That the Meiji Restoration marked Japan’s prorution as a modern industrial nation-state has become a commonplace among those who study Japanese political history. The event may lack the romantic drama and mythology of the French revolutionary upheaval of almost a century before, yet the Restoration has remained a source of fascination for scholars seeking patterns in the events that transcend national boundaries to form the seamless web of human history.

Historical watersheds such as the Meiji Restoration deepen in significance in times of perceived crisis; and amidst the mounting social, economic, and political tensions of the late Taishō and early Shōwa periods, leftist intellectuals in Japan turned their gaze toward the Meiji Restoration in the hope of discovering some key that might enable them to fashion a more propitious alternative to the emerging militarist recourse. Perhaps systematic comparison of Japan’s experience since the late Tokugawa era with the great upheavals that ushered bourgeois democracy into western Europe would reveal the specific circumstances that facilitated this transition in the one case.
and impeded it so heavily in the other. More urgently, as activist intellectuals committed to the unity of theory and practice, Japanese Marxist scholars were convinced that the past could offer clues to behaviors and policies that could be replicated or repudiated as they struggled to remold Japan to conform to their own visions of its promise.

Having resolved to confront the Meiji Restoration historically, leftist intellectuals—those determined to take Japan to and beyond a fully functioning bourgeois democracy toward socialism—were by no means unified on what significance they discerned in the Restoration. At issue was how to characterize the historical trajectory on which Japan found itself in the 1920s and 1930s and how to interpret the role of the Restoration in setting that course. The comparison with western Europe only complicated the matter: The abstract theory and often contradictory and perplexing interpretations of events in England, France, and Germany bequeathed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels could offer general guidance at best on how to assess the world-historical significance of the Meiji Restoration. The actual legacies of 1688 and 1789 in contrast to Marx’s and Engels’s schematic portrayal of the transition from feudalism and autocracy to bourgeois democracy, were ambiguous indeed, as the following discussion will illustrate. More disturbingly, the Meiji Restoration seemed to represent a pattern of events and consequences so different from England’s Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution that it would require a major effort to fit them into the schema of bourgeois revolution at all.

This difficulty, not unfamiliar to scholars of our own time, is reflected in the widespread acceptance of the view that if the Restoration was indeed a revolution, it was a revolution from above. The Meiji state took the preeminent role in spurring Japan to industrialize, and the Meiji oligarchy conferred a constitution rather than its being produced as the result of a spontaneous push for popular sovereignty. Well before the phrase revolution from above came into vogue, this persuaded many that what we witnessed in the Restoration were forces diametrically opposed to those rising from frustrated peasants, sans-culottes, and bourgeois in seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century France. In the past two decades, inspired in large part by Barrington...
Moore’s comparison of transitions from agrarian to industrial society in Europe, Russia, and Japan, scholars have increasingly targeted the conception of revolution from above as an analytical tool for studying the political and economic progression of late-developing societies; and they have widely cited the Meiji Restoration as a successful prototype of a phenomenon that also occurred in Prussia under Otto von Bismarck and in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin.

Moore’s interpretation is very compelling, arguing that changes in agrarian social structure determined whether the transition to industrialized society was accomplished through bourgeois revolutions from below or state-led revolutions from above. Specifically, he contends that the critical variables are the extent of agriculture’s commercialization, the landed agrarian aristocracy’s ability to adapt to that commercialization, and the industrial bourgeoisie’s presence or absence. In considering the Meiji Restoration, however, the dichotomy between the two kinds of revolution ought not to be drawn too sharply. After all, the Meiji leaders who undertook the industrialization of Japan themselves emerged from below and participated in a political and military rebellion that toppled the two hundred-year-old Tokugawa shogunate. There are thus antecedent factors to be sought in the bakumatsu (late Tokugawa period) to account for the change in regime from below that in turn made possible the modernizing revolution from above. Recognizing this conceptual dilemma, Japanese Marxists in the 1920s and 1930s analyzed both components of the Restoration. Depending on which aspect was emphasized, the Restoration might or might not be consistent with the concept of bourgeois revolution; and its consequences—and the prospects for a successful socialist revolution in Japan—might appear to be more or less divergent from those of the schema of bourgeois development posited by Marx and Engels.

Of course, the visions of left-wing intellectuals were not the only contenders with official policies in the prewar period; nor were leftists alone in seeking meaning and practical policy direction in the Meiji Restoration. There were at least three distinct categories of intellectuals in this era, and all three groups exhibited profound ambivalence toward the Meiji Restoration. This was true even of the first group, whom we may call, after Antonio Gramsci,
“traditional intellectuals.” These thinkers included men like Hozumi Yatsu-uka, Kakei Katsuhiko, and Uesugi Shinkichi. They served the Meiji regime and its successors by helping to create, sustain, and propagate the myth of the kokutai (national polity) that supported the political order. The astute political tactician Niccolò Machiavelli once counselled that it was prudent for a prince to establish a wholly new political order because the prince had the ability to convince his subjects that “nothing has changed.” In discussing regimes that have come to power through revolutionary uprisings, Machiavelli’s dictum might advisedly be recast to read that the monarch—or the victorious revolutionary party—can persuade his subjects that everything has changed. Hence, the ambiguous position of even the Meiji’s own traditional intellectuals vis-à-vis the Restoration. In order to defend the new Meiji regime, at one and the same time, one needed to emphasize that everything had changed—with the fall of the shogunate, legitimate political authority, the power to rule (tōchiken), had been restored to the emperor from whom it had been usurped two centuries before—and yet that nothing had changed: Power was restored to an imperial authority that had always wielded it in better, more halcyon days.

The family conception of the state with the emperor at the apex enabled Meiji ideologists to accomplish these seemingly irreconcilable tasks. Emphasis on the fall of the usurper would assuage the anger of those who had been discontented under the old regime. No longer would religious authority, military power, and political power be separated: Henceforth, they would all reside in the emperor where they belonged. There were, however, also those who would not feel comforted by such assurances. Change is frightening, so much so that even if one were miserable, one might well prefer the known quantity and quality of the familiar misery that one experienced from day-to-day over the uncertain risks associated with an unknown future. Thus, a revolutionary situation also requires an effort to comfort those whose fears might overcome their relief with an account of the new regime in terms of the remanence of relics of the past, renewed and strengthened to nurture the new order. It was the genius of the kokutai myth that it could also persuade that nothing had changed. The sanctity of the emperor, with his divine origins and

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6 Traditional intellectuals were to be distinguished from organic intellectuals who emerged out of or expressed the alternative perspectives of the subaltern classes. Gramsci had used the term intellectuals rather broadly to refer to those engaged in mental (as opposed to manual) labor in the service of the regime. Thus, jurists, technicians, clergy, and bureaucrats all qualified for this appellation. See Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. and trans. (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 5–13.


unbroken line, remained intact, as did the unity of his people, even after the multifarious changes initiated by the Meiji oligarchy. The new, in short, incarnated the immanent past, inasmuch as it fulfilled the Imperial Will.

The efficacy of this aspect of the kokutai myth was such that it inspired new Restorationist efforts decades later. Believing that if the Meiji Restoration had been revolutionary, Taishō (1912–26) and Shōwa (beginning in 1926) had been too much so, advocates of a Shōwa Restoration and like-minded rightists⁹ comprised a second group who were ambivalent toward the Meiji Restoration. The new generation of Restorationists affirmed the “restoration” of power to the emperor but argued that the Meiji oligarchs had gone astray when they allowed the values of the industrialized societies of western Europe to seep into Japan along with their technologies. The social problems (shakai mondai) afflicting Japan in Taishō and Shōwa, the movement for Taishō democracy, and the increasing acceptance of Minobe Tatsukichi’s heterodoxy elevating the ineffective Diet to an organ of the state were the consequences of the erosion of the Japanese essence that was incarnate in the emperor. They would be resolved only when the Restorationists, acting as direct agents of the Imperial Will, recovered the vital energies unleashed early in the Meiji Restoration and restored the emperor to his proper unrivalled position at the apex of the kokutai.¹⁰

Unlike the Shōwa Restorationists, Marxist-influenced nationalist socialists did not have difficulty with the industrializing or democratizing aspects of the Meiji program; but they shared the Restorationists’ conviction of Japan’s uniqueness and their reservations about those aspects of the Meiji Restoration that might be viewed as excessively imitative of Western Europe. As George Wilson has noted, Kita Ikki advocated “not . . . deliberate emulation of

