed lending practices. Due to the rapid growth of the Japanese economy and the increase in export volume, the appreciation rate of the Japanese currency was over-rapid. The Bank of Japan concerned that the excessive appreciation of the currency would lead to economic recession [5]. opted not to tighten monetary policy, reduce credit loans and currency issuance. Instead, it lent money to more people who wanted to invest in industries. These actions had greatly increased investment in Japanese stocks to a point where the market could not afford it.

In addition, land values were also soaring, especially in the 1980s when land prices in areas around Tokyo's commercial districts began to soar. This increase gradually affected nearby residential areas, driving up land prices in nearby residential areas, allowing more people to borrow money to buy real estate, invest in real estate, and purchase stocks of real estate companies [5]. This phenomenon led to excessive capital flow in Japanese commercial banks, creating a false impression of widespread wealth and extravagance. However, the core of the Japanese economy was already in deficit, with both investors and residents bearing enormous investment risks and mounting debts.

3. The Change of Japanese Ideology and the Emergence of 'City Pop'

The fake prosperity brought by Japan's Bubble Economy also changed the ideology of Japanese society at that time. Due to the over-borrowing from banks and the appreciation of the Japanese yen, the net assets of ordinary people doubled several times overnight, which quickly led to the phenomenon of excessive consumption by Japanese people in a global scale. The excessive wealth and the sudden increase of consumption level made people's desire amplified to the extreme. At that time, Japanese society advocated the concept of consumerism and the yearning for material and extravagant life [3]. Although they knew that the temporary prosperity was just the illusion of 'bubble', the satisfaction brought by material has made Japanese choose to escape from reality and live in a false fantasy [3]. Therefore, Japanese people had invested heavily in the entertainment industry, attempted to project people's imagination about future life through artistic works, such as music, comics, film and television works, etc. The popular culture formed by these types of artistic works not only reflects the aesthetic concepts of the masses well, but also resonates with the spirit of that era, meeting the needs of the public [3].

In the Bubble Economy period, there was a music genre that occupied a vital position in Japanese popular culture: 'City Pop'. The main factors that contributed to the formation of 'City-Pop' style included the diversity of Japanese culture, the projection of Japanese economy, and mass psychology. Due to the shift in the relationship between Japan and the United States from hostility to alliance after World War II, Japan gradually moved closer to the West from a traditional conservative country. As

Japan's relationship with Western countries became closer, Japanese culture was also impacted by Western culture. Before the 1980s, Japanese music focused on genres such as Jazz and R&B, with a single style and no major breakthroughs [4].

However, during the Bubble Economy, the "Summer" music style of the West Coast of the United States was introduced into Japan [4], giving Japanese musicians new inspiration: Mixed Japanese music elements with new western melodies, added funk and soul music to the melody, used more English words in the lyrics, and designed the album cover with "summer" elements such as beaches, oceans and swimming pools as the design theme [3]. The production style of 'City Pop' music was also related to the special economic situation in Japan at that time.

The Bubble Economy had made Japan experience rapid urbanization and economic growth. 'City Pop' reflects the critical period of Japan's economic prosperity and cultural transition and demonstrates the wealth of Japan's economy at that time. Additionally, at that time, the Japanese automotive industry was at its peak, and car audio systems were able to highlight the vitality of 'City Pop', with cheerful melodies and rhythms that allowed people to enjoy a unique urban atmosphere while driving [3]. Therefore, Japanese musicians not only incorporated a large number of lyrics depicting bustling city life, but also emphasized the rhythm and reverberation of 'City Pop', making it more suitable for driving.

Music was also a form of reflecting mass psychology. As mentioned above, the Japanese had been living in the illusion of Bubble Economy, extolling materialism, and using excessive luxury to escape from reality, in order to meet the empty spiritual world. 'City Pop' reflected the mentality of young Japanese people who were addicted to entertainment and love, focusing on praising intricate love stories and fashion, extravagant city life, and creating a dreamy and hazy vibe.

