Narratives and Bubbles: Rabbit Manias in Meiji Japan

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Abstract

This paper explores the 1873–1874 rabbit mania in Meiji Japan to show how a speculative boom emerged in the absence of fundamentals. Using newspapers, administrative records, and a rare legal case, this paper demonstrates that merchants' strategic narratives coordinated expectations within a small, tightly connected information environment. It also shows how telegrams concerning the rabbit trade were sent to the wrong recipient due to overlapping code registrations, drawing foreign traders into the boom and revealing significant information frictions in early global communication networks. The episode illustrates how narrative-driven belief formation and infrastructural constraints jointly shaped speculative dynamics in a period of institutional transition.

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Speculative bubbles—periods when asset prices rise rapidly and far beyond what appears economically justified—have appeared repeatedly throughout history. Beyond their financial dynamics lies a broader historical question: how such enthusiasm takes shape in the first place. Among various cases of speculative bubbles, this paper notices the rabbit mania from 1873 to 1874 in Japan. During this speculative bubble period, imported rabbits became a popular commodity, attracting both Japanese and foreign merchants.

The surge in popularity of imported rabbits, leading to a sharp price increase within a few months and potentially making them a target for speculation, offers a concrete approach to

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examining the process by which specific trading targets in a bubble come to be valued beyond their fundamentals. In exploring this process, this paper focuses on narratives—shared scenarios or stories that shape investor expectations as belief coordination signals. The significance of the concept of narrative lies in providing a theoretical framework for understanding the effects of strategic story-telling in economic dynamics (Shiller, 2019).

The purpose of this paper is to explore how narratives can coordinate speculative behavior during the rabbit mania. The central concern of this paper is to examine the mechanism through which speculation targeting rabbits evolved into a boom, by examining the actions and interactions of market participants involved in the trade. However, given lack of data on the rabbit mania, quantitative analysis must be set aside. This paper draws on historical documents, such as newspaper archives and administrative records, which offer rare insight into how these narratives were crafted, diffused, and used to shape collective beliefs.

Constrained by such lack of quantitative data, previous studies of the rabbit mania have also remained descriptive (Akata, 1997; Shiroyama, 2011; Takashima, 2013). Even though providing valuable historical context, these works do not offer a theoretical account of how the boom emerged or spread. The contribution of this paper is to position the rabbit mania as a historical fact demonstrating the crucial role of narratives in the emergence and expansion of bubbles. This paper indicates that the rabbit mania was not an irrational frenzy arising capriciously, but rather possessed aspects of a strategic boom constructed by merchants disseminating sensational narratives and positioning rabbit breeding as a promising economic opportunity.

Unlike modern digital markets where narratives compete in crowded and decentralized arenas, the rabbit mania featured a small number of actors with disproportionate narrative reach. This limited competition among narratives enhanced each merchant's ability to influence belief formation, allowing us to more clearly observe how shared expectations can emerge and coordinate speculative behavior.

A growing body of research points out how narratives, media, and social cues can endogenously generate such coordinating signals (Teeter and Sandberg, 2016; Shiller, 2019; Quinn and Turner, 2020). Johnson, Bilovich, and Tuckett (2022) emphasize the role of conviction narratives—emotionally resonant and socially constructed stories that help market participants manage uncertainty. Their work underscores the fragility of market order and argues that belief coordination depends not only on information but also on affective framing. The rabbit mania is treated here as one such episode—a phenomenon in which rumor, novelty, and communication technology briefly aligned to sustain coordinated enthusiasm.

This paper conceptualizes such process in the rabbit mania as structurally constrained belief coordination—a mechanism through which collective expectations are formed under institutional and informational limitations. When communication costs are high and reliable data are scarce, actors cannot form rational expectations independently; instead, they rely on symbolic stories and social cues to align their anticipations. Narratives, even in this view, can be used as quasi-public signals that temporarily stabilize shared conjectures. The rabbit mania serves as a clear empirical window into this mechanism, showing how collective belief could crystallize within a small, high-density information field—and how administrative and fiscal interventions eventually disrupted it.