⁹ In prewar Japan, the use of the terms left and right can be problematic because the distinction between the two political orientations is blurred by the presence of thinkers such as Kita Ikki, Takabatake Motoyuki, Akamatsu Katsumaro, and many others whose radicalism embraced elements conventionally associated with both extremes. Here the term the right is used with caution to refer to those who advocated the conservation and reinforcement of traditionalist, militarist, and authoritarian elements of the body politic; and the term the left refers to those who advocated the rapid abolition of these elements and their replacement by liberal, democratizing forces respectively. Marxists here are associated with the left, despite the unfortunate traditionalist and authoritarian Stalinist outcome of the application of Marxism to Russia because of the commitment to the dissolution of the state. Marxist national or state socialists are thus not assimilated to the left as it is used in this study. Compare the usage of Itō Takashi in “Shōwa seiji shi kenkyū no ichi shikaku” [One Perspective on the Study of Shōwa Political History], Shisō [Thought], no. 624 (June 1976), 215–28. Also compare the observations made in George M. Wilson, “Kita Ikki’s Theory of Revolution,” Journal of Asian Studies, 26:1 (November 1966), 89.

those societies which had advanced farther on the evolutionary scale, but a process of self-genesis through national awakening.” For Kita, the historical moment of the Meiji Restoration represented such a process and was the inspiration for beginning that process anew. Paradoxically, Kita rejected the mythology of the kokutai as something synthesized on the Prussian model of orchestrated nationalism; but his rejection of the way the myth was created and propagated did not mitigate his attachment to the content of that myth or to the imperial institution that was at its core. On the contrary, like Marxian national socialists Takabatake, Akamatsu, Sano Manabu, and members of the Kaitō-ha, Kita saw the essence of Japanese uniqueness in the Imperial Household, and he affirmed that aspect of the Meiji Restoration as placing it at the center of the polity. But unlike Kita, these Marxian national socialists shared the Restorationist and nōhon-shugi (agrarianism) distress over the shattering impact of capitalist industrialization on Japanese social structure. Thus, as these ideas amply demonstrate, the attitudes among right-wing thinkers toward the Meiji Restoration were neither simple nor uniform.

Ironically, the ambivalence of these thinkers toward the Restoration and its legacy often drew them close to the perspectives of liberal reformists and more radical leftist thinkers. Antipathy toward the official bureaucracy that had mushroomed with the expansiveness of the social and economic role of the post-Restoration state was keen among thinkers like Kita, who resented the interposition of the bureaucracy between the emperor and his people. But Kita also shared the view of many on the left end of the political spectrum that significant liberal elements inhered in the constitutional and institutional structures engendered by the Meiji Restoration and its aftermath. Taishō liberals, including Kawai Eijirō, Tanaka Ōdō, Ishibashi T anzan, Yoshino Sakuzō, and Nagai Ryūtarō, affirmed the first point of the Meiji emperor’s Five-Point Charter Oath as a liberal stipulation providing for democratic assemblies.14

12 Wilson, “Kita Ikki’s Theory of Revolution,” 94.
Similarly, Minobe Tatsukichi, who interpreted the Meiji Constitution as requiring that the Diet should function as a meaningful democratic element in the Japanese polity, countered the perspectives of Hozumi and Uesugi, who attributed absolute power to the emperor. Indeed, Ishibashi even saw in the Meiji Restoration a paradigm of national self-assertion that could serve as a model for a struggling China. Although he praised the Bolshevik Revolution as a victory for the Russian people, he dismissed it as a potential model for Japan. Ishibashi’s reservations were no doubt attributable to the fact that he, like most liberal reformers, was not drawn to the prospect of revolution. Among prewar liberals, only Kawai Eijirō, a disciple of T. H. Green’s socialist idealism, seemed to devote systematic attention to the theory and practice of revolution; yet he too rejected it in favor of a parliamentary path to democratic socialism. Thus, it fell to activist intellectuals farther to the left who shared a more sanguine view of the role of revolution in abetting human progress to conduct a thorough analysis of the Meiji Restoration in terms of the concept of bourgeois revolution.

For those farther to the left, as for all the political groups we have examined briefly here, ultimately the significance of the Meiji Restoration lay in what it could reveal about the dynamic interplay among the state and its bureaucracy, the imperial figurehead at its apex, and the Japanese people—in short, it had to do with the phenomenon of democratization and whether it was viewed as a positive or as a negative development. In the Marxist historical schema, it was the destiny of the bourgeois revolution to bring about increasing political democratization. In this sense, the significance of Meiji as bourgeois revolution and of bourgeois revolution in general is still very much in evidence in the suppression of democratic rebellion in Tiananmen Square alongside a wave of belated but dramatic upheavals across eastern Europe in a single year, two centuries after the French Revolution. We ask now how Japanese struggling for democracy sixty years ago envisaged bourgeois revolution and what forces, in their estimation, accelerated or retarded the flowering of bourgeois democracy in Japan. In so doing, we are inescapably drawn back to the earlier upheavals of France and England and must remind ourselves that even these classic bourgeois revolutions diverged greatly in their circumstances and in their outcomes.

The French Revolution and Problems in Conceptualizing Bourgeois Revolution

Like Western historians drawn to analyze the English and French revolutions, Japanese leftist intellectuals early in this century were attracted by the notion

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17 Hirai, Individualism and Socialism, 106.
of bourgeois revolution for many reasons. As Marxists, they saw class conflict and revolution as the motor force propelling history to higher and higher levels of human achievement. Consequently, and more importantly, if they were to believe that Marx’s promise of socialist revolution would be realized in Japan’s future, they needed to find an industrializing, democratizing bourgeois revolution in its past. They were bedeviled, in short, by the burden of Japanese exceptionalism. In Taishō and Shōwa, Japan’s fragile parliamentary democracy threatened not to blossom fully but to collapse into militaristic authoritarianism. Thus, like historians of Germany, another society that followed that course, Japanese scholars were challenged to explain why this should be so. The absence or incompleteness of the bourgeois revolution and the weakness or immaturity of the bourgeoisie that should have carried it to fruition seemed to hold the key to understanding the development or non-development of bourgeois democracy in Japan. 18

There were three models of bourgeois revolution that formed the basis for Marx’s and Engels’s descriptions of that crucial moment in the transition from feudalism to capitalism: first, seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century France, then nineteenth-century Prussia. Nevertheless, when one thinks of bourgeois revolution as a political process, the French Revolution immediately springs to mind. Over the past several decades, historians of France have converged on the view that the French Revolution did not in fact constitute a bourgeois revolution. 19 Nonetheless, critical aspects of the way we think about politics and revolutionary change emerged directly out of the

18 There is a striking similarity between the fascination among Japanese leftist scholars with the presence or absence of bourgeois revolution in Japan’s past, on the one hand, and the only recently challenged consensus among German historians that the weakness of parliamentary democracy and the eventual rise of Nazism in Germany lay in the absence of bourgeois revolution in Germany’s past. For cogent critiques of this German exceptionalism, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); and the essays collected in Geoff Eley, From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past (London and Boston: Allen and Unwin, Inc., 1986).

experience in France. As Geoffrey Best and Eugene Kamenka note, the term revolution in the political sense itself originated with the French Revolution. Prior to 1789, the term had referred primarily to the movement of the celestial bodies and secondarily to political change not necessarily of great consequence. But the term took on much more momentous connotations with the outbreak of the events in France. When informed of the storming of the Bastille, Louis XVI is said to have exclaimed, “But good God! This is a revolt!” “‘No Sire,’ replied the Duc [de Liancourt], ‘c’est la révolution’”—“this was a force of nature completely beyond human control.” From this point, the term revolution came to refer to the “violent transformation of the political and the supporting social arrangements of a country, replacing one species of ruler by another and giving itself and its people something of a new look.”

This concept of revolution, imbued with a sense of heroic action involving “the assertion of human subjectivity, of man as the master of history,” was reflected in Marx’s heralding of the French Revolution as the political rise of the bourgeoisie and in the bourgeoisie’s determination to remake the rest of the world in its own image. The revolution in France, more so than the English revolution, was universalistic in character, and out of it sprang not only a new genre of national politics and nationalist warfare but also a whole vocabulary that we associate with the ideas and politics of the modern national state: liberalism, nationalism, socialism, mass politics, even the concepts of political left and right, which came from the seats the French deputies took in their legislature.

