



TANAKA SHŌZŌ (1841-1913)

The Politics of Democracy and Equality
in Modern Japan

Brij Tankha

East Asia Series

**Tanaka Shōzō 田中正造 (1841-1913): The Politics of Democracy and
Equality in Modern Japan**

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East Asia Programme, Institute of Chinese Studies
2021

First Published in 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the research for this essay was done while I was a fellow at the Institut d'études avancées, Nantes, France Oct.2019-June, 2020. I am very grateful to the IEA for the wonderfully friendly environment they created and to my colleagues there for making my stay an unforgettable experience. I would like to thank Anthony Clavier in the library for managing to get whatever books that I wanted. I would like to thank Prof. Murat Akan, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey, Eddy Duformont, Université Bordeaux Montaigne, France, and Prof. Manoranjan Mohanty, I.C.S. for their very insightful comments and suggestions that have helped me to revise this paper. Parts of this paper were presented in two seminars, one at the IEA, Nantes, (*Against the Grain: Three Voices from Japan's Past*, 29 March 2020), as well as in an ICS seminar (Tanaka Shōzō (1841-1913) and Early Meiji Democracy", 16 September 2020). I first learned about Tanaka Shōzo from the late Prof. Yui Masaomi and later from Prof. Tamura Norio, and both have helped shape my understanding of his work and importance, for which I am grateful. I would also like to thank all those who have created freely accessible websites that have opened up research material to a wider public. This vast and expanding archive has made it possible to write this essay sitting in a remote mountain village. And last but not least, I would like to thank Kamini, Ishan, and Akshaya.

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May 20, 2020

Odha Khan, Uttarakhand

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INTRODUCTION

The unregulated disposal of industrial meth mercury by the Chisso Corporation into the Minamata Bay that caused the often fatal Minamata disease in 1956, the rise of respiratory diseases in Yokkaichi, where Japan's first oil refinery and the oil-powered power stations were discharging untreated sulfur dioxide in 1961, and the concerns with nuclear power generation led to civil action and the formation of groups, such as the Consumers Union of Japan in 1969, to fight governmental inaction and denial by the corporations. The recognition of the damage to the environment and the health of the people by unregulated industrial expansion spurred groups to organize and gradually forced the government to recognise the problem, establish the Environmental Agency (in 2001 it became the Ministry of Environment), and finally, in 1993 enacted the Basic Environment Law, and later other regulations to control industrial emissions and promote energy conservation. It was a hard and long battle to create public recognition that industrial development was causing environmental damage, a battle that continues today.¹

One effect of the anti-pollution movements was a rediscovery of Japan's past battles against the effect of unrestrained exploitation of the environment and led to a rethinking of Japan's past, and its successful industrialisation not as a triumphant story of success but one that destroyed both the environment and people's rights. In this questioning, the long-forgotten movement against the Ashio copper mine led by Tanaka Shōzō

¹ There is a vast literature on the subject. One of the early books by someone who did so much to raise awareness and combat pollution is Ui, Jun. 1992. *Industrial pollution in Japan*. Tokyo, Japan: United Nations University Press. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/27054963.html>.

(1841-1913田中正造) became powerful in Shozō inspiration and emerged as an early and prescient critic of Japan's industrialisation.²

Tanaka Shōzō's ideas and political activities were played out in different times while his early critique of industrialisation for creating environmental problems is important, it is equally important to understand that he was addressing the larger question of how a democratic state should function, in all its myriad aspects. Environmental destruction was just one aspect of a larger political vision that was hierarchic, exclusive, and exploitative. It had to be countered with an alternative vision that was local and specific but was universalising. The development of his political agenda points to the way two inter-related, but different battles were fought, one the establishment of a constitutional monarchy but the other equally important the battle was for realising equality. Shōzō's political project initially developed and grew through his work in constitution-making, electoral politics, and political engagements, but as his ideas evolved, he saw the limitations of constitutional monarchy and realised the need to address the larger question of who formed the community and nation and who was excluded. This question led him to lay the basis for other ways of organising state and society.

In this essay, I propose to look at how Shōzō's ideas of democracy were shaped through his work as a politician and a social activist. I will locate him in the overlapping international, national, and local contexts within which he and his contemporaries worked. I will outline some of the major trends in how democracy was being practiced in Europe, the U.S., Turkey, China, and Japan, touch on some of the characteristics of the Japanese demands for constitutional government, and then turn to Shōzō's

² An early work in English was Strong, Kenneth. 1977. *Ox Against the Storm A Biography of Tanaka Shozo: Japan's Conservationist Pioneer*, Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press.

ideas about government and his work in the village of Yanaka, where he crafted what is often termed as Yanaka studies, a project not to teach the people but to allow them to speak, a political project to realise equality. My focus is on how his ideas developed through his engagement as a politician, as a social activist, and as a thinker, on his political practice rather than explore the influences that shaped him.

CHAPTER I

Empires, Monarchies, and Nations: Constitutions and Democracy

The centrality of constitutions as the mark of a democratic polity enfold a wide variety of practices that can, and often are, deeply undemocratic, as can be seen in the way electorally strong political parties circumvent and undermine the spirit and the letter of the law. Constitutions are the bedrock on which both liberal democratic, authoritarian, and communist regimes are built, and they are found in geographically and culturally disparate areas pointing to the need to think about the origins and purposes of constitutional democracies and the differing ways they control and regulate their citizens. In this chapter, I look at the broad trends in Europe as this political environment played a part in shaping the political struggles to establish democracy in Japan. The role of leading thinkers and seminal texts is important, and there is a rich literature examining the exchanges that took place, but the practice of politics is an equally important source for models and inspiration.

The late eighteenth century saw revolutionary change in Europe and imperial rivalries around the globe as the old Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch empires vied with the trading companies of Britain and France. The French revolution and then the emergence of an independent United States, what Lipsett calls the ‘first nation’, changed the global landscape.³

³ Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1963. *The first new nation: The United States in historical and comparative perspective*. New York: Basic Books.

Tanaka Shōzō 田中正造 (1841-1913):
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Image: The national boundaries within Europe set by the Congress of Vienna (1815)

Source: Wikipedia⁴

What was the nature of the political regimes in Europe in the nineteenth century? Europe was dominated by monarchies that ruled vast colonial empires and used religious authority to underline their legitimacy. The nation-states of Great Britain and France, much like the empires, were ruled through parliaments and a bureaucracy drawn largely from the landed aristocracy. Italy was brought together between 1815-1879 but continued to retain very strong regional consciousness.⁵ Germany claimed both to be a continental empire as well as a nation-state unified under Prussian control by Bismarck through wars in the 1860-1870s.

⁴ See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book:Europe_XIX_Century

⁵ David Gilmour. 2011. *The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, Its Regions, and Their Peoples*. New York: Faber Straus and Giroux.



Source: Wikipedia⁶

In this imperial world, where new nation-states were beginning to take shape, the United States broke away from Great Britain with the help of France in 1783 and by 1821 declared the Monroe Doctrine, expanding its control to the Pacific Ocean through land purchase and wars and establishing direct control or protectorates in Central and Latin America. The Spanish-American war of 1898 brought the Philippines and twenty-two officially tabulated islands, and scores of uninhabited islands, in the Caribbean and Pacific under its control. Just as Japan was transiting from Tokugawa to Meiji rule, the U.S underwent a fractious civil war to end slavery but, in fact, through Jim Crow laws, it continued to treat the black population as an underclass. Racially divided, and with a political environment strongly shaped by religion, the U.S. was an emerging imperial power comparable to Japan in many ways, but it has never been held up as an example of incomplete modernity. The U.S democratic

⁶See, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_colonialism#/media/File:GreaterAmericaMap.jpg

experiment attracted little attention in Italy, Germany or Japan.⁷ Even more importantly, European control over the way the world thought ensured its centrality. The U.S-born writer Henry James wilyly noted, ‘it seems the natural thing for us to listen while Europeans talk. The contrary habit, of talking while the European listens, we have not yet acquired’.⁸

Learning and Resistance

In the other parts of the world, rulers had to contend with European military and economic power, but the flow of European ideas also contributed to creating resistance. Liberal constitutionalism and the ideas that were powering the Italian Risorgimento, or those that underlay the framing of the Cadiz constitution of 1812 in Spain, inspired critics of despotism in the colonies. To underline the close connections within colonial empires, the historian of India, Christopher Bayley, who has explored the global connections that made the modern world, writes that a revolt in Oporto, Portugal in 1820 led to an uprising in Goa 1821, underlining the many ways that new ideas of political organization and rights were being transformed globally. In British India, the reformer Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), who saw the Mughal emperor as the legitimate ruler of the country, was at the same time an advocate of republicanism? He adapted Montesquieu to argue that the Brahmans represented

⁷ As Adam Tooze writes, “America was a byword for graft, mismanagement and greed fuelled politics, as much as for growth, production, and profit.”, See Tooze, J. Adam. 2014. *The deluge: the Great War and the remaking of the global order, 1916-1931*. New York: Viking Adult. Pp.40-41.

A comparison of Japan and the US during this period as they developed as modern nations needs a separate discussion. The U.S. colonial empire, is usually forgotten. As late as 1940 the population of the US colonies was 19 million, that is one in eight of the U.S population lived outside the U.S mainland. See Immerwahr, Daniel. 2019., *How to Hide an Empire: A Short History of the Greater United States*, New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux

⁸ Müller, Jan Werener. 2011. *Contesting Democracy Political Ideas in Twentieth -Century Europe*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London. pp.13-14

legislative authority and the Rajput the executive. Harmony would prevail, Roy felt, when there was a balance between the two.



Image: Ram Mohan Roy⁹

Source: National Portrait Gallery¹⁰

Ram Mohan Roy met with Louis Philippe in 1831 and argued for reform of the English parliament where Indians and the English could sit together to check the power of the East India Company and give local autonomy to the rulers. He sought to preserve national customs and navigated a path between centralization and radical de-centralisation. Roy's ideas echo the reforms of the Tanzimat in Turkey and Qajar Iran, which were looking to build a modernized sultanate rather than an English constitutional monarchy.¹¹

⁹ Unknown artist, c.1820 .125 x 100mm © Victoria and Albert Museum

¹⁰ See, <https://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2007/between-worlds/exhibition-tour/roy>

¹¹ Bayley, C.A.. 2011. *Recovering Liberties Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and London. pp.51-57.



Image: *Mustafa Reşid Pasha the Great*

Source: Wikiwand¹²

The Tanzimat reforms 1839-1876 came not because of European influence but because bureaucrats such as Reshid Pasha (1780-1839) saw the dangers of internal weakness and corruption and worked to strengthen the government.¹³ The reforms put limits on the Sultan to dispossess bureaucrats, established an imperial council, set up specialized ministries, enacted legal and commercial codes, created an administrative system, and through education and conscription, began to assert control over all areas of life. The reforms were also aimed at defending the empire and regaining control over lost territories. Turkey used alliances with France and England to counter Russia and Egypt. The Gulhane edict and the Hatt-i-Humayun

¹² https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Mustafa_Reşid_Pasha

¹³ See Thompson, Elizabeth F. 2013. *Justice interrupted: the struggle for constitutional government in the the Middle East*. Cambridge Massachusetts : Harvard University Press.

of 1856 proclaimed equality of all citizens, and secular courts were established.

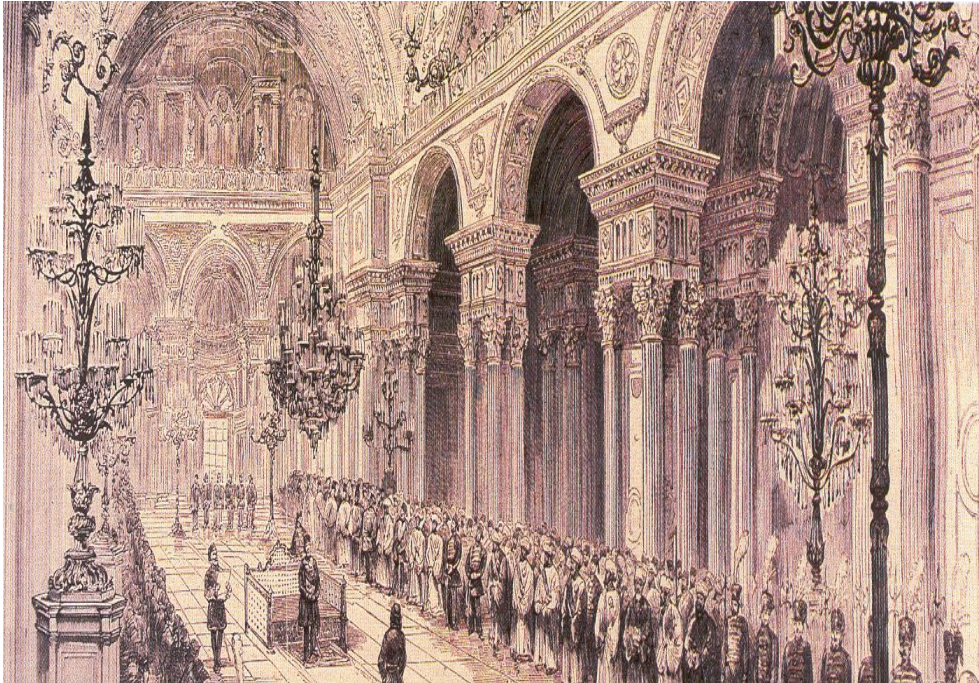


Image: Opening ceremony of the First Ottoman Parliament at the Dolmabahçe Palace in 1876.

Source: Wikipedia¹⁴

Turkey felt the power of British and European capital, as the British and French investment banks funneled domestic savings into overseas loans and projects, leading to Ottoman indebtedness. In the 1860s and 1870s the Young Ottomans carried out a coup, promulgated a constitution, the Basic Law (Kanûn-ı Esâsî,) as they were dissatisfied with the Tanzimat, but it was a short-lived experiment lasting from 1876-1878. The Young Turks would have to wait till 1908 to re-establish a constitutional government.

¹⁴ See, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Opening_ceremony_of_the_First_Ottoman_Parliament_at_the_Dolmabahce_Palace_in_1876.jpg



Image: Fig. 5 An 1884 painting of the Battle of Anqing (1861)

Source: Wikipedia¹⁵

Constitutions and Self –Strengthening

China faced a similar set of problems but on a bigger scale. Weak emperors and corruption had led to increasingly serious peasant rebellions from the White Lotus that began in 1796 to the massive Taiping rebellion 1850-1864 that killed twenty million people and spread over sixteen provinces laid waste to six hundred cities. The Chinese simultaneously faced Russian expansion and the predations of the British East India Company, which, having established control over India, began selling opium in China from 1729, creating economic problems but also posing a military threat as it began waging wars to ensure that it could trade unfettered by Chinese laws. This led to the loss of control by the Chinese government over large parts of its territory and revenues.

Despite these traumatic events, with the Taiping defeated, Qing reformers began the self-strengthening movement (1861-1865) to reduce government expenditure, support the peasantry to return to the land, took

¹⁵ See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiping_Rebellion

measures to start industrialization, and the study of western languages and ideas. The Court also established legations in the major Western capitals to deal with these new powers. In this intellectual atmosphere, new ideas of parliamentary government began to play a role in the 1880s and 1890s. These new political imaginings began the erosion of the cosmological significance of kingship, a process that gained momentum after 1895, a route very different from Japan, where the imperial house provided the foundations for modern political institutions.



