INTRODUCTION

The Growth Idea and Early Postwar History

The Meaning of “Loss”

As the end of the twentieth century neared and Japanese marked the completion of the first ten years of the Heisei era, public commentaries and scholarly examinations alike came to speak of the 1990s as Japan’s “lost decade.” Taken together, Japanese vernacular opinion and that of both native and foreign specialists on Japanese society all have routinely portrayed the ten-year period beginning in roughly 1991 as one of wasted years, a retrograde decade during which the Japanese people somehow lost ground, national power waned, and Japanese society foundered on the shoals of earlier national success. In not a few such accounts from the American perspective there lurked a barely disguised, but historically familiar, undertone of secret relief and satisfaction that Japan had, in the end, finally been brought down a notch. The least careful of these analyses created an unfounded impression of historical compression in which the troubled 1990s represented, not a significant but temporary period of national transition following upon a remarkable half-century of achievement and change, but rather the wholesale demise of the entire long, miraculous dream of postwar Japanese power, material might, and national competence. In their numerous additions to the perennial Nihonron (On Japan) genre of sociational treatise, Japanese, too, have produced their share of grim accounts of the 1990s as nationally aimless years when progress, they seemed to imply, abruptly ceased. Nor did the major publishing houses and their stable of celebrity commentators have a monopoly on such sullen diagnostics. As any observer of contemporary Japan could attest, “whither Japan?” anxiety surged strongly to the surface of public consciousness during the last years
of the century, expressed in one way or another in the national press, on TV, and in the public pronouncements and private conversations of business people, politicians, teachers, and students alike.

Such panoramically bleak and historically foreshortened representations of “lost” national years can seem rather odd when viewed in the context of the actual entirety of the complex, jostling record of the ten years beginning in 1991. Considered in the conventional sense in which nations are cast as unitary subjects operating on a world stage, a great deal of continued Japanese dynamism and global influence in fact marked that period of supposed Heisei-era gloom. Whether in terms of cultural production and influence, health and individual physical welfare, the transnational flows of people and capital into and out of Japan, continued corporate power, environmental leadership, or a comparatively high level of continued wealth—just to name a few domains of national prominence—Japanese displayed levels of creative activity at home and around the world that seem to stand in contrast with the “lost decade” thesis and stark etiologies of a sick Japan.

What paradigmatic set of assumptions, then, could be so persuasive that it would seem legitimate to speak of the complexity of collective experience in Japan during that decade’s time in terms of being somehow gone? Inverting this initial question helps make clear the need to identify the discursive and material representations of loss’s opposite—gain, achievement, acquisition, victory—at work inside the architecture of assumptions supporting such readings of the recent Japanese past. What lay at issue beneath declarations of Japanese failure were the accepted yardsticks at century’s end of the success of nations.

From this perspective, a universe of expectations about the primacy of material achievement, described in the specific technical terms of national macroeconomic growth, comes more clearly into focus. Here growth means, foremost, increase in the total size of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the national economy, and it is against this ideological backdrop that “the 1990s,” a time labeled one of “recession” (low-growth, no-growth, or even at certain moments decline in the size of the overall size of the GDP), now could be dismissed in terms of failure. It was the so-called bursting of an economic bubble in 1991 that economists tell us marked the beginning of the decade of failing growth. It was then that an interlocking inflation of stock-market and real-estate values that had begun some five or six years earlier came to a sudden end. Incessant reference to the burst bubble since the early 1990s itself quickly became shorthand for several interrelated troubling social and economic developments. Primary among these was a sudden absence of macroeconomic growth: GDP at best went flat and remained more or less in what was considered that pathological state for the next decade.
This deep current of social expectation about GDP growth, whether always overtly spoken or not, was of course not new to the post-bubble 1990s. The statistic of GDP (or the earlier more common variant, gross national product, GNP) had by that time already served long years as the premier national measure of things in Japan and in the broader global state system. And yet, there was a time when the knowledge formations and vocabularies of macroeconomic growth, its prescriptions and instrumentalized practices, were not yet so fully naturalized. Even as late as 1961, Ryū Shintarō, the famous economist and social critic, could point out the sheer novelty of what he described in a popular Asahi newspaper column as the “glorification of growth, growth” (seichō, seichō o raisan shite) that had come in recent years to grip the nation. As his repetition of the word “growth” suggests, Ryū, whose analytical career had passed through its formative stages under very different conceptual conditions during Japan’s colonial and increasingly corporatist 1920s and 1930s, wrote his 1961 Asahi columns more in mocking alarm than in the sort of celebration of growthist success that we have been conditioned to expect by our narratives of the postwar decades. He warned that, in his view, the obsession with rapid growth as such was based on shaky material foundations, rife with misconceptions and potentially detrimental to national fortune. But more telling was the mere fact that Ryū felt compelled, in the midst of a moment of national reconception in the early 1960s, to call at least brief attention to the fact that growth as a new organizing principle of political-economic perception seemed to have rather suddenly supplanted earlier conventions. Indeed, Ryū argued, the very word “growth”—seichō—had begun to drown out mention of all the familiar concepts—words such as keiki (health of the economy), for example—by which the economy had formerly been understood.

