

The People's Police: The Tokyo Police Museum's Version of History

Chelsea Szendi Schieder

Introduction

A bright orange character stands at the entrance of the Tokyo Police Museum. Arms outstretched to welcome visitors, "Piipo-kun" embodies the ideal of the Tokyo Police as the people's police; resembling an anthropomorphized mouse, he has big eyes, big ears, and an antenna sprouting from his head.¹ The Tokyo Metropolitan Police adopted this fantastical mascot character in 1987.² An explanatory placard notes that Piipo-kun's large eyes see into all corners of the world, his big ears catch the voices of the city's residents, and his antenna allows him to tune into all the movements in society. "Piipo," is a combination of the English words "people" and "police;" he is a manifestation of the contemporary ideal of the "people's police," in which the "people" and the "police" are melded. All human activity is subject to his control (visual, aural, and even antennal). He greets museum visitors with open arms just outside the entrance. Piipo-kun suggests a completely benign police subject, open and in touch with the local population.³



Piipo-kun statue

The Tokyo Police Museum's assorted displays also relate a historical narrative in which the Tokyo Metropolitan Police are portrayed as consummate protectors of the people over its 140-year history.⁴ The Tokyo Metropolitan Police opened its museum in the summer of 1994, as part of the Department's commemorative activities for their 120th anniversary. Built in the former Police Department Public Relations Center in Kyobashi, near Ginza, the admission-free

museum aims to “encourage Tokyo citizens to know more about the history of the police department.”⁵ The four floors of the modest building include several artifacts and documents, ranging from Meiji-Era woodblock prints and police uniforms to the first police helicopter. It also includes many special games and attractions, including a driving simulation video and small uniforms that children can wear while they pose in the various police vehicles in the lobby. Exhibits emphasize police efforts to enforce order and protect the people against the threats of crime and traffic accidents. Other displays show police protecting the government against dangerous political threats. How the museum conveys a depoliticized image of harmonious cooperation between the police and the public and discusses cases in which the police confronted protest illustrate what constitutes a police version of history in modern Japan.



Exterior of Tokyo Police Museum

Representing the People's Police

The figure of Piipo-kun is a contemporary representation of a perfect union between the people and the police, but the ideal of the police as a gentle protector is not new. Umemori Naoyuki argues that such characteristics as a “paternalistic attitude” and an “all-encompassing definition of the policemen's role” developed soon after the establishment of the Meiji state in 1968.⁶ To illustrate this point, Umemori quotes a popular 1876 police textbook written by Kawaji Toshiyoshi. Kawaji, memorialized at the Tokyo Police Museum as the founder of the modern police in Japan, wrote: “A nation is a family. The government is the parents. Its people are children. The police are their dry nurse.”⁷ This

statement invokes the prewar political metaphor of the Japanese nation-state as family, and suggests that the police are benevolent figures who not only protect but also nurture the people. In this representation, the role of the police is expansive regarding the people, and also paternalistic, regarding them as wards of the state and the police.

Much of the Museum's displays and interactive exhibits emphasize the police's protective roles of fighting crime, providing disaster relief, and maintaining traffic safety. Pedagogical videos and games instruct visitors on how to help thwart criminals and stay safe.

An informative video on “protecting order in Tokyo” – available in both an adult and a children's version – introduces the various tasks and divisions of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, beginning with the most visible everyday police activities at the local police box (*kōban*). A more recent division, launched in February 1995, indicates the expansive police interpretation of fighting crime in Japan; the “Lifestyle Safety Bureau” was born of a reformed “Anti-Crime Bureau,” and describes its mission as protecting citizens' lives from “all kinds of crime,” ranging from gun control to monitoring the potentially illegal activities of youth and foreigners.⁸ The name of the unit goes beyond mere crime prevention, however, and suggests protecting a specific “lifestyle,” or even a world view.



Anti-Crime Corner

Policing Protest: A Police Version of History

Crime fighting and traffic control are generally less controversial aspects of policing work; when the police confront citizen protest, however, various conflicting world views present in a given society come into conflict.⁹ The Tokyo Police Museum includes exhibits on policing protest mostly to illustrate cases in which police faced “crises.” The treatment of these events, distinct from day-to-day crime fighting because protest challenges the larger political order, suggests that the root of the critical danger was an excess of ideological zeal.