Image: Clockwise: Kang Youwei, Liu Shipei, Tan Sitong, and Zhang Binglin

The reforms in Qing China were comparable to the Tanzimat as they sought to strengthen the imperial court to enrich the country. The late Qing period, far from displaying inertia and bankruptcy, was a period of creative ferment, and intellectuals, as the scholar Hao Chang shows, responded to what he calls the ‘crisis of orientation order’ in new ways. Reformers like Kang Youwei (1858-1927 康有為) Liu Shipei (1884-1919 劉師倍) sought

the idea of the moral perfection of the individual in a future utopia, Tan Sitong (1865-1898 譚嗣同) looked for spiritual immersion in a selfless whole defined by the notion of ‘ren’ or humanity and Mahayana Buddhism underlay the ideas of Zhang Binglin or Taiyan (1869-1936 章炳麟). Chinese intellectual traditions far from being bankrupt responded to the challenges in creative ways. The inflow of new ideas led these thinkers to attack the hierarchical ideas of kingship and family based on the three relationships: ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife that underlay Confucian thinking.¹⁶

These intellectual changes inspired a new politics where the establishment of a constitutional government became a major driving force that culminated in the 1911 republican revolution. Largely ignored in the popular imagination, as well as in academic discourse, it was a major event, the overthrow of the long-ruling Qing monarchy (1636,1644-1911). Japan, the example of a successful modernizer, retained its imperial house. The 1911 revolution was preceded by provincial elections in 1909 held in twenty-one provinces (only Xinjiang did not have one) that saw two million voters cast their ballots. Over the next two years, one thousand city councils began to operate, and in January 1911, when the republic was declared, over forty million voters had taken part in local, provincial, and national elections. The Chinese electorate restricted the franchise to men over twenty-five years of age with elementary education and with no property qualifications. Xiohong Xiao-Planes draws the conclusion that since then, every leader down to Mao Zedong (1893-1976) and Deng

¹⁶ Hao Chang. 1987. *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning. 1890–1911*, California: University of California Press. Thinking based on European enlightenment became a universalized and abstract principles where ‘traditional’ ideas were dismissed as inadequate but in fact they played an important role in conceptualizing ideas of justice and freedom.

Xiaoping(1904-1997) has made the constitution the sole guarantee of legitimacy.¹⁷

The flow of students to Japan and other parts of the world, as well as the involvement of the overseas Chinese community, provided a fertile ground for the spread of republican and liberal ideas that would become important in the twentieth century.

A Complex Balance of Power: Japan

The political situation in the premodern period was marked by a complex balance of power between the ruling Tokugawa house and the over 250 domains it ruled over in the name of an emperor who was, in fact, governed by rules laid down by the Tokugawa. The country was knit together by economic ties as well as by long-held ideas of Japan as a country. Movement, even though regulated by elites and commoners, had created bonds across the domains that Japan was subdivided into that were supported by economic ties, and all this was bound together in a political structure that made Edo the centre of political power but not the sole arbiter. The fear of foreign incursion or colonisation, as there were plentiful examples that could be seen in the region, helped to further strengthen a nascent national consciousness. I would argue, contrary to Ikegami, that within the Tokugawa political environment, the relationship between political subjects and government was negotiable in practice and this laid the basis for the rapid turn to demands for a constitutional government.¹⁸

¹⁷ Xiaohong Xiao-Planes, 2012. "Constitutions and constitutionalism: trying to build a new political order.", in Delmas-Marty, Mireille, Pierre-Étienne Will, Naomi Norberg, and Philip A. Kuhn. 2012. *China, democracy, and law a historical and contemporary approach*. Leiden: Brill. pp.227-297 and pp. 228-29.

¹⁸ Ikegami, Eiko. 1995. "Citizenship and National Identity in Early Meiji Japan, 1868-1889: A Comparative Assessment" *International Review of Social History* 40, Supplement 3, pp.185-221.

There is a large body of work that has looked at the presence or absence of political and philosophical concepts based on classical European texts, such as the writings of Hobbes, Locke, and Marx. While engagement with these ideas in modern Japan altered and shaped the intellectual landscape, early Meiji thinkers were grounded in an intellectual landscape with a long history. The complex ways in which power was shared, the influence of peasant uprisings, the traditions of religious solidarities (一向一揆 ikko ikki), peasant rebellions, the role nativist (国学 kokugaku) ideas shaped thinking in late Tokugawa and early Meiji Japan.

The sociologist James W. White has argued that there was a culture of contention, in the sense Charles Tilly uses it (when people band together to make claims that affect others and this make them realise their own interests, these conflicts may be peaceful or violent but are usually disruptive), that centred around concepts such as justice, and was born of, and sustained by village solidarity. The community became the locus of rights, property, and mutual assistance, and after the removal of the samurai in the early Tokugawa period, the village had room for sub-rosa activity.¹⁹ I differ from White as I think that protest did threaten the established norms of rule and was influenced by religious ideas. It was not just that the scale and intensity of protest increased, but its character was being transformed, and along with this, intellectual movements such as

¹⁹ White, James W. 1995. *Ikki: Social Conflict and Political Protest in Early Modern Japan*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. pp.6-8, 108-110, 119, 300-303. Souyri, Pierre. 2001. *The world turned upside down: medieval Japanese society*. New York: Columbia University Press.

nativist ideas played a critical role in questioning the basis of daimyo-samurai rule.²⁰

Long familiarity with rules and regulations and the emergence of more generalized conceptions of the country made possible the turn to constitution-making. In the nineteenth century, as economic development and political confrontations increased, society became more stratified, and ideas about a public began to emerge, such as ‘peasants and the realm’ (講義の本百姓 *kogi no honbyakusho*), ‘all the people’ (万民 *banmin*) or ‘people of the realm’ (天下の民 *tenka no min*). Constitutional government was not just a product of an authoritarian government but of demands from below as those excluded demanded equality. However, the pressure of imperialism threatening the independence and the incorporation of Japan within the global market created an environment where the centralisation of government authority, the power of modern educational institutions, and growing public support for such measures because of their immediate benefits enabled the ruling oligarchy to lay the basis for an imperial democracy.²¹

The Dutch, who had been operating within the boundaries laid down by the Tokugawa were gradually sidelined by the 1850s like Russia, the United States, France, and Great Britain, began to demand the opening of trade relations, rights of residence, and juridical control. These imperial

²⁰ Ando Shōeki ((1703-1762 安藤昌益) is one example. See, for instance, Wakao Masaki.

(若尾政希). 2004. *Ando Shoeki kara mieru nihon kinsei*, (安藤昌益からみえる日本近). Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai. And my unpublished paper, “The Delusion of History: Ando Shoeki and the Search for Utopia”, International Conference on Transnational Asian Modernities, December 20-21, 2012 Inter-Cultural Studies centre, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

²¹ For the idea of imperial democracy see Gordon, Andrew. 1991. *Labor and imperial democracy in prewar Japan*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.pp.13-25

powers had the military resources to enforce their demands and posed a clear threat. The danger of colonial domination loomed large. The example of China and the ‘disorder’ created there by the opium wars, and the even greater impact of the Taiping rebellion underlined the consequences of losing political control, whether to foreign powers or rebellious subjects and was the backdrop for political volatility of the decades between the 1850s and 1890s. These developments spurred domain reforms to strengthen their economy and security. This meant in large part, breaking old status restrictions and laying the basis for greater equality. For example, the domain of Kii, one of the three main Tokugawa-related houses from which shoguns could be chosen, began a series of reforms in the 1850s to improve the economy and address the simmering discontent. They even broke the exclusive right of the samurai to bearing arms by recruiting monks and peasants to form a militia to defend the domain against possible foreign attack. The argument advanced was that those who tilled the land were bound to it with unbreakable ties and would defend it to the last.²² These measures were supported by the spread of *kokugaku* ideas that framed and expressed a new political consciousness based on the mythic origins of the land, its emperor, people.

The pace of change accelerated in the 1850s and 1860s, a period marked by peasant revolts and millenarian movements, the opening of treaty ports and the entry of foreigners into Japan, and the flow of new ideas. In this period of flux, the formation of a constitutional monarchy based on Western models was not a clearly articulated goal but rather emerged through the coming together of disparate forces that harnessed

²² See my. 2012. “Religion and Modernity: Strengthening the People”, in Rosa Caroli and Pierre-François Souyri (eds.) *History at Stake in East Asia*, Venice, Italy: Libreria Editrice Cafoscarina,., pp.3-20.

competing visions of Japan's future. The revolutionary upheaval was contained by the threat of 'colonisation', the fear of becoming a 'dying or subjugated country' (bōkoku 亡国). The lines of battle between the imperial court, the domains, the religious orders, as well as other social groups that now found a public voice, were fluid and changing, as they confronted political and economic problems. The rhetorical language to mobilise support used an older vocabulary but carried new longings.



Image: Samurai of the Satsuma clan, members of the Satchō Alliance, fighting for the Imperial side during the Boshin War period.

Source: Wikipedia²³

The dominant Satsuma-Chōshū alliance, backed by the domains of Hizen and Tosa, managed to gain control and engineer the 1868 change of government, the 'restoration of 1868, the Meiji ishin' (ōsei-fukko 王政復

²³ Photograph by Felice Beato, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satchō_Alliance

古 or ishin 維新) as a foundational myth took a longer time to realise. The end of direct Tokugawa rule and the return of power to the emperor was resisted in various ways, and even a republic was declared in Ezo by Enomoto Takeaki (1836-1908 榎本武揚) in 1869 though it lasted just five months.



Image: Enomoto Takeaki (1838-1906 榎本武揚) in The Hague²⁴ **Source:** Wikipedia²⁵

The Popularity of Constitution Making

²⁴ Enomoto Takeaki, a Tokugawa loyalist who established a short lived Republic of Ezo in opposition to the Meiji government, was one of the few opposition leaders to go on to play an important role in the Meiji government both as a naval officer, and politician. The republic deserves a fuller treatment but it does point to the different political strategies that were contending in the late Tokugawa period.

²⁵ See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enomoto_Takeaki



Image: Map of the modern prefectures

Source: Wikipedia²⁶

In 1868 the Meiji government had begun the process of administrative re-organisation of the country (haihan-chiken 廃藩置県) to break the existing power structure, and by 1871 it had abolished all 265 principalities (kuni 国) and re-divided the country creating, first 300 prefectures, which were finally reduced to 47 by 1889. It was a contentious process bringing local notables into conflict with national elites. Prefectures would be governed by an elected governor and an elected assembly, and these assemblies came to represent local interests against the demands of the new power elite. Old loyalties were beginning to shift, and new bonds were emerging.

The 1870s was a decade marked by elite revolts against the dismantling of the old order, but in the general churning of society, new trends began to emerge. In the 1880s these developed into strong popular demands for constitutional government. The demands were expressed by people from different strata and classes school teachers, priests, petty

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prefectures_of_Japan

merchants and small landholders but the former samurai and wealthy farmers (gōnō 豪農) played a dominant role. The changing character of this movement reflects this change in its composition. The movement was built on the backs of local organisations that grew out of discussion groups and even private individuals who saw the need to draft their own constitutional proposals.

In 1875 Itagaki Taisuke had formed the Society of Patriots (Aikokusha 愛国社), and by 1880 it turned its fourth conference it transformed itself into the League for the establishment of a National Assembly (国会期成同盟) and by the autumn of 1881 over ninety constitutional proposals were drafted representing different political agenda's, and of these proposals, thirty-eight were drafted in 1881. These drafts were sometimes made by individuals at other times by regional organisations from across the country, such as the Chūsetsusha 中節社 in Tōchigi or the Jitsugakusha 実学社 in Wakayama. There were over two thousand such associations that can be clearly identified formed across the country. These groups were created for a variety of purposes: to discuss and debate current affairs, for social and political objectives, and some for convivial meetings. Societies were formed by women, and marginalized groups, such as the former outcastes and by prostitutes, all reflecting the aim of realizing equality. The joining of the word sha (社) that referred to a Shinto shrine to the word musubu or join (結ぶ) to form a society or association (結社) expressed this new desire for freedom and equality. A new vocabulary defined the political imaginary that built around ideas of

local autonomy and self-government: the emphasis was on the importance of the local (jiyū 自由, jishū 自主, jiji 自治, jiritsu jiroku 自立, 自力).²⁷

The League finally approved three constitutional drafts: the Shinagawa Itsukaichi proposal, the Kōchi Self-Help Society (Risshisha's 立志社) and the Kumamoto Mutual Love Society (Sōaisha 相愛社) draft.

The Itsukaichi proposal with two hundred articles was the most sophisticated both in style and content, Chiba Takusaburo (1852-1883 千葉卓三郎), having studied foreign constitutions, was acquainted with European models, but more than individual competence, the emphasis on discussion reveals a style of thinking and a political approach underlining equality as well as local autonomy: all citizens of Japan have rights and others cannot trample them. These constitutional proposals were drafted by village societies formed by school teachers, priests, and local notables, and some were even drafted by private individuals²⁸.

To get some idea of the scale and density of such local formations, consider that in October 1881 when the Freedom Party (Jiyūtō 自由党) was formed it had 149 affiliates spread across the country, and by

²⁷ Arai, Katsuhiro. 2004. *Jiyū minken to kindai shakai*. 自由民権と近代社会. 吉川弘文館, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan. pp.49-64.

²⁸ Arai, Katsuhiro. 2004. *Jiyū minken to kindai shakai*. 自由民権と近代社会. 吉川弘文館, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan. Pp.38-39 and pp.40-42. On Chiba see ²⁸ Irokawa Daikichi.1985. *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, translated and edited by Marius B. Jansen, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, (Princeton, NJ) (Princeton University Press)

November of that year, it could mobilise more than 135,000 people in a petition campaign to demand representative government.

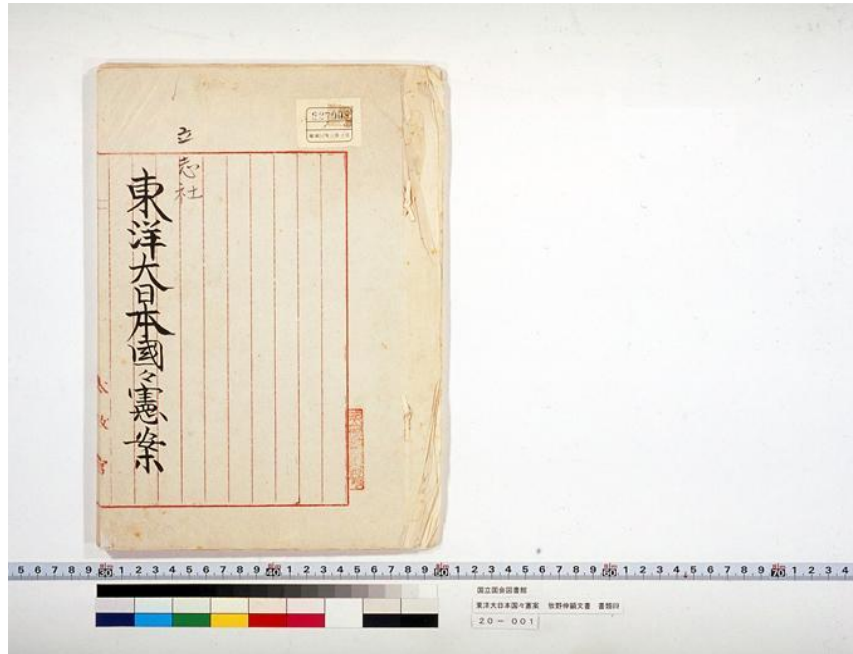


Image: Toyo Dai-Nippon National Constitution Proposal August 1881 Papers of Makino Nobuaki, Document #89 National Diet Library

Source: Modern Japan in Archives²⁹

Ueki Emori (1857-1892 植木枝盛) of the Self-Help Society (Risshisha 立志士社) drafted one of the more radical proposals which was based on a federal structure, like the U.S or Switzerland, and not only were women given the right to vote but the people even had the right to revolt against an autocratic government.