It is difficult today to imagine a world of political and economic policy, social scientific practice, economic enterprise, and even personal behavior, whether in Japan or elsewhere, in which the idea of ever-expanding material and financial accumulation (and the provision of new forms and increasing amounts of services) was not fundamental to our view of how societies and nations should work. Yet, despite its apparent temporal transcendence, growth—as an array of statistical measures, a body of theoretical models, a set of assumptions about the operations of the nation, a social and political goal to be accomplished, and a charge assigned finally to the state—has a history. This book attempts to write just such a history of the formative years of the growth ideal as it took shape in Japan during the first decade and a half after the Second World War. It is not my intent to write the entire intellectual and political history of the concept of growth as this played out in Japan from 1945 up to today, but rather to trace the early postwar history by which the pursuit of growth came, by the beginning of
the 1960s, to occupy such a dominant position in Japan and much of the rest of the world system and continues to do so in its own ways even today.

**Growth as Concept**

In a commonsense way, the fixation on economic growth that Ryū Shintarō saw all around him would seem to have had good cause. GNP was growing at an annual rate of over 10 percent in 1961 and, for the prior five years, had grown at an average of 9 percent annually. The flush of optimism this expansion engendered was reflected in national policy: Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato’s new Income Doubling Plan, which had just been passed in December 1960, projected average economic growth rates of over 7 percent every year for the next ten years and committed the government to promoting that outcome. Indeed, by the end of that decade, the Japanese economy had become the world’s third largest in terms of size of the GNP, surpassed only by the United States and the Soviet Union.

The story of this rapid economic growth dominates histories of Japan, coloring not only our descriptions of the post–World War II decades but also, retrospectively, much of the literature on the whole span of modern and even early modern Japan. Historians and social scientists for many years searched earnestly in every historical nook and cultural cranny for explanations for this national “performance.” Indeed, the story of the second half of the twentieth century is often told as if it were synonymous with the trajectory of high-speed growth. Defining both popular perceptions and scholarly research programs for decades beginning in the 1960s, growth became in great part what we knew about Japan. The rates of expansion themselves were remarkable, of course; and indeed, a great deal of scholarship has been written explaining this explosive growth on the material and social levels.

My argument is that to these important studies of the economic changes of the twentieth century we might also usefully add perspectives that account for growth as an idea, one that emerged alongside the rapid economic expansion itself of the postwar period. This book is thus at heart a conceptual history of growth in its postwar forms. Its central thesis is that the preoccupation with high growth of the postwar years in Japan was not merely a reflection of the material fact of increased economic circulation, which while remarkable in its rate was surely not in itself unique to that period of history, but was an artifact of the twentieth-century rise of growth as an object of social scientific knowledge and as an analytical paradigm that came to govern political-economic practices in nations around the world. Economies, after all, seemingly rooted as they are in the material “thingness” of making, selling, and consuming, are not objects that enjoy an existence distinctly prior to the theories by which we attempt to con-
ceive them. While not merely imagined, nonetheless they are, to borrow the term of Timothy Mitchell, “made” in the interplay between the real and cultural realms as quite sophisticated abstractions whose parameters and processes shift according to the rules projected by our modes of knowing them. It is thus not the anatomy of growth per se that interests me, but growthism—the conceptual frameworks, modes of economic imagination, and political programs by which Japanese understood rapid material change and simultaneously attempted in national terms to give it meaning and shape its direction.

This book explores three broad, intersecting themes in the history of the postwar growth regime as these unfolded between 1945 and the early 1960s. The first relates to the ways in which changes in social science contributed to Japanese forms of postwar growthism. This social-scientific dimension relates in part to new epistemological developments within the ascendant discipline of economics, the technical revolutions that enabled a new breed of technocrats to shape a shared vocabulary of growth for a national public. I specifically trace the history of national income accounting, the analytical procedures by which the new statistic of GNP and related macro-benchmarks were calculated, and show how these techniques rose to the forefront of economic understanding and policy making in Japan in the 1950s. As such aggregative empirical methodologies reshaped postwar social science, bureaucrats and scholars transformed GNP from an obscure academic exercise into one of the key conceptual instruments by which macroeconomic growth was imagined and pursued.

