Japan’s Book Donation to the University of Louvain

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The 1920s book donation represented Japanese culture as the Japanese elite wanted it to be perceived in the West. Most eye-catching are the high-quality illustrated books of the Edo period (1600-1868), as well as a selection of more recent literary works and academic studies published after 1868. For the majority of the Japanese population, however, the premodern past became commodified and integrated into the upcoming modern mass culture and mass consumption of the 1920s. Fragments of the Edo period could be found, for instance, as a frame of reference for popular historical novels, theatre plays, silent movies and songs on the radio and on gramophone records.

In the rapidly growing urban areas of 1920s Japan, which were as modern as their Western counterparts, there was increasing access to luxurious department stores, cafés and dance halls, cinemas, and public transportation. The modern way of life resonated with the tunes of new popular music, often jazz, which emanated from the speakers of the gramophone and the radio. It was also a time of cosmopolitanism. Japanese artists and intellectuals began to intensify their activities in and exchanges with the West in ever higher numbers. One example for this was the modern art exhibition held in 1929 in Brussels, mentioned by Freya Terryn in her essay in this volume, which was sponsored by the Japanese philanthropist Satsuma Jirōhachi, who around the same time financed the Satsuma Chair at the University of Louvain.

The 1920s were also the era of the so-called Taishō demokurashi 大正デモクラシー (Taishō Democracy), a time when steps towards further democratization were taken and social movements demanded reforms on many levels of politics and society. They were also an era of extremely volatile economic development, which culminated in Japan already in 1927 in a first major banking crisis, the Bank of Taiwan Crisis, and ultimately in the global “Great Depression”, which started in 1929. The subsequent trajectory towards the Second World War, which in Japan is called the Asia-Pacific War, started in East Asia with the Japanese invasion of North-East China in the so-called “Manchurian Incident” in September 1931. Given the events that then unfolded, including the failure of the system of collective security that had been attempted with the foundation of the League of Nations after the First World War, cultural diplomacy lost much – though never all – of its traction until after the end of the Second World War. It is therefore not surprising that the 1920s Japanese Book Donation moved out of sight for decades once the destructiveness of the political tensions that had accumulated manifested itself. The following gallery of descriptions of objects displayed in the exhibition is intended to shed further light on this side of the multifaceted background of the book donation to the University of Louvain.

1920s Consumer Culture in Japan: Popular Music, Department Stores, Fashion, Media

“Dancing to jazz, whiling away the time with booze,
You take the subway, I take the bus, but the stops are not made for lovers.”
(Song Tōkyō kōshinkyoku 東京行進曲 / Tokyo March, 1929)

Popular music like this song text echoed the fast changes in Japan of the 1920s. Many of these were global, i.e. the arrival of jazz from across the
Pacific Ocean. Jazz was connected to other, new forms of leisure, such as dancing to live jazz in the dance hall or to a record on a gramophone in a café. Jazzuru, ‘to jazz around’, was even a term to denote this lifestyle. Meanwhile, artists and composers experimented with their own music traditions and jazzy sounds, spawning new popular music genres like ryūkōka 流行歌. The quick tempo of jazz also symbolized the speed and mass consumption of contemporary technological advancements like the subway and radio. Moreover, the music itself was transformed into a mass product with the development of the big Japanese record companies.

Perhaps nowhere else is the complex situation of 1920s modernity in Japan reflected better than in the clothes worn. It would be a mistake here to simply see a juxtaposition between ‘traditional’ kimono and ‘modern’ Western clothing. Clothes increasingly became – at least for the upper and rising middle classes – a ‘projection screen’ of modern patterns. The kimono, too, was imprinted with modern(ist) designs. Western-style clothing became increasingly popular in modern Japan, especially by the end of the 1920s. Even so, the majority of Japanese women still wore the ‘traditional’ kimono, which was not only more affordable but also deemed more practical for daily life, though it was often combined with modern accessories or hairstyles. Men, especially in the rising middle class, began wearing coats and suits. They adopted the practice from the elites who, since the late 19th century, had been expected to wear Western clothing while working. While older children usually dressed in Western-style clothing, children under the age of six or seven as well as those of poorer upbringing often still wore traditional Japanese clothing. Once the children started school, they switched to school uniforms to become what Mark Jones has called “small national citizens”. Fashion(s) and mass media mutually influenced each other. A constant stream of imagery in magazines or department store advertisements stimulated the demand and fed the hunger for novelty and consumption.

The following objects, many of which were lent to the exhibition by the National Museum of Japanese History in Sakura, and their descriptions aim to highlight key tendencies of 1920s politics and consumer culture in Japan, which was part of mass culture in Japan’s modernity. Although not mutually exclusive these items can complement the concept of “Japanese culture” that lay at the heart of the elite project of the book donation to the University of Louvain, and they point to a heterogeneous, multi-layered, and never stable “cultural identity” in the 1920s, which was typical of a modern society of that time.

