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YONEZAWA YOSHIHIRO AND SHIKIJŌ KYŌTARŌ,
TRANS. ANDREA HORBINSKI

Translator’s Introduction

The people who became the hardcore fans of manga circles in the 1970s and otaku in the 1980s had a long prehistory as fans, geeks, and nerds from childhood. In the following chapter from *2B-dan gindama sensō no hibi: Shōwa 30-nendai, yume no shōnen ōkoku* (Tokyo: Shinpyōsha, 1982: The days of squad 2B and the silver ball war: The Shōwa 30s, the boys’ kingdom of dreams), leading Comiket figure and manga critic Yonezawa Yoshihiro (1953–2006), along with his co-writer Shikijō Kyōtarō (b. 1953, a penname), recount growing up in the Shōwa 30s (1955–65) as TV began its relentless march into Japanese homes and they glutted themselves on shōnen magazines rented from the local rental bookstore (*kashihonya*).

In this decade, the economy grew by leaps and bounds as Japan recovered from the damage of defeat in 1945, and middle-class prosperity became the watchword of society as Japan took its place as a “normal” country on the world stage, symbolized by the triumph of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Their recollections, written in a very definite first-person plural throughout, offer a ground-up view of the way things were far from the metropolis of Tokyo (Yonezawa was born in the city of Kumamoto, on Kyushu; Shikijō in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka). At times, the reader is strongly reminded of Urasawa Naoki’s manga *20th Century Boys* (1999–2006), which only makes sense as Urasawa was fictionalizing almost this exact age group and setting; his protagonists are perhaps five to eight years younger than Yonezawa, Shikijō, and their friends.

Numerous scholars have explored facets of the everyday experiences recounted here. In particular, Marc Steinberg’s *Anime’s Media Mix*¹ offers an

indispensable gloss on the collecting and candy mania that Yonezawa and Shikijō describe, and on its relationship with capitalism, anime, and consumerism. The name of the leftist mangaka Shirato Sanpei (b. 1932) recurs several times in this chapter, usually in the context of his masterpiece *Kamuyden* (1964–71, The legend of Kamuy); evidently the explicitly didactic project of Shirato's manga, which Ryan Holmberg explores in *Garo Manga*, succeeded.² The otaku way of perception and typical otaku interests that people like Yonezawa and Shikijō pioneered is discussed in depth by Thomas Lamarre in *The Anime Machine*.³

The year of their birth actually puts both authors slightly ahead of the first “otaku generation” that self-proclaimed “otaku king” Okada Toshio identified in *Otakugaku nyūmon* (1996, Introduction to otakuology); for Okada, the first otaku, the pioneers of the *shinjinrui* or “new type of humanity,” were born beginning in these same Shōwa 30s, rather than in Shōwa 28.⁴ But there is plenty of evidence in *2Bdan* that the boundaries of the *shinjinrui* can certainly stretch to include people like Yonezawa and Shikijō. Above all else, what marks them and their friends as proto-otaku is their obsession with information in general and science and mechanics in particular, as when they proudly note that they were the first in their households to master operating the TV, or that the information they got from *shōnen* magazines occasionally allowed them to get the better of their teachers in school.

It is important to remember, however, that in some ways the rise of the otaku was enabled by a deliberate retreat from politics into pop culture after the end of the so-called season of politics (*seiji no kisetsu*) and the defeat of left-wing and student movements by the mid-1970s.⁵ Yonezawa was an active participant in those left-wing movements, and his and Shikijō's casual mention of their rejecting authority from an elementary school age points directly to their later political engagement and beliefs. (In 1969, at the age of sixteen, Yonezawa participated in anti-war demonstrations in the town of Sasebo, site of a large US naval base.⁶) It also recalls the famously antihierarchical origins of Comiket, which began in 1975 as an event that celebrated manga fandom equally rather than venerating creators and which to this day refers to everyone who attends the event as some type of “participant.” Yonezawa was a member of Meikyū, the manga circle that first organized Comiket; he remained a key figure in the Comiket organization, after his faction won out in an organizational shakeup in 1981, until his death in 2006.

In the Shōwa 30s, however, all that lay in the future and politics largely belonged to the world of adults. In this chapter adults are largely absent,

except as the indirect source of the betrayals of mail order goods and manga magazine freebies. Although the authors mention their parents and teachers occasionally, it is clear that they lived predominantly in the "boys' kingdom of dreams" of the book's title, intermingling with the brave shōnen heroes and bumbling adult villains of media in their imaginations, untrammelled by adult problems and only occasionally taking note of adult secrets. The otaku grew up in a very different Japan, and a very different media environment, than those that made their name in the 1980s.

Chapter 3: "Putting a Hand into the Fountain of Knowledge"

TV, RADIO, SHŌNEN MAGAZINES, KASHIHONYA

As we had places to play, we could supply raw materials with a little pocket money. But without knowledge, we would not have been able to fully master them. In terms of having a great deal of information, we had effective power even in our society.

Besides, it was not that we hated learning. It was just that the things taught at school did not have any usefulness that connected them immediately to our lives, and they were not very interesting. For us, information was this kind of thing: for example, a riverbank somewhere nearby where good clay could be found or such like, at whose house the persimmons were just about ripe, that new toy weapons were being sold by mail order.

Those who had a lot of information were respected, and the knowledge spoken by older kid bosses shone with value. Yes, it was like those heroes and gang groups were scrambling for maps of secret plans for Project X. We were surprised by childish sleight of hand, our eyes were dazzled by the distribution of power in neighboring towns, our breath was taken away by the secret manufacturing methods of strong *menko* cards, all of which we watched closely.⁷ Our older playmates occasionally stealthily whispered secrets of adult society into our ears. That was forbidden knowledge, and when we heard it we had a slightly distinguished feeling. They were our professors.

The conversations of adults also slipped into our ears, in the way of not understanding them. My father's situation, human relations within the town, the classified information discussed at the school PTA, people's lies—we strained our ears. To outsmart all the adults together, we had to grasp that information tightly. Those details also had an influence on our rejecting authority figures.

That kind of information was closely related to our lifestyle, but additionally, there was also information that was important to making sure of our fellow feeling. That was more of a topic than knowledge for the sake of social life. Yes: that is, the knowledge we obtained from TV, radio, shōnen magazine manga, and such. From there we obtained topics for discussion, we discovered methods of making our play more interesting, and we experienced the aura of the metropolis.