This significance of revolutionary France was not unappreciated in Meiji Japan. Leaders of the Meiji civil rights movement (jiyū minken undo) drew heavily on Lockean thought on natural right and the rights of man, but this was Lockean thought filtered through Jean-Jacques Rousseau and into the French and American revolutions. The writings of Rousseau and Baron Charles de Montesquieu, as well as works on the French Revolution itself, were included in the curriculum of the Seidōkan (the Academy of the Right

22 Best, “Editor’s Introduction,” 2.
24 Kamenka, “Revolutionary Ideology,” 91; and Best, “Editor’s Introduction,” 6, 8–9.
Path) established circa 1881 by the Sanshisha political association to inculcate liberal values in Japanese youth. The left wing of this Meiji civil rights movement, particularly influenced by French political thought from the revolutionary era, popularized the concept of socialism, which eventually received support from young radicals. Subsequently, the liberals and radicals who formed the Shinjinkai (New Man Club) at Tokyo Imperial University in the Taishō period studied and translated the works of Rousseau and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon alongside writings of English and German political thinkers.

Nevertheless, Japanese leftists inspired by the example of the French Revolution would not necessarily find it easy to interpret it in macrohistorical terms, for the immediate and longer-term consequences of 1789 were ambiguous indeed. The difficulty here is not associated with the revolution’s onset, which clearly began in 1789, but with the uncertainty as to whether it ended in 1794 with the fall of Maximilien Robespierre on 9 Thermidor (July 27); in 1799 with Napoleon Bonaparte’s coup d’état; in 1804, when he crowned himself emperor; in 1814–15, with the Congress of Vienna and the restoration of power to Louis XVIII; in 1848, with the failure of the February revolution; or even in 1871 with the suppression of the Paris Commune and the inauguration of the Third Republic. At each stage, France experienced yet another change in political regime as the social forces unleashed in 1789 continued to evolve below. If the French Revolution was the quintessential political revolution of the bourgeoisie, it is also correctly viewed at every stage as “an unfinished, unconsummated revolution whose values and problems continue[d] to live” long after the execution of the monarch in 1793.

The difficulty of dating the end of the bourgeois revolution in France raised two fundamental issues for Marx and Engels and their successors. First, if ultimately the revolution erupted as a result of economic factors—if it was caused by the growing contradiction between forces and relations of production, as Marx and Engels claimed—then “it expressed in more coherent and developed form the necessary assumptions, the conditions of existence of the new bourgeois economic order shaking itself free of the constraints of feudalism.” But what was the relationship between the alleged rise of the bourgeoisie and the diverse political regimes that emerged successively in the century after the events of 1789? Marx used the vaguest possible terms in

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28 Kamenka, “Revolutionary Ideology,” 76.
the third volume of his *Capital* to discuss the political formations characterizing the various modes of production:

It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers—a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity—which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis—the same from the standpoint of its main conditions—due to innumerable different circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.30

One can hardly imagine a more imprecise depiction of the relationship between economic and political structures and changes in them. If state forms could vary so greatly, what uniformities remained on the basis of which one could generalize about the character of the political realm in a given mode of production?

Not surprisingly, the widely shared judgment of both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars has been that the theory of the state was the least-developed aspect of Marx’s work. It is apparent from Marx’s notes that he intended to write a major work on the state as part of the larger opus of which the three volumes of *Capital* formed but the first three parts.31 This work never materialized, in part because Marx had not yet completed *Capital* at the time of his death in 1883. That this work on the state never came to fruition also reflects the fact that although politics was always Marx’s central concern, “private government in the economic life was for him the primary and decisive realm of the political, and public government—the sphere of the state—was a secondary and subordinate political field,”32 “the understanding of which was to be derived from outside itself.”33 Thus, his followers were left with his early *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right,”* scattered passages in *The German Ideology*, “On the Jewish Question,” and commentaries on contemporary events such as “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.”

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Marx's and Engels's analyses of events in France furnished Japanese Marxists with little additional guidance on the bourgeois revolution in France as well as in more general terms. Marx himself offered several different accounts of the events in France, but each cast a different light on how his successors were to perceive regularities in the relationship between economic change and alterations in political regimes and regime types that might or might not be of revolutionary significance in themselves. Predictably, as the variation in the types of regimes in France accumulated over the years, Marx's and Engels's interpretations of them became increasingly complex; and it became more difficult to distinguish bourgeois monarchy from an absolutist regime that was not dominated by the bourgeoisie but performed certain vital functions of the transition to capitalism on its behalf. These vagaries of Marx's and Engels's views of the revolution in France were indicative of the perils of extracting a coherent model of bourgeois-democratic revolution that could be applied readily to the Meiji Restoration from the French example.

As a young neo-Hegelian, Marx's view of the French Revolution was intimately linked to his critique of Hegel's conception of the state. As French historian François Furet has asserted, the French Revolution epitomized, for Marx, at once the path-breaking and yet limited character of bourgeois revolution and the bourgeois state. Hegel had attempted to erect a new conception of the state by criticizing the classical political philosophers who had preceded him. He applauded the major advancement of Rousseau's effort "to found the state on Reason [rather than on historical accident of birth, utility, or conquest] and to give it a spiritual principle, the will." On the other hand, Rousseau made a grievous error by retaining the misleading (in Hegel's view) premise of the social contract and of an antecedent state of nature. For Hegel, the state was organic, and "man is a citizen of the state by birth": "It is in the state that self-consciousness finds its substantive liberty." For Hegel, the French Revolution was a tragedy that revealed the fatal flaw of Rousseau's position. Having founded the state on a contract based on individual wills, Rousseau's theory "afforded for the first time in human history the prodigious spectacle of the overthrow of the constitution of a great actual state and its complete reconstruction ab initio on the basis of pure thought alone, after the destruction of all existing and given material.' " The result was the Terror.

The young Marx objected strenuously to Hegel's views in the Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right," "On the Jewish Question," and The German Ideology as well as other early pieces. Arguing vigorously against Hegel's...
conception of the ideal state, Marx claimed that it was nothing other than the old regime with all its faults: The hereditary monarchy was not a rational method of selecting political leadership, and the Legislature did not transcend but merely replicated the schism between *bourgeois* and *citoyen* in the institutions of the state.\(^35\) Hegel's philosophy offered an illusory solution to this problem in the guise of something that was the natural and true expression of some absolute and intangible spirit rather than the product of human efforts. In this sense, Hegel's philosophy was nothing other than false consciousness, a reflection of man's alienation from himself. Moreover, in its political consequences, Hegel's conception discouraged the heroism of events such as the French Revolution, because it made no distinction between what is and what ought to be.\(^36\)

Nevertheless, at this stage Marx found himself in substantial agreement with a key element of Hegel's view of the French Revolution. For both men, the revolution had failed to achieve human liberation by reconciling private man with his public persona; yet where Hegel rejected the revolution in favor of the old regime, Marx lamented that the revolution had been "only 'partial,' 'merely political,'" because it had liberated only a small minority of society, the bourgeoisie.\(^37\) It did not achieve the universal liberation of men and women from their economic fetters, of which the political state was a mere reflection. To borrow Furet's words, the revolution was "the apogee of the political spirit as of the characteristic illusion of politics—the belief that it is possible to transform civil society by politics."\(^38\) In reality, "the political revolution dissolves civil society into its elements without revolutionizing these elements themselves. . . ;" its liberation "is a reduction of man, on the one hand, to a member of civil society, an independent and egoistic individual, and on the other hand, to a *citizen*, to a moral person."\(^39\) The original schism remained unresolved, alienating man from himself and his fellows. Yet there was also good news for followers of Marx in later industrializing societies: German backwardness would become an asset, affording "the conditions for a revolution more radical than the French Revolution." In short, a revolution in late-developing Germany "would be the sublation of the French Revolution." Subsequently, of course, Japan's Marxists would be further comforted by the actual experience of the revolution in an even more backward

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\(^{35}\) Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* 30, 70–73, 77–78.


