

Times Capsule Special Advertising History

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Ads are a mirror reflecting Japan's history and evolution

In the 1980s, the cultural context of ads was often discussed. It was a time when ads were frequently the starting point for fashion trends. The phrase "Ads are a mirror reflecting the current era" was in frequent use. But this only scratches the surface of the complex phenomenon of fashion. Ads also changed as Japan's industrial structure and consumer behavior evolved. For example, ads for cars and home electronics, which ran frequently during the period of high economic growth, have decreased as those related to mobile phones and internet services have increased. These have become the ads we see daily. Japanese electronics makers, which used to produce a full range of home products, have shifted to specializing in products and services that best take advantage of their respective strengths. Automakers now focus more on overseas markets than the domestic market. The greater use of information and communications technology has driven a significant growth of that industry, and this

is reflected in advertising. Historically, The Japan Times played a news agency-like role, providing information in English to embassies and consulates in Japan. It is not difficult to imagine that expectations were placed on it to showcase the appeal of Japanese companies and products and help report on conditions in Japanese society. Japan opened its doors to the rest of the world following the Meiji Restoration. In an effort to boost Japan's position in the global community, the government worked to help industry and the military under the slogan "fukoku kyōhei" (enrich the nation, strengthen the military). Standards of living improved. After the nation experienced defeat in World War II, there was a phase of recovery from the devastation, followed by a period of high economic growth. Japan eventually achieved the world's second-largest gross domestic product. Ads carried in The Japan Times reflect all this history, and are witnesses to it.

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Throughout their history, advertisements have always painted a picture of how people lived.

1897 - 1912

Meiji

First silk and pearls, then beer and soap

The Japan Times was launched in 1897 during the Meiji Era (1868-1912). Not surprisingly, it carried ads for silk and pearl products, and others from emerging industries began to appear. Beer, said to have been a favorite beverage of the politician Enomoto Takeaki, had begun to be imported in the final part of the feudal era, but domestic production grew to exceed imports by 1887. By that time, companies with modern brewing technology had been established. One can see from ads in this period that Japanese were increasingly taking up the habit of drinking beer. Domestic efforts to develop soap of a quality rivaling imported products started around 1890, when entrepreneurs Nagase Tomiro and Kobayashi Tomijiro launched domestic production. Soap was still a luxury item, but its use began to grow among ordinary citizens by the end of the Meiji Era, contributing greatly to public health. A prominent characteristic of the ads in this era is the emergence of those placed by individual business owners. Beer and soap makers, the early adopters of newspaper ads, have been developing their advertising methods ever since, and today engage in wide-ranging advertising activities.

Oct. 20, 1897

Feb. 5, 1898

Dec. 4, 1903

June 28, 1924

June 24, 1924

1913 - 1926

Taisho

Modern toothpaste, little luxuries and cars

Sandwiched between the Meiji and Showa eras, each of which saw major social changes, the Taisho Era (1913-1926) may at first appear to lack special character. As the commotion of Meiji subsided, society turned inward — yet the germs of wide-ranging changes began to emerge. Ads for department stores and specialty shops reflected how people's lives had improved, able to spend on little luxuries rather than just scraping by. Ads also reflected how the wealthy and educated — the main segment of The Japan Times' readership at the time — were increasingly taking up a modern lifestyle. Automobile ads began to appear. Toothpaste in tubes began to be sold toward the end of Meiji, along with soap, and won increasing popularity. The emergence of toothpaste ads was an important milestone in the history of advertisement in Japan because they led businesses to realize the importance of catchy copy and attractive artwork. Ads from those days still impress even modern eyes. The predecessor to Calpis Co., maker of the popular soft drink Calpis, was founded in the Taisho Era as a health product. The company was quick to recognize the importance of advertisement. Today Calpis is drunk around the world, and its original slogan, "the taste of first love," still pops up in conversation in Japan.

Oct. 28, 1905

Jan. 1, 1911

Jan. 24, 1924

Jan. 26, 1924

1926 - 1945

Showa I

Prewar: Automobiles and cultured pearls

The prewar part of the Showa Era, starting in 1926, saw Japan become a global power rivaling the United States and major countries in Europe. Ads for automobiles and motorbikes increased, though most were still for foreign products. Only a handful of people could afford them initially, but ownership grew along with the number of the wealthy. Japanese pearls made a major leap in quality thanks to domestically developed culturing technology and came to be recognized as the world's best. They had a devastating impact on the market for natural pearls. Japanese cultured pearls, which received an additional boost when Coco Chanel adopted the pearl necklace as a key fashion item, would come to dominate the global market.

Oct. 3, 1930

May 7, 1927

March 14, 1958

Sept. 6, 1966

Feb. 5, 1913

May 29, 1963

Dec. 18, 1956

Jan. 26, 1943

Feb. 16, 1943

April 24, 1927

July 26, 1961

Dec. 3, 1965

Aug. 10, 1968

1946 - 1970

Showa II

Postwar: Japan's cars and radios go global

In the postwar Showa Era, from 1946 to about 1970, Japan rebuilt from the ravages of war and achieved miraculous economic growth, flooding global markets with its products. Applying technology originally developed for military equipment, Japan's automakers grew significantly, eventually taking large shares in the global market. Though the transistor radio was invented abroad, household electronic products from Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo K.K., which would become today's Sony Group Corp., won worldwide recognition for their high quality. Cosmetics began to be marketed to women in the rest of the world. Japanese companies' strategy of establishing a brand image through many high-quality ads was imitated by foreign rivals. Ad concepts developed in this period are still in use today.



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