Another contribution of this paper is to examine the rabbit mania from the perspective of globalization in the context of the formation of international telegraph cables in the nineteenth century (Headrick, 2012). This paper also discusses lawsuits among foreign merchants who, having used cutting-edge communication tools, became caught up in the rabbit mania. This litigation case indicates that Japan's early move into the global economy created chances to make money. The episode captures the transitional nature of the 1870s, when modern infrastructure was growing fast but the tools for managing risk and coordinating expectations were still incomplete. The rabbit mania was a speculative bubble that emerged as Japan was being drawn into global markets but still lacked the institutional framework needed to restrain speculation. Against this backdrop surrounding the rabbit mania, Japan's capital markets entered their formative stage in the late 1870s.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 1 provides historical background on the rabbit mania during the 1870s in Japan. Section 2 explains the case, which demonstrates how foreign merchants participated in speculative activity targeting the rabbit mania. Section 3 discusses historical implications of the rabbit mania. Section 4 concludes this paper. The Appendix shows original Japanese texts of cited historical documents.

1 Rabbit Mania: Historical Case of Narrative-Driven Speculation

This section reconstructs the historical facts of the rabbit mania during the early 1870s in Japan, focusing on how speculative narratives emerged, spread, and ultimately collapsed. We begin by examining the early dynamics of the boom, showing how profit-seeking merchants framed rabbits as desirable assets (1.1), then highlight administrative concerns and official responses to fraud and misinformation (1.2). This section concludes by analyzing how classification schemes and taxation shaped investor expectations and contributed to the end of the speculative episode (1.3).

1.1 From Pets to Assets: Early Dynamics of the Rabbit Mania

The rabbit mania emerged among upper-income groups in urban areas such as Osaka and Tokyo. This speculative frenzy was not limited to informal trade. Alarmed by its intensity, Tokyo Prefecture issued ordinances that banned public auctions, mandated registration of ownership, and imposed a monthly tax on each rabbit. Such administrative responses highlight the scale and perceived disruptiveness of the mania—and underscore the importance of understanding how such speculative beliefs took hold.

This episode illustrates how speculative narratives could transform harmless animals into perceived assets. Behind the surge of interest were profit-seeking *kansho* (unscrupulous speculators), who actively promoted stories to inflate demand. As Shiroyama (2011) shows that these *kansho* included both Japanese and foreign merchants. Unlike modern markets with decentralized and abundant sources of information, the rabbit mania involved only a small

number of influential actors—an aspect that might have become crucial in shaping belief dynamics.

Picture-1: *Kansho* (A Speculative Merchant) as a Pig-Like Character
Source: Mantei (1873), NDL Digital Collections.

The illustrated literary work *Shinsei Tobi Dango* ("Hot Topic Rabbit Cute Story"), which took inspiration from the rabbit mania, features *kansho* caricatured as a pig-like character. Picture 1 shows this character gripping a rabbit. The character is shown grabbing both ears of a rabbit—something a genuine enthusiast would be unlikely to do—underscoring the satirical intent of portraying kansho as indifferent to the animals themselves. This illustration was based on the assumption that kansho would be portrayed as not unlike a rabbit enthusiast.

The rise of the rabbit mania was sparked by *kansho*. The following article, which was published in 1889, reports on the situation:

Document 1.1 “A certain *kansho* gave a foreign rabbit to a noble figure to curry favor. The recipient was so pleased that the merchant gained wealth and status by repeating this tactic with other elites. Enthusiasts observed this and began acquiring rabbits en masse, spreading the trend.” (Tokyo Toyodo, 1889, p. 16).

Document-1 implies that following proposition:

Proposition 1.1 Signals of desire among wealthy individuals to acquire an asset can generate speculative demand, even when the asset lacks intrinsic value.

Two biological traits of rabbits made them particularly attractive as investment targets. First, rabbits have high reproductive rates: they can give birth 6–8 times per year, with 4–10 offspring per litter. Second, they mature quickly, reaching full growth within a year. Even if one were to compare the rabbit to a financial asset with a constant price, two securities would distribute more than 24 securities of equal value, each of which could be sold within a year. *Kansho* utilized these characteristics to justify investment (Takashima, 2013) .

Despite their biological traits, rabbits had no established market as meat or fur animals, and no structured resale infrastructure—suggesting that price surges relied more on belief than on economic fundamentals. Rabbit trading left teahouses and spread to informal markets called *usagi-kai* or *usagi-urisabakijo*. Participants would meet to discuss and admire rabbits often competing over their appearance or how much they had paid. These gatherings soon attracted individuals with purely speculative motives.