Russia and by V. I. Lenin’s and Leon Trotsky’s theoretical interpretations of it.40

Except for such an explanation of how a backward Germany would overtake France’s bourgeois-democratic revolution (here Marx simply excitedly announced his discovery of the proletariat as the universal class that would be the agent of universal human emancipation41), the young Marx’s analysis of the French Revolution was straightforward. As Marx and Engels confronted the revolution again in terms of subsequent events in France and failed revolutions elsewhere in Europe late in the 1840s, however, their interpretations became increasingly complex. This occurred in at least two ways, both of which would be of consequence for Japanese leftists. First, the identification of the bourgeoisie with the agency of the revolution became increasingly tenuous. In part this was a response to the apparent retreat of the bourgeoisie into the background in French politics repeatedly between 1789 and the 1870s. In its stead, the peasantry emerged as an increasingly critical, even the decisive, actor in 1789 and in the mid-nineteenth century:

The French bourgeoisie of 1789 did not leave its allies the peasants in the lurch for one moment. It knew that the basis of its rule was the destruction of feudalism on the land and the establishment of a class of free peasant landowners. . . . The French Revolution, although defined by the interests of the bourgeois class, was made by all the people, with the peasantry at the fore, since this latter also found a provisional advantage in the conditions of the bourgeoisie’s ascendancy over the nobility.42

A second change that emerged in Marx’s and Engels’s writings on France is even more important: the increasing distance between the bourgeoisie and state power in their analyses. Describing the French regime just prior to the Paris commune, Marx argued that the state had become increasingly independent of civil society (and of any single sector or class of society):

What had been the characteristic attribute of the former state? Society had created its own organs to look after its common interest, originally through simple division of labour. But these organs, at whose head was the state power, had in the course of time,

40 Furet, “Young Marx,” 5, 7. For Trotsky’s and Lenin’s analyses of how “uneven and combined development” (Trotsky’s phrase) had led to an uninterrupted revolution in Russia, see Baruch Knei-paz, The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), chs. 3 and 4; and V. I. Lenin, “Two Tactics of Social Democracy,” in The Lenin Anthology, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975). Trotsky’s and Lenin’s views were very close on this question, although Trotsky’s more extensive theoretical and historical elaborations on it were repudiated under Stalin. They found expression in most of the Comintern’s theses concerning Japan, and through that vehicle they influenced Japan’s leftists.


in pursuance of their own special interests, transformed themselves from the servants of society into the masters of society.\footnote{Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in Marx-Engels Reader, 627. Compare "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (p. 607) in the same collection:}

Just a few pages later in the same discussion of The Civil War in France, Marx wrote that "the gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century [had] swept aside the . . . relics of bygone times," the impediment to the modern state power of the First Empire. Nonetheless, "at the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labour, the State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour, of a public force organised for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism." He then describes the events of 1830 as if they too had constituted a bourgeois revolution in France: "The revolution of 1830," he wrote, "resulting in the transfer of government from the landlords to the capitalists, transferred it from the more remote to the more direct antagonists of the working men."\footnote{Friedrich Engels, "Addendum to Preface to the Second Edition," in Friedrich Engels, The Peasant War in Germany (New York: International Publishers, 1926).} Similarly, turning his attention to Germany in 1874, Engels too described the increasing autonomy of state power. "On the one hand, the government reforms the laws at a snail pace tempo in the interests of the bourgeoisie; . . . On the other hand, the bourgeoisie leaves in the hands of the government all actual political power."\footnote{Karl Marx, "Civil War in France," 628–9.} Significantly, it was this very text by Engels on Germany that formed the basis of Kōza-ha Marxist Hirano Yoshitarō’s analysis of bourgeois revolution fifty years later. The autonomy of state power in postrevolutionary France figured most boldly in the considerations of Marx and Engels as they articulated the concept of absolutism as a form of state that rested on a balance of power between bourgeois and nobility.\footnote{This is especially evident in the "Eighteenth Brumaire." Cf. François Furet, "Marx and the French Enigma (1851–1871)," in François Furet, Marx and the French Revolution, Deborah Kan Furet, trans., and Lucien Calvié, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 74–75.} This too would become a focal point of concern among Japanese Marxists reflecting on the significance of Meiji, but Marx and Engels never explained precisely what economic and social forces made for the enormous differences between the bourgeois revolutions in France and Germany and what accounted for the different characters and roles of the state in the two cases.
The combination of Marx’s and Engels’s assessments of events in France and subsequently in Germany is perplexing. If Marx was determined to analyze political events in economic terms and if the bourgeois revolution marked the decisive rise of the bourgeoisie, why did it take so many bourgeois revolutions to achieve bourgeois rule in France (and how many more would it take in a less “advanced” society)? Indeed, if the state could be autonomous of the society, as it was said to be at various times in France and Germany, how was one to judge whether a bourgeois revolution had actually occurred? Was there any such thing as a prototypical bourgeois regime? And what should a bourgeois monarchy born of the English, not the French, revolution look like? Finally, and perhaps most important for Japan’s leftists, if what happened in France and England and what transpired in Germany were all bourgeois revolutions, what was a bourgeois revolution after all? As Furet argues, Marx never convincingly accounted for why the birth of the modern bourgeois state “was accompanied by a multiplicity of forms:” . . . “the constitutional monarchy, the Jacobin Terror, the parliamentary republic, Bonaparte’s dictatorship.”47 The account that Furet improvises on Marx’s behalf is not entirely satisfying:

Since there were several regimes, there must have been several bourgeoisies, or at least several parts to the bourgeoisie. Beginning with 1848, this idea becomes essential to an understanding of Marx’s analysis of France. In light of the fact that the July Monarchy—a supremely bourgeois government—was overthrown by the Parisian insurrection of February 1848, it was no longer sufficient simply to contrast the Restoration, which was in the hands of the great landowning proprietors, to the monarchy of the finance and industry after 1830. This opposition between landed interests and financial or industrial interests, the classic illustration of which Marx found in the English debates over the abolition of the customs tariff on wheat, no longer explains anything about 1848 and the extraordinary series of political reversals inaugurated by February 1848. In the series of articles he published on the Second Republic in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung of 1850 [the articles Engels later gathered together and published under the title The Class Struggles in France in 1895], Marx reorganized the internal structure of the bourgeoisie according to the succession of political phenomena manifested by the 1848 revolution. The July Monarchy becomes nothing more than the regime of the financial aristocracy.48

Whatever its shortcomings, perhaps such an approach could yield fruit for Marxists in other settings confronting similar difficulties. At the very least, Japanese Marxists examining the transformations of Meiji would have to expend considerable effort on their own to resolve the questions of regime types and historical uniformities in economic and political change associated with the phenomenon of bourgeois-democratic revolution.

THE MEIJI RESTORATION AS A BOURGEOIS-DEMOCRATIC
REVOLUTION IN THE MAKING

When Japan's Marxists turned to assess the significance of the Meiji Restoration in the 1920s and 1930s, they divided themselves into at least two factions. The immediate issue was the Communist International's strategy for the Japanese revolution. The Comintern's Soviet leadership, largely ignorant of the concrete socioeconomic and political conditions in Japan, had determined from the time of the birth of Japanese Communist Party (JCP) that Japan's socialist revolution must pass through two stages. Despite its impressive industrial capitalist development, Comintern leaders concluded that Japan was sufficiently backward in comparison with Russia on the eve of October 1917, that its revolution would have to proceed through the same two stages they prescribed for China: Only when Japan's bourgeois-democratic revolution had been completed could Japan move on to the proletarian-socialist stage. The JCP's leadership accepted this formula on the party's formation in 1922, but the young party, confounded by the efficient repression of Japan's police, dissolved itself in 1924. After the party was resurrected in 1926, the Comintern reasserted this view of the Japanese Revolution in its 1927 Theses. The JCP leadership obediently accepted the Theses's prescription of a two-stage revolution in Japan but not without serious opposition. Led by the former anarchist and then JCP leader Yamakawa Hitoshi, the dissidents seceded from the party within months after the new theses were published in Japan. The dissident faction immediately launched its own journal, Rônō (Labor-Farmer), to promote its view that Japan was a sufficiently advanced industrial capitalist society to have its revolutionaries pursue an immediate proletarian-socialist revolution. Those loyal to the Comintern Theses thereupon set out to produce scholarly studies of Japan's past that would support the Comintern line of two-stage revolution for Japan.49

Of these two mainstream Marxist factions, the dissident Rônō-ha had more to gain by employing Marx's notion of bourgeois-democratic revolution to interpret the Meiji Restoration. This group's advocacy of an immediate one-step proletarian-socialist revolution in Japan was premised on the belief that Japan's bourgeois revolution had already substantially been completed. Thus, Yamakawa Hitoshi, Sakai Toshihiko, and their associates sought to demonstrate that the dramatic socioeconomic and political change that Japan experienced from late Tokugawa through the Meiji period constituted a genuine bourgeois revolution. This would not prove to be an easy task, however. Even today, Marxist scholars have been unable to reach agreement on the decisive elements that underlay the transition to industrial capitalism in England and France. Several centuries after the fact, Maurice Dobb, Paul Sweezy, and other Western Marxists engaged in a protracted debate concerning the relative

49 See Hoston, Marxism and the Crisis of Development, passim.
weight of forces internal to feudalism and of international trade in precipitating the passage from feudalism to capitalism in western Europe. More recently, Robert Brenner, Sir Michael Postan, Guy Bois, and other Western historians have contested the roles of demographic change, agrarian social structure, and alterations in production methods in response to the commercialization of agriculture in determining the paths of England, France, and Germany from feudalism to capitalism.