“Board Game Commemorating a Flight to Europe”. Sugoroku 双六 were board games, either printed on wood or paper. They were often attached to newspapers or magazines as giveaways, as also in this case. This particular sugoroku, as an addendum to the newspaper Osaka asahi shinbun, allows the players to re-enact a flight by four Japanese aviators to and around Europe, starting in Tokyo and ending in Rome. The flight was made by two airplanes and was most likely the reverse version of a historic flight from Rome to Tokyo in 1920, which was similarly conducted in two airplanes with four Italian aviators. The Japanese flight was funded by the newspaper Osaka asahi shinbun in cooperation with the Imperial Army and Navy. The reasoning was that the flight – with ultimately only 111 hours in the air – would put Japan on the map in terms of the global aviation industry, and that it was meant as a sign of international cooperation. The Japanese airplanes Hatsukaze 初風 (First wind) and 東風 Kochikaze (East Wind) also passed through Belgium, and the newspaper Het Nieuws Van Den Dag reported on 20 October 1925: “Abe and Kawachi (pilots)” had left the airfield in Croydon (England) and arrived in Evere, Belgium. They were welcomed by the Japanese Ambassador Adachi Mine’ichirō and various Belgian officials with “the whole of the Japanese colony in Belgium gathered in the square to meet them”. The two bi-planes were met by and escorted by nine Belgian military aircraft who guided them in. On 25 October 1925 the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs met them and received from them a “wonderful piece of ‘borduur’ (embroidery) in the Japanese style, which has been paid for by the Asahi newspaper. In 1916 the Asahi had already given an old sword to the Belgian Royal house as a gift of friendship.”
2. Kaimono sugoroku ichimei depōmento sutōa
買い物双六 一名デパートメントストーリ

“Board Game: Shopping at a Certain Department Store”, appendix to Shōjo no tomo 少女の友 (1 January 1914)

This board game takes the players on a race through a department store and to the marvels to be consumed there. Anything from Western clothes, cosmetics, Japanese kimono, stationery and shoes to sweets, toys and music instruments, among other things, could be purchased there. In addition, family photos or portraits could be taken, a restaurant and a rest area offered food and beverages, while on the rooftop a small garden and a “zoo” offered views of exotic plants and birds. In the 1910s and 1920s sugoroku were often sold as supplements to magazines or newspapers. This particular one, advertising modern consumer habits and consumption worlds, was a supplement to a magazine for girls.
The Mitsukoshi Department Store chain was a trailblazer in modern Japan, introducing a new form of consumerism. The company established several research teams, including one which analyzed trends and how to create new ones. The Mitsukoshi 三越 house magazine served to advertise new products, lifestyles and special exhibitions. Although the magazine targeted a more upper-class clientele, just visiting Mitsukoshi and the desire to go shopping there became part of the consumption culture of the rising middle class. The pages shown here feature on the right stationary and writing materials, among which products by the renowned German company Johann Faber, as well as materials for painting, and on the left sewing tools.
These pages of the *Mitsukoshi* magazine show, on the right, “Bags and purses for ladies”, and on the left, “Bags and purses of different kinds for gentlemen”. It is typical that more “traditional” Japanese designs and products of high quality are displayed alongside expensive Western imported products.
On the top right of this double-page spread is a list of events that would take place inside the Mitsukoshi Department Store in January 1926, such as a sale in the early days of January and exhibitions of art photography and of photos of theatre plays that were both organized by the new photo magazine *Asahi gurafu* (Asahi Graph) and, for instance, the “Third Japanese Manga Exhibition.” The latter alludes to the fact that *manga* did only in the 1920s find their way into the mainstream of society and were also more and more consumed by the middle and upper classes. The table of contents at the bottom right guides the reader to articles by various authors not only on fashion but also on “children and dogs,” on “diamonds,” etc. The left page features a coloured drawing entitled *Hatsuharu* はつ春 (“New Year”) by artist Suyama Hiroshi 須山ひろし, who often produced drawings and designs for magazines as well as for sheet music similar to that introduced in Aurel Baele’s essay in this volume.
As the street surveys of Kon Wajirō 今和次郎 (see No. 10) and other contemporary evidence showed, throughout the 1920s the majority of women in Japan still wore a *kimono* like this one, which was selected by the National Museum of Japanese History because it is fairly representative of its time.
This item belonged to an affluent member of the local elites in Chiba Prefecture in the 1920s, produced with lavish materials and using a classical pattern in a modern way. While many men in the urbanized areas but also in the regional centres, especially the growing multitudes of white-collar workers, wore Western-style suits, it remained common that lavish kimono were worn for celebrations but also in private, casual settings. The design on this kimono is inspired by Ataka no matsu 安宅の松, a naga-uta 長唄 (a song accompanying a theatrical dance), first performed in 1769, which took its subject matter from the famous story of the deadly feud between Minamoto no Yoshitsune 源義経 (1159-1189) and his older brother Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147-1199), later to become the first shōgun 将軍 of the Kamakura period (1192-1333). Originally adapted from a 15th century nōgaku 能楽 theatre play, the theatrical dance subsequently garnered huge popular acclaim and was ranked as one of the kabuki evergreen plays, known as kabuki jūhachiban 歌舞伎十八番 (“best 18 kabuki plays”). This 1920s kimono is a vivid testimony to how classical topos of initially elite and later popular culture are incorporated into very modern, everyday life designs, becoming part of an always evolving - and never unified - cultural identity.
The *haori* is a coat worn over a *kimono* as a form of jacket. Very concrete images of modern icons and depictions of actual contemporary events were very popular in the 1920s as part of *kimono* designs called *omoshirogara*, ‘novelty’ or ‘cool designs.’ This one was produced at the end of the 1920s or in the early 1930s. It seems to herald US-Japanese Friendship by displaying the flags of both countries, a Japanese airplane, and a battleship, as well as a skyscraper skyline, representing either New York or San Francisco. One possibility is that the airplane, as well as the pilot goggles and pilot’s leather cap that can be seen on the head of one of the two boys depicted, allude to a daring trans-Pacific flight that was conducted by two US aviators in response to an offer of 25,000 US Dollars by the Japanese Newspapers *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* in October 1931. The flight – and the offer by the newspaper – came at an auspicious time, since US-Japanese diplomatic relations were heavily strained by the Japanese invasion in North-East China in the aftermath of the “Manchurian Incident”, which had started on 17 September 1931. In reaction to criticism of Japan’s actions in the US public, not only Japanese diplomats but also private citizens and companies, like the afore-mentioned newspaper, tried to amend the relation by friendship campaigns, which then became part of the everyday material culture, here in fashion for children.
In 1879, uniforms were introduced in the Gakushūin 学習院 school for the children of aristocrats, strongly inspired by the sailor outfits of the French and British Navies, which by that point had been adopted as the uniforms for the Imperial Japanese Navy as well. This compulsory wearing of uniforms at the Gakushūin school was the start of the spread of the uniforms throughout Japan for, by the late 1880s, ultimately all levels ranging from primary education up to the Imperial Universities. In the Taishō period (1912-1926) the various styles became consolidated into the now-typical gaku-ran 学ラン (學欄) school uniform for boys. For girls, uniforms only came into widespread use in the 1930s. The uniforms were in line with what the historian Mark Jones has called the discourses of the shō-kokumin 小国民, the ‘little (national) citizen’ and of the yūtōsei 優等生, the ‘superior student’, although he also identified another discourse of ‘childlike children’ (kodomo-rashi kodomo 子供らしい子供). The first one was connected to the idea of being of service to the nation. During the 1910s and 1920s, education was increasingly seen as a tool to climb the social ladder in a complex modern society by parents in all social classes. Thus, pushing children to achieve ‘superior’ results in school gradually became a social norm, especially in the elites but also in the emerging middle class. School uniforms became a normal sight on any street, with some of them worn by students who were affiliated to universities that participated in the 1920s donation to the University of Louvain. In addition, uniform-like children’s dresses were worn outside of school as well. This one is most likely from an elementary school boy.
The title “Modernologio – Studies of Present Times” refers to the concept coined by the folklore studies and ethnography scholar Kon Wajirō (1888-1973). He is primarily known for his extensive ethno-graphic research on changing material culture in light of Tokyo’s rapid urban transformation following the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. In this, he applied a method he framed with the neologism 考現学 kōgengaku, the ‘study of the contemporary’, as an antonym to the long-established 考古学 kōkogaku, ‘study of the old’, which to this day is the standard Japanese word for ‘archaeology’. He also used the Esperanto word modernologio, to express the global meaning of his approach of a “modernology”. The use of Esperanto alludes to the fact that many members of Japanese academia were intrigued by the appeal of one unified language to be used globally – which shows their transnational connectedness to the cosmopolitan avant-garde movements of their times. Together with his students and various other volunteers, Kon held large-scale surveys around the Ginza street (May 1925), Tokyo’s counterpart to New York’s Fifth Avenue, but also in the working-class slum areas of Honjo and Fukagawa, Tokyo (October 1925), meticulously capturing their observations of everyday life with annotated sketches and statistics. The same method was applied to surveys in Japan’s colonies and rural areas of Japan, including extensive studies on architecture and the material culture inside buildings of all kinds.