Irokawa Daikichi, the Japanese historian who did so much to uncover this forgotten history, held up the case of the Kumamoto Sōai (Mutual Love Society) in Kyushu. The members held ten consecutive all-night sessions, which led to the drafting of a constitutional proposal that was

²⁹ See, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/modern/e/cha1/description14.html>

based on a reading of translations of J.S.Mill, Jeremy Bentham, French and German legal scholars, translations of books on constitutions of different countries, books on British parliamentary history, the U.S constitutions, and all these books were owned by members. Irokawa writes that it is a matter of profound regret that Japan did not adopt a constitution that “emanated from the spirit of the people and embodied their enthusiasm.”³⁰



Image: Clockwise: Naja Chōmin, Ueki Emori, Itagaki Taisuke, Itō Hirobumi
Source: Wikipedia³¹

The drafting of constitutional proposals also reflected the serious engagement with ideas of law and rights. Kano Masanao, the Japanese historian, points out that in the field of social sciences, the official academic establishment of imperial universities and experts relied largely

³⁰ Irokawa Daikichi.1985. pp.168-169

³¹See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itagaki_Taisuke

on foreign translations while what he calls the ‘people’s rights and law studies’ group, despite its shortcomings, seriously engaged with the question of rights, justice, nation and all this was carried out by independently formed study groups. It is out of this intellectual environment that books such as Nakae Chōmin’s (1847-1901 中江兆民), *A Discourse of Three Drunkards on Politics* (Sansuijin keirin mondai, 三酔人経綸問答黒鍵反論 1887) or Ono Asuza’s (小野梓 1852-1886) *Theory of National Constitution* (Kokken hanron, 国権反論 1882-8) and the *Essence of Civilian Law* (Minpō no honne, 民放のほんね, 1883). Ono Asuza, while learning from European thinkers, carefully studied the Japanese situation and advanced an original framework for constitutional studies that took account of history. It was ignored by the bureaucratic legal approach favoured by the oligarchy.³²

It was not just a case of the transmission of new ideas from Europe, but old words were being redefined in the churning that was taking place. The word freedom or jiyū (自由) carried connotations of selfishness and lack of control, such a ship adrift in the ocean, but it now carried a positive meaning of right. The historian Tsurumaki Takao places the change quite precisely in an admonishment (yuzōbun 藩中諭造文) written by the former governor of the Komezawa han on 18 April 1871 published in the Yokohama Mainichi newspaper. The government had just abolished the han or domains, and he saw this as sweeping away the old feudal order that

³² Kano Masanao, 2013. "The First Stirrings of Folk Scholarship (Minkangaku) in Modern Japan (1983)." *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 25 (2013): 179-90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43945393>. pp. 179-180

had been characterized by an absence of the people (kokumin no fuzai 国民の不在). He argued that society in early times was based on equality, but under feudalism, it became a peerage or good family (monbatsu 門閥) society. In the pre-feudal period, there had been equality and now again an equal society, where all are equally people of the emperor was possible. People were differently endowed, but there should be no permanent status hierarchy. He called for a political system based on wards and prefectures (gunkensei 郡県生).³³

This popular upsurge culminated in the so-called ‘incidents of intensified violence’ (gekka-jiken 激化事件) between 1882-1885. These incidents in Fukushima, Gumma, Kanagawa, Ibaraki and Saitama prefectures "to overthrow the oppressive government, which is the public enemy of freedom" were largely organized by leaders from the Jiyuto. In 1884 the Kabasan (加波山) incident occurred when democratic radicals felt that only through an armed uprising could they establish a constitutional government and attempted to assassinate the government ministers to "protect the citizens' happiness and natural liberties." The Kabasan incident was not an uprising of people caused by economic difficulties but an attempt to ensure that the people could establish a

³³ Tsurumaki Takao(鶴巻孝雄). <iyū>, <minken> no katari,<gikai> oyobikake <自由> <民権> の語り、<議会> 呼びかけ” pp.108-145 in Arai, Katsuhiro. 2004. *Jiyū minken to kindai shakai*. 自由民権と近代社会. 吉川弘文館, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan. See pp. 11-4-115.

constitutional order. However, in the Chichibu uprising of 1884, the economic distress of the people was the prime factor.³⁴

³⁴ There is a vast literature on the people's rights movement. See, for instance, Irokawa Daikichi,(色川大吉) 1988, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, translated and edited by Marius B. Jansen, Princeton Library of Asian Translations, Princeton University Press., pp.334. Itokawa played a major role in earthing primary documents about the grassroots movement for democracy and changing the perceptions of this period. In English see Bowen, Roger W. 1980. *Rebellion and democracy in Meiji Japan: a study of commoners in the popular rights movement*. Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California.

CHAPTER II

Tanaka Shōzō: The Battle to Realise Democracy



Image: Tanaka Shozo The article is about the police questioning Tanaka because of the Fukushima incident of 1882.³⁵

Source: UCSD³⁶

Early Life: Finding a Moral Code

Tanaka Shōzō was born into a rural family and became village headman after his father in 1859, probably at the age of nineteen, six years after Commodore Perry and his ‘black ships’ came to the bay of Uraga. He

³⁵ Tanaka was investigating corruption charges against the Tochigi governor Mishima Michitsune, (1885-1838 三島通庸), a well-connected Satsuma bureaucrat, who served in a number of prefectures and played an important role in building a modern road, and later railway, infrastructure, trying to suppress the people’s rights movement. A leading bureaucrat who played a crucial role in furthering the Meiji centralizing development policies. The government appointed him governor of Tochigi to promote road development but also undermine the strong political base of the Liberal Party. A fascinating figure who deserves closer study. See Hirata, Motokichi. (平田元吉 1898. *Mishima michitsune*. (三島通庸). Senshinshoin. Pp.140-1443. See pp. 141. <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/782043> and <https://www.japanese-wiki-corpus.org/person/Michitsune%20MISHIMA.html>.

³⁶ See, <http://1884.ucsd.edu/archives/shozoarrest.html>

is usually presented as a Christian who saw the Bible as his guide, but in fact, as Komatsu shows in detail, his thinking was shaped by popular traditions such as the religious ideas of Fujiko. Fujiko, a typical popular religion founded in Edo by a Zen master in the 17th century, was turned by the sixth head Jikigyo Miroku (1671-1733 次企業弥勒), into a major co-fraternity, where the worship of Mt. Fuji was central to a set of beliefs that provided an everyday moral code. Shōzō was deeply influenced by religious ideas and in his youth even thought of becoming a Buddhist monk. These ideas continued to play an important part in his shaping his thinking, as seen in a letter he wrote while in Yanaka (dated October 30, 1904) that there is nothing on the peak of Mt. Fuji, the hotoke (Buddha) is within our hearts, echoing a well-known statement made by Jikigyo Miroku.³⁷



Image: Deguchi Nao, an illiterate woman who founded the Ōmoto religion

³⁷ Komatsu, 2001. p.59.

Source: Wikipedia³⁸

Shōzō's ideas of morality, the need for putting the needs of society ahead of personal gain and profit were shaped by this early influence of popular religious ideas.³⁹ Equally, his thinking was influenced by stories of peasant struggles, such as those in the Nanbu han 1847 and 1853, and the religious ideas of his contemporaries such as Deguchi Nao (1837-1913 出口なお founder of the Ōmoto (大本教) religion that was attacked by the government as a subversive political influence.⁴⁰ These ideals of an agrarian society helped to fashion Shōzō's politics and underlay his ideas of what Japan should be. It is significant that he never preached or tried to spread Christianity though an early biography in English does stress the influence of Christianity through his reading of the Christian bible and the influence of Quaker ideas. Many of his later ardent followers were Buddhists, and their meetings were regularly held in the local Shinto shrines.⁴¹ Komatsu importantly locates Shōzō's ideas within the context of the East Asian traditions rather than originating in Christianity. Shōzō's engagement with the Christian bible began much later, and significantly he never preached, so he was probably attracted by the commonalities that he saw that he saw in the Christian bible.

³⁸ See, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nao_Deguchi

³⁹ Shimazono Susumu, 1994. "Seishin shisōron" Asao Naohiro, et.al. (editors)朝尾直弘編 Iwanami Kōza Nihon tsushi 8 chsei 2. 生神思想論"岩波講座日本通史 8 中世 2, pp.290-301. See also Komatsu,2001. p.52-55.

⁴⁰ On peasant uprisings in the domain of Nanbu (南部) in English see Herbert P. Bix (1978) "Miura Meisuke, or peasant rebellion under the banner of "distress", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 10:2, 18-26, DOI: 10.1080/14672715.1978.10409079 . On the attack by the government see Sheldon M. Garon, "State and Religion in Imperial Japan 1912-1945, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* Vol.12.No.2 (Summer, 1986), pp.273-302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1978.10409079> .

⁴¹ Komatsu, 2001, pp. 675-676

From Prefectural to National Politics

Shōzō was elected to the Tōchigi Prefectural Assembly in 1880, where he was chosen chair in 1889. The country was engulfed in the democratic movement for civil liberties, a loosely defined people's rights movement. This vast movement brought together local and national elites advocating a wide variety of political prescriptions for establishing a constitutional monarchy. Some groups even advocated more radical change. In 1882 Shōzō, along with other leading 'people's rights (minken 民権) activists, such as Itagaki Taisuke (1837-1919 板垣退助) had expressed their ideas about representative government. Shozō argued for a political structure where the emperor and people worked together (kunmin tomo itari 君民共至). There was an urgent need to establish a national party to formulate a constitution, convene a national assembly, and reform the legal system. In his thinking, the political party was the core institution to build a strong nation and a strong imperial court. This, he wrote, would be very different from the oligarchy, which was just a clique of two domains and a couple of parties.⁴²

In the standard narratives of Japanese history, the Progressive Party (Kaishintō 改進黨) represents moderate British constitutionalism while the Freedom Party (Jiyūtō 自由党) is seen as the flag bearer of the ideals of

⁴² Komatsu, 2001, pp.134-138

the French revolution and considered a politically more progressive force but the divisions were not so clear, and there were many nuanced positions. Iwakura Tomomi (1825-1883 岩倉具視) and Inoue Kowashi (1844-1895 井上毅) argued that there was no tradition of political parties in Japan and so power should stay with the emperor and not with parliament.

Constitutional Government and European Ideas

The demand for a constitution is often framed in the civilization and enlightenment policies of the Meiji government as it adopted Western institutions, ideas, dress, and even food. For instance, Tessa Morris Suzuki argues that the ideals of the French and American revolutions were central to the philosophies imported and adapted by Meiji intellectuals, framing the argument with reference to Herder (1744-1803) and Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-94) to point to how these Western ideals resonate with older notions of right and rebellion against unjust rulers.⁴³ The translation or mistranslation of European concepts (the U.S is usually added as a part of the West, but I think it needs to be seen separately) has been an influential method of examining Japanese developments. Matsumoto Sannosuke argued that the idea of natural rights was absorbed through the Confucian idea of heaven or nature (天 *ten*), but others have argued against this, suggesting that such translations actually distort the radicality of natural rights in the European context.⁴⁴

⁴³ Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. 1998. *Re-inventing Japan: time, space, nation*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E.Sharpe.

⁴⁴ Matsumoto Sannosuke, 1978. "The Idea of Heaven: A Tokugawa Foundation for Natural Rights Theory," in ed. Tetsuo Najita and Irwin Schreiner, ed. *Japanese Political Thought in the Tokugawa Period*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. and for a different argument Thomas, Julia Adeney. 2001. *Reconfiguring modernity: concepts of nature in Japanese political ideology*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press. pp.78-79.

Traditions of Community Solidarity

This provides the necessary context, but it is not sufficient because the parliamentary practice was equally important, and not all were students of European philosophy. It is necessary to look at the place where ideology and everyday political practice met, in the debates in the Diet, and in journals and newspapers. As larger numbers of people had begun to exercise their power to speak for themselves and the newly created institutions had to be legitimized. In that process, political subjects were created through their actions even as they used the ideas being propagated by what Friedrich Hayek called ‘second-hand dealers in ideas’, a description he was not using pejoratively.⁴⁵

Moreover, village autonomy, especially once the samurai had been removed from their landholding in the early seventeenth century, even though beginning to fracture in the late Tokugawa period, did create a common sense of social (mode of life), economic (common interests) and cultural (shared culture) interests. This, combined with the tradition of village headman leading village revolts, provided the impetus to political organization, constitution-making, and electoral participation.⁴⁶

Two very important and influential arguments taken from European history have shaped the way we look at Japan and the adoption and functioning of democracy. One by Marx, who talks of the small peasant proprietors in France under Louis Bonaparte as not “entering into manifold

⁴⁵ Muller, Jan-Werner. 2014. *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Cumberland: Yale University Press). p.3

⁴⁶ White, James W. 1995. pp. 300-303.

relationships with each other. Their mode of operation isolates them instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse... They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented... Thus, the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes”.⁴⁷

The second is by the sociologist Barrington Moore, whose *Social Origins* has shaped the thinking about the political paths taken by different countries to argue how and where democracy flourished. Even though his analysis and many of his conclusions have been questioned, his argument, no bourgeoisie, no democracy’ continues to be widely accepted.⁴⁸

These ideas of rural repression and backwardness were important in Japan as well. The political scientist Maruyama Masao, whose writings have powerfully shaped our views of Japanese intellectual history, argues that the position of the emperor as the axis of spiritual life was grounded in the ideal of a village community that prevented the emergence of autonomous individuals (shutaiteki ningen 主体的人間) and similarly Takeuchi Yoshimi writes “In *kyodotai* at the base, as in *kokutai* at the apex

⁴⁷ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch07.htm>, Marx, Karl, (1851-1852), ñ, **Online Version:** [Marx/Engels Internet Archive](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch07.htm) (marxists.org) 1995, 1999

⁴⁸ Moore, Barrington. 1966. *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*. Boston: Beacon Press. and also see Ziblatt, Daniel, 2013. “Why Do We Read Barrington Moore? Some Reflections on the Survival of an Intellectual Icon”. Volume 11, No. 1 *Comparative Democratization*, January. *The American Political Science Association Comparative Democratization*, pp.4-6. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/dziblatt/files/apsa-cd_january_2013.pdf

of society all ideologies whether ‘modern totalitarian’ ‘parliamentary democracy’ or ‘harmonious pacifism’ – are necessarily subsumed. Thus, liberated from the spell of “abstract theory” the *kyodotai* is enveloped in a world of perfect oneness.”⁴⁹

However, as the folklorist Yanagida Kunio (1875-1962 柳田邦男) was among the first to note that with the collapse of the village community (*kyodotai*) the state had begun to stress the spirit of village solidarity as a way of binding the modern citizen to the nation-state. This it did through various measures, issuing edicts such as the Boshin Rescript an imperial edict 1908 calling people to be diligent, frugal and loyal to the imperial house and through the formation of state-sponsored civil associations such as the Movement of Youth Associations and the Reservists Association that began to meet from 1910.⁵⁰ The idea of the village community (共同体 *kyodotai*) as an unchanging formation is itself a modern invention.

Rural Japan in the mid-nineteenth century was not quite the society depicted by Marx; the small proprietors were not a sack of potatoes. The villages formed cohesive communities even though they were hierarchies, lines of power, and divisions, but they could, and did, organize and come together for work, festivals, and to oppose the ruling elites. This history provided the language of protest and dissent, right and justice. This was carried on in the daily debates and dissent in the Diet, public protests, and

⁴⁹ Quoted in Irokawa pp.270-71

⁵⁰ See Yanagida Kunio. 1964. “Saishin sangyō kumiai tsūkai (最新産業組合通解). Yanagida Kunio zenshu (柳田邦男全集). Chikuma Shobō. Vol.28. p. 7-131.

demonstrations. Through these daily struggles, Japanese politicians, social activists, and the public developed ideas about the nation, sovereignty, political parties, the rights of the citizen, and equality.