Such technical innovations fueled social-scientific fascination with applying what increasingly came to be called “growth theory” to the practical problem of understanding the real physiologies of growth and to promoting it within the national context. In this cause, scholars and bureaucrats revisited an older modern interest in the possibilities of planning. Immediately after the end of the war, many argued that planning could be redeemed from its failed wartime past and made to work for a new Japan. They thereby helped renew a vision of technocratic guidance that had increasingly, in various guises, formed a central component of national social and economic policy during the twentieth century. By the 1960s, the general acceptance of the ideal of planning as fundamental to the optimal working of postwar economies resulted in a new wave of apologia for the principle of planning now specifically cast by some in terms of growthist ends and modes of analysis.

The second dimension of the rise of growth thought and practice that I examine is the political harnessing of the growthist ideal to articulate, by the middle of the second decade after surrender, a domestic vision of national postwar purpose. Since the Meiji period, analysts from a variety of perspectives had consistently compared Japanese capitalist development to
supposedly universal models and declared it insufficient and “deformed.” With Japan now defeated and the empire ended, reformers resurrected these older forms of what I call negative national exceptionalism. Combining prewar Marxist critiques with postwar modes of macroeconomic understanding, they mobilized long-standing fears of “backwardness” to argue for a growthist vision of national reformation in part informed by a panoply of new macroeconomic methodologies.

The idea of a structural reshaping of long-standing political-economic patterns in Japan seemed to dovetail with the postwar mantra of full employment that found voice in national economies around the globe as the new macroeconomics of the British economist John Maynard Keynes began to alter the theories and practices of the discipline in fundamental ways. In Japan, prominently placed economists after the war seized on the ideal of full employment to support a progressive program to foster the rise of a more vigorous middle class in Japan and, hopefully by extension, to support institutions of democracy more thoroughgoing than those of the prewar and wartime pasts. Historians and economists have marshaled great evidence for the contribution of the external or international aspects of Japanese material success during the postwar years—the fact that a significant portion of the rapid increase in total output can be explained by an intense Japanese orientation toward exporting high value-added products to the rest of the world. Yet it is also true that conceptions of rapid macroeconomic expansion were in part based on the convictions of its most ardent technocratic promoters about the important contributions that overall expansion of the GNP could make to their goal of fashioning a domestic society of prosperity and equity.

The third overlapping dimension the book presents relates to efforts made by growth publicists over time in the early postwar years, and more overtly after the end of the Occupation period, to expand Japanese notions about what level of material and social prosperity their nation might be able to achieve in a reshaped postwar world. Visions of prosperity that became more fully articulated by the beginning of the very high-growth era of the 1960s did not emerge fully formed immediately after the war. Massive wartime devastation and the most basic need simply to rebuild a society in near ruins placed material and conceptual limits on what could be imagined for the future of the nation. Such apparently wretched prospects, however, render all the more remarkable the many attempts that Japanese did make after the war to grope their way toward social and economic goals that were considerably refashioned toward more expansive notions of national and even personal prosperity. The intertwined sets of ideas that constituted this prosperity vision, often underwritten by new theories of the workings of national economies, found increasingly stronger expression once the recovery emergency of the late 1940s had receded. The full-employment
ideal itself, and the accompanying belief in the need, more than had been true in earlier eras, for the government to provide stronger welfare and insurance supports for Japanese citizens as workers, both were critical parts of the conceptual framework of postwar prosperity.

But so, too, was a new willingness to accept enlarged understandings of the role of consumption in the national economy. Both public and private organizations strove to supplement a cultural canon of frugality and thrift—long evoked throughout Japanese history and a constant refrain during the war—by promoting the idea that certain forms of private consumption were newly appropriate in the drive toward a prosperity economy of growth. Largely heretical as these views would have seemed in earlier times in Japan much as elsewhere, by the 1950s many began to cautiously envision a consuming society on the basis of theoretical and statistical evidence observable in the field of contemporary economics.