If there is no consensus on the momentous transition to capitalism in Europe among Marxist and non-Marxist scholars fifty years after the debate on Japanese capitalism, murkier still was the context in which the Rōnō-ha wrote in the 1920s and the 1930s. The Rōnō-ha faced two major difficulties. First, the scantiness of statistical data on western Europe, Tokugawa Japan, and the Meiji era made empirical comparisons extremely difficult. This problem afflicted the rival Kōza-ha as well, but such data were especially important for those who wished to establish the basic uniformity of the forces at work across different national contexts. Even in Japan, where the transition from agrarian feudalism to industrial capitalism occurred much more abruptly than it had in the West, the society could be expected to exhibit aspects of both the declining and the ascending modes of production at any given point during the transition. Marx's own predilection to see momentous change obscured this point in much of his work. Still, the point remains that it was essential for the Rōnō-ha to have some sense of the point at which the quantitative changes accumulating in a burgeoning bourgeois society made it qualitatively different from the old feudal order—in short, making it decisively bourgeois. The Rōnō-ha's eagerness to classify the Meiji as Japan's own heroic bourgeois revolution suggests that it was not at all uncomfortable with the remanence of the relics of Tokugawa feudalism. Yet this strength of the Rōnō-ha also highlights its weakness in dealing with the political sphere, where the legacy of feudalism and absolutism appeared to be strongest. What exactly was the nature of the regime that succeeded Tokugawa feudalism and initiated the Meiji's modernizing reforms? If it was once absolutist, when and how did it become bourgeois? These were critical questions, for at the center of the Rōnō-ha's revolutionary strategy was the contention that Japan's imperial regime in Taishō and Shōwa was not absolutist, as the Comintern and JCP claimed, but a bourgeois monarchy.


Yet Rônô-ha scholars were not the first to argue that Japan had experienced its own bourgeois revolution in the Meiji Restoration. Even before the dissident group had coalesced as such, the heterodox but influential Marxist Takahashi Kamekichi advanced that very claim. Though repudiated by mainstream Marxists of both Rônô-ha and Köza-ha for his view that Lenin's critique of imperialism did not apply to Japan's military expansion onto the Asian mainland, Takahashi produced highly respected economic studies of Japan in the Meiji, Taishô, and Shôwa eras. Indeed, although Marxists on both sides of the debate on Japanese capitalism harshly censured Takahashi's apologia for Japanese expansionism, his scholarly studies of Japan's economic and political development laid the groundwork for the Rônô-ha's interpretation of the Meiji Restoration as a bourgeois revolution. Moreover, the idiosyncratic elements of his analysis of the Restoration were extremely suggestive for those who were prepared to address critically Marxist orthodoxy on the relationship between economic and political change. In 1927, months before the Rônô-ha split from the JCP, Takahashi's controversial views brought the interpretation of Japan's recent economic history to the forefront of the Marxist controversy on the appropriate strategy for socialist revolution in Japan. Takahashi referred to the Meiji Restoration in order to support his claim that in the 1920s Japan suddenly found itself in an economic deadlock (yukizumari) when the conditions that had facilitated rapid economic growth in the middle and late Meiji period had disappeared. As he approached the Meiji Restoration, Takahashi incorporated in skeletal form all the elements essential to an assessment of the events and circumstances surrounding the Restoration as a bourgeois revolution: first, an appraisal of the antecedent factors conditioning the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate; second, an account of the economic reforms initiated by the Meiji state and their role in fostering Japan's industrial revolution and the rise of a capitalist economy; and third, an analysis of the

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54 The conditions included: (1) the flourishing of production forces that resulted from the copying or borrowing of production technologies from the more industrialized Western Europe and the United States; (2) the resulting increased yield of Japan's scarce raw materials that had not been exploited under Tokugawa feudalism; and (3) an ample and readily available supply of cheap labor both within Japan and in countries on the Asian periphery where Japan had an economic presence. See Takahashi Kamekichi, Nihon shihon-shugi hattatsu shi [History of the Development of Japanese Capitalism], revised and enlarged ed. (Tokyo: Nihon Hyôron-sha, 1929), 332–8; and Takahashi Kamekichi, Nihon keizai no yukizumari to musan-kaizé no taisaku [The Deadlock of the Japanese Economy and the Countermeasures of the Proletariat] (Tokyo: Hakuyô-sha, 1926), 17–21.
nature of state power from Tokugawa to Meiji in terms of the political characteristics of bourgeois revolution.

As an economist, Takahashi’s primary purpose was to interpret economic change since the Meiji period. He noted changes in the nature of state power but did not address directly the thorny theoretical issues surrounding the distinction between absolutist and bourgeois states. Takahashi did identify the confluence of two circumstances as key to the collapse of the shogunate. The first was the rising internal crisis manifested in the increasingly severe fiscal straits of the bakufu (shogunate) caused by “the stagnation and atrophy of production,” the “squandering of Japan’s national wealth,” and the worsening “exhaustion of national power and hardship among the populace.” Second, these strains combined with the inability of the Tokugawa shogunate, whose legitimacy was founded on military supremacy, to respond effectively to the military pressures exerted by the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry on Japan’s shores in 1854. Impotent in the face of the Western superior technology that had already humiliated the great Chinese empire, the shogunate rapidly lost the support of the lower strata of the unproductive ruling warrior class, whose members were imposing an increasing economic burden on the shogunate as their numbers proliferated. In response to these dual pressures, these lower-strata samurai formed a patriotic army expressing disillusionment with the existing regime, rallying opposition to the shogunate with the slogan of sonnō jōi (revere the emperor and expel the barbarians).55

Interestingly, Takahashi argued that the Meiji Restoration was so-

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55 Takahashi, Nihon shihon-shugi hattatsu shi, ch. 1. Takahashi cited waves of abortions and declining population after the 44-percent growth rate from 1603 to 1703 as indicators as the economic stagnation of the bakufu and its inability to support the Japanese population. Conversely, the population increase of about 48 percent in the first thirty-five years after the Restoration reflected the Meiji’s robust economy and dramatically higher standard of living (see Table):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keichō 8  (1603)</td>
<td>18,000,000a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genroku 16 (1703)</td>
<td>26,000,000a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyōhō 11 (1726)</td>
<td>28,500,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenpō 4  (1833)</td>
<td>30,000,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenpō 5  (1834)</td>
<td>29,700,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kōka 3  (1846)</td>
<td>29,400,000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meiji 5  (1872)</td>
<td>33,110,000c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meiji 40 (1907)</td>
<td>48,819,000c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taishō Founding Year (1912)</td>
<td>52,523,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Population estimated on the basis of 1 person per seki crop yields.
b Based on bakufu population surveys and extrapolations.
c Based on government censuses.

Cioeconomically a bourgeois or capitalist but not political, revolution. This argument deserves serious scrutiny because it could respond to the more troublesome questions concerning the limits of bourgeois democratization in the Meiji era, issues with which Rônô-ha analysts would have more difficulty, given their view that the Restoration was a revolution both politically and economically. Takahashi argued that the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown by two major forces: a “revivalist” or restorationist group “longing for the old days of the dynastic era” and a second “progressive” faction enamored of Western capitalist society, which “sought to transplant it to Japan.” After the demise of the bakufu the progressives quickly gained ascendancy over the revivalists, and the result was “the capitalist revolution” that was “the great achievement of the Meiji Restoration.” Its success did not require a political revolution, Takahashi contended, for the same strata of samurai that had belonged to the ruling class under the old regime were the source of the new ruling Meiji oligarchy. Moreover, the old state power of the shogunate had also boldly undertaken policies to encourage the growth of capitalism in Japan.56

One could protest that the last point signalled the limits of the economic rather than the political revolution of Meiji: If significant state-sponsored economic initiatives towards capitalism had been undertaken under the Tokugawa shogunate, then those of the Meiji oligarchy were less revolutionary than they might have been. The logic of Takahashi’s argument would have required him to claim that the kinds of policies pursued by the Meiji leaders were so qualitatively different from those pursued by state entities under the shogunate that they were genuinely revolutionary in character themselves and in their results. Nonetheless, he did not make this argument explicitly, and his position that the Restoration was not a political revolution did not dispose him to pursue in depth the qualitative and quantitative differences between state economic tutelage under a centralized national state and that of a shogun and his daimyô (vassals) in the individual han (domains) that comprised bakumatsu Japan. This task would fall to Kôza-ha political economists who were more interested in such nuances to prove the incompleteness of the Meiji Restoration as a bourgeois revolution.57 Moreover, Takahashi’s effort to limit his view of the Meiji Restoration to socioeconomic revolution suffered from another major defect: It was difficult to support the notion that the political leadership of lower-stratum samurai provided essential continuity from Tokugawa to Meiji. His assertion that “[this] class was destroyed” with the Meiji Restora-