In the small town of Fujioka, now in Tōchigi prefecture, the scholar Mori Ōson (1831-1907 森鷗村) played an influential role in shaping the thinking of many of those involved in the Ashio copper mine problem. A scholar of Chinese learning, Mori had studied in a temple school (terakoya 寺子屋). These temples schools, some 15,000 spread all over Japan, shaped the thinking of the rural population. Mori established his own school in 1868 and brought out a magazine, *New Civilisation* (Bunmei shinshi 文明新誌), which was published till 1904, and during this long period, it built up a wide circle of readers. The magazine provided a forum where new ideas regarding the economy, money as a determinant of relations, new forms of organization and contracts, were discussed and debated. The magazine played an influential role in spreading knowledge about modern society, particularly to those educated in traditional ways. These new networks bound people in communities of ideas and led them to devise new ways of thinking and acting. Tamura Norio shows how this laid the basis for those affected by the Ashio pollution to draw up a charter to establish a commune.⁵¹

There was no bourgeoisie in Japan during the period of the formation of constitutional democracy. Indeed, the people behind drafting the constitutional proposals were in the rural areas, some elites, but others were

⁵¹ Tamura Norio.(田村紀雄).1998. Tanaka Shōzō wo Meguro genron shisō(田中正造をめぐる言論思想.) Shakai Hyoronsha. pp.40 and 58-62

not educated enough to express their ideas in an appropriate language and had to call upon an educated person to help them draft their proposals. It is hard to see democracy as an alien import struggling to survive when during the early years, there was so much enthusiasm from a wide range of social classes to form associations to discuss and debate what shape their future would take. Moreover, since many of the developments in Japan parallel what was happening in Europe, it becomes difficult to argue for European exceptionalism. The rural supporters of constitutional democracy were pitted against the elite samurai from the powerful anti-Tokugawa clans, who were tightening their grip on the centres of power and authority. The constitution became for the Meiji oligarchy a mode of containing and controlling the rural supporters of democracy. The establishment of repressive structures becomes possible as the oligarchy incorporated, suppressed, and eliminated the opposing forces.

The Japanese oligarchy's cautious, conservative outlook partook of contemporary approaches to political participation as regional cliques jockeyed for power to lay out the national goals as they confronted both the international pressure to 'open' Japan and the demand for greater popular participation.

Nineteenth-Century Democracy

The question of democracy is a complex issue as the idea, in the latter half of the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the countries of Western Europe and North America, carried the taint of mobocracy and rule by the people was as much feared as tyranny. In most democratic nations, political participation was limited to property owners,

and all others, including women, were denied rights. In Europe, only France, Germany, Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland gave voting rights early in the nineteenth century, but in all others, the electorate was between 3-8 percent and only expanded by the 1880s. In Italy, only 14 percent of the population had voting rights as late as 1914.⁵²

Take the case of Russia, usually not seen as part of the West. One of the major milestones of twentieth-century democracy, as Adam Tooze notes, was the election of the Russian Constituent Assembly on the basis of universal suffrage, when forty-four million cast their votes, the largest expression of popular will in history. More than three times the number of Russians voted than did U.S. voters in 1916, and there was higher rural participation. Tooze quotes O. Radkey, who writes that when burgers vote for property rights, soldiers and their wives for peace and demobilisation, and peasants for land, what is there about the spectacle that is abnormal or unreal? They may have little experience of democracy, but in an ‘elemental way, the electorate of revolutionary Russia’ knew what it was doing’.⁵³

Constitutions were conceded because it became necessary to accept popular demands, but these were used to control and contain. The flexibility they provided ensured that varieties of political regimes function within a constitutional order. Europe was largely under monarchical rule, where legitimacy was determined by what Max Weber called the ‘charisma of blood’.⁵⁴ Some monarchies, like Great Britain, were beginning to move

⁵² Stefano Bartolini, (1996), “Enfranchisement, Equality and Turnout in the European Democratisation Process: A Preliminary Comparative Analysis” *Working Paper* n.121 Barcelona. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/13283325.pdf>.

⁵³ O. Radkey. 1989. *Russia Goes to the Polls: The election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* Ithaca, NY. p.63 quoted in Tooze, Adam. 2014. p.83

⁵⁴ A translation of Weber’s “Charisma and Discipline” from, Tony Waters, and Dagmar Waters. 2015. *Weber's rationalism and modern society new translations on politics, bureaucracy, and social*

away from the idea of the ruler's divine right to rule, and, as new social groups began demanding a voice, they began presenting their ruler as a unifying symbol and a 'servant of the people'. This was a way to appeal to the people as their role in politics began to grow, but most governments, even though the bureaucracies were powerful, were run by aristocratic cabinets; usually, even the bureaucrats also came from elite families. It was only in 1906 that the first non-aristocratic cabinet was formed in Great Britain.⁵⁵

Broadening Political Participation

In Europe, the new order, as represented by Disraeli in England and Napoleon III in France, was based on broadening political participation to win the support of the new social classes. Cavour in Italy promoted both economic development as well as allowed greater freedom in many spheres. The Italian state brought together liberals nationalists in their newly established parliament to counter the authority of the Church. In Germany, Bismarck used war, first with Denmark, then Austria, in 1870-1871, and then France, to form a German empire under the leadership of Prussia. He sought to contain the socialist movement, while an elected lower house was held in check by an upper house chosen by the wealthy, and government appointments were made by the crown.

stratification. New York: Palgrave Macmillan is available online:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303591848_Discipline_and_Charisma_by_Max_Weber_translated_and_edited_by_Tony_Waters_and_Dagmar_Waters_From_our_book_Weber%27s_Rationality_2015

⁵⁵ Muller, Jan-Werner. 2014. *Contesting Democracy*, p.14.



Image: The Communards pulled down the statue of Napoleon in the Place Vendôme., Photograph from Corbis.

Source: The Newyorker⁵⁶

In France, after the failure of the Paris Commune in 1871, the Third Republic established by conservative republicans expanded its political base, strengthened freedom of the press, speech, and association, and attacked the Church's control of education but contained demands for radical change. Jules Ferry (1832-1893), one of the key political figures, is representative of the times, as he attacked the Church and, through new laws (1881-82, 1886), promoted a new education to inculcate nationalism, establish a republican identity, and strengthen the French language, a policy which led to the destruction of several regional languages. *Laïcité* or secularity in schools, and its definition, continues to be an important point of tension. He also promoted the importance of a colonial empire to strengthen the economy.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/22/fires-paris>

⁵⁷ Here for instance is the government website explaining *Laïcité* or secularism: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/secularism-and-religious-freedom>

In the U.S, voting rights were initially restricted to white males with property and by religious tests, but after the civil war ended in 1865, while voting restrictions were lifted, the so-called Jim Crow laws curtailed the voting rights of black through literacy and religious tests and poll taxes. In fact, the abolition of slavery actually increased the power of the Southern states because the black population remained disenfranchised while it continued to be counted to determine the population for representation.⁵⁸

The Japanese Oligarchy Concedes a Constitution

In this fluid situation, the Meiji oligarchy, while establishing its power, had to negotiate with the demands of different groups as it put into place powerful bureaucracy, military, and police that were mostly out of the ambit of legislative control. Along with this, laws were enacted to exclude certain groups, such as teachers, government officials, and those with criminal convictions, from taking part in political activities. Censorship and peace preservation laws were further enacted to control political assembly and speech in 1875, 1877, and 1880. This laid the groundwork for establishing a constitutional monarchy to meet the international standard of civilisation while containing the popular upsurge of representation that was engulfing the country.⁵⁹

Importantly democracy did not begin with a constitution or with the formation of parties but was created through the action by groups who came together to fight for common demands, initially through petitions and

⁵⁸ Foner, Eric (2020), "The Corrupt Bargain", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 42, No.10, 21 May, pp.3-6.

⁵⁹ Gong, Gerrit W. 1980. *The standard of 'civilisation' and the entry of non-European countries into international society: the cases of China, Japan*. Boston Spa: British Library, Lending Division.

agitations, and then through the prefectural assemblies and later the Diet. These demands and the strategy to deal with them was continuously debated, but it led to one, restricting the room for maneuver for opposition and dissidence through laws before the constitution was granted, and two, through the use of the imperial institution, the oligarchy could use imperial edicts to quieten opposition.

The constitution was a gift, and the powers of the elected assembly and representatives were limited. A very small, property-owning class that paid the tax, according to the 1871 revised land tax law, that is only 1 percent of the population, had voting rights, and though the number grew, many positions were by appointment. In 1897 the Universal Suffrage League (Futsū senkyō kisei dōmei kai 普通選挙期成同盟会) began a movement to expand voting rights but was defeated as surveillance and suppression of the opposition increased. The fundamental attitude of the oligarchy towards the Diet and political parties was expressed by the prime minister Kuroda Kiyotaka on the day the constitution was proclaimed, “The government must always steadfastly transcend and stand apart from the political parties, and thus follow the path of righteousness”. The idea of ‘transcendentalism’ became a key word that defined the oligarchy’s view of political parties though, in these early decades, there was still support for working with parties.⁶⁰

It was not just the Meiji government that wanted to control public opinion. The acceptance of a constitutional form of government in Japan was even questioned in Europe. Herbert Spencer thought that the Japanese

⁶⁰ Banno Junji. 1992. *The establishment of the Japanese constitutional system*. London: Routledge. pp.9-10.

used as they were to despotic government would now experience “the evils arising from too large an installment of freedom”.

Itō Hirobumi, the key figure behind the drafting of the constitution, studied European constitutions during his tour there in 1882-83, during which he met many scholars and leaders. The German Kaiser Wilhelm I warned Itō that constitutions were not promulgated with any pleasure.⁶¹ Shōzō begins the fight against the oligarchic view with the invitation he received to attend the promulgation of the constitution in 1899.



Image: Adachi Ginkō (1853-1908 足立銀行), a ukiyo-e artist of the Utagawa school, was not invited to the ceremony. The emperor is seen in his admiral's uniform in the most elevated position, the *gyokuza* (imperial seat), with the Sacred Jewel and Sacred Sword being held by two attendants below him, the empress in a pink western-style dress and bonnet seated to his left, a little lower. Around him, various dignitaries and Sanjō Sanetomi (1837-1891), the minister of the imperial household holds the constitution. Adachi later did caricatures of the Meiji emperor and was arrested and jailed for a year.

Source: AKG Images⁶²

⁶¹ Kokaze Hidemasa, 2011, “The Political Space of Meiji 22 (1889) The Promulgation of the Constitution and the Birth of the Nation” *Japan Review* 23 :119-141, p.127-128.

⁶² See, https://www.akg-images.com/archive/-2UMEBMYA12B_P.html.

Promulgation of the Meiji Constitution

The woodblock prints painted depicting the formal ceremony where the emperor gifts a constitution are well known, but the democratic opposition was already questioning the idea of a gift. The journalist Miyatake Gaikotsu ((1867-1955 宮武外骨) launched the *Journal of the Society of Ready Wit* (*Tonchi kyokai zasshi* 頓珍協会雑誌) on 4 March 1889 in response to the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution of 1899. The journal was a direct attack on the emperor and the ‘gift’ of the constitution. The depiction, done by the illustrator Adachi Ginkō, of the meeting of the Society, mirrored the woodblock prints depicting the formal ceremony, where the emperor gifted the constitution, but here instead of the emperor there was a skeleton on a raised dais handing down a set of ‘rules for study’ (kenpō, 研法) a homonym that could also mean ‘constitution’ kenpō 憲法) to an awaiting commoner. It was a costly satire for Miyatake as he was fined fifty yen and jailed but it showed the way the event was being perceived in the popular press.⁶³

Tanaka objected to the use of the word ‘haikan or view with reverence’(拝見 the first character ‘ogamu’ means stand with reverence, as when praying to the Buddha, and the second ‘to view’) in the invitation. The other dignitaries had been invited to attend (sanretsu 参列 to

⁶³ I have discussed this in two talks, “Networks of Play, Networks of Subversion: Miyatake Gaikotsu and the Recovery of Ukiyoe”, Terasaki Center of Japanese Studies, Department of History, UCLA, 21 February, 2018, and “Weapons of the Witty: Miyatake Gaikotsu and the Political Uses of Satire”, Department of East Asia, Faculty of Letters, University of Geneva, Switzerland, 24 November 2016.

participate). Moreover, the former invitees would not be seated with the other dignitaries but stand outside the main hall. Shōzō and six other prefectural assembly chairmen argued that they were representatives of the people, and so had the right to sit with the other dignitaries. The Home Minister finally conceded to their demand, but it is not clear whether it was because of the emperor's 'discretion' (obo shi meshi 思し召) or a concession by the oligarchy but the word was replaced with attendance (sanretsu 参列), as used in the other invitations. This was perhaps a symbolic victory but it showed that the idea of equality was central to Shōzō's idea of constitutional government and democracy.⁶⁴

Elections and the Problem of Representation

The first election held in July 1890 was a very important step that defined the period that began in 1868 with the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate. The years till the promulgation of the 1889 constitution were of revolutionary ferment. Itagaki Taisuke grandly declared in an election speech in the town of Mito on June 18, 1890, "Gentleman, this year is truly an auspicious year. It is the year in which we emerge from despotism and slavery, and are born a people of constitutional liberty".⁶⁵ This is precisely what Itō and the oligarchy feared, and they worked to consolidate their position and contain the opposition. The constitution marked an important step in the successful containment of diverse oppositional movements. There was still space for democratic opposition, and the focus from the first

⁶⁴ Komatsu, 2001, pp. 250-251

⁶⁵ Quoted in the dedication page of Mason, R.H.P. 1969. *Japan's First General Elections*, Cambridge, England: University of Cambridge Press Oriental Publications.

Diet in 1890 was to expand the control of the political parties. This would involve defining the relation between the parties, the people, and the emperor.

The problem of representation then was crucial to defining the people and the community. The political parties became organisations used by dissatisfied samurai groups, but they also brought together people who were more closely allied to rural movements. The Jiyutō was led by Itagaki Taisuke, a member of the oligarchy who began to have differences with his fellow leaders and but these differences led to the dissolution of the party on October 29, 1889, after the Chichibu incident. The different groups were split over their support for whether to expand national power (kokken kakuchō 国権拡張) or people's rights (kaishin jiyūshugi 改進黨自由主義). The Jiyutō, Aikoku kokutō (Public Party of Patriots 愛国国党) and the two groups that came out of the Great Alliance (Daidō Danketsu 大同団結) movement, supported people's rights and came together to form the Constitutional Liberal Party (Rikken minshū tō 立憲民衆党) in 1890, which then went back to using the name Liberal Party. Nakae Chōmin (1847-1901 中江兆民), a translator of Rousseau, clearly grasped the situation arguing that the people's parties should attack before the government's control solidifies.⁶⁶

Shōzō and his fellow politicians saw the Diet as a place to realise their goals of a representative government. The electorate based on limited suffrage (males above 25 years paying at least 15 yen in taxes) was just 1.3

⁶⁶ Komatsu, 2001. pp.244

percent of the population.⁶⁷ The residents of Hokkaido and Okinawa were excluded. The greater majority of the electorate was from rural landlords or entrepreneurs, and former samurai formed only a small percentage. The Liberal Party (Jiyutō) won 130 seats and the Progressive Party (Kaishintō) 41 in a 300-member assembly. The government-backed parties fell short of a majority. The first Diet was inaugurated by the emperor and was celebrated with an even greater fervor than the promulgation of the constitution. The streets were decorated, and concerts were held to mark the great day.⁶⁸

Constitutional Hurdles: Controlling the Budget



⁶⁷ The rural voters were dominant because the law stated that those who had paid a land tax of 15 yen for one year could vote but for income tax payers the requirement was three years. There were 500,000 thousand who paid land tax of 15 yen or over while only 14,000 income tax payers qualified. The Shiga prefecture had the highest number of voters 2 per cent of their population while Tokyo had only 0.38 per cent, as few residents owned property or paid tax. See R.H.P.Mason (1969), pp.30-31.