Our growth and the growth of TV were perfectly matched. The wild enthusiasm for the process of broadcast relay in street TV scattered into individual households. While every household still did not have a TV, lots of individuals from nearby would gather around each individual TV set. On Christmas or bonus day we often saw fathers carrying TV boxes. Little by little TV stretched out the hand of invasion.

We, who were easily carried along by it—we were without exception TV kids. We were particularly wild about *Moonlight Mask* (1958–59), *Maboroshi tantei* (1959–60, Iridescence detective), *National Kid* (1960–61), *Seven Color Mask* (1959–60), and other such superhero stuff aimed at children, but it was not just those. In *Father Knows Best* (1958–64), *The Rifleman* (1960–64), *Rawhide* (1959–65), *Leave It to Beaver* (1957–63) and other foreign programs we experienced the America that we admired, and because those dramas were well done, they were popular with everyone.

Avec utagassen (1962–68, With a karaoke contest), which accustomed Tony Tani to the abacus, and NHK's *Amateur Nodo Jiman* (1946–present, Amateur singing contest), and the variety show-style *Shabondama holiday* (1961–72) and *The Hit Parade* (1959–70). The comedy programs *Owarai sanjūgumi* (1955–60, Owarai trio) and *Densuke gekijō* (1959–60, 1961–72, Densuke theater), as well as *Gesture* (1953–68), *Only I Know* (1957–63), *Watashi no himitsu* (1955–67, My secret). Sports, baseball, and sumo shows like *Puroresu awā* (1968–72, Pro wrestling hour) and such.⁸ The shows that aired on the troubled NHK around six in the evening, such as *Fushigina shōnen* (1961–62, Wonder boy), *Uchūsen Silica* (1960–62, Spaceship silica), *Galaxy Boy Troop* (1963–65), *Minna no uta* (1961–present, Everyone's song), *Mono shiri hakase* (1961–69, Know-it-all professor), etc., . . .

If you were home sick, the lunchtime *Kaō family gekijō* (1960–61, Peony family theater) and *Ohiru no engei* (1954, 1956–62, Midday entertainment), the soap opera *Tsuki yori no shisha* (1961, 1966, 1972, Angel from the moon) and others. . . . Even late at night, we could not separate ourselves from the TV. Even though our parents got mad at us, *Jiken kisha* (1958–66, Incident

reporter), *Himana-shi tobidasu* (1955–62, Mr. Himana appears) and the like delighted us, and while we cried "I can't go to the bathroom!," we enjoyed "there are strange things in the world" shows like *The Twilight Zone* (1960, 1961–67) and *Kyofu no mira* (1961, Mummy of terror).

We got used to the medium of TV, whatever was sent out from there, no matter what it was. There drama and fights and stories were interesting, and we could experience the latest fashions. As for introductions for new products—in other words, commercials—it was like we were being brain-washed.

Take toothpaste: after TV, every kid immediately switched to Sunstar Banana toothpaste; the day Nissin chicken ramen came out, everyone lined up to have it for lunch. If you sneeze three times, rush to the pharmacy to buy "Lulu"; for castella, choose Bunmeido; when you march, sing the Jintan song.

TV gradually became an essential lifestyle item. What it replaced as it retreated was radio. Radios, many of which had cloth speakers in a wooden box, little by little became covered in dust. We put out two hundred yen and could buy a battery-less germanium radio, while the older boys had the new-fangled transistor radios.

Unlike TV, which still had the feeling of being watched as a family, manga published in bulk in *shōnen* magazines was ours alone, a pleasure that furthermore we could read anywhere, any time. It was our source of essential information, our fountain of knowledge. When we read science articles in *shōnen* magazines, occasionally we could even get the better of our teachers in an argument.

The magazines we loved were *Bokura* (1954–69, We), *Manga ō* (1951–61, Manga king), *Hinomaru* (1958–63), *Shōnen* (1946–68), *Shōnen gahō* (1948–71, *Shōnen* illustrated news), *Omoshiro bukku* (1959–69, Interesting book), *Shōnen Club* (1914–62), *Bōken ō* (1949–83, Adventure king), etc. Those we each bought once a month and could read them by passing them around amongst our friends, but when all is said and done what we most highly valued was the existence of the *kashihonya*.

Just like penny candy shops, one *kashihonya* was always in the line of a back alley. There would always be an old lady or an old man settled down there absent-mindedly too, looking at us from behind their glasses. Since reading *shōnen* magazines on their publication day was an extremely difficult feat, if you won the competition it was many days later. Aside from *shōnen* magazines, we could borrow *kashihon* manga tankōbon if we had time after reading the monthly *shōnen* magazines. B6 hardcover manga changed little by

little to the stylish black A5 gekiga books. For us, any manga was fine, but our parents had “good” and “bad.” Occasionally they would peer into the manga we were reading and frown.

Shōnen monthly magazines were definitely not manga magazines. Along with a lot of manga, they had novels and sports athletes’ photos, children’s news, science information, quizzes, trivia, humor, and more, lots of it. We obtained a lot of knowledge from them. Furthermore, monthly magazines were truly bulging, with twelve big freebies (*furoku*) inserted into them.⁹ Six to eight of them were supplemental volumes of manga; later they were liner space guns or space erasers, magic sets or ninjutsu diagrams, record players, and other special freebies.

The monthly magazines’ previews for the next issue always made our hearts extremely yearnful, but we were always betrayed by the reality. “X pistol that shoots flames” was just a cardboard pistol with a fluttering red vinyl scrap that you could attach to the muzzle area. The lens on “this amazing 100x magnification microscope” was a vinyl bag shaped like a lens that you could put water into: everything you saw was distorted. But just like a lottery, even though we were betrayed and betrayed, our hearts fluttered at that preview.

But that was not the only betrayal. Monthly magazines’ mail-order goods made us salivate, but if you bought anything, not even one of them was like what you imagined. But we bought books for improving our memory and we thought that if you put an Edison band around your head you could become a genius; we believed that for two or three hundred yen you could have a ten-thousand-year pencil or a camera or a remote-controlled robot.¹⁰

In any case, we trusted shōnen magazines and manga. We did not know how much secret knowledge Shirato Sanpei’s ninja epic was imparting to us. To protect cats, use the flames of silver vine; to protect dogs, put earthworms in a can and leave it in the sun for three days, then use it to make “inuman.” Bugs and Japanese blood flukes plunder life from humans; as for guns, if you pour out nitric acid in a line, when it turns black and crumbly you can make gunpowder.