Table 1. City Pop music examples

Song Name	Singer	Lyric
OH NO, OH YES!	Nakamori Akina	'One by one, the lights in the commercial area gradually go out, hide the sound of high heels, just to meet you.' 'Oh no, loving you is not right. But no, don't take me home tonight. Oh yes, so baby, won't you hold me tight.'
Plastic Love	Mariya Takeuchi	'The life of day and night reversal has been with me until now. Dedicate oneself to the popular disco dance of forgetting emotions.' 'Love to me is just a game, having fun is enough. The grand dress and shoes that conceal my closed heart.'
Please hold me tightly with your eyes	Ishii Akemi	'My love for you is endless. Please take look at this overflowing longing.' 'Just be full of love, nothing else is needed, no need for telling me.'
CATHY	Penny Tohyama	'Love is like standing in the spotlight, one day you can't even see yourself. Love is sick. Love is heart sick.'
Stay with me	Miki Matsubara	'The window glass displays the figures of two of us, stay with me... Knocking on the door of the midnight, crying and begging you not to go back.' 'Stay with me...While repeating your catchphrase and embracing the moment of their coexistence, I still haven't forgotten and cherish this beauty.'
Goodbye Boogie Dance	ANRI	'Baby, started to beat the rhythm with your hands. Flying boogie dance. Baby accompanied the night and dancing to disrupt the beam of light. Goodbye boogie dance.'

As Table 1 demonstrates, the lyrics of 'City Pop' music mainly described modern city life, romantic and sad love, and even emotions that were not recognized by the secular world. From the elements of 'streets', 'shop windows', 'spotlights', 'disco' in the lyrics, we could see the social phenomenon of urbanization in Japan at that time. The nightlife of young people was various and colorful. During the period of economic prosperity, Japanese people were immersed in enjoying the present happiness, squandering money, and not considering practical issues of Bubble Economy. In

addition, the music also sung for urban life lovers, described the sadness of their separation, the carefree moments after parting, and the sweet moments of falling in love. Via the indolent and relaxed solo of female singers, it reflected the transformation of Japanese society's love concept and ideology from highly traditional to open and diversified.

City Pop music had become a symbol of Japan's Bubble period. Audiences could feel the positive Japan's economy and fancy urban life through the music style, album cover and lyrics. It not only brought audiences an immersive and dreamy atmosphere, but also showed the historical background, spiritual outlook, public aesthetics and development trend in a country.

4. The Relationship between Japan's Economic Prosperity and the Rise of Japanese Anime

The Bubble Economy was the source of inspiration for mass entertainment [6]. Supported by the socio-economic background, Japanese animation had become one of Japan's most popular cultural export products and economic soft power. During the Bubble period, entrepreneurs' investment in the animation industry reached its peak. Japanese animation also combined more electronic and computer-generated elements on the basis of traditional hand painting to form a specific artistic style with a stronger sense of dynamics and more genres [2].



Figure 1. Mobil Suit Z Gundam (1985)



Figure 2. Astro Boy (1980)

With regards to the theme of anime, Mobil Suit Z Gundam (1985) created by SUNRISE which based on universe and story of the future world, praised heroism and human bravery. By depicting the story of humans driving Gundam in battles in the future world, boldly expressing human fantasies about the future world and the universe and designing a Gundam with a sense of mechanics and technology, it reflected the rapid development of Japanese industry at that time. Japanese people were confident in having positive hopes for future human technology. Astro Boy (1980) created by Osamu Tezuka was a utopian child's animation. It was an imagined companion of children with superpowers. As well as he was a microcosm of Japanese people's beautiful imagination about life, people hoped to achieve all their wishes with wisdom. All of the above displayed that the prosperity of the Bubble Economy brought Japanese expectations and blind confidence in the future. People embodied unrealistic fantasies through art works, hoping that this prosperity could continue forever, which also reflected the positive attitude of the public in Japan at that time.

5. Conclusion

The economic development of a country affected the style of popular culture in society. This research evaluated the study of the impact of Japan's Bubble Economy on the style formation of 'City Pop' music and animation industry as an example analyzed the elements of popular culture which

reflected Japanese social phenomenon and public aesthetic. The lyrics described urban life and love stories in 'City Pop' music and the vision of utopia and future technology in animation were closely related to Japan's prosperity and blind self-confidence during the Bubble period.

This paper demonstrated the socio-economic development was the source of inspiration for mass entertainment, positive economic development would bring confidence to art creators and the public, thereby placing a positive attitude towards life and imagination of the future on art works, thus forming specific artistic styles and aesthetic trends.

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