⁶⁸ Fraser, Andrew, R.H.P. Mason, and Philip Mitchell. 2016. *Japan's early parliaments, 1890-1905: structure, issues, and trends*. London : Routledge. p.1. An early book on the first elections is Mason, R. H. P. *Japan's First General Election, 1890*. London: Cambridge University, 1969.

Image: In October 1881, plans for building a Diet building were started, but delays forced the Diet to be held in a hastily built two storey temporary building, completed on November 24, 1890, just one day before the Imperial Diet was convened. It was destroyed in a fire in less than two months because of a short circuit. Few images of the building exist. A second building, almost similar to the first, was quickly constructed by October 1891. The present structure was completed after seventeen in 1937—Views of Tokyo, 1910.

Source: National Diet Library⁶⁹

The major issue in the first Diet was over the control of the budget with Ōe Taku (1847-1921 大江卓) and the Jiyūtō leaders calling for an 11 percent budget cut and a 20 percent reduction in land tax. As the scholar Banno Junji has pointed out, the budget cut led to very important administrative reforms, such as consolidating the accounting departments of each ministry into one bureau, incorporating the police department into the Tokyo metropolitan prefecture, abolishing the post of councilor, and reducing the number of lower-level administrative officers.⁷⁰ This was not acceptable to the government and was the underlying reason for the differing interpretations of Article 67.⁷¹

The constitution, a creature of the oligarchy, defined the powers of the emperor (kenpō jo no taiken 憲法上の大権) over the organization of the military, appointments to the bureaucracy, and control over foreign policy so the government could not accept the opposition's interpretation as it affected Article 10.⁷² Itō and the oligarchy recognized that Article 67

⁶⁹ See, <https://www.ndl.go.jp/scenery/e/data/196/index.html>

⁷⁰ See Banno Junji's analysis in aAnzai Kunio, et. al. (editors) .1989.(安在邦夫 [ほか]編) Tanaka Shōzō senshū mintō to kokka Vol.2. pp. 300-308.

⁷¹ Article 67 of the Meiji Constitution, "Those already fixed expenditures based by the Constitution upon the powers appertaining to the Emperor, and such expenditures as may have arisen by the effect of law, or that appertain to the legal obligations of the Government, shall be neither rejected nor reduced by the Imperial Diet, without the concurrence of the Government." <https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c02.html#s6>

⁷² Article 10. The Emperor determines the organization of the different branches of the administration, and salaries of all civil and military officers, and appoints and dismisses the same. Exceptions especially

and Article 71 acted as a protection for their power, and any modification would destroy the basis of the constitution and the state, as they interpreted it. (kokka no seiritu wo haimetsu shi kenpō no gensoku ni sōmuku mono 国家の成立を廃滅し憲法の原則に背く者).⁷³ The right to determine the government budget became the battleground to assert the right of political parties. There were different approaches within the oligarchy, with Itō Hirobumi favouring negotiations and some compromise, while Yamagata Aritomo argued for a tougher approach.⁷⁴ The oligarchy used bribery and other means as well to win over voters and increase their support, but despite these tactics, they only managed to get ninety-three of their own representatives elected in the second election. Itō then began to court Itagaki and the opposition, offering limited cooperation, but he also began using edicts issued by the emperor to push his political agenda.⁷⁵ This was an important issue and shows that both the oligarchy and the opposition were not merely trying to emulate Western models but working to create a political system that represented their objectives.

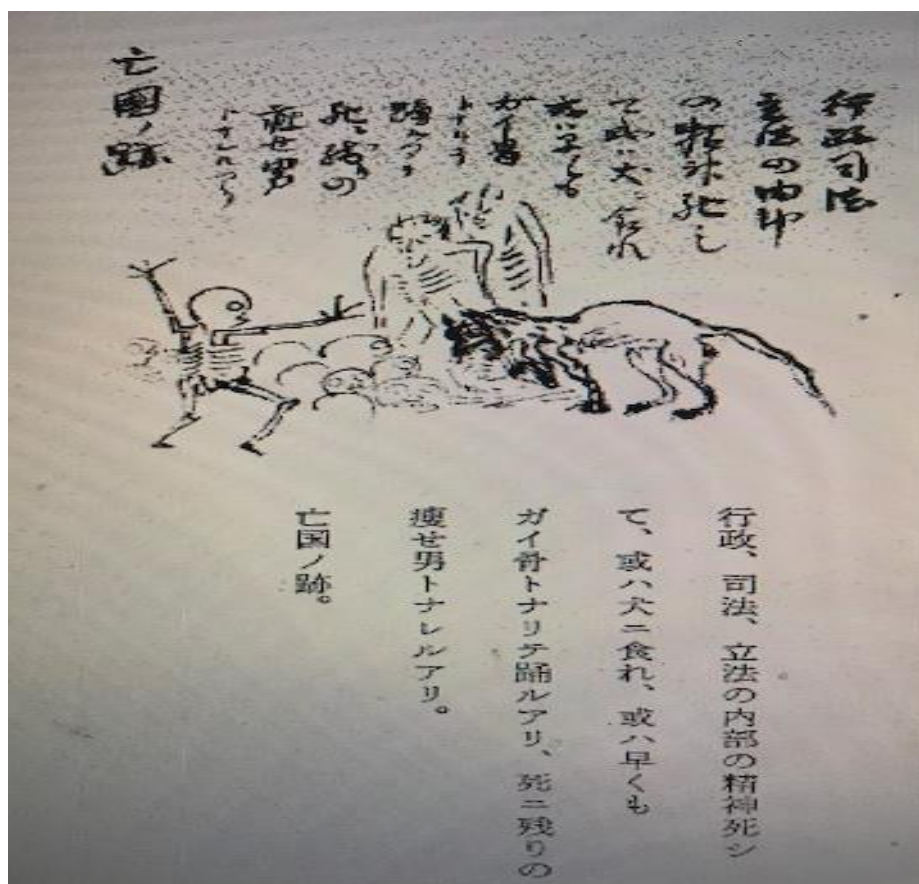
provided for in the present Constitution or in other laws, shall be in accordance with the respective provisions (bearing thereon). <https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c02.html#s6>

⁷³ Komatsu, 2001. pp. 246-248.

⁷⁴ Akita, George. 1962. "The Meiji Constitution in Practice: The First Diet" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 Nov., pp. 31-46.

⁷⁵ Jansen, Marius B. 2008. *The Cambridge History of Japan. Vol. 5, Vol. 5*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 669-670.

The Death of a Nation



The text reads, “The administration, judiciary, and law are dead in spirit, emaciated men waiting to die, to be quickly eaten by dogs, or reduced to dancing skeletons. Signs of the death of the nation.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The drawing is dated February 13, 1900 and part of his speech in the 14th Diet. The Japanese text is :” 行政、司法、立法の内部の精神死して 或は犬に食れ或は早くもがい骨となりて踊るあり 死に残りの瘦せ男となれるあり。亡国の跡” , *Tanaka Shōzō senshū* Vol 3. Iwanami Shōten, pp. 256. I have translated it as dying but it can be translated as subjugated, colonised, or lost. In China, there was an extensive debate about how why countries and people were subjugated or colonized. The examples discussed ranged from India to Poland and South Africa. Shōzō would have been aware of the significance of calling Japan a bōkoku. It was account that was dying because of its own

All these measures carried out by the oligarchy were, Shōzō began to see, paid for by ever-increasing taxes that placed an intolerable burden on the ordinary people. In contrast to the oligarchic approach Ueki Emori, Nakae Chōmin, Shōzō, and other supporters of people's rights argued for a 'little Japan'. This led them to oppose the administrative re-organisation and advocate the preservation of the territorial boundaries of the former han, which would be the basis for creating representative assemblies. Nakae Chōmin was extremely critical of the oligarchy and its supporters and said that their actions showed that the constitution was just a formal gesture, an imperial gift that did not recognize the power of the people.

Chōmin had been critical from the beginning. The lessons he drew from the French Revolution was that the delegation of authority to elected representatives should be limited. He derisively called them bloodless insects arrayed in battle formation (muketsu mushi no junretsu ba 無血虫の陣列場) and resigned the next day, February 21, 1891.⁷⁷ Shōzō continued to believe that the constitution was the right step as it guaranteed the right to life, legal protection of property, and it allowed for the possibility of controlling the government through the budget so they could move towards what he saw as the ideal government.⁷⁸

The wars with China (1894-5) and with Russia (1904-5) saw military expenditure increase massively, with 40 percent of the budget

government's policies. On China See Karl, Rebecca E. 2009. *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Duke University Press Books. eg pp..15, 37, 75, 78, 79.

⁷⁷ Komatsu, 2001. p.249

⁷⁸ Komatsu, 2001. p.251-2 and Tanaka Shōzō. 1989. Tanaka Shōzō senshū. Vol 5. pp.312 quotes Nakae Chōmin, 1890. "Senkyojin mazamashi 選挙人目覚まし"

given to the army and navy led to increased defense production, laying the basis for the formation of big industrial conglomerates, the zaibatsu. The zaibatsu such as Mitsui, Mitsubishi, and Sumitomo, even though some had a long history, established their position during this period. In this climate of war and increasing concentration of wealth, the prevailing mood in the country was of ‘worshiping Mammon (haikinshugi 拝金主義). Higher military expenditures were financed by increases in the land tax and taxes such as on liquor, consumption, and energy. Shōzō opposed the tax increases and the rising military expenditure and, while the whole nation was roused by patriotic fervor he, speaking in the thirteenth Diet, called the soldiers ‘traitors to the nation’ (kokuzoku 国賊) and criticized police brutality. There was a furore, and the Speaker expunged the remarks. This was the moment when Shōzō begins to talk of Japan as a ‘dying nation’ (bōkoku 亡国).⁷⁹

The idea of a ‘dying or defeated country’ was earlier applied to countries that had been colonized, such as India. Shōzō applies to Japan the idea that it has become like a subjugated colony while the Japanese establishment is preening itself on its success in war, industrialization, and becoming a modern nation. The strength of Japan, Shōzō stressed, would be based on the rights given under the constitution that protected property and guaranteed the welfare of the people. This would ensure the strength and wealth of Japan (ikkoku no fukyō wo nasu 一国の富強をなす) as opposed to the Japanese governments ‘rich country, strong army’ policies.

⁷⁹ Komatsu, 2001. pp.372-374

In 1897 there was a case of a Japanese judge posted in Taiwan being dismissed because of his opposition to the army, and Shōzō spoke about this case as yet another example of how the constitution was being violated, just as it had failed in dealing with the Ashio copper mine problem. This destruction and damage to the constitution (kenpō wo haimetsu kison 憲法を廃滅毀損) was another sign of a dying nation.⁸⁰

Democracy would ensure security and development. He felt that oligarchic rule, based on building a strong army, was placing an unacceptable burden on the ordinary people by increasing taxes and equally by curtailing their liberty. The Japan that was dying was the ‘little Japan,’ a democratic country where people would have a voice, both politically and intellectually, in determining their lives and their ideas. The Japanese oligarchy, by controlling power, was destroying these aspirations by imposing policies and programs that benefitted the few but were destroying the people and land. The burden of taxes was the critical issue that led him to the conclusion that it was the government’s modernising policies that were turning Japan into a dying nation (bōkoku 亡国)

⁸⁰ Komatsu, 2001. pp. 428-429.

CHAPTER III

A New Pedagogy for a New Community

Ashio Copper Mine: Understanding the New Economic Environment



Image: Furukawa Ichibei (1832-1903 古川市兵衛)

The Ashio copper mines in the prefecture of Tochigi, north of Tokyo, were old mines and did not appear to be profitable, but Furukawa Ichibei saw an opportunity and bought the rights to the mine in 1877. The transformation of the traditional mines through new technologies and management methods marks them as central to industrial development necessary to transform Japan into a ‘rich country’, to make it a ‘big Japan’ so that it could become a world-class nation.

Furukawa was adopted into a business family and given a basic education that enabled him as a young man to trade in raw silk and rice for the export market. He turned out to be an astute businessman and, while chief clerk of the Ono Company, started the Tsukiji Mill, one of the first built for private profit rather than, as many were in the last years of the Tokugawa, to provide the domain with revenues.⁸¹



Image: Ashio Copper Mine in 1895.⁸²

Commodity trading was a volatile business, and Furukawa turned early to mining. The Ashio copper mine was the second one he bought, and it became one of the biggest mining operations in Japan. On the success of these operations, he built a business empire that included coal and copper mines, metals, and later electrical goods, establishing the

⁸¹ Yasuzo Horei, "Modern entrepreneurship in Meiji Japan" in Lockwood, William W., and Martin Bronfenbrenner. (2015). *The state and economic enterprise in Japan: essays in the political economy of growth*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. pp. 183-208. See p. 186, Meiji government helped privileged merchants (seishō 政商)

⁸² Unknown author - Japanese book "Pictorial History of Modern Japan Vol.5" published by Sanseido. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashio_Copper_Mine#/media/File:Ashio_Copper_Mine_circa_1895.JPG

Furukawa Electrical Company. He was reputed to be as wealthy as the Mitsui's.

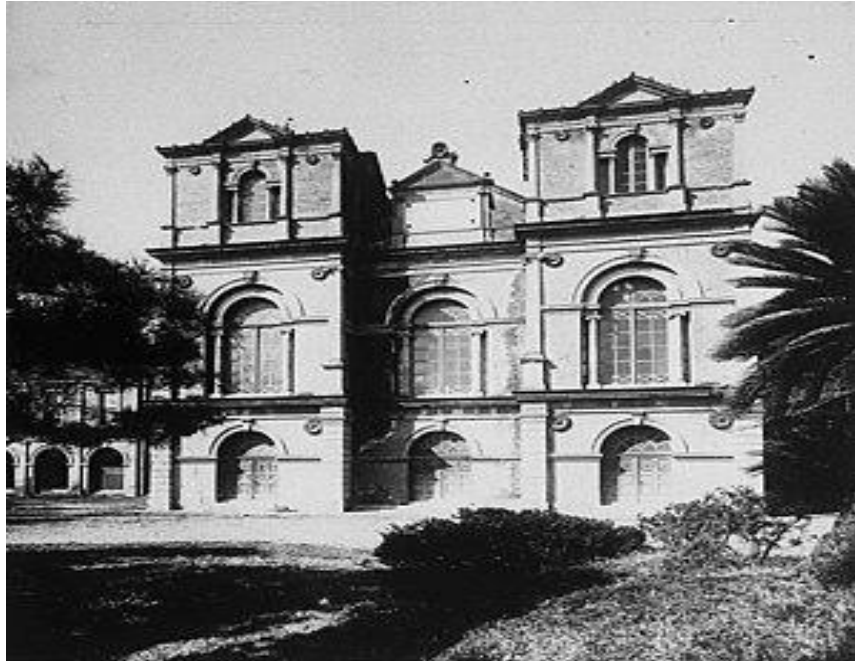


Image: Imperial College of Engineering (Kōbu Daigakkō 工部大学校) 1880.
Source: Wikiband⁸³

Mining, Technology, and Education

Mining for metals had a long history in Japan. Japanese silver and gold mines largely supplied domestic demand, but copper mining grew in the seventeenth century and Japan supplied copper to China and Holland. The Meiji government recognised the importance of mining as crucial to industrialisation and supported both the development of mines, the import of new technologies, and training and education programmes. Engineers from Europe and the United States came to train Japanese students. In 1868 the first mining school was opened in the Ikuno silver mine, and another in

⁸³ <https://www.wikiwand.com/ja/工部大学校>

the Engineering University (Kōbu Daigakkō 工部大学校) within the Ministry of Mining. The engineering schools of Tokyo and Kyoto Imperial Universities developed from these early institutions.

The government provided financial support for the students to encourage people to take up a career in this field as it was not very popular given the difficult work that miners did and their low social status. The students were financially supported in their six years of course work and also for seven years while they were employed in the mines. By 1900 most engineers working in the mines were graduates from these institutions. The government also opened the Osaka Mining school (Ōsaka kōgyō gakko 大阪工業学校) in 1896 where a four-year programme for training technical assistants was started for elementary school graduates. Later other schools were opened but finding labour for mines was still very difficult. In the early years, convict labour was used, but after 1910 with the occupation of Korea labour was forcibly brought from there.