The first page [ill. 1] displayed here is taken from his 1925 Ginza survey that was originally published as the index to the July 1925 issue of the women’s magazine Fujin kōron, summarizing the fashion of strolling men and women, including a distinction between Western-style clothing and more traditional Japanese garments. The rectangular boxes with numbers attached to different elements on both the female and male model sketches guide the reader of the survey to numerous tables with...
statistics on percentages of anything ranging from different types of hats, of hair or beard styles, of glasses, purses, parts of the respective dress, down to the different types of shoes worn by anybody who walked past Kon Wajirō and his fellow surveyors. The sketches on this index page already show by the percentages given below, that the clothing styles of the most likely more elite or middle-class passers-by differed radically between the genders at the time of the survey: while 99% of the women wore *kimono*, 67% of the men wore Western suits. At the same time *kimono* were not unaffected by modernity either: new color schemes and graphic patterns were rapidly being introduced by the modern department stores and found attention through distribution to local smaller stores throughout the Japanese Empire and through mail-order catalogues or popular magazines. A significant number had modernist graphic patterns or depicted icons of modernity as can be seen in the case of the children’s *haori* among the objects included in this catalogue here.

The second page [ill. 2] is taken from the survey *Honjo Fukagawa hinminkutsu fukin fūzoku saishū* 本所深川貧民窟付近風俗採集 (Collections regarding customs from around the slum areas of Honjo-Fukugawa), depicting a radically different material culture than that seen on the Ginza shopping street. In the 1920s, Honjo and Fukagawa in Tokyo, two areas that stretched from north to south, occupying a vast stretch of land east of the Sumida River, were full of smaller factories and over-crowded living quarters for working class families, who often lived in precarious conditions. Only a few kilometers away from Ginza, everyday livelihood situations could hardly be more different. Seen through the lens of what was sold in shops in the Honjo-Fukugawa area and for what prices, the left side depicts the “Items that women of Honjo-Fukagawa need” in everyday life, while the right side shows what “Things men of Honjo-Fukugawa want” to buy in the shops surveyed, and what the average prices were.

Both pages were reprinted as part of a collection of Kon’s surveys in 1930 under the title “Modernology - Studies of Present Times”, which he published together with Yoshida Kenkichi (1897-1982), his former fellow junior student at the Tōkyō bijutsu gakkō 東京美術学校 (Tokyo Academy of Fine Arts), who had become a theatre scenographer. Yoshida was similarly intrigued by contemporary material culture and habits and collaborated with Kon in developing the concept of “Modernology”. 