Rabbits began to sell at even higher prices, creating a bubble. Between 1872 and 1873, some rabbits were sold for the price level from 50 yen to over 200 yen (*Tokyo Toyodo*, 1889, p. 15). The monthly starting salary for an elementary school teacher in 1886 was reported to be 5 yen (Asahi Shimbunsha, 1988).

Rabbits were traded at prices more than 10 times or 40 times that of a public servant's monthly wage. The boom also caused the price of rabbit feed, such as soybean husks, to increase (*Tokyo Toyodo 1889*, p. 16). The *usagi-kai* had no official sanction or regulation. One early newspaper, *Shinbun Zasshi*, founded in 1871 with funding from Kido Takayoshi, reported on a fraud case involving rabbit trading in its 78th issue in February 1873.

Taken together, these patterns—reliance on belief coordination, lack of fundamentals, and rapid price inflation—match the theoretical characteristics of a speculative bubble. What enabled

such rapid belief formation was not only the merchants' intent but the structural openness of the information environment itself.

These conditions turned incidental anecdotes into self-reinforcing stories. Hence, rather than portraying the mania as a fully engineered boom, this paper situates it within a gradient between strategic construction and spontaneous contagion—where narratives became institutionalized fictions organizing collective enthusiasm.

1.2 Strategic Misrepresentation and Administrative Responses

Moral hazard commonly arises in historical bubbles. The rabbit mania was no exception. According to a newspaper report, one incident involved a merchant who chemically altered a rabbit's fur color to deceive buyers:

Document 1.2 "A man named Shihara Yasaburo, living in Ikebukuro, Tokyo, purchased a white rabbit in July 1872. He dyed it persimmon color with chemicals and sold it for 2 yen, pretending it had that natural hue. Later, at the request of an acquaintance, he repeated the process on another rabbit. He was sentenced to a fine of 2 yen, 60 lashes, and 60 days in prison." (*Shinbun Shūsei Meiji Hennenshi*, 1940, p. 18).

The proliferation of such unfair practices led local authorities to intervene. In July 1872, the Osaka Prefectural Government issued a proclamation condemning the speculation and its social consequences:

Document 1.3 "Recently, markets and gatherings have been forming for the purpose of rabbit trading. However, rabbits are originally meant for enjoyment and appreciation. Excessive time spent on trading disturbs people's proper occupations and daily lives. Moreover, some *kansho* have manipulated prices and spread baseless claims, such as 'raising rabbits prevent illness,' to confuse the public. The Prefecture has always supported sound commercial activities beneficial to society, and these rabbit markets run counter to that spirit. We hereby request that such gatherings be discontinued." (Osaka Prefectural History Editing Office, 1971)

This proclamation explicitly accused *kansho* of price manipulation and criticized their dissemination of misleading narratives, such as claims that "rabbits are becoming popular among the wealthy" or that "raising rabbits prevent illness." These messages were not entirely implausible: in some regions, particularly Osaka Prefecture, shrines like Sumiyoshi Shrine revered rabbits as symbols of fertility and health. This cultural resonance may have lent credibility to the health-related narratives and contributed to their diffusion among the public.

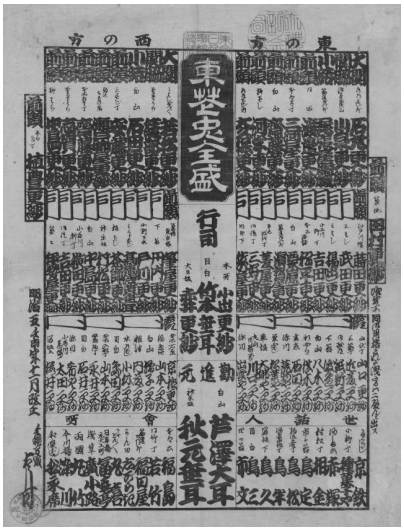
The administrative response did not merely target economic disruption; it aimed to undermine the credibility of specific narratives that had enabled the boom. These narratives included stories framing rabbits as fashionable among elites or as sources of health benefits. Such narratives had become sufficiently widespread to attract public concern, indicating their central role in sustaining speculative enthusiasm.

Proposition 1.2 In the midst of speculative booms, constructed narratives can spread widely enough to shape shared beliefs—prompting public concern and official responses that may disrupt the coordination they sustain.