The problems faced in getting staff for the mining operations led owners to set up schools to recruit directly. In 1894 the Hokkaido Mining and Shipping Company started direct recruitment, and soon other mining companies followed suit, even setting up schools for workers' children and training programmes to make a job in mining attractive. Furukawa at the Ashio mines unusually provided classes in English, Japanese, Chinese, drawing, mathematics, and ethics. The Miike coal mine started night classes for their key workers.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Levine, Solomon B. and Hishashi Kawada. 1980. *Human Resources in Japanese Development*. Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press. See particularly, "Training Patterns in Traditional Private Industries: Banking, Textiles, and Mining", pp. 206-257.

Furukawa worked to build a modern, efficient enterprise and train his workers. He was also quick to see the potential of new machinery for increasing productivity and brought in the latest technologies, looking after his workers, establishing schools, hospitals, and other facilities. The output of the mines began to increase dramatically, and by 1885 the Furukawa mines were producing 39 percent of Japan's copper. Copper was, after silk, the biggest export earner for Japan. However, the effluents from the mining process had begun to contaminate the Watarase and Tone rivers and poison the fish. These effluents blighted the crops and soon farming, and fisheries in the area were devastated. People began to demand the government take measures to halt the contamination. By 1890 when the presence of copper in the fields was confirmed, protests began to grow in scale and intensity.



Image: View of Ashio Copper Mine C1910

Source: Mindat⁸⁵

⁸⁵See, <https://www.mindat.org/loc-28764.html>

Combatting Environmental Destruction

In 1896 major floods spread the pollution to a wider area. The contamination caused by the mines and the increasingly vociferous protests began to bring the problem to the notice of a wider public. Since the area was near Tokyo, it was extensively covered by the expanding new media of print journalism, and the problem became a national issue.

Natural disasters aggravated the economic distress caused by deflation and bad harvests and led to a fall in the price of rice. The possible threat of a severe famine led people to compare the situation with the time of the great Tempō famine of the mid-1830s but also to the famine in north China in the years 1877-78, which led to the death of some thirteen million people. In Japan, though there was hardship, no such famine occurred and Steven J. Ericson argues that while tax delinquency and land auctions, usually cited as indicators of rural distress, did occur, it affected only a small percentage of the people. However, he agrees that there was an increase in indebtedness, which had a disastrous effect on agrarian communities.⁸⁶ It is in this context that Paul Mayet (1846-1920), a German advisor to the Meiji government, wrote in, *A Proposal for the Amelioration of the Japanese Agriculturalist* (1886), “poor peasant, poor country, poor country, weak country”, almost a counter to the better-known government call of ‘rich country, strong army’ and echoing the criticism that Shōzō and his supporters of small Japan were saying. After 1885 the economic situation improved, but agriculture took another decade to recover from these blows. From 1890 Japan began to import rice from Southeast Asia, and Korea becoming a net importer by the turn of the century. Government

⁸⁶ Ericson, Steven J. 2020. *Financial Stabilization in Meiji Japan: The Impact of the Matsukata Reform*. Ithaca, NY Cornell University Press. particularly pp.117-121 and pp.112.

also began increasing investments in armaments, establishing integrated steelworks, and expanding the rail network.⁸⁷

Shōzō's ideas did not appear full-blown but were gradually formed and developed in the course of his struggles. In fact, he first became aware of the effects of pollution from the surveys that students from Waseda University in Tokyo were carrying out. Shōzō met these students and became aware of the problem, and took up the cause of the affected farmers in 1880 (others have pointed to different dates: 1881, 1882). These student surveys were later published, bringing the problems to the attention of a wider public.

In the same year, on April 20, 1880, Karl Marx carried out a small survey of workers in France, titled, 'A Workers Inquiry', it is, as Marcello Hoffman states, a much translated but usually ignored work. The survey asks workers to answer a list of 101 questions that gradually widen in their scope forcing the worker to confront the general problem of the working class. Hoffman argues that this 'investigation', is not just a gathering of empirical information to build a theory but rather, for Marx, it was a way for workers to act politically. Investigation is, along with strikes, protests, occupations, rallies, revolts, and revolutions, a profound effort to constitute knowledge in radical movements. He characterizes this investigation as arising from a deep skepticism of official and theoretical representation of the subaltern classes. The knowledge so gained could be put to use to

⁸⁷ Ericson, Steven J. 2014. "The "Matsukata Deflation" Reconsidered: Financial Stabilization and Japanese Exports in a Global Depression, 1881–85" *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (WINTER), pp. 1-28. Ericson argues that Matsukata Masayoshi's (松方正義 1835-1924) objectives was neither to undermine the people's rights movement nor to generate surplus for armament expansion but to establish a sound convertible currency and a centralised banking system using Japan's own resources. Erikson. 2020. p.115

formulate a political strategy and furnish the basis for political activities. Investigation has the potential to produce a collective political subject.⁸⁸

Research and surveys became a very important method for people to understand what was affecting their lives.⁸⁹ Moreover, these were areas that the government ignored as they were not considered important to the national objective of becoming an equal of the West. In fact, it became apparent that mine and government experts failed to understand the ground situation because they either did not investigate the problems properly or ignored them. Truth was partisan, and Shōzō and his supporters needed their own ‘truth weapon’, as Foucault calls it. The very act of listening to the people to find a solution was politically empowering.

Shōzō going to the people was the beginning of a radically different approach to addressing the problems that were destroying Japan and its people. It began a process where the affected began to see that knowledge was a weapon deployed by the state to serve its interests and that it was necessary to first recognise what they knew as knowledge so they could become producers of knowledge. Such knowledge would serve the interests of the people by countering the state-sponsored knowledge that

⁸⁸ Hoffman, Marcelo. 2019. *Militant acts. The role of investigations in radical political struggles*. Albany: State University of New York Press..pp. 5-9 and 28-38. Hoffman also examines Lenin’s forgotten questionnaires of the workers in St Petersburg 1894-1896 designed to both uncover the exploitative conditions in the factories and to shape struggles against them.pp.38-43.

⁸⁹ Yanagida Kunio, then working in government began from the early 1900’s to intensely survey villages as he came to stress direct observation and experience for understanding the condition of the people. His objectives were the betterment of life and building a cooperative spirit rather than raising productivity the driving force behind government policy. A comparison with Shōzō’s ideas would help identify the ways knowledge creation outside state structures was being conceptualized. See Namimatsu Nobuhisa.(並松信久).2010.Yanagida Kunio no nōseigaku no tenkai- sangyō kumiai to hōtokusha wo megutte” (柳田邦男の農政学の展開－産業組合と報徳社をめぐって) pp.83-125. 京都産業大学論集, 社会科学系列 (27), 83-125, 2010-0. 京都産業大学 , particularly pp.88-93 .<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/228505443.pdf>.

purported to be universal. The political organisation of villagers was not just to mobilise them for demonstrations or for disseminating information to the newspapers and the public, but through study and investigation to allow them to devise policies to address the problems they faced. Political mobilisation increased awareness and played a role in transforming attitudes and this, in turn, led to wider dissemination of the problems affecting the area.⁹⁰



Image: A Hut in Yanaka (谷中) Village.⁹¹

Modern Education and Yanaka: Establishing the Basis for a Democratic Knowledge

The educational reforms began with the setting up of the Ministry of Education in 1871 and culminated with the Imperial Rescript on

⁹⁰ Tanaka Shōzō. 1989. Vol 3 pp.318-320

⁹¹ Source: Tanaka Shozō to sono jidai: tenno jikiso hyaku nen shunen (<http://dappan.net/research/tanaka/7.html>)

Education 1890, the same year the first Diet met. A centralized educational system was established under the control of the government, whose prime thrust was to produce a literate but patriotic population. In the early Meiji period, this was not so easily accomplished. Government regulations strengthened the hands of the state in enforcing orthodoxy, but the higher rates of education and a lively print media building on earlier traditions of questioning and protest tested and pushed the boundaries of state control.

The new print media provided a popular avenue for intellectuals, political activists, and other educated people to advance counter-arguments. The growth of journalism made the public aware and contributed to increasing political activism. This political consciousness was in turn, invigorated by a new class of editors and journalists who experimented with forms and ideas. Shōzō, like other political activists, was a prolific journalist as well. He brought out the *Tōchigi shinbun* in 1879 to create a platform to disseminate his ideas and to carry on his political activities.



Image: Tanaka Shōzo at the age of 63 when he moved to Yanaka.

Source: National Diet Library⁹²

In 1904 Shōzō moved to Yanaka, a small village of 450 households (population 2,700), which the government wanted to remove as it would be flooded once the reservoir was completed. The village has often been portrayed as well off, but it was only well-off in the sense that since the soil was very rich, crops could be grown without the use of fertilisers. In fact, the tax-paying population was very small. In the 1900 elections for the prefectural assembly, only two people, out of a male population of 1,202, qualified to vote.⁹³ He and other activists bought small pieces of land, so their movement came to be called the ‘one *tsubo* movement’ (1 坪

⁹² Watarasegawa: Call no.:798-231-(3), Monochrome, 10.6×14.3 cm, https://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/e/datas/290_2.html

⁹³ Komatsu, 2001. p.476 Komatsu, 2001 quotes Arahata Kanson's 1907 Yanaka mura mestsubōshi 谷中村滅亡し.

tsubo = 3.31m²) from the size of the land they bought to establish their right to prevent the state from acquiring the land in the name of national interest.

Shōzō argued against the construction of a reservoir that would lead to the displacement of the people and the destruction of their livelihood. Shōzō initially focused on ‘teaching the people as he felt they needed to be enlightened to realise the problems they were facing. Most villagers thought it was only a problem of water contamination, often forgetting that it was caused by the Ashio copper mine’s effluents.

In this initial period he often uses the word ‘research’ (*kenkyū* 研究).

The order of the day was for everyone to understand the problems through observation and study because what worried Shōzō was there was so little resistance to the government. The problem was not just that the government imposed its ideas but that people accepted these without questioning. He argued that the people must be able to decide developmental goals, and this they could do if they understood what was happening. The microcosm of the village came to represent the problems of Japan: an ‘unimaginable hell’ had been created not just because of the poisoning of the land and the increase in diseases but because this was where Furukawa and the administration had collaborated to bring about this calamity on the ‘people without sin’ (*mutsumi no ryōmin* 無罪の良民) by misusing the name of public interest.⁹⁴

Unfortunately, the people were not always so receptive, and some half the population slowly accepted the compensation the government offered to take over the land. Many moved to Hokkaido then being populated by the government. Komatsu dates the change in approach to

⁹⁴ Tanaka Shōzō *senshū*. Vol 5. pp.303-305.

precisely March 21, 1908, quoting Kinoshita Naoe saying that after years of working in the village, Shōzō and his supporters moved away from ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’, moved far away from the world of popular politics (shibaraku zoku seikai no hitobito tōkuseri 暫らく俗政治界の人々遠くせり) to a radically different perspective on how to effect change.⁹⁵

Shōzō looking to base his struggle among the people and learn from them, defined his approach as the Yanaka-ology or methodology (Yanakagaku 谷中学). He argued that knowledge was controlled by a small elite of experts created in the universities where other knowledge traditions were dismissed as old customs and superstitions. It was not just what was taught that troubled him but the lack of understanding of human nature. His religious ideas recognised that human beings are born with innate skills and abilities, and these natural-born qualities (shinki binshō 神機敏捷) he argued were being crushed in the new school education, which used uniform curriculum and organised classes hierarchically. An individual’s natural qualities are a heavenly gift (tensei 天性) and the formal educational system stressing uniformity and sameness was not just regressive but immoral and would destroy the sacred land of Japan (tenchi 天地).⁹⁶ He was seeking to re-distribute knowledge and truth in the words of Jacques Rancière.⁹⁷ Rancière uses the ideas of Joseph Jacotot, a French language teacher, who in 1818 proposed that even those who did not know

⁹⁵ Komatsu, 2001. p.498.

⁹⁶ Komatsu, 2001. pp.509-10

⁹⁷ Jacques Rancière, 1989. *The Nights of Labour: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, translated by John Drury. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p. 22.

could teach to argue for a redistribution of, what he calls, the distribution of the sensible, *le partage du sensible*.⁹⁸ Education preserves and reproduces this unequal distribution of the sensible. Pedagogy is the social bond of this order.⁹⁹ Shōzō, through Yanaka-ology is creating a method to allow those not destined to think, to think, for the silent to speak, and the invisible to become visible. He uses the phrase that encapsulates this vision, ‘to hear and to make someone listen’ (kiku to kikaseru 聞くと聞かせる).¹⁰⁰ The idea that people who so far had only to hear and obey could now insist on being listened to allowed for the development of new conceptions of political order and new possibilities of collective enunciation. It was a universalism that emerged from a place and time but was based on a universal idea that would allow for the imagining of other universalisms.¹⁰¹

Old Ties Dissolve

Moreover, the Meiji drive to succeed had encouraged the rise of individualism and what was popularly called ‘success in life’ (‘risshin shūsei 立身修正’), epitomized by the popularity of self-help books. The translation of Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* in 1871 became one of the holy books of the Meiji era, with people “lining up even camping out overnight-

⁹⁸ On Joseph Jean Jacotot and his teaching see Rancière, Jacques. 1991. *The ignorant Schoolmaster: five lessons in intellectual emancipation*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press. p.12-15. *le partage du sensible* : Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. Jacques Rancière, (2004), *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum. p. 12-33.

⁹⁹ Rancière, Jacques. 1991, pp.117.

¹⁰⁰ Komatsu, 2001. p.502.

¹⁰¹ Skaria, Ajay “The Project of Provincialising Europe: Reading Dipesh Chakrabarty”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 14 (April-4-10, 2009): 8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40278688>.

to buy copies of a work that attacked hereditary wealth and power from its very first line”.¹⁰² The early Meiji era saw the pace of dissolution of the old society pick up speed and momentum as established ties of community and social solidarity unraveled.

Against the prevailing romanticism, Shōzō urged people to not just look at autumn leaves in the mountains but understand real life, not just accept the expressed ideals but examine the practice. Knowledge had to be used to improve the lives of the people so it could only be developed by engaging with the real world, by understanding the problems the people faced, and by recognising what they knew as knowledge. Shōzō was critical of the imperial academies, and by 1918 there were five, which produced the bureaucrats, politicians, academics, and experts that ran the country because they were out of touch with the problems of the people. He advocated acquiring modern technical knowledge but found the experts in the universities ‘the great mechanism that destroys’ because they studied their subjects as abstract issues, and their objectives were not to better living conditions but to ensure growth.¹⁰³

Engineers represented the new order and approach favoured by the Meiji oligarchy. In the committees that the government established to investigate the Ashio copper mine pollution problems, the members and experts were largely from the imperial universities or government institutions, but there were differences among them. The agricultural

¹⁰² Kinmouth, Earl H.,(1980), “Nakamura Keiu and Samuel Smiles: A Victorian Confucian and a Confucian Victorian”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (June), pp. 535-556 URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1854916> .