Economists alone were not responsible for the incremental changes that took place in Japanese understanding and acceptance of consumption, however. International social-scientific support for rethinking the place of consumption in the economies of the postwar world did not operate in some rarified theoretical vacuum. The wave of iconoclastic views of consumption, demand, buying, and spending that surged forth from mid-century economics was in fact mingled with a host of real-world developments. Producers everywhere around the world sought new lines of business in consumer goods as the need for armaments shrank after the end of the Second World War; beginning in the 1950s, an increasing cultural focus on household domesticity characterized societies in one way or another in all the former wartime belligerents; wages and disposable income generally rose as labor unions around the world fought for their share of relative postwar prosperity; and, although less marked everywhere else than in the United States, the apparatuses of marketing and advertising expanded in complexity and reach during the postwar decades.

Even during these changing times, any unguarded exuberance for consumerism in postwar Japan would have had to confront a formidable arsenal of critique, one armed with culturally and politically venerable languages of sacrifice, frugality, and saving. Those who suggested a reconsideration of the role of consumption did so in a complex cultural, economic, and political environment that simultaneously included postwar versions of movements supporting the causes of savings and temperance that had been a constant feature of earlier decades of national life. Indeed, none among those seeking to adjust national conceptions of consumption for a new age ever advocated the idea of unfettered consumerism: careful, appropriate rationality, in their view, ought to govern the nature of consuming, no matter whether by government, business, or individual citizen. Yet, these cautions aside, Japanese society by the 1960s was one in which private consumption
played a much larger role than it had earlier in the century, in terms of personal experience and behavior, cultural acceptance, and material fact. Efforts by economists operating in a variety of spheres to sanction these changes represented an important part of this history and were closely linked to larger conceptions of national prosperity.

This strand of the book’s findings helps to insert Japan into the larger history of consumerism that has proved so riveting to scholars in many disciplines and national fields over the last two decades. By thus helping to historicize our understanding of Japan as one of the richest and most complex of consumer societies it also contributes to an increasingly vibrant conversation within Japanese historiography about the competing visions in Japanese modern history, on the one hand, of cultural and personal continence in regard to the desire and increasing ability to consume and, on the other, of the good life as defined in ever more materialist terms.9

My concern throughout the treatment of these themes is to contribute to a broader historicization of the pervasive, but increasingly dated, concept of never-ending growth that over the course of the first postwar decade and a half began to be articulated in ways familiar to us today, and that stubbornly continues in the early twenty-first century to undergird our most basic beliefs about societies and the global economy. To be sure, I attempt to do so by tracing the technical and political trajectories by which the concept was naturalized in the specific instance of Japan. Yet even as Japan became the premier icon of the postwar growthist ideal, neither the faith in rapid growth as a prescription for postwar peace nor the ascendancy of economics and econometric techniques that provided its technical support was unique to Japanese experience. This constellation of developments reflected, rather, a mid-century romance with technocracy common to industrial nations the world over and to the multilateral organizations formed after the war to manage global markets and development. Charting the ways in which growth as theory and practice emerged in the specific context of Japanese capitalism, the book is offered also as a contribution to our understanding of the larger transnational history of this technocratic ideal.

The fixation on growth in Japan as it came to be expressed in the mid-twentieth century shared continuities with earlier modes of economic thought that industrializing societies cast in nationalized terms of material power and competitive advantage. It also in part represented a renewal of an older emphasis on the “wealth of nations” that, first in the eighteenth century, had emerged as a preoccupation of the canonical strands of European political economy that would later so shape the modern and contemporary forms of the economics discipline. As can be seen in early modern ideas and practices, Japanese too had explored the implications of their own desire to promote the material prosperity of the realm. In the case of
an otherwise obscure figure like Sada Kaiseki, some in the immediate post-Tokugawa years even suggested that promoting virtuous cycles of consumption of domestic products would accelerate economic circulation and thus the wealth of the country. But, in important ways, growthism as it came to be practiced by the early 1960s in Japan, as in industrialized economies the world over, was a distinctly postwar phenomenon. Technical revolutions within the social sciences, particularly the discipline of economics, the rising power of economic knowledge within both the academy and the public sphere of policy debate, the conceptual trauma visited by the Great Depression on orthodox views of how economies worked and ought to be managed, and the techniques of macroeconomic management with which leaders first experimented in the prosecution of total war all had the effect of creating a new level of awareness of what began to be called the “macroeconomic growth” of nations as the key objective of an activist vision of economic administration, the focus of scholarly research programs, and the most significant gauge of national power. To talk about growthism in the early years of its formation is not to claim that it alone caused economic growth. Rather, it is to begin to tell the history of the ways in which growth as a concept came to govern national and global agendas, not just for the early postwar decades, but indeed for the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond.