The presentation of three historical crises displayed in a corner of the Museum suits the self-representation of the police as ostensibly non-ideological protectors of order, and also demonstrates the strong influence of the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s in forming the contemporary self-image of the police. The three cases included in the exhibit are: The February 26 Incident (2.26 Incident) of 1936, the Nihon University “disturbance” of 1968, and the Asama Mountain Lodge (*Asama sansō*) incident of 1972. All three of these events embroiled the police in larger political conflicts and created police casualties.



Historical Crises Display

The first case, the 2.26 Incident, was an attempted coup d'état organized by young officers in the Imperial Japanese Army. The latter two incidents grew out of 1960s student activism. The Asama Mountain Lodge (Asama Sansō) Incident of February 1972 was a police siege of a group of militant radicals on the run who held a woman hostage and exchanged gunfire with police for almost ten days in what became one of the most publicized media events of the 1970s.¹⁰ It is also frequently invoked as a marker of the decline of popular support for youth activism and radical leftist politics, since the five young men involved in the incident were members of the United Red Army, and a subsequently revealed bloody internal purge within the group prompted a public outcry and self-reflection among many former radicals.¹¹ These two events – the 2.26 Incident and the Asama Sansō Incident – shocked the public and transformed politics. However, the more interesting inclusion in the museum's exhibit is that of the "Nihon University disturbance" of 1968. It is a generally forgotten part of a largely neglected history, that of the campus-based student activism in the late 1960s. Its inclusion alongside such high-profile historical events underscores the police view of student radicalism as a threat to social order and is a rare case of public commemoration of what, at

the time, was a heated university dispute.

The exhibit in the Police Museum frames the student movement in the late 1960s as ideologically dangerous. It reads, "From 1966 on, extreme leftist violent students attempted to make campuses into revolutionary fortresses, radicalizing disputes at various universities." The display presents the 1968 death of a police officer who faced off against students occupying the main building of the economics department of Nihon University. Students at Nihon University, like students at so many campuses in Japan in the late 1960s, barricaded buildings, forced negotiations with their administrations, and clashed with the police. They cited both campus issues, such as rising tuition fees, as well as international controversies, such as Japan's collaboration with the United States in the unpopular Vietnam War. At the peak of campus disputes in the late 1960s, about 80 percent of the nation's campuses—165 schools—were involved in some kind of political contestation.¹² At seventy of these, students built barricades in which they physically blocked school administrators from campus buildings.¹³

In the late 1960s, police casualties led to a crack down on campus protest, although student activist casualties also caused the public to sympathize with protestors. The death of a police officer during the Nihon University struggle persuaded many politicians that the "violence of the campus disputes should no longer be allowed," in the words of one LDP lawmaker.¹⁴ While citing the high number of police injured while managing campus unrest—over 10,000 of whom 400 were hospitalized—he did not mention the numbers of student and other activists also injured. The numbers of injured students, however, was also quite large over a similar period; medical expenses for such students was part of the support work undertaken by citizens' groups designed to offer legal support to student activists.¹⁵ Testifying to more widespread

public sympathy for campus protest, one police officer recalled his chilly reception by medical staff upon arrival at a hospital in an ambulance also full of injured student activists following a clash with a street demonstration. Fearing the hostility of the public hospital's staff, he was greatly relieved when he was transferred to a police hospital.¹⁶ Although difficult to measure, the popular support enjoyed by the student movement was a key factor in challenging the legitimacy of the forceful policing of protest at several moments in the late 1960s.

In general, the displays at the Tokyo Police Museum elide the vigorous debates in postwar Japan about how to protect Japan's nascent democracy from the police acting on behalf of the state. Disputes about policing are excluded. However, debates in the 1950s often brought up the issue of police violence, usually against protesting or striking workers. Labor unions that were legalized and protected by the postwar Constitution, often tested the limits of what was permissible in postwar protest. In the Diet, politicians decried not only direct police violence toward protestors, but also police confiscation of information on protest participants, such as news photographs of labor disputes.¹⁷ By excluding such contentious issues faced by a reconstituted national police force in the wake of war and occupation, the exhibit conforms to a view of the wartime period as a historical aberration to Japan's modern national project.



Asahi Shinbun (via Wikicommons) Photograph of June 18, 1960 Protest at Diet

The photograph on display at the Tokyo Police Museum shows far fewer participants, protesting in a “zig-zag formation” associated with the radical student movement.