¹⁰³ Kano Masanao. "The First Stirrings of Folk Scholarship (Minkangaku) in Modern Japan (1983)." *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 25 (2013): 179-90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43945393>. p.184

experts recognised the contamination created by mine effluents, but the engineering department experts refused to acknowledge this and stressed the comparative benefits of having mining for economic productivity and jobs. The elite knowledge created in the universities called western ideas knowledge and transformed the knowledge outside the academy into ‘traditional’ practices, customs, refusing to grant it even the status of knowledge. It was this biased approach that lay behind the ‘rich country, strong army’ approach that Shōzo took a stance against.¹⁰⁴

Breaking the Shackles of Knowledge

Shōzō talks of villages and towns being destroyed by government policy because for him, it is the village that is the site that best shows the dangers of the policies of building a ‘rich country and strong army’. As Shōzō writes, “ The slaves of knowledge will become the soldiers of the destruction of the state and society (dōrei ga shakai kōkka wo nakusu no heishi to naritaru 奴隷が社会国家を亡すの兵士トナリたる).¹⁰⁵

The Yanaka area was being devastated by floods and the outbreak of diseases that followed, but, as Tanaka began to see, it was not just about pollution and flooding, behind these problems was a story of corruption and power colluding to bring about this calamity. The administration, in collusion with business, was misusing the idea of ‘public interest’ for the interests of private industry. The collusion between corrupt politicians,

¹⁰⁴ Kano Masanao. "The First Stirrings of Folk Scholarship (Minkangaku) in Modern Japan (1983)." *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 25 (2013): 179-90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43945393>.pp.185-187.

¹⁰⁵ Tanaka Shōzo 1909.3.21, and Komatsu, 2001. p.513

businessmen, and bureaucracy was the cause of the problems the ordinary people were facing, for the death of the nation.

Shōzō argued that the ordinary people, (下性 kajo) had lost their livelihood and the problem of Yanaka bore the double burden of pollution and war, its lands poisoned, the people and their way of life dying. It was these very ordinary people who were sent off as soldiers to fight the war in the interests of business and politicians. Tanaka and his supporters, through their struggle against the state had begun to see the crucial link between knowledge and power and the need to oppose the increasing centralization of authority and policymaking. The fight against taxation was an important element in this fight but so was the battle to retain the lands in Yanaka because it represented an intellectual assault on the policies of ‘rich country, strong army’ (fukoku kyōhei 富国強兵).

A Poisoned Village and a Dying Nation: An Appeal

Yanaka was a ‘poisoned village of a dying nation’ (亡国水毒村) the destruction a product of the success of Meiji Japan in creating a militarily strong and economically powerful country but at the expense of the people. To counter this, it was necessary to form an alliance of the oppressed to abolish war, and Shōzō thought of going to the First Hague Conference called by Tsar Nicholas II that began a process to regulate the conduct of war. It was a meeting whose intellectual and political roots can be traced

back to the laws passed under Abraham Lincoln during the U.S civil war to bring about world peace. So even as Japan had defeated China, made Korea a protectorate, and seemed to be a first-class power for Tanaka Shōzō it was actually a ‘dying nation’ (bōkoku 亡国).

By the time Shōzo became involved with the struggle to stop the construction of the reservoir, he had come to recognize that merely providing studies to back up their demands would not move the government. He now began to plan to appeal to the emperor directly. Shōzō’s ideas of rule had envisioned the emperor as ruling jointly with the people, holding power in trust. This idea led him to think that petitioning the emperor was a way to right wrong and change policy. His idea of petitioning has often been compared to peasant petitions of earlier times, but his actions were grounded within a different political philosophy. The decision was not easy as trying to hand a petition to the emperor was punishable by death, but he was willing to make himself a martyr to the cause.

The historiography around what motivated Shozō to attempt to petition the emperor, his ideas about the role and function of the emperor, have changed over the years. In earlier writings, such as that of his contemporary Kinoshita Naoe, (木下尚江 1869-1937), this was seen as an impulsive act in the tradition of peasant leaders, martyrs who selflessly tried to highlight wrongs, (gimin 義民) but after the 1977-78 edition of his collected works came out it began to be seen as more of a strategic act to revive the movement against the Ashio copper mine. Scholarly interpretations began to change from the 1980 and 1990s as greater

emphasis was given to his larger political perspective and to his ideas about the emperor. Often Shōzō's views of the importance of the emperor have been underplayed.

The Japanese scholar Komatsu, after a detailed exploration of the historiography, argues that just as the constitution was central to Shōzō's politics, the emperor was also a crucial element and should not be ignored. The violation of the spirit of the constitution was destroying politics, the land and harming imperial divinity and virtue (shin sei 神聖 and toku 徳). The government had used the emergency powers granted by the constitution to hollow out the authority of the Diet. Shōzō had long felt that the emperor should issue an edict to protect the people and act like a principled ruler (utoku no kunshu 有徳 の君主) and, as he wrote in the petition, implement the law correctly (teikoku kenpō oyobi hōritsu wo seitōni jikkō 帝国憲法及び法律を正當に実行). The Ashio problem was just an occasion to address his larger concerns.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Komatsu, 2001. pp.431-435.



Image: Contemporary woodblock print depicting Tanaka Shōzo attempting to petition the emperor.¹⁰⁷

Shōzō's petition was composed together with Kōtoku Shusui (1871-1911 幸徳秋水).¹⁰⁸ Tanaka Shōzō, on December 10, 1901, attempted to directly present the petition, an illegal act punishable by death, to the emperor. Luckily for him, his act was dismissed as that of a mad man and his life spared. One phrase in the petition stands out “And so to my mind, let the unbroken traditions of the imperial house’s morality go out to all of Japan; do so, and the people will surely honour you”. Proper government

¹⁰⁷ <http://gauss0.livedoor.blog/archives/8415883.html>

¹⁰⁸ Notehelfer, F.G. 1971. *Kōtoku Shūsui: portrait of a Japanese radical*. Cambridge: University Press.
Tierney, Robert Thomas. 2015. *Monster of the twentieth century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's first anti-imperialist movement*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

was grounded in the right morality that recognized the rights of the people and the land.¹⁰⁹

This petition was not just about the Ashio copper mine pollution but really about the deteriorating political climate and saving both the people and the state. The increasing military expenditure because of the Sino-Japanese war was financed by higher taxes, a burden felt by the ordinary person. The poor were paying for the war through taxes and dying as recruits in the army. The ordinary people, Shōzō argued, were being sacrificed by the state for the benefit of a few.

Emperor as Protector of the People

The constitution was the key to the proper functioning of the state. The wealth of the country could only be built by respecting the people, protecting finances, and ensuring that development did not upset the functioning of nature that belonged to everyone. The political parties were not fulfilling their duty but had become representatives of industrial and business interests and not the public interest. The administration supported this political regime by using the police to suppress dissent. Shōzō, in opposition to both Itō Hirobumi and many of his own democratic supporters, wanted the emperor to have the power to directly issue a petition, which was not given to him by the constitution, to protect the people's welfare.

¹⁰⁹ Stolz, Robert. 2014, *Bad Water Nature Politics and Pollution in Japan 1870-1950*, (Durham: Duke University Press), pp.208, The quote is: “伏^{ふし}テ 惟^{おもんみ}ミルニ、陛下不世出ノ資ヲ以^{もつ}テ列聖ノ余烈ヲ紹^つギ、徳^{とく}四海ニ^{あふ}溢^いレ、威^{いは}八紘ニ^は展^のブ”

Shōzō marks out the oppositional categories that distinguish the government's project from his vision. He had begun his fight for realizing democracy first in the prefectural assembly and then the Diet, but now he saw the village as the site where the destructive policies of building a 'rich country and strong army' could best be understood, and around the village, he could mount an attack against the foundational pillars that supported such destructive policies. In an essay titled, a history of corruption, he underlined the need to use the constitution and law to address the problems that had led to the death of the country. It was written immediately after over 251 towns, and villages were affected by the flooding of the Watarase River. In this history, he marked out the fundamental opposition between 'progress' and 'freedom': Great Japan was progress, a hard foreign policy, military spending, high land taxes, an immoral cabinet while the ideals he upheld were centred around a 'little Japan', which represented the ideals of freedom, and the protection of the people's welfare.¹¹⁰ The government had drummed up support for the war, with leaders like Itō, Itagaki, who, according to Shōzō had sold the country. Shōzō, however, held fast to his principles based on law and morality. Quoting Confucius, he wrote that law comes out of morality and morality is the basis for law. Japan commits aggression in China and in comparable ways, sells inferior goods (不品行 fuhinko) in the U.S, both are morally condemnable dishonourable actions. In China it is the Japanese military, and in the U.S, Japanese merchants are trying to compete with the mills of Lyons by selling shoddier goods. The merchants, by sending inferior goods and the bureaucracy because of corruption, are not functioning according to the law and morality.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Tanaka Shōzō senshu Vol. II. (田中正造選集 第二巻), pp.248-249. "Fuhai no rekishi" 1896.3.31 (腐敗の歴史), and pp.319-323.

¹¹¹ Illustration of China as a diseased body in, *Tanaka Shōzō senshū*, Vol. 2. 2013 Iwanami Shōten Vol 2. p.260-261



Image: Illustration of China as a diseased body. Text on left reads, “Japanese administrators like the scholar bureaucrats and officers in China only use their merit and experience for themselves” (Nihon no gyōseikan wa shina no gushi sugashōko no gotoku kō wa onore ni tatakau wa hei nomi 日本行政官は支那の軍士官将校の如く功は己れに戦は兵のみ)

The dying nation was no longer the ‘colonised’ Other but Japan the ‘rich country strong army’ state. Great Japan had ruined the land and the people. Shōzō had turned around the prevailing view of Japan as a successful modern nation, economically rich and militarily powerful, to argue that these were the very signs of Japan’s failure. The country was dying.

The Village of Ancient Times

War and increasing tax burdens endangered livelihoods and created social turmoil, which government and politicians were aware of and sought to address, but their objectives were different. They were seeking social stability and economic growth, and to achieve these ends, the government sought to control and suppress opposition but also address the concerns of the people. The rural regeneration or local improvement movement *chihō kairyō unō* 地方改良運動 was born of the concerns of enlightened bureaucrats but grounded in a conservative vision to diffuse and redirect social tensions.¹¹²

Administered by the Home Ministry from 1900-18, local improvement meant doing away with regressive traditions and promoting progressive practices through the promotion of thrift and frugality. It also meant re-organising local administrative units and breaking local autonomy. Grounded in a paternalistic vision of promoting harmony between rural classes, it envisioned society as the family unit writ large, and just as love and harmony bound the family unit with the household head as a benevolent patriarch, so too should be the bonds of society.¹¹³

¹¹² Pyle, Kenneth B. 1973. "The Technology of Japanese Nationalism: The Local Improvement Movement, 1900-1918". *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 33 (1): 51-65.) and Gluck, Carol. 1985. *Japan's modern myths: ideology in the late Meiji period*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press. pp. 157-212.

¹¹³

Along with this was a redrawing of the boundaries of local administrative units that ignored long-established historical ties. One major aspect of this re-organisation was the amalgamation of Shinto shrines under the 1908 Shrine Merger Act in a government-defined hierarchy, with the imperial shrines of Ise at the top. Shinto priests would be paid by the government. The argument was that one well-kept shrine for one village was rational. However, aside from the destruction of local traditions and the impact of this on the people's beliefs and practices, it also opened the protected shrine forests to commercial exploitation by the timber industry. In his opposition, Shōzō's critique resembles Minakata Kumagusu's (1867-1941 南方熊楠) complex critique of shrine amalgamation that layers of damage that his bureaucratic approach caused to spiritual traditions, to the environment, and to local autonomy. Minakata calls for the protection of the environment is linked to both their spiritual beliefs but also to their local autonomy, and these are not national assets but part of world heritage.¹¹⁴

Shōzō's critique of the government-supported rural regeneration programme was based on a completely different understanding of local autonomy, and he linked his critique of what was happening in Japan to the government's aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. The village was for Shōzō, not a unit constructed by the state but, as he wrote in 1901, one with a long history from 'ancient times' (korai 古来). It was these natural villages based not on unity around the village notables, as was the basis for administrative villages, but on the basis of those who lived there the

¹¹⁴ Tankha, Brij. 2000, "Minakata Kumagusu: Fighting Shrine Unification in Meiji Japan", *China Report* (New Delhi), pp.555-572.Vol 36, No.4, October-December, 2000

‘residents’ (jūmin 住民) who formed the community. This was the same idea expressed in the Ueki Emori draft constitutional proposal Article 40, “The citizens and people of Japan are all those who live (在る) in the political society (seiji shakai 政治社会) of Japan”.¹¹⁵ This spirit that united them (kōkyōshin 公共心 or kyōdōshin 共同心) was of equals and not the state-sponsored paternalism that was the basis of the government’s programme. Shōzō writes in 1912 that this ancient right of local autonomy (chōson jiji tenrai no onore tokuken 町村自治—天来の己得権) was greater than the protection of the ‘national polity’ (kokutai 国体) in the constitution and was absolute and without limitation. The village unit was not just a community of people but was also inextricably linked to the landscape where they lived constituting a life of mutual dependence and cooperation (chōkyō kyōryoku seikatsu no soai 公共協力相愛の生活).

This criticism also linked Japanese colonization with the transformation of Japan into a country where the ruling ideology was supported by those over whom domination was exercised. Shōzō saw the increasing frustration of the common people caused by this acceptance the danger of this internal domination. All over Japan, Shōzō wrote, that people were celebrating the occupation of Korea with lantern procession (chōchin gyōretsu wo mōkugeki 提灯行列を目撃). This deepening militarisation of Japanese

¹¹⁵ My translation Ienaga Saburō. (家永三郎 (Ed.). 1965 *Gendai nihon shisō taikēi 3 minshushugi*, (現代日本思想体系 3 民主主義 Chikuma Shobo. pp.74-90,

society had led to a situation where the country was ‘eating its own stomach’ (自分の胃袋を食い破るまで).

By the end of his life, the core of Shōzō’s revolutionary import of his ideas was not around the construction of the constitution, or his views of the emperor, or environmental destruction, but it lay in his understanding of local autonomy as the root of an equal society and his rejection of an absolute state. However, in his focus on the village he does not seem to have linked the fate of the villagers affected by the mine effluents and the working condition of the mineworkers. Worker’s organisations were few till the early twentieth century, but more than half of the labour disputes that took place occurred in the coal and metal mines. One of the effects of forcing the Ashio mine to control the discharge of effluents was that the increased expenditure by the company led it to lower the wages of the mine workers. This drop-in wages for a section of the workers was one of the reasons behind the labour riot in the Ashio mines in February 1907.¹¹⁶

Formulating a Theory of Rights

By 1907-08 in the face of government indifference and more brutal police attacks on demonstrators, Shōzō and his supporters began to question the government’s idea of public interest. The government was

¹¹⁶ Komatsu, 2001. pp.562-572. The place of workers in Tanaka Shōzō’s writings needs to be explored further. On the Ashio workers riot see Nimura, Kazuo. 1998. *The Ashio riot of 1907: a social history of mining in Japan*. Translated by Terry Boardman and Andrew Gordon. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Niimura wrote the essays in Japanese between 1959 and the early 1970’s well before his critique of Maruyama Masao, Okochi Kazuo, and the lack of autonomy of workers became widely accepted. Michael somewhat unfairly criticizes his ideas as now widely accepted. See Lewis, Michael. 1999. "The Remaking of the Japanese Working Class". *Labour / Le Travail*. 43: 203-210.

using many ways to break the resistance of the villagers and undermine the movement. The Home Minister Hara Kei (1856-1921 原敬) joined the first Saionji cabinet (1849-1940 Saionji Kinmochi 西園寺公望, first cabinet 1906-08) and worked to encourage the villagers to move from Yanaka by giving them compensation. Hokkaido had been opened to colonization by mainlanders after the Meiji government came to power, both as a means to assert its control and to reduce social and economic tension by the offer of free land.