56 Ibid., 61,72; and Takahashi, Nihon shihon-shugi hattatsu shi, ch. 1.
57 See Hirano Yoshitarô’s responses to Hani Gorô (also of the Kôza-ha) during the debate on the manufacture period in Japan (see below), especially Hirano Yoshitarô, “Jiyû minken: sono seishitsu, undô no gendo, naibu-teki kihon tairitsu no kiso kôsatsu” [Civil Rights: An Examination of their Character, the Limits of the Movement, and the Basis of its Fundamental Internal Contradictions], Kaizô [Reconstruction] (December 1933), 12n–13n.
tion was ambiguous. Was he arguing that this class declined with the Restoration itself or with the impact of the succession of state policies set in motion by the Restoration? And what impact did the rise and fall of the samurai class have on the political configuration of the new Meiji regime and its posture on civil rights and other achievements conventionally associated with bourgeois regimes? These lacunae in Takahashi’s argument remained to be filled by Marxists more attuned to the political dimensions of the changes associated with the Meiji Restoration.

Outraged by Takahashi’s use of Marxist theory to justify Japanese expansionism, Rōnō-ha Marxists were quick to respond to Takahashi’s challenge by initiating their own analyses of Japanese development. The first in the Rōnō-ha to undertake this task was Waseda University economist Inomata Tsunao. Initially, Inomata’s riposte was targeted against theoretical and methodological flaws in Takahashi’s case, but his commitment to analyzing the Meiji Restoration as a bourgeois revolution eventually impelled him to deepen his own research to study the effects of the Meiji reforms on Japan’s laggard agricultural sector and even to investigate the roots of Tokugawa and Meiji in the “Asiatic” characteristics of ancient Japan. These latter inquiries led Inomata to postulate that feudalism had come late to Japan, in the fourteenth century, after eleven centuries of an Asiatic mode of production that finally dissolved as a result of internal contradictions. Feudalism very much like that of medieval Europe then prevailed in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, until class organizations evolved into an independent, centralized state feudal power in the Tokugawa era.

Inomata did not make these observations until 1937, several years after he had broken his ties to the Rōnō-ha. This was unfortunate for the Rōnō-ha, because virtually no other Marxist scholar associated with the Rōnō-ha pursued pre-Meiji Japanese politics and economics in any depth, thus making their argument more difficult to support. Only Tsuchiya Takao, who became engaged in the largely Kōza-ha controversy on the development of manufacture production, conducted any significant research in pre-Meiji history in support of the Rōnō-ha cause. This was not fortuitous. Although the group argued that the Meiji Restoration was a bourgeois revolution, they did not find its roots deep in Japan’s own history. They seemed to assume that the shogunate collapsed as a result of the “natural process of the disintegration of feudalism,” which itself was accelerated beyond its natural slow pace—given

the immaturity of Japan’s bourgeoisie—by the sudden shock of the pressures exerted by the Western powers. Thus, the Rōnō-ha agreed substantially with Takahashi’s portrayal of circumstances surrounding the demise of the shogunate, but they did not attempt to document the strains of its waning years. Nor did Tsuchiya, on their behalf, find significant evidence that a shift to capitalist commodity production, such as manufacture, was spontaneously gaining ascendancy in Japan before the Restoration.61

Rōnō-ha scholars, then, devoted most of their energies to documenting the revolutionary elements that came from above in the form of the Restoration reforms; and they questioned the importance of the undemocratic and seemingly nonbourgeois elements of the post-Restoration state. The faction’s political leader, Yamakawa Hitoshi, and scholars Inomata and Tsushima Tadayuki took the lead in asserting that “the revolution of the Meiji Restoration formally proclaimed the transition from feudal society to capitalist society in our country.” Agreeing with Takahashi, Yamakawa further acknowledged that Japan’s was a special bourgeois revolution, but not one that the bourgeoisie led in any sense:

those who played the major role in before the spectators were not bourgeois but were mainly lower-stratum bushi [samurai]. . . . Because of the special circumstances of our country’s feudal society, at that time, the bourgeoisie was still weak and immature, and the special historical situation of our country which produced this direct motor force of the revolution determined this [allocation] of responsibility.

This critical stratum of the warrior class had already lost its economic basis, Yamakawa argued, “so standing on the economic basis of the rising bourgeoisie and representing that class’s interests was the only way of survival for them.”62

Exactly how the warrior class came to “stand on” the bourgeoisie’s “economic basis” was unclear, but to Yamakawa, the role of this group was critical to an understanding of the peculiar features of the transition to capitalism in Japan. “Political power fell into the hands of these leadership elements [of the lower-stratum warriors], instead of passing directly into the hands of the bourgeoisie.” Consequently, instead of seeing the emergence of the kind of regime typically associated with the bourgeoisie on the heels of “medieval


autocracy," Japan experienced a transitional government, the so-called han-batsu (clique of those associated with the Chōshū and Satsuma hans) state. This outcome meant that the Meiji Restoration had constituted a bourgeois revolution but only in its very beginnings. It would take some fifty years to complete, and many of the bourgeois-democratic tasks conventionally associated with the bourgeois revolution could come to fruition only as part of the proletariat's struggle for socialism in the Shōwa era.63 Thus, the Rōnō-ha called for the dissolution of a Communist Party wrongheadedly pursuing a bourgeois revolution that had substantially been completed for all intents and purposes, and in its place they proposed to establish a coalition of proletarian socialist political parties that would strive for an immediate socialist revolution. This revolution would at the same time complete the bourgeois-democratic tasks left unachieved by the Restoration and that the now reactionary and imperialistic ruling bourgeoisie lacked the will or desire to accomplish on its own.64 In short, the Rōnō-ha argued that Japan in the late 1920s was analogous to Russia between February and October 1917 under the (bourgeois) Provisional Government: The situation cried out for a more radical (socialist) revolution.65 In this sense, the completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution would "not precede the proletarian socialist struggle," Inomata asserted. "It is not that when the first is finished the latter begins. At the outset, the two are indissolubly linked. . . . The execution of the strategic struggle [for socialism] is the fundamental responsibility, . . . and the execution of the bourgeois-democratic struggle is [merely] a secondary derivative responsibility."66

Neither Yamakawa, Tsushima, nor Inomata showed how the lower-level warrior stratum succeeded in toppling the Tokugawa shogunate and establishing new state power; nor did they attend to the circumstances that facilitated the transition from one regime to another. Rather, what was truly revolutionary about the Meiji Restoration and deserved far greater attention, in their view, was what the Meiji oligarchs achieved once the new regime was in place; for they established capitalism in Japan and created the conditions for the subsequent flourishing of the bourgeoisie. The most important action of the new government came with the land tax reforms. These reforms caused

63 Ibid., 177, 183.
66 Inomata Tsunao, "Puroretaria senryaku ni okeru burujoa minshu-shugi tōsō no yakuwari" (II) (December 1928) [The Responsibilities of Bourgeois-Democratic Struggle in the Strategy of the Proletariat (II)], in Inomata, Nihon puroretariaato no senryaku to senjutsu, 114.
the “dissolution of so-called feudal landownership” and of efforts to encourage the capitalist enterprise which was carried out under the Tokugawa shogunate and which Tsushima dubbed “state capitalism.” In Tsushima’s view, elements were already eroding the “state feudalism” of the Tokugawa shogunate prior to the Restoration; and those arguing that the Meiji Restoration arrested this disintegration were “denying the laws of social development.” The consequences of the Meiji land tax reforms were many and significant: They “caused the [progressive] emergence of an excessively small-scale agricultural tenant system” that was “semi-feudal” rather than feudal in character. With the legal recognition of the alienability of the land, private landownership came to supplant the state landownership characteristic of the Tokugawa era. Landlords in turn became increasingly bourgeoisified as they came to “draw most of their income not from rents, but from interest, dividends, and industrial profits.”67 This had the effect of strengthening the overall power of the bourgeoisie economically and politically.68 Where usurious ground rents and high land prices, which Kōza-ha scholars cited as evidence that feudal landlordism was simply reinforced after the Restoration, persisted in post-Restoration Japan, it was not “because [they] were inherited intact from the feudal period; [rather they] represented the limits of the peculiar development of private land ownership newly established on the basis of old excessively small-scale agricultural production methods.”69 The persistence of high land rents paid in kind was not a mere carryover from Tokugawa feudalism but the product of market forces and of the scarcity of land in relation to the demand for it. Economist Kushida Tamizō argued that “even though rents might take the form of payment in kind, they had already been changed to currency [“in the minds of landlords and tenants”]: even if the forms were similar, [they] differed essentially from feudal ground rents.”70 As the Meiji reforms destroyed the old feudal landholding system, cottage industry as a sideline of agricultural production was also then destroyed, and “the progressive capitalistic development of commercial industry” in the countryside proceeded.71 Finally, Inomata stressed that the Meiji reforms were progressive in that they prevented the emergence of a large-scale landowning landlord elite that had existed, for example, in Germany and

67 Niijima Issaku [pseudonym of Inomata Tsunao], “Nihon musan-kaikyū undō ni kansuru teize II. Seiji jōsei” [Theses on the Japanese Proletarian Movement. II. The Political Situation] (June 1928), in Inomata, Nihon puroretariaato no senryaku to senjutsu, 25; and Inomata Tsunao, Gendai Nihon kenkyū: Marukishizumu no tachibaa yori [Studies on Contemporary Japan: From a Marxist Perspective] (Tokyo: Kaizō-sha, 1929, 1934), 150.