While part of a common mid-century history, national inflections particular to Japan affected the rise of growthism there in the late 1940s and the 1950s. One of the purposes of this book is precisely to shed light on the contextual conditions of possibility in which growthism initially took shape in Japan, and to suggest as well some of the reasons for its eventual strength there. In the course of the narrative, the book will propose at least three interwoven explanations.

The first relates to the dramatically altered geopolitical context of the postwar years. As Japanese searched for new purpose after the war, they did so as members of a nation not only thoroughly defeated but one that had suffered the swift demise of a far-flung empire on which they had premised conceptions of national power for a full half-century. The postwar period everywhere was characterized by a trend toward decolonization, as old metropole powers slowly came to terms with the moral and political force of nationalist movements around the globe. In the case of Japan, however, the relinquishment of imperial lands was an entirely forced one and, at least in legal terms, almost instantaneous. It was partly in response to such radically revised and newly confining circumstances that Japanese eventually imbued the growthist ideal with such bedrock national meaning. Following a period of uncertainty after the death of the old verity that the state secures the nation by securing territorial empire, a new axiom supposed that the state, though certainly more circumscribed than before, can help to secure
national power by ensuring conditions for domestic industrial strength and rapid growth.

The second factor contributing to the Japanese instance of postwar growthism was an exceptionalist view of Japanese political economy that held that peculiar structural “dualities” could be addressed once and for all only by a national mobilization to expand rapidly the total size of domestic economic production. Elements of both the right and left wings of the political spectrum after the war supported this view of the special applicability of a growth remedy for uniquely Japanese socioeconomic diseases. This diagnostic formula, moreover, drew in its own way on older modes of Japanese exceptionalism that had long informed modern nationalist thought, even as it did so in this case by positing that an unhealthy state of affairs defined the Japanese case. It thus revealed telling continuities between the conceptual tropes of the postwar growth nation and those of earlier years.

The third broad factor that helped to amplify the power of the growth idea in Japan in its most formative years relates to growth as a technocratic pursuit. Accompanying (even underwriting) a belief in growth as telos with identifiable laws of progression was a new panoply of tools for counting, measuring, predicting, and managing it. Together these contributed to a view of postwar economic practice as now truly scientific. Such an idea was particularly attractive in post-defeat Japan. Identifying the goal of growth as a universal good and the techniques for understanding it as the marks of rationalized statecraft, bureaucrats and policy makers in Japan now seemed to have an acceptable replacement for the bankrupt national languages of imperial power, racial mission, and cultural purity of the colonial and wartime pasts. Practitioners also embraced the view that growthist technocracy provided an apolitical means to governing that could escape what many now dismissed as the irrational, ideological management of the state that had existed in earlier years.

**Historicizing Economic Knowledge**

While on the whole the topics and sources of this book relate to the domain of economics, the term “economics” here is multilayered. It refers not only to the scholarly discipline as pursued on university campuses, though this was at times important, but also to the public practice of policy, to the pursuits both of labor and capital in the operations of the market, and to a rising parlance of GNP-ism among a national public. My interests thus lie both in knowledge developments internal to the discipline of economics and in the more publicly cast expression of economic thought as it affected conceptions of the nation, cultural ideals, and the connections between individual subjects, private lifestyles, and national fortunes. I often draw on books and journals intended for scholarly audiences and on technical
publications of key economic agencies and research organs of the government. At the same time, I also make use of national newspapers, journals of opinion, books for the mass market, and the popularly packaged reports and white papers, particularly of the Economic Planning Agency and its predecessor institutions, that regularly garnered wide readerships during the first postwar decades and exerted unrivaled influence on public perceptions of economic change. I examine as well a variety of other documents and official organs produced by planners, reformers, and related advisory, research, and promotional institutions that particularly contributed to the strands of growthist thinking after the war as I have laid them out. The U.S. National Archives files from the Occupation period provided some insight into the early American role after the war in promoting a postwar vision in Japan of macroeconomic regulation of the nation, though, even in this case, institutional histories and document collections from the Japanese side yielded a great deal of the relevant detail.