This 1923 poster features a girl in *kimono* enjoying a glass of Kirin Beer with other patrons at the neighboring tables in suits and a lady in traditional dress in the background. Japan’s beer production and consumption had increased tremendously since the introduction of German brewery techniques in the 19th century. Although it was considered an exotic luxury beverage before 1900, by 1920 the average consumption of beer per capita had risen fivefold. The Kirin Beer Company, which was established in 1887, had a share of 18.9% of Japan’s beer market in 1920. The first place (64.1% in 1920) was taken by Dai Nihon Beer, which was the result of a merger of Kirin’s three competitors Sapporo, Ebisu, and Asahi in 1906. That producing beer was a profitable business was also reflected in Kirin Beer’s and Dai Nihon Beer’s positions (89th and 39th respectively in 1918) in the top 100 of Japan’s largest industrial firms.

The consumption and cultural representation of beer in fact rose in parallel with the social and economic transformation that Japan experienced between 1900 and 1920. The image of beer remained exotic, but in a different way. With the expansion of cities, the foreign nature of beer became linked with trends in a modern urban lifestyle that were globally oriented. In beer halls Japanese salarymen could be found savoring beer that was served by the *jokyū* 女給 (waitresses). Another contemporary image in the weekly illustrated magazine *Asahi gurafu* 朝日グラフ featured a combination of beer, waitresses, cigarettes, and commuter trains to symbolize the life of salaried men. What Kirin attempted to do with this poster and other similar ones in the 1920s was to create such imagery of the modern life, in which the consumption of beer and other modern beverages was to be deeply entangled. An image like this, in which the woman in the poster is alone and radiates self-confidence while indulging in her beer, would have been impossible even a short while before and was probably still provocative to a certain extent in 1923, but it also shows that Japanese companies saw women and their independent consumption choices as an increasingly important market segment.
Fujokai, “Women’s World”, published between 1910 and 1950 (briefly revived in 1952), was one of the many thriving women’s magazines in the 1920s. The magazine featured a variety of items, including serialized novels and practical advice for everyday life. This poster advertises the July 1927 issue of the magazine, which was a special issue focusing on *O-kane no tamaru seikatsu-hō* オお金のたまる生活法, on a “lifestyle which allows saving money”. It was part of a general trend to encourage accumulating savings that was often fueled by government campaigns. Women were ascribed a crucial role in this endeavor as they were deemed more trustworthy in administering the family savings than their husbands. The relative success of encouraging thrift and savings led to a path-dependency in spending habits that turned Japan, up to today, into one of the nations with the highest rates of private savings.
Mitsukoshi, the most renowned Japanese department store, with its main branch located on the Ginza street, Tōkyō’s ‘Fifth Avenue’, organized so-called jidō hakurankai 児童博覧会 “Children’s Fairs” or “Children’s Exhibitions” from 1909 to 1921. This is an advertisement, in a playful graphic design playing with the graphic elements of the Japanese characters, for the 7th edition, taking place between March 20 and May 5 1915. The exhibition focused on children’s toys and other products from both in and outside Japan. In the 1910s and 1920s a new type of modern childhood was invented – with children forming a new category of consumers. The last event in 1921 featured a lavish display of toys of all kinds, domestically produced and imported from all over the world, clothes for children, sweets and items related to education, books, photos, modern school desks and chairs etc., and also articles for improving hygiene.
Poster advertising a special screening of the American silent film “The Ten Commandments,” directed by Cecil B. DeMille. The character for ‘ten’ 十 is stylised to resemble the Christian cross. “The Ten Commandments,” grossed over $4,000,000 in the USA, which made it into one of the commercially most successful movies for Paramount in the early 1920s. In Japan it was screened even still in 1925, for instance in the Cinema Teikokukan 帝国館, the ‘Imperial’ Cinema in Tōkyō’s Asakusa cinema district.

This advertisement poster is from the Shin-sekai Iroha-za 新世界いろは座 cinema in Osaka, which originally was a traditional theatre that had been remodelled into a modern cinema specializing in premiers. It is an example of the popularity of Western films, which were shown in mixed programmes with Japanese productions, usually consisting of traditional sword-fighting movies, set mostly in the Edo period (1600-1868), and contemporary dramas or comedies.
This is one of the many contemporary illustrations which shows the radio as a gathering point for the whole family in the 1920s. The picture was part of a collection of images which depicted what the editors in 1931 saw as historical milestones of the Meiji (1868-1912), Taishō (1912-1926) periods and the early years of the Shōwa (1926-1989) period. It was a supplement to the January issue of the very popular general-reader magazine *Kingu* and demonstrates that many even very recent events were seen as “historical” already, which Japanese historians have ascribed to a keen awareness of the contemporaries in the late 1920s of having entered *gendai* 現代, which means “modern/modernity” but also “contemporary”. It shows the very first Japanese radio broadcast in 1925, with all household members of a Japanese multi-generation family gathered around. The text above states: “‘J.O.A.K., J.O.A.K., this is the Tokyo Broadcasting Station.’ It was on March 1 that the announcer’s cheerful voice could first be heard in the East [in East Asia]. The people in the capital gathered in front of the amplifiers and could not help but marvel and rejoice at this wonder of scientific civilization.”
The displayed model is a ‘Harmony’ manufactured by the Japanese company Nihon chikuonki shōkai (Nipponophone) with the manufacturer’s logo inside under the lid. In the 1920s gramophones became an accessible commodity for many Japanese, with prices going as low as about 19 yen for a basic model. Already in 1920, the sales volume for domestically produced gramophones peaked at about 5.6 million yen. That year imports of foreign-made gramophones such as the ‘Victrolas’ (the models produced by the Victor Talking Machine Company) and Grafanolas (Columbia) totaled 350,000 yen, but would increase fivefold by 1925.