1.3 Classification, Taxation, and the End of the Boom

As speculative interest intensified, efforts emerged to formalize perceptions of value. During the rabbit mania, rabbit *banzuke* (ranking lists) were created (Picture-2). *Banzuke* refers to the traditional ranking system of sumo wrestlers, and in this context, such classifications provided seemingly objective cues for evaluating rabbits. These rankings helped frame rabbits not merely as animals but as graded investment targets—strengthening the persuasiveness of the speculative narrative.

Picture-2: Rabbit *Banzuke*



Source: Tokyo Metropolitan Library HP.

In December 1873, Tokyo Governor Okubo Ichio issued a taxation notice addressed to ward and district heads, targeting rabbit owners:

Document 1.4 "Despite repeated official notices and continued enforcement efforts since the spring of this year, the buying and selling of rabbits remains unchecked. Therefore, taxation will now be imposed as outlined below. Each jurisdiction is hereby instructed to conduct a thorough investigation of all individuals in possession of rabbits, collect the applicable taxes by the 25th of each month, and remit the proceeds using the prescribed method." (Ogawa, 1873).

Upon issuing this ordinance, Tokyo Prefecture mandated that all rabbit owners report changes in ownership to local offices, imposed fines for unregistered possession, and prohibited public gatherings for auction purposes.

The purpose of this taxation was not to suppress pet keeping, but to curb rabbits' use as speculative instruments. Monthly taxation aligned with rabbits' gestation cycles, implicitly acknowledging their reproductive nature as a source of speculative appeal. Only the wealthy, who could afford the tax, would continue keeping them—possibly reinforcing rabbits' role as status symbols.

Once taxed, rabbits became a burden for *kansho*. Unlike enthusiasts, these speculators had little emotional attachment to the animals and began selling them for meat. Rabbit hot pot gained little popularity, and the speculative fever faded. The rabbit mania would resurface in later years, as described below, but it never reached the boom seen between 1873 and 1874. Sporadic booms in pet keeping continued into later periods, such as during the Russo-Japanese War, when rabbit fur was in demand.

Proposition 1.3 Exogenous factors—such as rankings that reduce uncertainty or taxation that raises costs—can amplify or weaken narratives and shift the threshold for participation.

One reason speculative narratives during the rabbit mania were particularly effective lies in the information environment. With only a few dozen active merchants involved, narratives faced little competition and could diffuse rapidly through limited channels such as teahouse networks, illustrated leaflets, and local newspapers. This concentrated field amplified the influence of each promoter, allowing narratives to coordinate expectations more strongly than in decentralized or noisy environments.

Shiller (2019) emphasizes that stories can have real economic effects when they are contagious and emotionally resonant. They also align with classic and contemporary theories of speculative dynamics, which highlight how actors may strategically amplify optimistic framings to influence expectations and behavior. For example, Chancellor (1999) and Kindleberger (2000) emphasize the recurring role of belief-driven manias in financial history. Barberis, Greenwood, & Shleifer (2018) model how narrative-induced sentiment and return extrapolation can drive asset prices beyond fundamentals.

2 International Commercial Actors and the Rabbit Trade

This section examines a legal dispute over international trade that emerged from the rabbit mania. We review an article from The *Japan Weekly Mail*, a weekly English-language newspaper published in Yokohama from 1870 to 1913 and later in Tokyo until 1917. While the article reported no verdict, it provides a rare contemporaneous account of a trial arising from

the rabbit mania. While the details of this lawsuit are themselves of interest, this paper presents the foreign observers' descriptions of the rabbit mania as a point of departure for source criticism.

The case, Mendelson Bros. v. W. H. Talbot, serves as a valuable lens through which to examine the interaction between modern telegraphy and speculative commerce. The proceedings, held before Assistant Judge C. W. Goodwin at the British Consular Court in Yokohama on 20 April 1874, centered on two telegrams that never reached their intended destination.

The plaintiffs, merchants operating between Japan and California, charged W. H. Talbot, Reuter's local agent, with negligence that had allegedly caused significant losses in the rising rabbit and leather trades. They sought $1,999 in damages.

Note that the yen had been introduced in 1871. While minor discrepancies arose in practical transactions, the official convention treated one dollar as equivalent to one yen (Yokoyama, 2024). For this reason, it is plausible that the reporter switched between currency units arbitrarily, even though the article contains both dollar and yen denominations.