Furukawa was well connected with the ruling elites and was in a strong position to shape government policy. Hara Kei had worked as Vice-President of the Furukawa corporation till 1906. Furukawa had also built close connections by employing graduates from the Tokyo Imperial University engineering departments and former government officials and was able to get their support.¹¹⁷ Shōzō, in an article filled with humour, writes of the variety of stray dogs that are seen in villages, cities, some fierce others gentle, but the worst, he notes, are the dogs that help Furukawa, the ‘bitter enemies of the poor’.¹¹⁸

The earlier defense of people’s rights was based on the right to private property, the people had as much right as the company. In the Diet and later fighting for the rights of the people against the Ashio copper mine Shōzō argued that the people had as much right as Furukawa on the basis of Article 27 of the constitution, which guaranteed protection of private

¹¹⁷ The Ashio office was run by Minami Taizō (南泰三,) a former bureaucrat of the Finance Ministry who became head of the Tokyo Mine Inspectorate,. Minami had signed the third anti-pollution edict in 1897 and then joined the Furukawa corporation in 1900, becoming the head of the corporation in 1903. Kazuo Niimura, p.28

¹¹⁸ Tanaka Shōzō. 1989. sVol. 3. pp.311.

property. But Shōzō moves from a general public interest to argue for the protection of ‘life’ (seimei 生命) that is the basis for human rights (人権 jinken). These rights are based on the idea that land and wealth are given as a trust by god. Rights cannot be bartered but are commonly held.¹¹⁹

Shōzō’s appeal is perhaps best expressed in his declaration in 1912 when he wrote “We have a constitution. Unfortunately this constitution is based on [narrow] Japanese principles, not on universal [natural] principles (*hiroki kempō, uchūteki kempō* 広き憲法宇宙の憲法). As such, even if Japan were to die, he urges, we are under no obligation to die with it. That is if the big Japan that the oligarchy is fighting to build dies the people are not obliged to die as they are upholding not the narrow regulations of the Meiji constitution but one based on natural principles.¹²⁰

In the aftermath of the petition, Shōzō’s attitude towards the emperor gradually changed though he never outright rejected the importance of the emperor. He began to criticize the vast differences between the luxury enjoyed by the emperor and the common people, pointing to the vast hunting estates owned by the imperial household in Shizuoka and other places.¹²¹ The High Treason trial of 1910-11 and the republican revolution of 1911 in China affected and helped shape Shōzō’s view of the emperor. The historian Kano Masano, in his commentary, links his views of the emperor to the 1911 republican revolution in China.¹²²

In the aftermath of the High Treason incident, 1910-1911, where twelve people, including one woman, were accused of conspiring to kill

¹¹⁹ Tanaka Shōzō . 1989.. Vol. 5. p.313.

¹²⁰ Tanaka Shōzō . 1989. Vol.5. p.330.

¹²¹ Komatsu, 2001. p.529. Shōzō wrote this criticism in 1904.

¹²² Kano Masano commentary to Vol 7 of Tanaka Shōzō. 1989.

the emperor and executed in January 1911, repression against any opposition increased. In fact, moving away from the imperial eras that divide modern Japanese history would mark this as one of the major dividers after the restoration of 1868.¹²³

The plot may have been fabricated, but few knew that at that time, and the trial was used to strengthen the Peace Preservation laws to increase suppression of left movements and the executions, including that of a woman for the first time in Japanese history, ushered in a decade of ‘winter’ silencing all voices of questioning or dissent. Shōzō, like many of his contemporaries, was not aware of the police fabrication, and since he had worked with Kōtoku Shusui, one of the executed, he was particularly careful to be seen to be upholding constitutional democracy. However, he continued to stress the symbolic role of the emperor and underlined the fact that the emperor never exercised any personal authority. His views on the emperor were comparable to that of his contemporaries such as the historian Tsuda Sōkichi (1873-1961 津田左右吉) and Wada Tetsujiro as like them he began to see the emperor as a cultural symbol of Japan.¹²⁴

The dominant view in Japan of the overthrow of the Qing and the formation of a republican government in China was to underplay the revolutionary significance and separate it from Japanese politics. Revolution was defined as a quintessentially Chinese characteristic with a long history and contrasted with the continuity of Japan’s unique “national body” (kokutai 国体), which was based on the divinity of the imperial

¹²³ Gavin, Masako, and Ben Middleton. 2013. *Japan and the high treason incident*. London: Routledge.

¹²⁴ Komatsu, 2001. 538-39

house. Inukai Tsuyoshi, (1855-1932 犬養毅), the conservative politician and later prime minister, for instance, argued that China was free to choose its political path but it was a country that had historically experienced revolutions while Japan's kokutai had continued unchanged. A view supported by Toyama Mitsuru (1855-1944 頭山滿), a leading right-wing ideologue, who said it would be insulting to Japan's kokutai if people thought that a republican revolution in China would affect Japan.¹²⁵

Shōzō saw it very differently. In fact, he saw the revolutionary upsurge in China as a warning to Japan to strengthen constitutional government and thereby strengthen the country. Shōzō begins to relativise the imperial constitution, that is it holds no absolute value based on an unchanging kokutai. He reads it as a dictionary of people's rights and begins to emphasise the spirit rather than an particular article. There is hardly any mention in Shōzō's diary of the Meiji emperor's death, he merely notes the change in era names, from Meiji to Taishō.

A Collectivity comes to Maturity

It was after the French and U.S constitutions that Immanuel Kant wrote in praise of the written constitution as a guarantee of permanent peace. He was opposed to democracy, which at that time carried the meaning of 'direct democracy' or majority rule as this would pose a threat to individual liberty. Fredric Jameson argues that Kant in writing about ways of ensuring permanent peace was not arguing for a particular type of government or state, rather he was signaling a moment when a collectivity

¹²⁵ Komatsu, 2001.pp.529-542

comes to “maturity” by taking the formation of a new society into its own hands. The importance given to a written constitution, Jameson says, has led to the idea that the endpoint of political theory lies in the drafting of a constitution, conceived as the end of revolution rather than its apotheosis.¹²⁶

The political fight to expand representation was fought at various levels. The strengthening of electoral democracy was done by making the political parties key players in decision making. One major step was the formation of party cabinets, the first formed by Hara Takeshi in 1918 and the other the movement to gain universal male suffrage, finally achieved in 1925. Trade unions began to emerge in the mining and textile industries but were small and the government took strong measures to suppress them. It was not till the early decades of the twentieth century that large scale trade unions began to organise and agitate for worker rights. These struggles overlapped with, and were equally a struggle to becoming producers of knowledge.

Shōzō’s political activities led to the development of his ideas of democracy and education and the recognition that these were inextricably linked. His thinking was based on religious ideas but incorporated the new

¹²⁶ Immanuel Kant.1795. *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm>, and Fredric Jameson. 2016. “An American Utopia” in Slavoj Žižek (editor), *An American Utopia Dual Power and the Universal Army*, Verso Books. pp.1-96, particularly pp.22-24. https://dl1.cuni.cz/pluginfile.php/849353/mod_resource/content/1/Jameson.pdf

secular knowledge of his times. He began his political life defending the public interest, that is of the nation, which he saw being trampled by the oligarchy and administration as they represented the ‘private interests’ of business. Gradually this conception of public rights broadened to include what he called ‘human rights’, (jinken 人權) which in turn were based on the right to life for all (seimei 生命). Opposing capitalist modernity as constituted by a centralized nation-state he struggled in the interests of the poor and marginalized and came to an understanding of the crucial role of knowledge in realizing democracy

CONCLUSION

Democracy is not just about political institutions, parliamentary representation, the constitution, and law, though they are important, but about the ability of people to be part of an equal political community where they can shape their lives. The written constitution had come to symbolize a modern nation, but in fact, it had instituted a different type of repression that could only be fought by articulating a new political community. In the foundational period of modern Japan, various groups struggled with articulating an agenda that would address the issues of equality and development. The oligarchy and the groups that supported it were armed with a powerful political agenda of becoming a ‘rich country, strong army’ state that was backed by state power both of repression as well as material development that provided employment to large sections of society.

Shōzō, to use the words of Kano Masano, fought against the whole idea of ‘rich country, strong army’, his appeal, to begin with, was framed within the idea of power entrusted to the emperor by the people. The emperor as symbol of the powers of the community had a strong appeal but it could not prevail nor even counter the more powerful appeal of a state-centred nationalism based on a divine emperor. The reservoir he fought to prevent was built by 1915, the Furukawa zaibatsu, which ran the Ashio Copper mine, later became the Fuji Electric company, a joint venture with Siemens, and then Fujitsu, the second oldest IT company in the world after IBM. In 1954 Fujitsu built the biggest supercomputer in the world. The transformation of the Furukawa zaibatsu from commodity traders to mining and then to computers represents the trajectory of modern Japan’s

economic growth from one based on heavy industrialization to the new digital economy. The powerful appeal of this political project cannot be minimized, but neither should the work of critical opposition that exposed the flaws and biases undermining, modifying, and offering alternative ways of being be dismissed.

Shōzō's political fight may have been contained, but the very fact of opposition pushed the boundaries of what should constitute the political community. This intellectual legacy was carried on and developed through diverse movements, many inspired by his ideas, to form communities based on egalitarian ideals. One major strand of this was the spread of 'intentional communities', communes that were inspired by the idea of placing the 'village' as the site of struggle against the project of modernity.¹²⁷ The creation of democratic institutions has always been a battle, politics is war by other means, as Michel Foucault, reversing Clausewitz, put it so aptly. The formative phase of democracy in Japan gave rise to contests and debates that placed in a comparative perspective point to understanding democracy and constitutional government not as a set of institutions but as a practice, a political project always in the making.

Democratic regimes, however, defined, vary considerably in their political practice, and constitutions reflect their character. The Meiji constitution was a gift to the people, but in other contexts, constitutions have been gifts or concessions of the elite to the people. The Indian constitution assembly, for instance, was not popularly elected, and there was little influence on its deliberations by the people. The constitution

¹²⁷ Konishi Sho. 2013. *Anarchist modernity: cooperatism and Japanese-Russian intellectual relations in modern Japan*.

retained colonial laws, emergency powers, and ease of amendment made the state powerful enough to override individual or state rights. A constitution opens new possibilities for emancipatory politics, but it can also be employed as a ‘spectacle of emancipation’ to quote Rohit De writing of the Indian constitution, where there is a gap between the ideals of the written text and the violence of law in daily practice.¹²⁸ Rohit De goes on to argue that breaking out of this limiting binary allows us to see the profound transformation of everyday life and how what he calls ‘constitutional consciousness’, took root in the popular imagination. This provided the basis for a democracy, as people used litigation to get their rights.

In Meiji Japan, what can be called ‘constitutional consciousness’ was displayed in a different way in the extraordinary number of societies that sprang up to draft constitutional proposals. These proposals varied in their approaches, inspired by European examples but the drafters exercised their choice in picking and choosing depending on how they evaluated. It was not a monolithic West that they saw but different political communities.¹²⁹ This movement to define the political community across the country pushed the oligarchy in the direction of drafting a constitution. The constitution was not a gift but a grudging concession.

¹²⁸ De, Rohit. 2018. *A People's Constitution The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. pp.5-10

¹²⁹ A cautionary reminder but it cannot be ignored that the West, without any political boundaries, represents a civilization. It functions as a social power while at the same time mystifying it. Today it is often equated with the ‘free world, with the U.S as it’s leader. Lazarus N (2002). The fetish of “the West” in postcolonial theory,” in: Bartolovich, C, Lazarus N (eds). 2002. *Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Gidwani makes the important distinction that capital is not universal, as Lazarus argues, but universalizing, which is closer in spirit to Marx. Gidwani, V. K. 2004. “The Limits to Capital: Questions of Provenance and Politics”. *Antipode*, 36(3), 527–542.

Many of the proponents of constitutional government soon began to realise that the Meiji constitution was a political device to control and regulate, and that an emancipatory politics could only be realised if people could determine administrative policy and national goals. The political organisations and electoral system, however, did not appear for many as offering the best way of realising their goals.

Tanaka Shōzō, through his work as a political activist to address the effects of pollution caused by the Ashio copper mine on the lives and work of the people in the region, realised the limits of constitutional democracy and party politics. He saw that capitalist modernity, based on the exploitation of the land and the people, was supported by an educational structure that actually devalued the people. The intellectual environment ensured that certain voices would not be heard. The oligarchy and the forces behind the developmental policies were enraptured by the modernist dream of engineering a new society. The political and educational systems were part of a 'police order' that defined who was included and who excluded.

Democracy, as Jacques Rancière argues, cannot be merely defined as a political system, one among many, characterized simply by another division of power. In such an environment, inequality is no longer the arbitrary distribution of wealth and power but is the basis for what is called a 'rational' society that puts people in their 'proper place'. It is more profoundly defined as a certain sharing of the perceptible, a particular redistribution of its sites. These divisions exclude and silence certain

groups, perceptions, and ideas.¹³⁰ To counter the abstract universalism coming from Europe that devalued the history, intellectual traditions, and lived experience of the people, Shōzō developed the basis for resistance on local autonomy and a methodology to transform the conceptual basis of the educational system through Yanaka-ology. This countered both the centralisation that took decision-making out of the hands of the people and the domination of educational structures set up by the government to produce the leaders and builders of Japan based on acquiring the latest and best technologies and ideas. This centralisation of power fuelled the drive to expand state control within the country and expand the empire through wars.

Yanaka-ology for Shōzō was a counter to this abstract universalism sweeping Japan providing a local universalism based on a critique of Western capitalist modernity. His was not a ‘pedagogic politics’, in the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty writing about leaders such as Nehru and Nyere, but one where he assumed equality as his starting point.¹³¹ It was this cutting up (decoupage) of the sensible that allowed him to counter the policies and perceptions based on what was recognised as knowledge and institutionalised in the ‘modern’ educational system of schools and universities that, in fact, served to exclude. Shōzō’s approach was to initiate movements where the people became creators of knowledge,

¹³⁰ Pelletier, Caroline, 2009. “Emancipation, Equality and Education: Rancière’s Critique of Bourdieu and the Question Of Performativity”,
https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10003196/1/Pelletier_2009_Education_Equality_and_Emancipation137.pdf p.9

¹³¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty.2005. “Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture”
Economic and Political Weekly. Vol. 40, No. 46 (Nov. 12-18, 2005), pp. 4812-4818 (7 pages)
Published by: [Economic and Political Weekly](#). p. 4814

knowledge that would let them define national policy and goals. His political agenda was to build the basis of an equal society. His attempt to work within the boundaries of the sensible ended with the attempt to appeal to the emperor. He then found in the struggle of the people suffering from the pollution caused by the Ashio copper mine a way to challenge the fundamental basis of the Meiji oligarchy's political project by listening and speaking to those who were not heard nor had been granted a voice.

I began with the anti-pollution movements of the 1960s and how this helped to bring greater recognition to earlier struggles against the destruction of the environment but Shōzō, and for many of his compatriots, these struggles over environmental destruction were always linked to the livelihood of the people, livelihood in the broadest sense of encompassing the material, intellectual and religious life. He struggled to dismantle the political hierarchies that the Meiji oligarchy was putting into place. Forms of constitutionalism were borrowed from Europe, but the politics of equality drew sustenance from and developed through the daily struggles of the 'ordinary people, who used the new political institutions by drawing sustenance from earlier religious ideas and traditions of protest to question the constraints of imperial democracy. Shōzō was part of a long line of thinkers and activists who recognised that capitalist democracy is a regime of control with a crucial place occupied by the military apparatus, both for repressing popular movements and for colonial expansion, and he fought single-mindedly to create the possibilities of what Marx called a 'true' democracy. As the historian Kano Masanao recognised decades ago Tanaka Shōzō dedicated his life to fighting for the ordinary people based on the understanding that that law was a public good for the protection of the people and when it was used to suppress them in the private interests

of a few then the people had the right to rebel (hanran ken 反乱権) to protect the people's spirit of autonomy (jiritsuteki shimin seishin 自立的市民精神).¹³²

¹³² Kano, Masanao. 鹿野政直著 1977. *Kindai seishin no dōtei: nashonarizumu wo megutte*. Tōkyō: Kashinsha. 近代精神の道程 : ナショナリズムをめぐって Kashinsha 花神社. See pp.196-199.

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