Where earlier types before 1920 still possessed a horn on top of the machine, the Harmony uses a different technique. The vibrations that the needle picks up from the disc’s grooves are amplified and sent from inside the opened box. This gramophone is an acoustic model where one has to wind a handle several times to tighten a metal coil to play the record. Electricity-powered devices were only introduced from 1925 onwards.
In the 1920s, smaller specialized stores and wholesalers promoted and sold gramophone records of manufacturers under an exclusive contract system. In some cases these were shops that combined the sales of music instruments and gramophones, such as Yamano Gakki and Nippon Victor. This poster showcases the sale of Taihei records by the watch store Nakamura that mentions its exclusive relationship with Taihei as a “special contracted store”. The poster is lavishly executed with a replica of a disc physically mounted on it, showing the innovativeness of the advertising industry at that time. Their products are praised as being “genuine domestic electrical recordings”. This was due to two reasons: Before the 1920s many Japanese songs had been recorded and printed in overseas studios before being imported to Japan. From 1925 onwards, electrical recording was introduced in Japan, which improved the sound quality. Domestic record companies used the new technology in their advertisements to boost their sales.
This is a gramophone record with the song that accompanied the silent film Tōkyō kōshinkyoku (Tokyo March), directed by the renowned director Mizoguchi Kenji (1898-1956). The record sold over 300,000 copies. The film was based on a novel by Kikuchi Kan 菊池寛 (1888-1948), which was serialized in one of the most popular Japanese magazines at the time, Kingu キング. Set in 1929 Tokyo, the story depicts a tragic love story between an upper-class boy and a lower-class girl. Sound was an integral part of the cinematic experience in silent films. Such films were accompanied by benshi 弁士, live narrators, who guided the story and added to the experience, as well as music from gramophone records that were played before, during and at the end of a screening. It was exactly the hit “Tokyo March” that elevated the film’s success. The allure of “Tokyo March” was its jazzy tunes and the catchy lyrics both reflecting the fast transformation of Japan’s society. The tie-up that the film company Nikkatsu formed with the American-owned record company Nippon Victor was crucial here. The latter’s introduction of new American market strategies and an exclusive contract system influenced the practice of increasing the tempo at which films and the accompanying songs were produced. “Tokyo March” is thus exemplary for the media mix that formed in Japan’s 1920s mass entertainment.
This 1924 record was produced by one of the big domestic Japanese record and gramophone companies, Dai-Nihon Nittō chikuonki kabushiki gaisha. Nittō was the biggest competitor of Nihon chikuonki shōkai (Nipponophone), the company that produced the gramophone on display here (see: 16) in the 1920s. Nittō was established in Osaka and occupied a strong position in the record market of Western Japan. This record featured a speech by Lieutenant General Gondō Denji on the hai-nichi mondai 排日問題, the “Anti-Japanese Problem,” entitled “Facing a National Crisis”. The title referred to the recent outcry within the Japanese public when news reached the country of the Immigration Act of 1924, a US federal law often called the “Asian exclusion act” since it targeted Japanese and Chinese immigrants, especially those residing on the US West Coast. General Gondō was a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) and also the head of the Dai-Nippon kokkō sen'yō kai 大日本国光宣揚会 (Association for the enhancement of the national glory of Great Japan), an ultranationalist organization that exploited the legitimate criticism of the racist and discriminatory US legislation that led to lasting mistrust and anger in the Japanese public. This example illustrates that records were not only used to distribute music but also educational or, as here, political content. The 1920s Japanese book donation can be seen as one attempt at cultural diplomacy to counter rising international tensions and to improve Japan’s image in the world, as Lieven Sommen argues in his essay in this volume.
Dai-Nihon Tōa chikuonki kabushikigaisha was a minor gramophone company and label from Ōsaka. This record features a recorded traditional tale performed as *Chikuzen biwa* 筑前琵琶 narrative storytelling. The *Chikuzen biwa* is a lute-like instrument with four strings and four frets or five strings and five frets. Originally this form of storytelling had been performed by the *biwa-hōshi* 琵琶法師, blind monks, since the late medieval period. The *Chikuzen biwa* came into use in the Meiji period (1868-1912) and was very popular in the 1920s, when many older tales were adapted to a more modern style of narrative and distributed on gramophone shellac records. The tale is about Ishidōmaru 石童丸, a legendary figure who features in the temple founding myth of the Karukaya-dō 荊萱堂, a temple hall which is part of the famous Shingon buddhist temple complex around the Kongōbu-ji 金剛峯寺 on Mt. Kōya 高野山. The story was performed for this recording by a certain Madono (or Shinden) Asahiyama 真殿旭山, which was the pseudonym of a performer about whom not much information can be found nowadays. The modernized versions of such tales in narrative performance accompanied by a *biwa* or other forms of oral narrative performances were a very popular genre for gramophone records and existed in parallel to equally popular modern music like the jazzy tunes of the “Tōkyō March” (see No. 18), or imported Western music.
The reverse side of the sleeve that holds the Chikuzen biwa performance of the tale about Ishidōmaru (see No. 20) provides a hint at the range of genres on sale by domestic Japanese record companies and how they – at least in the language of their advertisements – rationalized their own existence. The text on the sleeve proudly announces:

"The five great missions of East Asia Gramophone Inc., which were born out of our times:
- The production of gramophone records for education.
- The study and proliferation of music for children.
- The study and proliferation of popular music.
- The preservation and improvement of Japanese music.
- Enhancing the practical uses of gramophones."