Counsel Dickins argued that Reuter's contract was void because its printed conditions absolved the company from all liability, even for gross negligence. Two firms—Mendelson Bros. and Ahrens & Co.—had been registered under the same telegraphic code word, "Monteagle," producing the confusion that diverted the plaintiffs' telegrams. Mr. Ahrens testified that messages intended for Mendelson Bros. had reached his Berlin office instead. Jonas Mendelson stated that his 1873 telegrams concerning the rabbit trade never arrived; a letter from his San Francisco branch described one message as "utterly unintelligible." When he confronted Talbot, the agent admitted that a mistake must have occurred in London:

Document 2.1 "Two firms Messrs. Ahrens & Co., and Messrs. Mendelson Bros. were registered under the same code word, 'Monteagle,' and this he conceived was sufficient to create the confusion.… Mr. Ahrens, called, stated his firm had Houses in Yedo and in Berlin but could not remember the code word used in registration. He remembered that a telegram, (produced), had

been forwarded to him, when he was in Berlin, at the close of 1873, but he had not received it.…Jonas Mendelson stated that he was a member of the firm of plaintiffs. He remembered sending a telegram in 1873 concerning rabbits. He sent another in October of the same year. So far as he was aware these telegrams had not arrived. His correspondents had neither received nor acted upon the telegrams" (The *Japan Weekly Mail*, April 25, 1874).

Testimony revealed the context: a brief but feverish "rabbit boom." Imported long-eared European breeds became luxury curiosities for Japanese elites, fetching 50 to 800 yen each, sometimes $300 or more. Shipments arriving by late 1873 sold for as much as $1,600, until a new government tax of $1 per month collapsed the market by December. The plaintiffs contended that timely telegrams would have allowed them to profit before the crash:

Document 2.2 "Kikoya Edengiro, cautioned: He is a merchant. Last year he speculated in rabbits a good deal-both buying and selling them. Rabbits were bringing from 50 to 800 yen a piece, according to "spots, tails, ears and size." Large spotted ones with long ears were worth about 300 yen and upwards. These were about the prices from the 10th month to the 10th December, 1873. He was not in Yokohama on the 30th of Nov. He returned about 30th December. …Nowositchi, cautioned: He is a merchant in Yokohama. He did a large business with foreigners in rabbits. During the 7th and 8th months of last year there was a scarcity of rabbits with long ears in Yokohama. Perhaps in a hundred imported rabbits there would not be more than four or five good ones—that is to say, with long ears and spots. He sold an exceedingly fine rabbit for 800 yen to an ex-daimio in Yedo. He also sold ten good and indifferent ones for $2,200.…Morris Beiler, sworn: He is a clerk in the store of Herzog & Roth: He remembered the Colorado arriving in the end of November. He saw six or eight rabbits sold for $800. About this time Japanese were offering from $70 to $80 for rabbits with long ears, bob tails, and spotted skins" (The *Japan Weekly Mail*, April 25, 1874).

Talbot, testifying for the plaintiffs, explained that *"Monteagle"* had been replaced by *"Fletcher"* in March 1873, but the notice reached Yokohama only by mail months later. He relied on Reuter's non-liability clause and claimed ignorance of the telegrams' value. Dickins countered that such blanket exemptions were unreasonable, citing English and American

precedents, and insisted the loss—about $1,600—was direct and proven. Defence counsel Ness replied that no contract had been broken and that Reuter's was a private contractor, liable only for fraud. Judge Goodwin reserved judgment.

The boom's life span was under half a year. Government taxation—set at one yen per rabbit per month—appears to have acted as a trigger for deflation. The court testimonies suggest that scarcity had already been undermined by oversupply and imitation prior to the decree. Within weeks, rabbits that had commanded prices as high as 500 yen fell to as little as 25 yen, a price collapse characteristic of a speculative bubble's burst:

Document 2.3 "Nowositchi, cautioned: He is a merchant in Yokohama. He did a large business with foreigners in rabbits. During the 7th and 8th months of last year there was a scarcity of rabbits with long ears in Yokohama. Perhaps in a hundred imported rabbits there would not be more than four or five good ones—that is to say, with long ears and spots. He sold an exceedingly fine rabbit for 800 yen to an ex-daimio in Yedo. He also sold ten good and indifferent ones for $2,200. He made this last sale about the end of the 10th month. On the 11th November the U.S. mail came in, bringing about 30 rabbits, in which were some five or six good ones. He bought the lot for $2,000. About the 12th month a decree was issued by the Government imposing a tax on rabbits (irrespective of kind) of $1 each per month. This caused a great fall in the market, and at the time, though he had a large stock on hand, he could not sell them except at very low prices indeed. He thought the decree caused the depression, though it did not altogether stop the demand. He could only get $100 each for good rabbits on this account" (The *Japan Weekly Mail*, April 25, 1874).