This study focuses much energy on epistemological change, the invention of new high-modernist abstractions, and political interpretations of history; but people matter here, too. A cast of seminally important individuals figures prominently throughout the chapters that follow. It was on their senses of national mission, social-scientific dedication, and political faiths that the conceptual and institutional developments I narrate in great part depended. Their autobiographies and memoirs, the histories they wrote, and interview recollections of their activities during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s all also provided rich material for the stories I tell. While politicians and journalists do appear, this history features economists, working in a variety of settings, most prominently. “Economists” here refers to professionally trained academics (commonly called keizaigakusha), but also to economic bureaucrats in central state institutions (generally known in the Japanese context as “bureaucratic economists,” kanchō ekonomisuto) who daily assumed more public roles on the national scene after the Second World War. A significant number of such government economists, as well as prominent academic economists who frequently served together with their government counterparts as official advisers, attained considerable public stature in the late 1940s and the 1950s, and they played critical roles in employing new analytical methods and shaping public opinion and state policy. It is this new breed of what I call “public economists,” whether bureaucratic or academic, that most often in this study commands my attention.  

This book does not focus on just one specific institution as somehow explanatory of the postwar growth “system.” I have drawn the sources for this study from a variety of official and academic institutional settings, and many organizations and voices combined in the history I trace to articulate growthism as I am defining it here. All the same, it is also true that some
agencies loom far larger in my story than others. In particular, the Economic Stabilization Board of the early postwar period and the later Economic Planning Agency (EPA), which grew by the mid-1950s out of that earlier organization, represented some of the most significant institutional settings in which growthist paradigms were shaped and disseminated.

The Economic Stabilization Board wielded unprecedented powers during the Occupation years of recovery, and in many ways no other one political-economic agency of the Japanese state overshadowed it during its existence. The later EPA was also centrally important to the functions of the Japanese state and to the shared perceptions of officials and the private sectors of economy and business. Unlike the ministries and agencies with which it worked to formulate its plans and forecasts, however, the EPA possessed no explicit administrative authority by which to pursue its goals. Criticisms of the agency as ineffectual and removed from the practical issues of real governance are common in the historical record. Detractors frequently attacked it as a “thesis ministry” and dismissed its plans as nothing more than “paper” lacking any real power of implementation.

Yet despite its lack of administrative authority, the EPA wielded considerable power in the realm of public opinion during the formative years of the growth idea. Although those with higher hopes for more authentic government coordination of the economy did attack EPA planning at the time, many of the critiques of it as a “thesis ministry” were, in fact, a product of a later time, when high growth ended in the 1970s and the charmed aura that had surrounded the agency faded in the wake of failures to predict fundamental changes in the economy.

The diminished stature of the EPA later in the century stood in contrast to earlier decades. From the time of its creation in the mid-1950s, the agency had been known as one of the government’s “Big Three Economic Agencies” (along with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Finance) or, alternatively, when counted along with the Foreign Ministry, even as one of the “Big Four” organs of the government as a whole. This was perhaps in some measure due to its historical association with its indubitably powerful predecessor institution, the Economic Stabilization Board. But the high estimation of the place of the EPA also issued from its role in setting the terms of national debate on the economy. It was uniquely charged to take the pulse of the entire economy and positioned to make comprehensive statements on its future directions. The EPA served as a clearinghouse for conceptual and methodological developments in economics, transforming these into coherent representations of national fortunes for the mass media and a public readership. While some portion of the outcomes of rapid expansion in economic output might have occurred without the plans of the period, these and the other documentary products of the EPA remained significant in their influence in determining what was
"known" about the economy and therefore the objects of attempted state remediation. EPA plans and white papers certainly provided what economists refer to as a "signaling effect," in which their economic projections helped form expectations about continued prosperity that influenced government, business, and consumer behavior. Less remarked, however, is the way in which they functioned to introduce and shape the conceptual instruments by which growth as an organizing principle of national affairs was conceived.

This book participates in an enlarging body of literature that takes as its subject the historicity of economic knowledge and that simultaneously works to broaden our view of the multiple discursive fields in which "the economic" operates. This scholarship is often conversant with the theories and treatises of the discipline more formally defined, but also in the ways these stand in iterative relations to political practice and wider cultural fields, over time becoming deeply dissolved into the perceptual ether of national publics. The writings of Keith Tribe, Philip Mirowski, and Deirdre McCloskey all in their own way represent seminal demonstrations of the inherent status of economics as discourse, one that generates its own modes of rhetorical construction and that produces reality effects that are less than direct "reflections" of the material facts of economic action. Other histories as diverse as those of Ian Hacking on the replacement of causal determinism in nineteenth-century Europe with new laws of statistical chance, of Martin Weiner on long-standing tensions in England between commercial values and pastoral ideals, and of William Leach on the many spheres in which experts and publicists sanctioned a new order of consumer society in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America all explore the vernacular life of economic ideas on cultural terrain. These works have all provided inspiration, confirming and expanding on the initial impulses and concerns that fed my thinking as I reflected on my initial archival research and as my arguments took shape.