An interesting detail is that the company pledged not only to preserve more traditional forms of Japanese music but to “improve” it, which points to a process of adapting – or in many cases quite substantially reinventing – “traditional” music to align it with the modern tastes of the 1920s.
This record by Nipponophone was mistakenly placed in the wrong sleeve by its previous owner. Nipponophone was a label of the Nihon chikuonki shōkai 日本蓄音機商会 (short: Nitchiku). With the name change it came into the hands of exclusively Japanese owners and would remain so until the company was acquired by Columbia and subsequently became its subsidiary in 1927. This record features a shosei-bushi which was a form of popular song for the masses that had been adapted around 1900 from an earlier, more political form. That earlier form had been used to disguise demands and critique directed at politicians in the 1870s at the time of the government-critical ‘Movement for Freedom and Popular Rights’ (jiyū minken undō 自由民権運動). In the 1910s, the musical style of these often witty and ironic songs was used to also convey premodern stories, such as, here, the famous traditional puppet theatre play Sonezaki shinjū (Love suicide at Sonezaki). This play had first been performed in Osaka in 1703 and was written by none other than the Edo period playwright and dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門 (1653-1725), whose work deeply influenced Japanese theatre through the various forms of puppet theatre. The latter developed into the kabuki 歌舞伎 theatre, which then, by the 1920s, was already seen as “traditional Japanese” theatre in contrast to contemporary plays. Chikamatsu plays are also present in books that were sent to the University of Louvain in the 1920s to represent Japanese culture, while they were integrated into modern mass media consumption in Japan at the same time.
This record features another narrative song performance accompanied by a *Satsuma biwa*, a lute that has four strings and four frets and is played with a bigger plectrum than the *Chikuzen biwa* lute. It was also the older, longer established version of the two. The record demonstrates well the merger of a pre-modern form of lute and song performance with a modern subject: the piece recorded here is about one of two ships that were named *Hitachi-maru*. Both were sunk, the first in June 1904 during the Russo-Japanese War when transporting Japanese troops with 1,091 lives lost, the second in September 1917, with 16 lives lost and the rest of the crew and passengers interned by the German auxiliary cruiser SMS *Wolf*. It is not clear which of the two ships the song is about, but it is certainly a song about the ravages of war and loss of Japanese life at sea, performed with a modernized version of a very old lute tradition. The map on the sleeve shows the core of the Japanese Empire, Japan as we know it today, and the colonies Korea and Taiwan. The label Nipponophone boasted 15 branch offices marked on the map, from Otaru on the northern Japanese main island Hokkaidō to Hakata in Southwestern Japan and Dalian (Jap.: Dairen) in Manchuria, Seoul (Jap.: Keijō) in Korea, and Taipei (Jap.: Taihoku) in Taiwan. Although a simple record sleeve that was to advertise the record company, it gives an impression of how widespread the awareness of being part of an Empire was, which was also part of the basis of the self-confidence manifest in the joint efforts of Japanese politicians, academics and entrepreneurs to support the donation to the University of Louvain.
Domestic Politics Through the Lens of Posters

The political and socio-economic dynamics and tensions of late 1920s Japan finds ample expression in graphically powerful posters. Many of the posters introduced here stem from the 1928 national election and are testimony to the so-called “Taishō Democracy”. The term refers to the promising democratic tendencies of the Taishō period (1912-1926) and, in a wider sense, to the period from 1905 to 1932, which became also an important source of inspiration for post-1945 democracy in Japan, similar to the role the Weimar Republic played for postwar Western Germany. Other posters – often illegal ones – advertised labor and peasant movements or called for the liberation of the so-called burakumin 部落民, the former pre-modern “outcasts”. They represent the rising radical social and political movements of the 1920s. The conservative government bureaucracy was afraid of a possible future revolution from the left, due to having the example of the Russian Revolution and the emerging Soviet Union literally next door geographically, with the Russian Far Eastern provinces located on the opposite site of the Sea of Japan. The infamous Chian iji hō 安維持法 (Peace Preservation Law) that was promulgated together with the revision of the election laws to universal male suffrage in 1925 provided the state with far-reaching instruments to censor and punish anything that was violating a deliberately vaguely defined kokutai 国体, which means “national body” or “national policy” in a narrower sense but could also be translated as “national essence,” which centered around the Imperial Institution. The mighty conservative bureaucracy, often in alliance with the employers and with academics, also tried to engage in what historian Sheldon Garon has called ‘moral suasion campaigns’ that were designed to induce certain behaviors in the population and to ease social tensions. The posters by the Industrial Welfare Association displayed here represent this tendency. These domestic – but also global – political tendencies have to be taken into account when asking why in the 1930s the priorities of Japanese politics – and politics elsewhere – ultimately shifted away from cultural diplomacy, which the Japanese 1920s book donation is an example of. The latter never fully ceased to exist, but with the rising domestic and ultimately global political tensions the world began to march into the direction of a second, even more devastating World War, due to which the Japanese donations and many similar Interwar period efforts were forgotten, sometimes for decades.