Document 2.3 provides circumstantial evidence that the rabbit mania cooled following the imposition of taxation. Yet the testimony is equally revealing in another respect. While taxation exerted downward pressure on prices, merchants continued to expect that demand for rabbits would persist to some extent. This expectation—that market conditions would normalize rather than collapse—resembles what may be described as a normalization bias in speculative markets.

3 Historical Implications

This section explains the essential characteristics of the rabbit mania (3.1), examine its historical significance (3.2), and the recurrence of the bubble (3.3).

3.1 Features of the Rabbit Mania in Meiji Japan

The market arose not from agricultural demand but from fashion and exotic display. Rabbits—especially long-eared, spotted European breeds—were imported through San Francisco as luxury curiosities for wealthy Japanese, including former daimyo. Their value depended more on symbolic novelty than on productive use. This point relates to Proposition 1.1, which states that signals of desire among wealthy individuals to acquire an asset can generate speculative demand, even when the asset lacks intrinsic value.

Prices multiplied within months: witnesses reported 50 to 800 yen per animal, with occasional sales exceeding 300 yen. Such phenomenon could well be described as either a frenzy, mania, or a bubble. As Proposition 1.3 describes Exogenous factors such as rankings that reduce uncertainty can amplify or weaken narratives and shift the threshold for participation. In addition, Government taxation of one yen per rabbit per month acted as a trigger for collapse, but the court testimonies reveal that oversupply and imitation already eroded scarcity. Within weeks, rabbits worth 500 yen fell to 25 yen. The span of the boom was under half a year.

The trade linked Yokohama, San Francisco, and European brokers through intermediary networks of telegraph lines, shipping routes, and commercial agents. Yet the mis-sent telegrams expose significant information frictions: a single coding error could eliminate expected profit and disrupt cross-border coordination.

The rabbit mania emerged as Japan first confronted global communication and contract risks. We can recognize that Asia's commercial networks and Europe's commercial networks became closely intertwined via communication cables during the 1870s.

3.2 Implications of the Rabbit Mania from 1873 to 1874

The rabbit mania arose at a moment when imported goods, international trading routes, and telegraph lines were rapidly expanding, yet the institutional mechanisms required to coordinate these systems remained incomplete. In this respect, the episode captures the tensions inherent in Japan's early integration into global markets.

The speculative demand for rabbits emerged at the intersection of domestic buyers and the international circulation of commodities and price information. Yokohama functioned as a critical entrepôt linking Japanese investors with American and European brokers. Transactions depended on intermediary infrastructures: steamship lines that moved high-value goods across the Pacific, and telegraph networks that transmitted orders and prices. Yet these infrastructures were prone to failure.

Regulatory responses lagged behind market expansion. The Japanese government's abrupt imposition of a monthly tax on rabbits served as an improvised mechanism of registration and oversight for a market that had grown too quickly for existing administrative practice. The measure illustrates a broader pattern in early Meiji economic policy: formal institutions were still in the process of formation, leaving authorities to deploy ad hoc controls to manage volatile trading activities.

Foreign merchants were central actors in this environment. Their involvement in the rabbit trade was not anomalous but reflected established patterns of speculative activity in rice, raw silk, and exchange-rate fluctuations between the Mexican dollar and Japanese silver coins (Yokoyama, 2024). In the absence of fully developed public financial infrastructure, foreign traders often operated informal exchange markets, tacitly tolerated by the Meiji government.

Taken together, the rabbit boom demonstrates how Japan's early global economic integration produced opportunities for profit alongside significant information frictions and institutional gaps. The episode highlights the transitional character of the 1870s trading world, in which

modern infrastructures expanded rapidly but the systems required to manage risk and coordinate expectations had not yet fully emerged. It thereby offers a historical perspective on the challenges that accompanied the construction of a new commercial order in Meiji Japan.

3.3 "History Does Not Repeat Itself, People Do."

