

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, March 2025

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

Showa: Retro-Modern and Retro-Bubble

In stark contrast to society's churning out newness and fashion, people tend to seek nostalgia and comfort, as well.

Matsuyama station was recently modernized by the introduction of automatic ticket gates. Nice cafes and neat souvenir shops have opened within the station premises.

However, some people miss the old ticket gate, where the station staff used to make holes one by one in their tickets with an old fashioned ticket punch.

Jun kissa, pleasantly antiquated coffee shops, are now just as popular as the latest cafes. These eateries are a bit similar to American diners. You can spread out a newspaper, have a smoke, and relax.

A classic "morning set" menu (toast, boiled egg, mini salad, and coffee) and "Napolitano" spaghetti used to win customers' hearts and stomachs, and is now in the spotlight again.

Green cream soda with a cherry looks as though it's practically become part of our cultural heritage.

As another example, smartphones make it so easy to enjoy music, videos, and photos that older gadgets of the seventies and eighties may seem out of date. But in reality, analog devices such as cassette tapes, vinyl records, and instant and disposable cameras aren't quite as obsolete as they seem. On the contrary, they are prized by the young generation these days.

We call such trends "Showa Retro."

This current generation of digital natives has a stronger desire to cherish things from the Showa era than the generation born in the Showa era.

Why is that? There will never be another era like the Showa (1926 to 1989) with WWII, postwar reconstruction, and rapid economic growth all part of this period.

I pay tribute to those who survived, overcame and thrived during these turbulent times. They were willing to look forward and imagine a brighter future.

I lived through the last part of that era, the time when Japan's economy was booming due to the so-called bubble. (Compared to those days, I feel that Japan's economy has lost momentum.)

The Showa period is not easy to describe, but there is a place where you can see and learn about its artifacts.

Pokopen-yokocho in Ozu City, Ehime is a sightseeing spot that recreates a Showa era alleyway with a drugstore, barbershop, and variety stores common in the Showa 30s, that is, around 1955.

I went to this museum accompanying a second-generation Japanese-American woman in her 80s.

She was born in Japan and moved to California as a teenager. She looked at the exhibit of an old, low dining table and a treadle sewing machine, and she must have felt as though she had traveled through time and space until she'd regained her childhood. These were things that she had almost forgotten. Some old tools seem dead and gone as a dodo. Still, old knick-knacks remind people of their old selves and family and precious days that will never come again.

My daughter tells me, "I like Showa Retro because it's heartwarming." Though he's only twenty, my youngest son talks as if he experienced those times. "That's how fashions repeat, right?" he says.

My oldest boy finds something new and different about Showa Retro.

People back then were optimistic about the future. There was so much hope there. I think the strength, passion, and warmth of those days ignited the Showa Retro boom.

(Miwa N.)

Recently, NHK ran a panel discussion in which the participants, none of whom appeared to be over thirty years old, condemned the eighties Japanese Bubble Economy because, at the time, "...peer pressure forced young people to find boyfriends and girlfriends and to go out on dates." Whether they wanted to or not.

Uh huh.

Yep, the Bubble Economy. The above example suffices as a natural corollary to the old hippy adage that if you remember the sixties, you probably didn't experience them.

But I most certainly did experience the final days of Japan's all singing, all dancing riot of non-stop spending. Featuring impossibly handsome businessmen in their designer suits hailing late-night taxis by waving ¥10,000 yen bills in the air. Absolutely gorgeous businesswomen in bodicon dresses waving big fans as they swayed on stage at Juliana's Tokyo.

And it was a blast. From start to final fiscal Götterdämmerung.

I spent 1987 until whenever it was the Showa Emperor died working in a nursing school, followed by a stint at an "English Conversation Club" way up north in Tohoku.

At the time, the nursing school seemed too much like real work, so after a couple of years, I went even farther north to Morioka in Iwate prefecture.

There I was basically paid to drink coffee, smoke cigarettes and chat in English with club members for 6 or 7 hours a day.

Don't laugh. There was probably more real English learning going on at the smoking table than Waseda and Tokyo Universities combined.

Sure, Sendai and Iwate were both long bullet train rides from Tokyo, but after work recreation was probably pretty much the same as in any big city.

I once paid roughly the equivalent of \$100 American for one watered down whiskey soda. That, come to think of it, somebody else ordered for me.

One of my students had a part time job as a bunny girl at this particular club, the only reason I can possibly imagine for me even being there.

Boy, that drink was expensive.

But wasn't everything then. Including dating.

English club members would occasionally fall for one another or somebody at their workplace, and that would necessitate the male side of the equation gifting some outrageously pricey item to the girl of his dreams.

And then bragging to everyone at the English club about how his wallet was now empty because he'd just blown a month's salary on one date.

I'm talking Tokyo Disneyland as a popular first date destination, and I'm including two round trip bullet train tickets from Morioka, whatever souvenirs might happen to take her fancy, dinner, and at least one hotel room (if he's lucky).

If second, third or even fourth dates followed, there would also be dual memberships at expensive tennis clubs, matching motorcycle helmets, skiing holidays and occasional jewelry.

Speaking of motorcycles, one non-dating related memory stands out, and it's a good example of

how if you didn't personally experience Japan's Bubble days, you wouldn't understand it, or for that matter, even believe it.

One club member paid for a six-month membership but afterwards only showed up at the club once or twice. Riding an accessorized Harley Davidson. Dressed in black leather chaps decorated with silver studs. All the students and teachers went downstairs to look at his bike.

During the interview, he remarked he was a member of the Japanese mafia, which, at the time, didn't seem particularly surprising.

It was only later he confessed to actually being a Buddhist priest. Who knew one could pursue enlightenment on a chopper?

And if you need proof this kind of thing was the norm, there's 4 hours of it. A compilation of Illustrator Seizo Watase's short animated films "Heart Cocktail". A virtual checklist of expensive items one needs to survive the Bubble. It's on YouTube.

It includes all kinds of reckless impulse buying.

And boys and girls succumbing to peer pressure and falling in love.

(Editor)

On February 11, my friend and I went to Namekawa valley to see icicles.

It was a warm, sunny day after the recent cold wave. Almost from the point when we entered Namekawa town, the roads were still covered with snow and ice.

My friend drove the car carefully. She stopped the car at the entrance to the valley, and we began walking.

As soon as we stepped into the valley, we saw icicles hanging from the trees on both sides, and we cheered and shouted at the amazing view.

As we walked along the valley, the icicles became bigger and longer. Many people were taking pictures with big cameras. As we went farther and farther, finally we could see the famous waterfall in front of us.

Only the center of the waterfall was not frozen, but on both sides, there was a spectacular view of the icicles, which were almost reaching the ground.

It was a very exciting and satisfying day to see the beauty of nature.

(Hiroko.T)