Even if we had only had Mabuchi Motor, we would have had as many inventions as we pleased; science was already plunging into the world of science fiction. We were reared along with shōnen magazines, and we were reared by shōnen magazines.

There we went from lifestyle knowledge to forbidden knowledge; they were packed to the gills with suspicious things that even a child might think

were lies. We who could not yet clearly tell the difference between dreams and reality—with the information we received from various things, we thought we comprehended the total picture of the world. We were not entirely mistaken, but that was not all of it.

Knowledge is power and money in the bank. That we knew from our own experience. We wanted to gain as much knowledge as we could. That was also our road to survival.

IN THE DARKNESS OF THE MOVIE THEATER: SUMMER VACATION CHILDREN'S THEATER

In our age, the chief pleasure of adults was still movies. In town, the department store and the movie theater always seemed to be crowded, and near our back alleys there were always several company theaters.¹¹ We went together with our parents on Sundays, though that was restricted to the stuff aimed at children: kaiju movies and Disney films. And so, we would occasionally turn our steps to the movie theater ourselves.

At any rate, on summer vacation and spring break, Toei theaters and the like would put on the "Summer Vacation Children's Theater" from nine in the morning to eleven, showing serialized long-form action movies. Since the serialized dramas that TV was doing were shown about two at a time, and the movie theaters showed one episode each from several different film serials each day, the local kids, namely us, would be crowded together in the darkness of the movie theater from early in the morning.

What has to be called Toei's specialty was, among the historical dramas (*jidaigeki*) aimed at children, strong guys with just a slightly legendary component: *Benikujaku* (1954–55, Red peacock), *Kaze kozō* (1960, Wind kid), *Ōgonkujakujō* (1961, Ōgonkujaku castle), *Takamaru Kikumarū* (1959), and the like. On top of that, the superheroes of TV and manga became movies. *Moonlight Mask* (1958–59), *Shōnen tanteidan* (1956–58, The boy detectives club), *Seven Color Mask* (1960), *Iga no Kagamaru* (1963). Of course, other movie theater companies also made other superhero stuff: *Akadō Suzunosuke* (1957–58), *Maboroshi tantei* (1960) and such.

At any rate, movies at the time were made to feel like realistic TV, divided into standalone, a first and second part and such; "continued in the next part" was common. And that continuation was not something you had to wait three years for; you could go see it after about a month. And because TV was not VTR but instead filmed on film stock, everything that was done on TV could be shown in the movie theater.

We liked that superhero stuff, but what we really loved was kaiju movies. For the tokusatsu series that Toho would do for New Year's and summer vacation, we barged in in great numbers. Those spots were always crammed with children. *Godzilla Raids Again* (1955), *Rodan* (1956), *Varan the Unbelievable* (1958), *Battle in Outer Space* (1959), *Uchū bōeigun* (1959, Cosmos defense forces), *Mothra* (1961); the one that became the biggest kaiju pageant was *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962). Accompanying these were short films, the Krazy Kats and the Wakadaishō series. We enjoyed stuff like that too.

Tons of cushions were scattered on the tatami seating upstairs. In summertime a huge fan more than one meter in diameter would shake like jelly as it rotated from the ceiling. We could always buy ramune soda and candy from the concession in the theater during the movie; during the intermission, old ladies would come around in the space between the seats hawking "rice crackers, caramels, anpan." Older adults called movies "cinema" or "motion pictures" (*katsudō*).¹²

Movies were in decline as the chief form of entertainment, but along with magazines and TV, we were enchanted by them. The stills affixed by the entrance said that we could get things afterward; for example, if we went to the bathhouse we could receive the poster for the movie we just saw. Posters were slapped on planks here and there; the movie theater's billboard worked hard in terms of impressiveness and ideas.

Those sorts of movie theaters—before and after the Tokyo Olympics, they all changed into pachinko parlors, fish ponds, bowling alleys, race-car tracks, racetracks and such. The movie theaters on the outskirts that we could walk to in five minutes along the backstreets all disappeared. And we beheld movies' departure from the places of our lives.

THE TV LANDSCAPE: THE BEGINNING OF "TV KIDS"

A television set was a luxury item. Since TVs had not yet diffused to every household, people gathered at houses in the neighborhood that had TVs when it was time for popular programs. The masters of households that had TVs were offered tea and such by everyone, and they looked satisfied gazing at the TV alongside everyone. Relationships with neighbors were prosperous, and though everyone was not middle class, the charm of TV was already extremely strong.

The TV channel hegemony that we had was almost entirely from 5:30 in the evening to 6:30 and 7:30, in half-hour increments. The programs marketed to us were extremely concentrated in that timespan, so it was not particularly a problem. After that followed the programs that adults watched.

We loved the TV. A round cathode-ray tube and a plastic frame, its innards bristling with complicated-looking vacuum tubes for a great number of channels. This was certainly the television that the cutting edge of the age of science was heading toward. Even if you surveyed the inside of the home, there was nothing mechanical that gave such a feeling of the power of science as the TV. And our curiosity was such that inside the household we were the fastest to take the honor that was memorizing the operation of the TV.

We dreamed more and more of color TV or even a solid body TV. Among those (this was definitely around 1961), the cathode-ray tube set with a shadow mask and the catchphrase "Make your household TV color!" appeared. Because it was expensive, the parents who took a chance buying it were amazed when they saw the real thing: arms with rubber suction pads attached to plastic boards with a red and yellow graduated cable hanging from above. Indeed, we could see that on the TV those covering plastic boards and the screen of the cathode-ray tube were connected to the red and yellow cable from above. This is color TV! However, when people's faces were in close-up, a redhead looked like a yellow person from the nose up, while from the mouth down they assumed the color of someone in a vegetative state. In the end this color TV set with a shadow mask was stowed away in the back of the closet after watching it about two times.¹³

We became TV kids in the blink of an eye. We watched any program. Speaking of the programs we remember, no matter how they were arranged, they were endless. Incidentally, the weekly *shōnen* magazines of the time had a section called the TV Guide, and in the September 7, 1961, issue the featured programs were *Tsukibue hibue* (1955, Moon flute, sun flute), *Fury* (1955–60), *Otogi no kuni* (1961, Never-never-land), *The Sheriff of Cochise* (1958), *Huckleberry Hound* (1959–60, 1961–62), *Homerun kyōshitsu* (1959–63, Homerun classroom), *Laramie* (1960–63), *Bus dōri ura* (1958–63, Behind the bus avenue), *Nikoniko jinsei* (1961–62, Life with a grin) and the like.