The historical reality of reestablishing a postwar police force, however, was much more complex, and the memory of the wartime role of the police, in particular in countering protest, was recent and raw through the postwar period. There was no question that the police had been complicit with the wartime state. The question was how to prevent policing policies after the war from crushing dissent in the name of law and order. In the 1950s, it was not only members of the opposition parties, mainly the legalized Japan Communist Party (JCP) and Japan Socialist Party (JSP) who took

up this issue, but also representatives of the newly unified and ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), who were generally more conservative. Nakano Bunmon of the LDP garnered applause when, in late 1958, he questioned the good faith of recent police attempts to woo the public at a House of Representatives hearing, declaring that it made him wonder "exactly for whose 'community safety and order' are the police working?" The political mood was such that Nakano even declared that under this kind of law and order system, peasant uprisings (*ikki*) and "revolutions" (like the Meiji Revolution, he added) could not have happened. His unease stemmed from a feeling that the public was simply being told to trust the police without the police earning that trust. He noted also that the experience of the wartime influenced his understanding of this situation: "I totally believed during the War. Those who said then, 'just trust us, just trust us' led us all astray. In that same way, we're being told the same thing in the postwar period: 'just trust us, just trust us,' and I just can't trust them."¹⁸ Wariness about the basic integrity of the police in their interactions with citizens colored discussions about expanding police powers at the highest levels of the government.

The political turmoil surrounding clashes in the Diet at the time of the 1960 revision of the US-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) prompted debate on whether the police or protesters posed the greater threat to Japan's nascent postwar democracy. As student activists involved in the Anpo demonstrations began to test the limits of policing, forcing their way into the Diet grounds on November 27, 1959, an LDP member decried the act as one of desecrating the "sacred palace" of the chosen representatives of the people, and called for increased security in the name of democracy. In response, the Minister of State conceded that past police responses may have been a bit "indulgent" with the protesters.¹⁹ The June 15, 1960 death of a female student activist, Kanba

Michiko, shocked the nation, but left opinions sharply divided on the source of the violence that killed her: some blamed the demonstrators, but many turned Kanba into a martyr of state violence, and a symbol of the fragility of postwar democracy.²⁰ At the Police Museum, in contrast, the mass demonstrations surrounding the 1960 revision of Anpo, and the policing of those protests, are reduced to one photograph. Aerial photographs taken at the peak of citizen protests show the streets outside the gates of the Diet filled with demonstrative citizens. Photographs taken at ground level, such as those taken by Hamaya Hiroshi, also revealed the broad range of participants in the mass protests.²¹



Tokyo Police Museum Photograph of Anpo Protests at Diet

The caption describes the police as "protecting the Diet" from "screaming" demonstrators, reducing complex and passionate negotiations about citizen participation in politics and the potential for police repression into an instance of maintaining order in the face of fanaticism.

Conclusion

While modest in size and influence, the version of history on display at the Tokyo Police Museum stresses a harmonious relationship between the officers who maintain civic order and the city's residents. The Museum's displays only portray protest as a threat to political order, rather than a potential expression of political will. However, moments in which citizens engaged in contentious politics challenge this narrative of consensus and apolitical police protection. If the police are ultimately tasked with protecting the state, what happens in situations in which the public takes to the streets to critique the state's policies?

In moments of conflict between the state and a mobilized segment of the public, the role of the police quickly becomes another site of contestation. Anyone who has attended recent protests against the Abe administration's policies can attest to the heavy police management of these events; they act as a barrier between demonstrators and the Tokyo population and seal off demonstrators from the spaces of political power, such as the Diet Building. The ideal of the police as the people's police helps explain the polite, but firm, gestures officers display to most protest participants, asking them calmly to cross the street, or stay on one side or the other of a police blockade. However, it will be surprising if critiques of the current administration do not extend to examine the role of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police in protecting the state against the people. In particular, the participation of many segments of Japanese society new to street protests, most notably young people, suggest that experiences in facing off against police at demonstrations may generate new interpretations of the police role in mediating or suppressing the demands of the people against state policies, posing one of the critical questions of democratic rule.

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Recommended citation: *Chelsea Szendi Schieder*, "The People's Police: The Tokyo Police Museum's Version of History", *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 44, No. 1, November 2, 2015.

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Notes

¹ The suffix "kun" indicates that Piipo is male.

² These often go by the term 'yuru kyara' (wobbly characters), coined by cultural critic Miura Jun in 2004 in response to the many mascots created to promote agencies, localities, and events. See Debra Occhi, "Yuru Kyara Humanity and the Uncanny Instability of Borders in the Construction of Japanese Identities and Aesthetics," *Japan Studies - The Frontier*, n.d., 7-17.