The book that has resulted has particular affinities with an especially fruitful strand of scholarship interested in the history and sociology of numeracy and statistical modes of description. While some of the work done by the narrative that follows is rooted in the administrative practices and institutional history of numerical production, one of my accompanying concerns is with the power of those statistics to name and assign order. The book thus shares with a broader historical scholarship on statistical modes of knowing an interest in the ways in which "practices of quantification have also their own logics." Two books have been particularly important to me in this regard. In The History of the Modern Fact, Mary Poovey retraces the history of knowledge practices in Europe that from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries increasingly accepted numbers as the most appropriate representation of fact. That numerical modes of knowledge seemed to
allow for transparent description, immune from questions of interpretation, contributed to a near obsession by the nineteenth century with counting—with assigning numbers to observed particulars. Silvana Patriarca’s *Numbers and Nationhood* ties this counting impulse to a history of nationalism, showing the ways in which statistical data deployed by patriots created a spatial portrait of a unified Italy. Social and demographic numbers thus helped project a geographical body for a nation not yet existent, one that would encompass all the varied territories and political units arrayed over the Italian peninsula.17

I wish, however, to extend the insights of histories such as those of Poovey and Patriarca by lengthening the temporal frames applied to the developments they narrate. The question of how practitioners of the sciences of wealth and society sought to generate and represent their particular forms of knowledge does not end, as the accounts of Poovey and Patriarca essentially do, with the nineteenth century. The increasingly formalized discipline of economics, in particular, turned to statistical epistemologies with renewed fervor in the twentieth century, often by supplementing older forms of induction with mathematical practices and modeling. This book is occupied in great part with tracing the expressed intentions and self-conscious goal setting of economic practitioners across an early postwar arc of time. It attempts to do so, however, by also keeping an eye toward how the twentieth-century modes of statistical innovation that these public economists employed conditioned their descriptive practices.

One of the critically influential forms that reinvigorated statistical obsessions took during the twentieth century constitutes a central topic of this book. Though at the outset of this project I could only dimly have imagined such a subject playing an important role in the history I would write, the sources I began to uncover during my research slowly suggested a story of postwar growthism that was intimately linked to an explosion in new, powerful statistical methodologies by which social scientists were beginning to conceive economies at mid-century—and by which growth would eventually come routinely to be spoken. As I discovered, the very concept of a GNP, a number derived by accounting techniques that saw an entire national economy as if it were a household economy writ large, represented a very recent invention. Its sudden appearance in the historical record in Japan during the late 1940s and early 1950s seemed to bear more than coincidental relevance to the questions I was interested in exploring. It was thus through rather unexpected but happy card-catalogue discoveries that I began to see the seemingly rarified story of statistical technologies, if you will, as a key to understanding the history of growth as I wanted to tell it.18 On this score especially, it is my hope that this study adds to our understanding by supplementing our anatomies of growth as material fact with an account that highlights the very recent provenance of the tools
themselves by which economic practitioners of the time demonstrated such fact—and by which the economic-historical anatomist could in retrospect reconstruct and explain it.

The Mid-Twentieth Century and the Postwar-ness of Growthism

The many significant dimensions added during the twentieth century to what were seen as the ends and means of economic thinking came, moreover, at certain moments. The emergence and eventual apotheosis of the social-scientific object and political ideal of macroeconomic growth was, in Japan, centered on a period running from the mid-1940s to the beginning of the 1960s. These are the years, therefore, covered most explicitly in my narrative. At the same time, this post-1945 history represented only the most visible portion of a complex international story of theoretical innovation, empiricist practice, and instrumentalizing application that in fact links that initial postwar decade and a half with technical developments begun in the 1920s, 1930s, and wartime 1940s. My narrative also accounts for these early traces of the thinking that would go on to inform postwar growthism by circling back where appropriate to earlier twentieth-century moments of invention.

The conceptual genealogy of growthism can be seen, therefore, as one aspect of an array of technocratic developments, fueled by modernist desires for managing societies, that tie the years both before and during the Second World War to those after. At what might be called the lowest power of temporal magnification, it is useful to think of a period called the mid-twentieth century as a distinct era, one stretching roughly from the end of the First World War through the 1960s and defined, among other things, by epistemological developments within the sciences of society and the economy that seemed to confer more far-reaching abilities to ascribe to them the truth claims of science, deepening faith in the possibilities of rationalized planning, and a political-economic modernism that played out in a host of large-scale experiments with reshaping metropole, colonial, and postcolonial states, societies, and geographies. At the same time, it is also crucial that historians be sensitive to the many layers of change even within such a mid-twentieth-century period.