In the May 22, 1960, issue of *Shōnen Magazine*, they were *Yanagi Susumu tabinikki: Dokuganryū sanjō* (1960–62, Yanagi Susumu's travel diary: Calling on the one-eyed dragon), *Hakuba dōji* (1960, Hakuba kid), *Kaiketsu Harimao* (1960–61, Wonder man Harimao), *Highway Patrol* (1956), *Sugarfoot* (1960–62), *Wanwan daigaku* (1960, Bow-wow college), *Bonanza* (1959–73), *The Lone Ranger* (1959–63), *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* (1954–59), *Lawman* (1959), *Tales of the Texas Rangers* (1960), *Gunsmoke* (1959–63), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1957–58, 1960–61), *Bat Masterson* (1959) and such.

Even excepting superhero stuff, there was thankfully a lot to our taste.

Wakai kisetsu (1961–64, Youthful season), *Nakiwarai sakuranbo gekidan* (1960, Laughing while crying cherry troupe), *Hana no shōgai* (1963, The life of flowers), *Mitsuko no mado* (1958–60, Mitsuko’s window), *Tenamonya sandogasa* (1962–68, Something like a conical hat), *Sucharaka shain* (1961–67, Ridiculous company employee), *Goronbo hatoba* (1964–66, Goronbo wharf), *Jiken kisha* (1958–66), *Minna no uta* (1961–present), *Gesture* (1953–68), *The Three Stooges* (1963–64), *Chibikko gang* (1963–65, Ankle-biter gang), *Waraeba tengoku* (1961–66, Paradise, if we can laugh), *Otōsan no kisetsu* (1958–61, Father’s season), *Only I Know* (1957–63), *Ponpon taishō* (1960–64, Ponpon general) . . .

And of course, commercials. . . . TV commercials poisoned us and lured us into consumer culture.

TV transmitted a lot of different information to us. We sucked it down greedily. TV was our friend and our teacher, a performer. And perhaps it was some kind of ingenious brainwashing device.

SUPERHERO CATALOG: OUR YEARNING

Our yearning, our dream, the adventures and fights we were on the edge of our seats for—among TV programs, that was superhero stuff. Until the 1963 anime *Tetsuwan Atomu* (1963–66, Astro boy) became a big hit, these were made too cheaply, with live filming, but the power of our imaginations unmistakably made those into huge adventure action films. The heroes who fought for the sake of world peace or justice even taught us how to live. The costumes were simple, but do not laugh. National Kid’s Eroruya Ray Gun shone, and everyone wanted Shōnen Jet’s Super Colt gun.

There were kids who were zealous at practicing *shinkūgiri* and the Miracle Voice. There were also those who bought the Akadō set and went to the kendo hall. Our heroes were always gallant, upright and clean-handed, valuing fellowship and kindness; they were power heroes full of love. Let us introduce these heroes.¹⁴

Superman (1956)

Moonlight Mask (1958)

Seven-Color Mask (1959)

Maborishi tantei (1958)

Shōnen Jet (1959)

Allah no shisha (1961, Messenger of Allah)

Fushigina Shōnen (1960)

National Kid (1960)

Kaiteijin 8823 (1960, Submarine 8823)

Yūsei ōji (1958, Planet prince)

Tetsujin 28-go (1960)

Tetsuwan Atomu (1959)

Shōnen Kenia (1961, Boy Kenya)

Kaiketsu Harimao (1960)

Jyaga no me (1961, Eye of the tiger)

Compared to America's superhumans, there were many Japanese superheroes who were, in comparison, flesh-and-blood humans dressed up. If they were shot they would die, and if they were cut they would bleed. If this comes from cultural differences, it may be that the Japanese superhero comes from the chanbara hero. Does not Moonlight Mask look quite like Hakuba?

Hakuba dōji (1961)

Yaguruma Kennosuke (1959)

Tonma tengu (1959, Goblin Tonma)

Akadō Suzunosuke (1959)

Takamaru Kikumarū (1959)

Fūun Sanadajō (1964–65, Fūun Sanada castle)

Kuroyurijō no aniki (1961, The brothers of Kuroyuri castle)

There were still programs that flowed from the radio like *Fuefuki dōji* (1960, Fluteplayer boy) of "Hyarārichariko" and the *Shinshokoku monogatari* (1952–60, New stories of various provinces) series, *Kotengu Kotarō* (1960), *Kaze kozō* (1960), *Himalaya tenpei* (1959, Heavenly army of the Himalaya), and the chanbara heroes who flourished in great numbers. This sort of hero vanished from the cathode-ray tube, with *Hakuba no kenshi* (1964, Swordsman Hakuba) as the last.

By the way, American heroes are not just Superman and Batman. Westerns and action films exist in genres over there too.

Bat Masterson (1959)

Have Gun—Will Travel (1960)

The Rifleman (1960)

Laramie (1960)

Rawhide (1959)

Tales of the Texas Rangers (1960)

There were others. *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1959–61), starring Steve McQueen; *Gunsmoke* (1959–63); *The Restless Gun* (1957–59); *Lawman* (1959), about Wyatt Earp; the series about the activities of the five famous brothers of the Cartwright clan, *Bonanza* (1959–73); *Bronco* (1961–63) (the protagonist was Bronco Layne; afterward, *Cheyenne* was added and the two appeared alternately every other week as *Bronco/Cheyenne*). There were still more. When I hear the William Tell overture to this very day, my feet start tapping unconsciously—the American edition of the saddled guardian, *The Lone Ranger* (1959–63). Tonto’s greeting “Ke-mo sah-bee” is nostalgic. This was considerably later but the show that mixed the Western and the spy genre, *The Wild Wild West* (1969–70), was there too.

Unlike the chanbara heroes who could hold a heavy sword with both hands and wave it about, the heroes of Westerns could fight bad guys with only a slight move of their little finger. We were crazy about this kind of mechanical operation.