“Universal Suffrage – Everybody, go to the ballots!” This poster, issued by the Home Ministry, calls to vote in the 1928 election, the first with male universal suffrage, further stating on the brighter right-hand side of the poster: “Vote and the future will be bright! The politics of a Shōwa Period Restauration based on public opinion will be realized.” This is juxtaposed with the darker tones on the left-hand side of the poster, which states “Abstain from your right, and darkness shall fall!” The usage of the phrase “Shōwa Period Restauration” was rather conspicuous since, although the poster was issued by the Home Ministry that was supposed to be politically neutral, this phrase was also used in right-wing discourse. There, it expressed the idea of renewing the Meiji Restauration of 1868, this time ‘completing it’ by aspiring to put the population in a more direct connection with the Emperor, which could mean to devaluate parliamentarism. But in the context of this poster it rather means that the Shōwa era, which had started in 1926, was to usher in a more democratic era of widened participation by the public via the elections and the political campaigning for votes surrounding them.
On this poster, Masutani Torakichi (1878-1953) is depicted asking for “your precious vote”. He was the candidate of the progressive Rikken Minseitō, the Constitutional Democratic Party, one of the main democratic political parties in interwar Japan. Ever since universal male suffrage was granted in 1925, it was clear that the coming election campaigns would have a very different character. Before, the limited number of elite voters had meant often exclusive back-chamber talks in all localities in Japan to convince local elites to give their votes en bloc, sometimes even through bribes. But with the first election under universal male suffrage, the candidates had to compete for a suddenly massively enlarged electorate, hence also the graphically ever more appealing posters in order to get attention.
“Give your pure [uncorrupted] vote to Hiraga Shū!” Hiraga (1882-1957) was a lawyer and House of Commons candidate of the conservative democratic party Rikken Seiyūkai for an election district of Osaka. Before that election, votes were often exchanged for political favors or money by all established parties.
Campaign poster for Tsutsui Tamijirō (1875-1941) of the progressive Rikken Minseitō Party for the 1928 Lower House Elections under universal male suffrage. The text reads: “It is your one vote that will influence the world! It is the person who will accomplish your mission – Tsutsui Tamijirō.” Tsutsui had been elected before for the Ōsaka City Assembly and in 1924 to the House of Commons, although for another party, the Seiyū hontō 政友本党. His campaign in 1928 for the Ōsaka No. 1 election district was not successful. The raised hand on the poster holds a ballot for the house of commons, which the vast majority of the (exclusively male) voters had in their hands for the first time. It was a considerable leap forward to further democratize Japanese politics and the campaigning for votes was fierce.
The candidate Sumi Gensen (1871–1943), was a former colonial bureaucrat-turned politician, a member of the Lower House, and later the mayor of Shingū city from 1933 until 1935. The poster promises to give everyone food and work, hinting at the social hardships of the late 1920s. Above his name the phrase “strict and righteous neutrality” can be found to set him apart from colleagues of the established political parties and claim that he was impartial to the usual strife between the political parties.
This poster with its avant-garde style demands: “Give parliamentary seats also to men of letters! Members of the reading class – vote for Kikuchi Kan!” The novelist, playwright and journalist Kikuchi Kan (1888-1948) had won nationwide acclaim for his 1920 novel *Shinju fujin* 真珠夫人 (Madam Pearl), which was first serialized in the major newspapers *Ōsaka mainichi shinbun* and *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun*. He was also the author of the novel on which the screenplay for the film *Tōkyō kōshinkyoku* 東京行進曲 (Tokyo March) with its immensely popular soundtrack was based (see item 18). The novel was serialized in the popular magazine *Kingu* from June 1928 onwards, the same year that Kikuchi was – ultimately unsuccessfully – running as candidate for the House of Commons in the general election, the first election under universal male suffrage. He was supported by the Socialist People’s Party, one of a number of left-leaning parties with a background in the proletarian movement that were allowed for the first time. However, this party ultimately managed to win only four out of 466 seats in the House of Commons, the lower chamber of the Imperial Diet. After the Second World War he was purged by the US Occupation forces for his strong involvement in wartime propaganda, but his influence is lasting, with many of his novels and theatre plays having been turned into movies and later into TV dramas, and his tutelage for the foundation of two of the most prestigious literature prices in Japan, the Akutagawa Price and the Naoki Price, while another one, founded in 1938, was named after him.
This poster was issued by the Nihon rōdō kumiai dōmei – Kansai gōdō rōdō kumiai (Japanese League of Labor Unions – Kansai Joint Labor Union), stating: “Ten-ant farmers, shopkeepers and workers [vote for] Yatsushiro Tomozō. We – for us – for our representa-tive!” The poster points to the rising social tensions in the rapidly urbanizing areas of Japan, here the Kansai region with Osaka being the economic hub, only rivaled by Tōkyō. Many peasants had lost proprie-torship of their own land over the previous centu-ries and were degraded to tenant farmers, often working on the same fields their ancestors had once owned for an upper stratum of wealthy lenders, burdened by high taxes. In the aftermath of the First World War and the drastic rise in domestic prices that the unprecedented wartime boom had ushered in, tenant farmer strikes and violent clashes with landlords and the police became common, and some also sought legal actions supported by lawyers solidarizing with them. Here they and the urban small business owners and factory workers are called upon to unite behind a candidate from their own social background.
The Rōdō nōmin tō, the Japanese Labourers and Farmers’ Party, active between December 1926 and December 1928, was a proletarian political party with a centrist socialist stance.