69 Inomata, “Tochi mondai,” 147–9 (emphasis in the original).

70 Uchida and Nakano, Nihon shihon-shugi ronsō, 145–7 (emphasis in the original).

Russia. This was an important point, because the existence of such a class had posed a decisive impediment to the development of capitalism in these other national settings.72

Inomata’s last point about landlords was critical to Rōnō-hā scholarship concerning the impact of the Restoration on the Japanese polity, for here the entire question of the gains and limits of bourgeois democracy associated with bourgeois revolution came to the fore. Contradictions in its various accounts and its reluctance to take up issues concerning the Imperial Household, absolutism, and the transition to capitalism impeded the Rōnō-hā’s ability to respond convincingly to this issue. At the heart of its position was the assertion that the lower-strata samurai who made the revolution from below had brought in a political regime that was initially a hanbatsu “absolutist” (meaning autocratic) government, which had then given way to a bourgeois state. The precise moment of the transition was unclear, for various accounts placed it during the late Meiji period, the Taishō era, or even at the time when Yamakawa and Inomata were writing.73 The class composition of the original transitional government might have been heavily comprised of landlords, but as that class became increasingly bourgeoisified and its former basis in semi-feudal landholding disintegrated under the impact of the Restoration reforms, their influence too came to be supportive of the bourgeoisie and its demands. In other words, landlords, whose impact was to make the government highly bureaucratic and militaristic, were rapidly “assimilated into the bourgeoisie’s forces through their [own] subsequent capitalistic development.”74 By the Taishō and Shōwa eras, the distinction conventionally drawn between the Seiyūkai and the Kenseikai as representing landlord and bourgeois interests respectively was no longer valid: The two political parties had become virtually indistinguishable.75 The net effect was that by the Taishō and Shōwa eras, Japan had a bourgeois state in which the industrial and financial bourgeoisie was the dominant force and in which capitalism and the state were becoming so closely intertwined as to deserve the appellation of “state capitalism” or “state capitalist trust.”76


73 See, for example, Yamakawa, Seiji-teki tōitsu,” 177–8, 178n, 179, 183; Yamakawa Hitoshi, Yamakawa Hitoshi jiden, Yamakawa Kikue and Sakisaka Itsurō, eds. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1961), 430–1; Inomata, Gendai Nihon kenkyū, 149, 158–60; and Inomata, “Nihon musan-kaikyū undō ni kansuru teize II. Seiji jōsei,” 24–26.


76 This term was borrowed from Nikolai Bukharin’s work on the advanced capitalist state. See Inomata, Gendai Nihon kenkyū, 163; and Niijima Issaku [pseudonym of Inomata Tsunao], “Nihon musan-kaikyū undō ni kansuru teize. I. Nihon shihon-shugi no gensei” (December 1927)
This brought the Rōnō-ha face to face with the problem of how to account for the manifestations of bureaucratic, militaristic, and autocratic forces that the Kōza-ha referred to as absolutist and were said to be left from the Tokugawa feudal era. As the discussion on the Kōza-ha will demonstrate, the term absolutism was used very carefully by the Kōza-ha to refer to Marx’s and Engels’s description of a transitional regime resting on a balance of power between declining nobility and rising bourgeois, but the Rōnō-ha used the term much more loosely when referring to forces that they associated with feudalism and autocracy. They were prepared to acknowledge the continued existence of such forces in the Privy Council, the genrō, the upper house of the Diet, the General Staff Headquarters of the military, and the military’s access to direct appeal to the throne, as well as illiberal ideological elements associated with the remanence of these institutions. They also conceded that the material basis of these forces consisted of feudal landownership, which continued to exist throughout the Meiji period. However, the political position of the landlord class from Meiji through Shōwa is ambiguous in Rōnō-ha writings. Either it shared political power with the very weak and immature bourgeoisie, or “it never held the real power of political rule,” depending on which account by Inomata and Yamakawa one examines. Landlords were said to have opposed the bourgeoisie yet also to have helped to nurture it through policies pursued by the Meiji government to promote capitalism. They were illiberal, as was manifested in their suppression of the civil rights movement in the 1870s and 1880s, but at the same time the government bureaucracy itself was said to represent the lower-stratum bushi who had overthrown the Tokugawa shogunate, thus making the relationship between the so-called feudal absolutist forces on the one hand and the bushi on the other very murky indeed.

And what was the material basis of the latter, who were supposed to have arisen against the shogunate because of the loss of their own economic basis? These issues remained unresolved or unaddressed in Rōnō-ha accounts. Nevertheless, the Rōnō-ha tried to dispose of reservations concerning the political dimensions of Japan’s bourgeois revolution by asserting that feudal remnant forces had lost their material basis, as the effects of the Meiji reforms eliminated the vestiges of feudal landownership from the countryside. These forces, it seems, were never able to mount effective resistance to the bourgeoisie, which remained weak because it never had to engage in a decisive struggle with a strong, large, landed, feudal nobility. If they continued to persist in Japan’s political superstructure, it was because the newly strengthened bourgeoisie had become reactionary and imperialistic and thus had no desire to eliminate these vestiges of illiberalism from Japan’s political land-


[See, for example, Inomata, Gendai Nihon kenkyū, 113, 148–9; Uchida and Nakano, Nihon shihon-shugi ronso, 19–20; and Yamakawa, “Seiji-teki tōitsu,” 180–1.}
scape. Their militarizing and bureaucratic character was consistent with the militarism and bureaucratism of advanced capitalism. Hence, even though the bourgeoisie continued to be "indecisive," it was possible for feudal remnant forces to continue to exist, without taking away from the fact that the state was fundamentally a bourgeois state, even if the cowardice of the bourgeoisie was only exacerbated by the emergence of an increasingly assertive proletariat.78

As time passed and as the capitalist elements of the Japanese economy became stronger vis-à-vis those economic elements that were the basis of the absolutist forces, the state had become increasingly bourgeois in content: "The casing of the Japanese state is still embellished with many feudal remnants," Inomata conceded. "But its content is becoming bourgeois." As their numbers declined among government officials in the Privy Council and House of Peers, large landowners who remained from the Meiji era were becoming less and less of a political force. These individuals were "a minority, and even that minority [were] frequently dependent on more capitalist income. The majority have become, if not capitalists, their direct or indirect agents."79 In short, the Japanese imperial political system was no different from the British monarchy: It too was a bourgeois monarchy.

But there are many respects in which this Rônô-ha interpretation was unsatisfying. Even other Rônô-ha analysts had difficulties with Inomata’s and Yamakawa’s accounts of the bourgeois revolution of Meiji. For example, Tsushima Tadayuki objected that if the "feudal remnant forces of absolutism" no longer had a material basis, then how could they have survived for so long?80 Why was it not possible for progressive forces such as the civil rights movement, coupled with the bourgeoisie supposedly in power by the middle of the Meiji period, to achieve the abolishment of these elements? It was precisely in this way that the Meiji "absolute monarchy . . . differed decisively from the British monarchy" in the mid-to-late-Meiji period and even as late as the Shôwa era. Indeed, Tsushima concluded that perhaps the Meiji Restoration after the founding of the new state might not have been as revolutionary as the Rônô-ha mainstream assumed: "Why did it [Japan’s political system] take such a non-revolutionary path?"81 If absolutist forces were able to suppress the aspirations of proletariat, peasants, and bourgeois, then they must have been more powerful than Inomata and Yamakawa were prepared to admit. Perhaps there was more significance to the tardiness of commercializa-


80 See Tsushima, "Nihon shihon-shugi ronso" Shirô, 63–64.

81 Ibid., 80–81.
tion in the agrarian sector—a factor much later emphasized by Barrington Moore—than they attributed to it. Perhaps they should have to come to terms with the question of absolutism in its more precise sense. Given their determination to prove that Japan’s bourgeois-democratic revolution had already occurred, the Rônô-ha left the task of probing the phenomenon of absolutism in greater depth to scholars associated with the Kôza-ha.