There were animal shows too. First of all was *Lassie* (1957).

In any event, unlike shoddily made dramas produced in Japan, American-made dramas at the time were actually interesting, from composition to plots. Additionally, it might also be the case that in the Shōwa 30s, still strongly influenced by the shadow of the postwar, Western things seemed to shine.¹⁵ We unconsciously were influenced by the patriotism of our parents; the proof of that was when we saw Rikidōzan rush Art Michalik off his feet with a karate chop and our hearts immediately tasted feelings of love, and in the *Shōnen Magazine* special issue on the war, the Zero fighters and the Ohka greatly surpassed Grumman and the Spitfire—so we said, talking with our friends while blowing bubbles from our mouths.¹⁶

We screamed out soliloquies in great numbers, so to speak. The flip side of that was, we opened our eyes wide at the remote control ceremony in *Dennis the Menace* (1959–63), while we admired the humanism of causing a great uproar over nothing to save just one dog in *Lassie*. But on the other hand, our stomachs twisted at the meaningless gags in *Otora-san* (1956–59), and we also had only the slightest sensitivity to the humanity of the livelihoods of the poor backstreets in *Ponpon taishō* and *Yūyake tenshi* (1960–61, Twilight angel).

THE GLICO AND KABAYA ATOM STICKERS

Because we were poisoned by TV, we loved candy that came with freebies. The first were those where, if you collected however many tickets, you could receive a splendid prize: with gum, you could receive a baseball set or a Kabaya

Bunko book.¹⁷ The Kabaya Bunko books that you could receive by collecting the tickets in Kabaya caramels were splendid books with copious illustrations, ranging from action novels aimed at boys to girls' novels, and there were quite a lot of them, even famous ones. Those were good books.

If you did not want to do the annoying thing of collecting the tickets, there were Glico Almond Caramels, which contained 300 meters in one lump.¹⁸ These came with a small cheap tin toy or a cardboard or plastic novelty. Though these were a deception upon children in some respects, they occasionally had cool stuff.

But the thing we were most passionate about was stickers. The Atom stickers inside a thirty-yen tube of Marble chocolates awakened an extraordinary excitement among us. The popularity of Atom on TV goes without saying, but the pride or something like it that we took in the coolness of the stickers and the numbers of our collections had us running wild for collecting the stickers.

That did not stop at Atom. Marumiya's Noritama furikake had 8 *Man* (1963–64) stickers included, and the Sukiyaki furikake had a different kind. If you bought Morinaga cocoa, those were Wolf Boy Ken stickers. Morinaga parade chocolate had three-dimensional stickers. Then Glico came out with badges in opposition to them, from small cloth patches to huge vinyl sponge



Figure 1. Cover of the Kabaya Bunko book *Taichō Buriba* (1953), based on the novella *Taras Bulba* (1843) by Nikolai Gogol.

badges. Moreover, not just *Tetsujin 28*, but world flags and world tours and other different kinds of badges were introduced.

Subsequently, Meiji came out with “magic print” temporary tattoo decals. These were attached to magazine freebies as well, and original stickers sold for ten to twenty yen per sheet began to appear too; in that era, we began to



Figure 2. Screenshot of Mandarake item-listing for the 8 Man sticker set, released by Maruyama for the 55th anniversary of Noritama furikake.

pull back from sticker collecting. Just being able to obtain them with money was not a very good sign to us, and we gradually became tired of it.

Even so, the war of candy freebies and gifts did not peter out. Glico's stamp presents are said to be an epoch-making development even among stamp collectors.

THE PARENTS WHO RAISED US: MANGA AND SHŌNEN MAGAZINES

Superheroes overflowed not just on the TV but also in manga. No—manga itself was the birthplace of heroes. Besides, we loved manga. The monthly shōnen magazines, thickly distended by the freebies, were treasure chests of information and pleasure that were delivered once a month. We passed around and read the copies that our friends had bought according to the monthly contract, we borrowed them from kashihonya, we went overboard with manga.

At the beginning of the month those aimed at young students, *Bokura* (1954–69), *Hinomaru* (1958–63), *Manga ō* (1951–61), came out; and about three days after that those aimed at high school students, *Shōnen* (1946–68), *Shōnen Club* (1914–62), *Bōken ō* (1949–83), *Shōnen gahō* (1948–71), *Omoshiro bukku* (1959–69) (which afterward was called *Shōnen Book*), came out. On every cover were smiling boys, and inside were packed ten big freebies along with thrills and deluxe manga.

Manga was roughly divided into three types. The first was lifestyle gag manga that had ordinary boys who might have lived nearby as protagonists, exemplified by *Yotarō-kun* (1963–67), *Potato taishō* (ca. 1961, Potato general), *Taifū bōya* (ca. 1961, Typhoon boy), *Pikadon-kun* (ca. 1963), and *Garakuta-kun* (ca. 1959). Another kind was sports stuff; popular sports like kyūdō, baseball, kendo, and sumo appeared frequently: *Jyajyauma-kun* (1958–63), *Igaguri-kun* (1952–54) and the like.

Besides these, the most plentiful to say the least was science detective manga that had a touch of SF. Here was where a lot of heroes crowded together. The popular ones became TV and radio dramas, and there were those that from the beginning were meant to tie into them as well. These shōnen heroes who were clad in cool costumes, and rode around on motorcycles or in supercars and fought with bad guys, were born in huge numbers one after another. If you read these manga, you would have thought that the imperial capital Tokyo was an evil metropolis (*mado*) where spies, global secret organizations, aliens, and gangs roved.

Robots and spaceships, and moreover scientists who sought to create secret weapons from Something X, appeared one after another. It was not that

we swallowed these whole, but we did wonder to some extent whether they might be real. While they had the same boys' bodies as us, they were heroes who fought against society's evil with wisdom and courage and new weapons. Even though we envied that, our yearning was nothing more than our hearts beating for and thrilling at adventure.

For us manga was an otherworld of primary colors full of thrills. We were entranced by the charm of non-existent gadgets, the heroes who writhed in agony when they fell into the bad guys' hands, and the strange-looking enemies who were dispatched with transformed hands and transformed items. Our excruciatingly boring everyday and manga's extraordinary world of liberty intermingled within us. What made the world sparkle was that our days were like festivals. Manga's imaginative power was not that it was the inspiration for our play, but that it taught us how to enjoy the world.