Such a view of novelty within continuity is fundamental to my conception of the place of the Japanese instance of growthism in the broad transformations of the mid-century era. The descriptive and predictive practices on which GNP growthism rested shared many impulses with the various forms of modern developmentalism—whether enacted at home or in colonial holdings—that had marked Japanese history. But as their full influence began to be felt in the postwar years, these practices also introduced significant new elements to national economic and political imaginaries,
elements that have often been taken for granted as nothing more than natural epiphenomena of material change itself or as identical to other forms of economic statecraft.

This fact has implications for our received understandings of the vaunted “postwar Japanese system” of political economy, however one may wish to describe this mythical abstraction that so occupied the interpretive energies of scholars, journalists, and policymakers in Japan and around the world during the late century. Long-standing debates on the nature of Japanese postwar political economics—both those that have focused on the history of industrial policy and found either a “strong state” or a “weak state” the key to Japanese forms of capitalism and those concerned with the postwar legacies of wartime mobilization and new institutions of coordination as these arose between capital and the state—certainly have relevance to this book and, at some moments more than others, constitute a conceptual “deep context” to the arguments as these unfold.

Readers will find, however, that it has not been my intent to reexamine these particular older debates on their own terms in any programmatic way. As I hope is clear by this discussion, I am in fundamental sympathy with histories that emphasize the transwar dimension of political-economic institutions in Japan, particularly in regard to experiments with industrial policy and a panoply of schemes of financial and material resources allocation that emerged fitfully beginning in the late 1920s and more forcefully during the wartime 1930s and 1940s. Yet, by the same token, it is a mistake to portray all postwar conceptions and approaches as nothing but static carryovers from interwar, colonial, or wartime experience. I concur with arguments that emphasize the continued importance of colonial and mobilization planning approaches and of industrial policy during the postwar years. Yet I also maintain that any history of postwar change misses a great deal unless it takes into account the ways in which Japanese were drawing in those years on an expanding palette of social-scientific knowledge and applying some of this in a postwar language of growth that was new. Postwar growthism thus did not supplant industrial policy practices of longer standing but supplemented them, existing side by side in ways that eventually made the postwar years different from those before.

Finally, a brief summary of the chapters that follow will give a sense of how the themes I have discussed in this introduction fit into the overall trajectory of my narrative of the formative years of growth as an idea that redefined national conceptions of purpose and prosperity. Chapter 1 treats the concerted movement by former wartime planners to resuscitate and redeem the ideal of planning for the postwar era. Though their definitions were often diffuse, partisans revived their faith in planning, which had been tainted by war, defeat, and empire, by self-consciously recasting it in terms of a new democratic and scientific humanism.
Chapter 2 revolves around the significant changes that were at work within the discipline of economics worldwide in the mid-twentieth century and the effect that these new lines of theoretical and methodological inquiry had in Japanese social-scientific thought. The chapter specifically traces the rise of a host of statistical epistemologies that formed the basis of the accounting conventions out of which was produced the statistic of GNP, a highly charged measure that by the 1950s became a central component of macroeconomic growth analysis and perception in Japan and around the world.

In Chapter 3, I continue the discussion of changes within economic knowledge that supported an increasing macroeconomic focus on growth. Though rarely translated into policy in any idealized form, Keynesianism and its emphasis on the ideal of full employment seemed to offer a possible vision of abundance applicable even to a Japan still grappling with the problem of postwar reconstruction.

The book goes on in Chapter 4 to trace the rise of growth theory within the academy and economic agencies of Japan in the 1950s and illustrates how its analytical power prompted historians and economists to reevaluate both Japan’s national past and its national future in terms of that theory’s conceptions. It also argues that Japanese technocrats seized in perhaps surprising ways on the growthist view of planning as they believed it was practiced in the United States to argue for the importance of central economic blueprints for growth.

In Chapter 5, I show how public economists leveraged the postwar ideal of full employment to argue that structural inequality and what they saw as Japan’s age-old population problem could finally be overcome through a macroeconomic focus on rapid domestic growth. This chapter concludes with a look at how hopes about the possibility for a society of abundance intersected with new economic conceptions of the importance of spending and demand in national economies to prompt some to suggest that new kinds of private consumption might also have their place in the Japanese economy of growth.