The rabbit mania was not a singular event. In 1876, *The Japan Weekly Mail* reported that there were symptoms of a fresh outbreak of the rabbit mania. Noting that valuable English rabbits continued to sell at prices as high as 300 yen, despite the continued enforcement of repressive regulations. More in detail, see as follows:

Document 3.1 "Notwithstanding the repressive law still in force there are symptoms of a fresh outbreak of the rabbit mania. The *Hochi Shimbun* sees indications of the coming fashion and notes the sale of certain valuable English varieties 'with fine eyes' at 300 yen each." (The *Japan Weekly Mail*, Mar. 18, 1876)

The renewed outbreak of the rabbit mania suggests that people became re-infected by rabbit-related narratives. In the context of Shiller (2019), narratives spread much like viruses: their influence contracts as individuals acquire a form of temporary immunity, yet they can later re-circulate and infect new audiences. This process of narrative re-infection provides a mechanism through which speculation can reappear.

By the late 1870s, however, merchants engaged primarily in speculation—often referred to as *kansho*—had shifted their attention toward government bonds. As public debt became a focal target of speculative activity, the government grew concerned and began to pursue the institutional development of securities markets in a more systematic manner. As a result, stock exchanges were established in Tokyo and Osaka in 1878. The rabbit mania was thus one of the factors that heightened awareness of the need for some form of institutional framework to govern speculative activity at the inception of Japan's securities markets.

It is not merely that bubbles recur; rather, it is that humans, continually influenced by narratives, repeatedly generate bubbles themselves.

4 Conclusion

The historical context of this boom was unique, yet the mechanisms it revealed—the critical mass breakthrough triggered by narrative, and the formation of conviction through strategic storytelling—were not confined to Meiji-era Japan.

Rather, these exposed issues common to asset market bubbles. In addition, the rabbit mania, aided by advances in communication technology, also came to influence the actions and losses of European merchants. Rabbit mania arose and recurred in a situation where the aspects of deliberate promotion for speculative purposes intertwined with the unintended formation of beliefs, making it difficult even for people at the time to distinguish between design and flow.

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Appendix-1 Original Japanese Texts of Documents

Document-1「或人曰く兎の流行せし所以は決して偶然にあらず。初めある奸商某貴顕の歓心を得んが為め偶々異種の兎を得て其児を贈る。貴顕は見て大に喜び厚く之に報ひたれバ奸商は猶其児の播殖するを待ちて権門貴家に贈り大に富豪の身となれり。世の好事家これを見て俄に多く兎を蓄ふるに至り延て此流行を致したるものなりと」（東京東陽堂『風俗画報』第4号、1889、16 頁）

Document-2「兎を求めて懲罰。府下池ノ端七軒町ニ住セル志原彌三郎ナル者昨壬申七月下旬白兎一匹買求メ、薬汁ニテ柿色ヲ染付、眞物ニ偽リ、池ノ端七軒町長谷川太郎吉へ代金二圓ニ販売シ、其後兼テ知ル人鈴木長吉ヨリ被相頼、白兎一匹買遣シ候處、一日同人方へ罷越種々談話中、白色ノ毛ヲ染付呉度、甚懇望イタスニ付、其意ニ任セ最前同様ノ仕法ニテ柿色ニ染付候罪ニ依リ左ノ通裁断相済タル由。詐欺賍金二圓、杖六十、懲役六十日」（新聞集成明治編年史編纂会『新聞集成明治編年史第二巻』林泉社、1940 年、18 頁）

Document-3「近来兎売買之為所々において市を立、或ハ集会を催し候もの有之趣相聞、無謂事ニ候、斯る翫弄物を売買之為無益之時間を費し、銘々職業之妨をなすのミならず、右ハ畢竟奸商之計策ニ而、一時直段を騰貴し愚昧之小民を惑し甚敷ニ至りてハ、病を避候など無謂説を唱へ候もの有之哉之趣、兼而有用広益し商業可相営旨之布告ニ悖り、不宜所業ニ付、市立集会等、向後令禁止候事」（大阪府史編集室編『大阪府府令集　一』、大阪府、1971 年、府令-甲二三七）

Document-4「当春以来兎売買乃儀ニ付てハ度々告諭致し置候處未だ相止ず左之上税申付候間区々洩し無く所持人名取調月々二十五日限リ集金相納め可し此旨相達候事」（小川為治『兎の問答』、1873 年）