This poster, which used the same basic layout as the advertisement for the “Japan Laborers and Farmers newspaper” (No. 33) and was most likely also used for other candidates of the Japanese Labourers and Farmers’ Party with just the name and the photo exchanged, states: “Authorized candidate of the Japanese Labourers and Farmers’ Party for the House of Commons Fukuda Kyōji”. The writing on the flyer that the worker holds in his hands with a portrait photo of Fukuda says: “A friend of peasants, workers, salary earners, shopkeepers. Cast the right vote!”
This poster advertises the “Japanese Labourers and Farmers’ Newspaper.” The text reads “To realize a weekly publication, we are collecting a fund of 3,000 yen. Read the militant political newspaper of the proletarian masses: the ‘Japan Labourers and Farmers’ Newspaper’!!”
This poster announces a “Laborers and Farmers’ Russia Exhibition” encouraging the visitors to see the “evidence of the construction of ten years that were filled with power and hope.” The exhibition commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, displaying statistics, posters, caricatures, sculptures, books and magazines from Soviet Russia. The exhibition was sponsored by several leftist organizations of the proletarian movement. It is obvious that the main design of the poster itself was influenced by Soviet aesthetics. In the lower left corner a suggestion for further reading can be found: a Japanese translation of Karl Marx’ Capital, *Shihonron* 資本論, by the famous Kyōto University professor of economics Kawakami Hajime 河上肇 (1879-1946) and his former student Miyakawa Minoru 宮川実 (1895-1985), who had become a marxist economist himself. This translation had been published as an affordable paperback by the left-leaning major publishing house Iwanami 岩波.
The Japan Farmers' Union campaigned for direct ownership by farmers of their land and recognition of their cultivation rights.
The Zenkoku Suiheisha, the ‘National Levelers Association’, founded in 1919, fought for the emancipation of the *burakumin* 部落民. They were outcasts discriminated against since the pre-modern era because their occupations were associated with death, such as grave-digging or tannery. The bottom of the poster features the exhortation “‘Special village people’ of the entire country - unite!”, with the term ‘special village people’ being used to describe the discriminated.
Poster stating “Take good care of the machines, pay attention to your work” issued by the Sangyō fukuri kyōkai 産業福利協会, the Industrial Welfare Organization. This association was founded in 1925 under the tutelage of the Naimu-shō shakai-kyoku 内務省社会局, the Social Bureau of the Home Ministry, which itself had been founded in 1921 as a reaction to rising inequality and social tensions in Japan but also around the world. The Home Ministry bureaucrats feared possible left-wing activism or even an attempt at revolution. One should not forget that the Russian Revolution of 1917, leading to the foundation of the Soviet Union, had happened “next door” to Japan, which shared a water border with the Russian Far-Eastern regions. Throughout the 1920s these tensions experienced a further rise also in Japan, and the government in liaison with the business world tried desperately to find ways to amend them - without granting workers too wide-ranging rights to self-organize. The Association, which was later merged with the Kyōchōkai 協調会, the ‘Conciliation Society,’ that had a similar purpose of mitigating conflicts between employers and employees, had a paternalistic character which can be easily discerned from this and the other posters issued by it. The slogan on the poster alludes to the many accidents in factories, here essentially blaming the workers and encouraging them to be more attentive to avoid accidents, in an attempt that historian Sheldon Garon has described as ‘moral suasion’.
The text in bold red print on this poster reads: “Proper clothes – always safe”. This winning poster design was, according to the text at the bottom, submitted by a worker in the Kure Naval Arsenal close to Hiroshima by the name of Iwamoto (or Ishimoto) Nobukata (or Nobumasa) 石本信方 (since, as an ‘ordinary’ worker, he is not to be found in any bibliographical lexicon or database, the reading of this name cannot be confirmed). The design was one of the many submitted to the Industrial Welfare Organization as part of a competition it had advertised. The three examples show the disastrous consequences of wearing improper garments for work, resulting in accidents because of parts getting caught in machines, while the upper, superior example features a workman’s apron and tight sleeves.
This poster shows a female factory worker who is ostentatively showing her white teeth as the result of frequently using a toothbrush, stating “To brushed white teeth – [comes] shining health”. The poster alludes to the many maladies induced by inferior oral hygiene among factory workers, against which ministerial bureaucrats, employers and the medical profession campaigned in order to raise the average health level of the workers.

39. Migaita shiraha ni hikaru kenkō みがいた白歯に光る健康
Poster issued by the Industrial Welfare Organization, 1934
This graphically appealing poster, stating “The hygienic canteen – take out the flies which are at the basis of diseases”, was a winning poster of the 6th poster competition of the Industrial Welfare Association, lobbying for stricter hygiene measures in factory cantinas. Insects are abundant especially in Japan’s humid summers, and high rates of diseases associated with insects had been a constant problem in factory eateries for decades. Modern hygiene studies, often related to research undertaken in Japan’s colonies on behalf of the prestigious Imperial Universities – many of which supported the 1920s book donations to Leuven - resulted in ever intensifying attempts to change behavior in order to avoid diseases.
This poster in an abstract style announces: “Natural disasters always strike when you least expect them”. It was a winning poster of the 11th poster competition of the Industrial Welfare Association and part of a campaign by the Home Ministry aimed at changing the behavior of the population in the event of disasters, encouraging them to always be on the guard to not be engulfed in calamities. This is demonstrated here in a humorous way with a housewife in a kitchen, but literally with a serious background, it being set ablaze, while a cat, through the ages accused of stealing but also loved, is taking advantage of the situation.