³ The rise of military manga in Japan also strives to portray military organizations with a "cuddly, depoliticized image," as Sabine Frühstück shows. See Sabine Frühstück, "AMPO in Crisis? US Military's Manga Offers Upbeat Take on US-Japan Relations," (<https://apjjf.org/-Sabine-Fruhstuck/3442/article.html>) The Asia-Pacific Journal, 45-3-10, November 8, 2010.

⁴ Many major cities, and some smaller ones, also have police museums. Some examples include the New York City Police Museum, the City of London Police Museum, Paris's Musée de la Préfecture de Police, the Beijing Police Museum, Hong Kong's Police Museum, Singapore's Police Heritage Center, Cairo's National Police Museum, and Sao Paulo's Museum of the Civil Police. The International Police Association list of police museums in the United States includes 21 police museums in

California alone. "Museums." (<http://www.ipa-usa.org/?page=Museums>) International Police Association. July 2016. Accessed November 1, 2015.

⁵ "Keisatsuchō no 'keisatsuhakubutsukan' ga ōpun" [Metropolitan Police Department opens its 'Police Museum'], Mainichi shinbun, July 14, 1994. p.

⁶ Umemori Naoyuki. "Modernization Through Colonial Mediations: The Establishment of Police and Prison System in Meiji Japan" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2002). 30.

⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁸ "Hanzai-bu ga kaishō, seikatsu anzen-bu ni" [The anti-crime bureau renames as the lifestyle safety bureau], Asahi shinbun, Feb. 2, 1995.

⁹ Donatella della Porta, "Social Movements and the State: Thoughts on the Policing of Protest," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Zald Mayer (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 65.

¹⁰ Yoshimi Shunya reduces it completely to a media event Shunya Yoshimi, *Posuto-Sengo Shakai* [Post-Postwar Society], Shiriizu Nihon Kingendaishi 9 (Iwanami shinsho, 2009).

¹¹ Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Death by Defeatism and Other Fables: The Social Dynamics of the Rengō Sekigun Purge," in *Japanese Social Organization*, ed. Takie Sugiyama Lebra (University of Hawaii Press, 1992); Yoshikuni Igarashi, "Dead Bodies and Living Guns: The United Red Army and Its Deadly Pursuit of Revolution, 1971-1972," *Japanese Studies* 27, no. 2 (September 2007): 119-137.

¹² Yukiko Sawara, "The University Struggles," in *Zengakuren: Japan's Revolutionary Students*, ed. Stuart Dowsey (Berkeley: The Ishi Press, 1970), 138.

¹³ Takazawa Kōji, Takagi Masayuki, and Kurata Kazunari, *Shinsayoku nijûnenshi: hanran no kiseki* [A Twenty-Year History of the New Left: Miracle of Revolt] (Tokyo: Shinsensha, 1981), 117.

¹⁴ House of Representatives, Plenary Session. April 17, 1969. Comment #20. Accessed July 5, 2015. "Kokkai kaigi kiroku shisutomu (Diet Debate Records System)." 66/27.

¹⁵ For more on such support groups active both in the 1970s and today, see William Andrews, "Trial Support Groups Lobby for Japanese Prisoner Rights, Fight to Rectify Injustices," *Japan Focus* 12, no. 21 (May 25, 2014).

¹⁶ Hiroshi Harada, *Aru keisatsukan no shōwa sesō shi* [Showa History as Told by a Policeman] (Tokyo: Soshisha, 2011), 135.

¹⁷ House of Representatives, Budget Committee. November 1, 1958, Comment #66. Accessed July 5, 2015. "Kokkai kaigi kiroku

shisutomu (Diet Debate Records System)." Session 30/5.

¹⁸ House of Representatives, Local Administration Committee Public Hearing. November 4, 1958, Comment # 4. Accessed July 5, 2015. "Kokkai kaigi kiroku shisutomu (Diet Debate Records System)." Session 30/2.

¹⁹ House of Representatives, Plenary Session. November 30 1959, Comment # 4. Accessed July 5, 2015. "Kokkai kaigi kiroku shisutomu (Diet Debate Records System)." Session 33/13.

²⁰ See Chelsea Szendi Schieder, "Coed Revolution: The Female Student in the Japanese New Left, 1957-1972" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2014).

²¹ For Hamaya's photographs and historical context see Justin Jesty, "Tokyo 1960: Days of Rage & Grief," (http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/tokyo_1960/anp2_essay01.html) MIT Visualizing Cultures, 2012.