The B-grade science detective manga that was packed into the monthly shōnen magazines was our formative experience or however you want to call it; we exposed ourselves to manga, and along with thrilling excitement, we became acquainted with a way of understanding the world.

There were many, many heroes gathered there making a commotion.

Tanaka Masao's *Speed Hatch* (1959–60) and *Angel Z* (1959); Yokoyama Mitsuteru's *Tetsujin 28-go* (1956–66), *Red Mask* (1958–60), *Shōnen rocket buchō* (1960–63, Boy rocket division head), *Iga no Kagemaru* (1961–66), *Thunderboy* (1962–63); Yoshida Tatsuo's *Supergiants* (ca. 1959), *Shōnen ninja buchō Gekkō* (ca. 1962, Boy ninja division head Gekkō); Kuri Ippei's *Missileman Kintarō* (1960), *Shōnen tetsu kamen* (1961, Boy iron mask), *Allah no shisha* (1961), *Kait-eijin 8823* (1960); Nazumine Taiji's *Seven Color Mask* (1959), *Uchūjin Mach* (ca. 1961, Alien Mach), *Denjin Arrow* (ca. 1965, Electric man Arrow), *Silverhawk* (1961); Kuwata Jirō's *Dangan top* (1958, Bullet top), *Kurowashi shōnen* (1959, Black eagle boy), *Garoro Q* (1961), *Maboroshijō* (1960, Castle of illusion), *Maboroshi tantei* (1957–61, 1964–65); Takeuchi Tsunayoshi's *Condor King* (1961), *Shōnen G men* (1959), *Shōnen Jet* (ca. 1959), *Tokyo Patrol* (ca. 1960); Horie Taku's *Yagurama Kennosuke* (1957), *Hanmākitto* (1958), *Taiyō kamen* (1959, Sun mask), *Shōnen Harimao* (1960–61, Boy Harimao), *Tenma Tenpyō* (1960); Tenma Masato's *Jyagā no me* (1959–60), *Yūsei ōji* (1959), *Super Z* (1959–60), Fujiko Fujio's *Umi no ōji* (1959–61, Ocean prince), *Shōnen tanteidan* (ca. 1960); Takano Yoshiteru's *13-gō hasshin seyo* (1959–60, Number 13, takeoff!); Kishimoto Osamu's *Shōnen senpūko* (1960–62, Boy typhoon kid), *Hurricane boy* (1960–62); Masuko Katsumi's *Apollo no kishi* (1959, Knight of Apollo); Kaneda Kōji's *Denkō Red* (1960, Lightning red), *Denkō ningen* (1960, Lightning man), etc., etc. . . .

Just summoning the titles makes me happy. We enjoyed more and more of these manga, as though we would devour them. Moreover, what was published in monthly shōnen magazines was not just manga. Novels and illustrated stories (*emonogatari*) were disappearing little by little, but they still had the power to absorb. Besides Edogawa Ranpo's *Shōnen tanteidan* series and the like, so-called fantasy science novels were the majority.

Thus, there were numerous articles that taught us science knowledge or the world's mysteriousness, such as "Mame chishiki," "Hitokuchi memo," "Rigaku tokushū" and the like. These were the "education" that made us clever: the world's biggest special feature or the world's mysteries or the science of robots or the science classroom or an introduction to magic or the secret of hypnotism or an introduction to ninja.

To us there were many interesting articles in the monthly shōnen magazines. Ninja especially gave us an extreme feeling of reality. If you try every day like you are scattering hemp seeds, you will master the power of jumping; with three per day, that is the recipe for pills your body maintains. We put this sort of thing to the test in reality.

Speaking of ninja manga: Shirato Sanpei. We learned a lot of knowledge from there. At any rate, Japanese green gentian (*senpuri*) and sicklepod (*ebisugusa*) are effective against a stomach ache and the like—if you dry phosphorescent microorganisms and daub cloth with them, you will even have something noctilucant. . . . Moreover, the diving technique which uses a bamboo pipe with a joint removed, the poison that uses wolfsbane root. Showing off drying the water out of the lake with the dragon god technique—all that changed into knowledge for the time of science experiments. If just that could absorb us, we could obtain so much knowledge from wherever, and that information itself was the power we carried within us.

While we were poisoned by the articles inside monthly shōnen magazines, our various hobbies and interests were expanding. In other words, stamp collecting, vintage coin collecting, plastic models, fishing, toy guns, stargazing, pro wrestling, sumo, baseball, science fiction, handicrafts, racecars, sticker collecting, etc., etc. . . .

We were educated by shōnen magazines.

HOPE AND DISAPPOINTMENT: THE ADVANCE NOTICES IN MAGAZINES FREEBIES WERE LIES

"Do you still have the June issue of *Bokura*?"

I asked the old lady this when I burst, gasping, into the dirt-floored kashi-

honya room. The old lady, who had made a hole at the end of the *Manga ō* freebie and who was cross-stitching, raised her face and said, “You’re the first.”

So saying, she brought out the freebie that had been bound with the copy of *Bokura*.

I promised to return it the next day at four, and that I would take *Manga ō* at that time, and I left the kashihonya after putting down ten yen. My heart was pounding, full of anticipation. The front cover had a TV station as the setting, and a boy with a sideways camera was smiling on it. Above that were the words “15 big freebies.”

Shōnen Jet, *Seven Color Mask*, *Tsunkoro Daisuke* (1960–61, Strongman Daisuke), *Robot-kun* (1959–61), *Super Giant* (1957–59), *Harima no kotengu* (1960, Harima the kotengu): the detective set, doctor glasses, a glow-in-the-dark Seven Color Mask, a secret reflector, a small police notebook, a detective’s license, a pursuit game. I did not know what the freebies would be, but the “bound-in freebies” deception was for *Tatsumaki kotengu* (1960) and *Taifū bōya* (ca. 1961), and beyond that, the showpiece freebie was a “rocket with a timing device, that you can launch twice!” All told, there were fifteen of them.

I felt a little bit cheated. When I returned it to the kashihonya, I asked for the detective set freebie and the rocket separately. I felt as though this month’s issue had some kind of big secret weapon. With a rustling sound, the old lady brought out a gaudily colored stencil and a bundle of papers from the mountain of this month’s freebies behind her, and said, “That’ll be fifteen yen.”

I brought out three five-yen coins, without holes in them, from the pocket of my trousers and put them on the counter.

Now I had this month’s complete set. I ran to my house.

This was usually how we got our hands on the monthly magazine freebies that made our hearts beat fast. There were those who bought them monthly, but the reliably fastest way to read them was the kashihonya, and if you wanted the freebies, you had to ingratiate yourself with the old lady or old man at the kashihonya. They sold the leftover freebies from back issues for about ten yen.

Now then, for these showpiece big freebies, when you saw the advance notice you would definitely want them, but when you finally got your hands on them, almost all of them were not that great. In the middle of this magazine was a page on “how to assemble the freebie,” and we looked at that to put them together: the materials were cardboard, cellophane, rubber bands, small metal fittings, and vinyl. Besides these there was definitely an aluminum fastener called a brad. With just these, you could not make a decent toy.

After playing with it once or twice we would lose interest, and it became unusable.

The most common freebies were cardboard catapults, cardboard rockets and missiles and such that you could make fly. Liner space guns, radar missiles, rocket towers, pioneer guns, ninja pistols, Jupiter V-6s, Yukon-style comet rockets, disk guns, etc., etc. . . . By way of an example, the reality of the "Yukon-style comet rocket" was a cardboard airplane with wings attached to a string, which you could stop by hooking it to a cardboard pistol, and by holding the pistol and the rocket above your head, turning around and around about ten times, when you pulled the trigger, the string slipped and the rocket flew—that was the technique. What about this was "Yukon"?

Although paper and rubber and brads were comparatively the main ingredients, if I think back now, everyone thought those were okay. Nonetheless, the reality of the announcement, the difference between its cool illustration and the real thing, was incredibly large. No matter how many times we hoped and hoped, we were always betrayed. Inside there were even record players as freebies. The September 1964 issue of *Shōnen* had an "Atom sono player" as a freebie. The Atom "sono records with convenient speed adjustment attached" were included. The player, which was made of paper and cellophane and aluminum brads, did emit sound. At most, passing through the air, it let out a "yayyy, lalalaaaa laa laa, you who I desireeeee . . ." and so it would revolve into incoherence. That was that. You turned it with your finger. . . .

Imitation screen printing (a speed printing machine), a vinyl glove with an attached fin (hyper swimming), games, a microscope, an X company mask, a disguise set, a ninja arts set (secret shuriken, skull fire arrows, shuriken crests, ninja iron claws), a boys' race car set, a pinhole camera, things made from cardboard, stickers, a Zero battle card, a constructed-style magic lantern, etc., etc. . . .

The constructed monthly *shōnen* magazine freebies, being extremely flashy and super wonderful, had their own appeal, but because of their own fragility they destroyed themselves.

That might have been why there was a fight between reality and the dreams we harbored, not realizing the obvious fact that there was no reason why they should be worth more than a freebie from a book that cost one to two hundred yen. Certainly, the preview illustration for the freebie announcement gave us dreams. And when we got our hands on it, it gave us reality too. What made these splendid cardboard freebies obsolete was the appearance of realistic plastic toys, which probably was due to the advance of prosperity,



Figure 3. Screenshot of a Mandarake item-listing for an Atom sono player from September 1964.

which made it possible to buy these slightly higher quality toys. The monthly shōnen magazines, stuffed with freebies, when they could not stand and bear our dreams alone, faced their demise.

About that time, we transferred our longing to high-quality plastic models, such as the Imai robot called “Thunderboy” and the “Thunderbird secret base.”

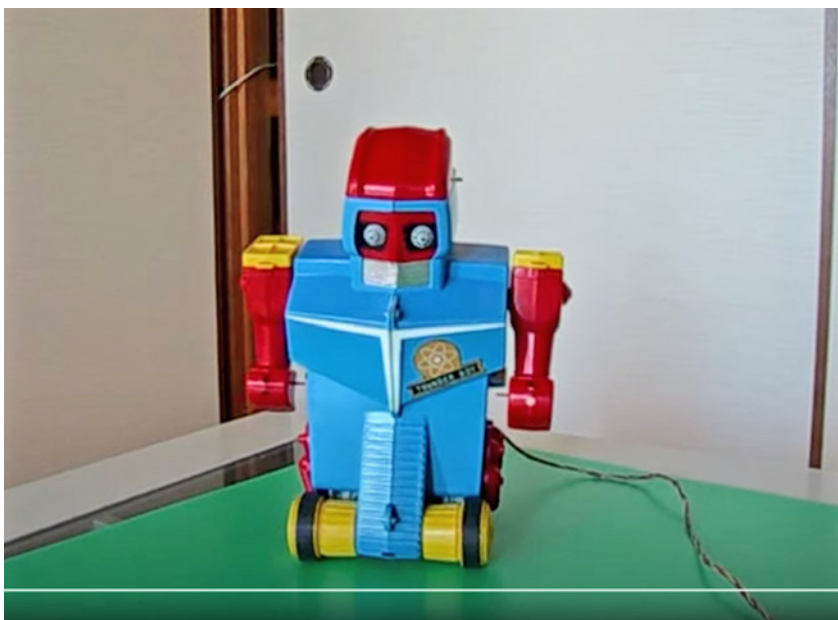


Figure 4. Screenshot of YouTube video showing the “Imai science robot Thunderboy” in action. Note the attached wire. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXD7x_n8Goc.

THE BETRAYAL OF MAIL ORDER — THOSE DUMBASS OLD MEN

Even though we were betrayed by the announcements, we began to think dimly that that was the way it was to some extent. And next we were charmed by and made to yearn for mail ordering, which confronted us with reality. Naturally, we loved mechanics, and we wanted the real thing, ones that adults had, unbearably. Those were exactly the frames upon which the hearts of boys who did science rested. Of course, those tools and mechanics were the “power” that we wanted. If you had them, they were convenient, and you could show them off to your friends; it felt as though an unknown world had opened up. Because of that, getting your hands on them meant a new kind of play, and what we dreamed of once we got our hands on them was infinite possibilities.

The Tentai Bōen gun (400 yen), Junior 8.8mm Cinecamera (1500 yen), 300-bu Kenbi gun (1500 yen), No. 2 Projector (900 yen), remote controlled airplane (900 yen), starter camera R-type (500 yen), a watch in ten monthly payments, a rubber ball (250 yen), an air gun (4500 yen), your first radio (3000 yen), Starry transistor radio (1200 yen), a penlight (400 yen), a handy typewriter (900 yen), detective glasses (60 yen), a Condor 28 gun (1200 yen),

a genuine leather holster (400 yen), a round crystal radio that transmits through the air (480 yen), a Nobel magnetic brain instrument [Edison band], a memory band, a ten-thousand-year pencil with no pen nibs (350 yen), a Meisupii 35 camera (1200 yen), etc., etc. . . .

While these various things that could be mail ordered from the middle of the shōnen magazines gave us the air of Tokyo, but for us the reasonable price to obtain them stretched out the hand of temptation. Certainly, unlike high-class genuine articles, they were cheap, but within those limits we were satisfied with cheap. The camera took good pictures, and the crystal radio had good reception too. Those were like the real thing, but cheap.

Afterward, stamps and coins and especially model guns were published in large numbers, but science toys did not disappear. By the way, fraudulent objects were mixed in amongst these mail orders. Which was which was not obvious, but usually the ones that had a quiz or a free item attached were the ones it was better to be suspicious of.

The ones you could get cheaper by answering easy crossword puzzles or questions were this kind of situation: “For those who answer two correctly, we’ll offer a discount on the price of one of the two items you want the most from among the five items on the left. Those who answer three correctly, we’ll give you a lucky bag with lots of unusual world stamps inside it.” So it said, and the questions were things like “What year is it in the Western calendar?” and “What country is hosting the next Olympics?” which everyone knew. And if you looked closely, the price of those items was double the usual mail order price.

“A quiz for a radio!!” “A quiz for a camera” “A complimentary new camera for those who register for a radio!!” All of those were fairly expensive, and suspicious. But sometimes we would be caught by them. Even now I get angry thinking about them, such as this one.

“For those who order a ten-thousand-year pencil, register free of charge for a crystal radio with two speakers or a remote-controlled robot.” If you registered for a ten-thousand-year pencil for 600 yen, you could get a robot: “As it’s remote-controlled, it doesn’t need a power cable and with one control instrument it can march forward and turn on land and sea, and since it has a strong magnetic guidance system that can change speeds to climb hills and move freely, if you have two you can have a robot battle, and as it uses metal parts it comes with a complete set of control instruments so you can make it move without breaking it.” All of that was extremely attractive. Unquestionably anyone who read that would want it.

I saved up for two months and sent in 600 yen.¹⁹ And what I received was a robot doll about ten centimeters high made of wire, bolts, and a small quantity of plastic. There was a magnet attached near the foot. And the control instrument was a magnet with a rod attached. In other words, if you set the robot on top of a desk pad, and moved the magnet from behind, you had the trick of the robot moving. I was angry. And when I read the exposition for the robot again, I realized that there was no lie written there. I was a child taken in by a deception for children.

So, in any case we learned a lot of information that might be useful later, not distinguishing between good and bad. There were things that came in handy when studying for school from time to time, and stuff that we could use to confuse teachers or parents. Of course, it was most useful among our friends. In the development of a new form of play, and even more in excitement and adventure, there was nothing that a lot of information did not overcome. The inhabitants of the kingdom each had information and skills, and with craft as their power they competed amongst themselves.

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Notes

1. Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
2. Ryan Holmberg, *Garo Manga: The First Decade, 1964–1973* (New York: The Center for Book Arts, 2010).
3. Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
4. Discussed in Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 146.
5. Andrea Horbinski, "Manga's Global Century: A History of Japanese Comics, 1905–1989" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017), 232.
6. Yonezawa Library, "Yonezawa Yoshihiro: Nenpu zenhan (1953–1989)," <https://>

www.meiji.ac.jp/manga/yonezawa_lib/profile_year_01.html. The English version of Yonezawa's life timeline at https://www.meiji.ac.jp/manga/english/yonezawa_lib/profile/ does not mention his student activism (accessed April 14, 2021).

7. Menko cards, made of thick cardboard and printed with popular images, are used to play the game menko, which has been around since the Edo period. In this era, manga, TV and then anime menko cards were all the rage. See Rebecca Salter, *Japanese Popular Prints: From Votive Slips to Playing Cards* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).
8. *Pro Wrestling Hour* is notably later than other shows cited in this passage and may be a mistake. Here and throughout, I give the dates of Japanese broadcast unless they are unknown, and I have silently corrected textual errors as I encountered them.
9. Furoku, "supplements" or "freebies," ranged from additional volumes of manga to portraits on wood and more, as described here. They were and are highly coveted.
10. "Edison bands" were first marketed in the 1930s but were extremely popular in this era. These headband contraptions purportedly sharpened one's thinking by cooling the forehead.
11. Toei Cinemas remains one of Japan's leading movie theater chains today.
12. Short for *katsudō shashin* (literally, motion pictures).
13. The authors are describing color television sets using the shadow mask display system developed by RCA in the 1950s; color TV was first broadcast in Japan from 1960. These early sets were expensive, with very dim pictures, and required users to constantly adjust the three electron guns to get the colors correct; failure to do so resulted in color problems like those they describe.
14. I have omitted the authors' descriptions of the media in this section, most of which have Wikipedia articles and fan sites in English and Japanese. The dates are those given by the authors.
15. The "postwar" in the sense of economic recovery was declared over by Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichirō in 1956.
16. This pro-wrestling match took place on March 14, 1962, in Los Angeles. Rikidōzan (1924–1963) was in fact Korean-Japanese; he came to Japan as a Korean subject in 1940.
17. The Kabaya candy company published a line of 159 children's books from 1952–54; see <https://www.kabaya.co.jp/about/history.html> (accessed March 20, 2021). Kabaya caramels are still sold today. The Okayama Prefectural Library maintains a list of Kabaya Bunko titles, digitally scanned and freely available, at <http://digioka.libnet.pref.okayama.jp/mmhp/kyodo/kabaya/bunko/index.htm>.
18. Although a bit obscure, this is likely a tagline reference to the Glico running man, who has been the symbol of the company since the 1930s.
19. Six hundred yen in 1963 money is the equivalent of ¥2863 in 2021 money, as calculated by the Inflation Tool (<https://www.inflationtool.com/japanese-yen/>).