LATE DEVELOPMENT, THE ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION, AND THE MEIJI RESTORATION

Unlike the Rônô-ha, Kôza-ha scholars were in no way committed to proving the notion that the Meiji Restoration comprised a bourgeois-democratic revolution. The Kôza-ha was the faction that remained loyal to the JCP after the Rônô-ha seceded from the party at the end of 1927. Kôza-ha scholars defended the Comintern’s prescription of a two-stage revolutionary strategy for Japan. Thus, the point of departure for their research was the view that Japan’s bourgeois-democratic revolution had never come to fruition and therefore that the achievement of such a revolution was the immediate task of Japan’s proletariat and peasantry. The JCP’s Draft Program, framed by Bukharin and others when the party was born in 1922, as well as—despite minor variations—the bulk of the Comintern’s theses on Japan for the next decade, asserted that the urgent imperative of Japan’s revolutionary movement was the “abolition of the emperor system” and the implementation of land reform in Japan’s backward agrarian sector. The continued existence of both of these signified the vitality of feudal elements in Japanese economic and political life as late as the 1920s and 1930s.

Despite Japan’s remarkable development as a capitalist industrial power in the middle to late Meiji era, Comintern observers insisted that the Japan of the 1920s was essentially at the same stage of development as prerevolutionary imperial Russia and argued that Japan’s revolution must follow the same two-stage course as Russia, first completing a bourgeois-democratic revolution and then achieving a proletarian-socialist revolution. In this view, the Meiji Restoration was revolutionary to the extent that it established an absolutist state in the strict Marxian sense—a state that rested on a class alliance be-

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82 These included the 1922 Draft Program of the party, which remained a draft because police forces caused the party to be dissolved before the draft could be accepted officially by the party; the 1926 Moscow Theses, the 1927 Theses, and 1931 Draft Political Theses, and the 1932 Theses. Of these documents, only the 1926 and 1931 theses approached the argument that Japan’s state was already under the domination of the “imperialist” bourgeoisie. In all other cases, the state was said to rest on the shared power of bourgeois and landlord (feudal) forces.

tween rising bourgeois and large semifeudal landowners and nurtured the rapid development of capitalism in Japan. As a direct result of these activities, the bourgeoisie increased its power in the state until in the 1920s it held hegemony over the landlords, dominating its alliance with the landlords that had characterized state power. Nonetheless, the continued power of the landlord element—reflected in the imperial institution, the kokutai ideology of the family-state that supported it, and the persistence of the same nondemocratic institutions that troubled the Rōnō-ha: the Privy Council, the Upper House of the Diet, the genrō, and the right of the military to appeal directly to the emperor—required that Japan pursue the elusive bourgeois-democratic revolution before undertaking the task of establishing socialism. In short, the Comintern called for a bourgeois revolution against a state power in which the bourgeoisie was said to hold hegemony.84

This was the theoretical framework that the Comintern aspired to establish for those who would defend the official JCP line through historical scholarship; and the peculiarity of this last aspect of the Comintern position helps to account for the ambivalence in Kōza-ha attitudes towards the Meiji Revolution. For the Kōza-ha, the Restoration had the revolutionary impact of setting into motion forces that accelerated the development of capitalism in Japan. At the same time, the Restoration also nurtured a capitalism born on the survival of feudal elements rather than on their dissolution: hence, the continued significance of feudal remnants in the Taishō and Shōwa eras. The Kōza-ha is generally viewed as having defended Comintern orthodoxy in arguing these points. In fact, however, there was much diversity in the positions taken by Kōza-ha scholars. These positions also underwent change over time as theoretical formulations were revised to accord with the increasing weight of the historical evidence. There was, therefore, considerable variety, even sharp conflict, among Kōza-ha writings on specific aspects of Japan’s political and economic history. Hani Gorō accentuated the importance of the Asiatic mode of production in Japan’s ancient history, while Hattori Shisō argued that Hani’s interpretation attributed excessive weight to peasant insurrections in explaining the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate. Noro Eitarō (who died from prison privations before he could incorporate the results of historical research into his perspectives) was inclined to accept the Comintern’s assumption that the Japanese countryside was characterized by large-scale agrarian landlordism comparable to that of prerevolutionary Russia; but Hirano Yoshitarō and others revised the Comintern view to argue that Japan suffered from an agrarian land system characterized by excessively small-scale landownership. Despite these and other differences, however, scholars of the Kōza-ha were united in asserting that whatever new elements might be identified in the Restoration, the Rōnō-ha claim that the Meiji Restoration con-

stituted a bourgeois-democratic revolution was a “simplistic non-analysis of the Meiji Restoration.”

Because they emphasized continuities from Tokugawa to Meiji, scholars of the Kōza-ha devoted considerably more attention than did those of the Rōnō-ha to the circumstances that fostered the demise of the Tokugawa shogunate. The most influential of the diverse Kōza-ha accounts were offered by Hirano Yoshitarō, Hani Gorō, and Hattori Shisō. These chronicles all emphasized the late development of industrial capitalism in Japan by, comparing it to that in England, France, and Germany: These scholars all found the nascent development of capitalism in Tokugawa Japan and identified the feudal domains that led the revolt against the shogunate as the loci of the most significant development of such capitalist forces; and all of them saw the influence of Asiatic characteristics as key to both Japan’s backwardness and the enormous role of state power from Tokugawa to Meiji. Thus, despite differences among these accounts, together they articulated the basic Kōza-ha treatment of the collapse of the Tokugawa and the origins of the new Meiji state.

Hani and Hirano began their analyses with an assessment of the nature of the Tokugawa regime itself, its general character, and its historical peculiarities in comparison with the western European experience with feudalism. Hirano acknowledged Marx’s observations in the first volume of Capital, in which the Tokugawa shogunate is presented as representative of classical feudalism: a “‘pure feudalistic organization of land ownership and developed small-scale agriculture.’” However, both Hirano and Hani saw significant “remnants of the Asiatic mode of production” in the Tokugawa era. The Asiatic element, Hirano asserted, was evident in Tokugawa feudalism having been established and maintained on an extremely low technological level of agricultural production. In addition, he noted, the daimyō relied heavily on “semi-serf, semi-slavish labor” that was coerced and that was associated with the kinds of tasks that subjected laborers to “general slavery” work performed for Asiatic despots: constructing irrigation ditches, clearing land, building roads, and other large-scale construction projects. “The dissolution of this Asiatically characterized typical feudal landholding organization” through a “retrogressive” self-destruction “made the Meiji reforms possible and inevitable and determined their nature.” Hani elaborated at greater length on Tokugawa feudalism’s Asiatic characteristics, stressing that such characteristics were evident because the Tokugawa system was considerably more


86 Because of space limitations, only a general sketch of these accounts can be offered here. For much more detailed analyses of the work of these and other Kōza-ha scholars, see Hoston, Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan, chs. 5–9.


centralized than its West European counterparts. The fact that Japan had long ago experienced the Asiatic mode of production accounted for this powerful role of centralized power in an otherwise classical feudal system. "The shogun," Hani noted, "was the largest landholder in the country... and reigned as the highest political ruler." The imperial monarchy had been maintained because the large feudal landholders—the daimyō—needed to maintain the form of a unified monarchy in order to suppress the resistance of peasants and townspeople and repel foreign invasion; still, actual state power was represented in a centralized form by the existence of the mighty bakufu.89 Ultimately, the duality between the actual political and military preeminence of the shogun and the fiction of "a unified feudal monarchy," "while secondary, was a contradiction." When combined with other intensifying strains in the feudal order and the inability of the shogunate to respond effectively to the Western powers, this tension eroded the Tokugawa system and led to its downfall.90 The sonnō-jōi campaign to restore actual ruling power to the emperor was precisely the product of this destructive duality in the Tokugawa shogunate.

The most important of the other tensions helping to precipitate the downfall of the shogunate were associated with the growth of capitalistic forces within the Tokugawa economy. These forces eroded the well-being of the samurai class by fueling dissatisfaction in its lower ranks and increased the economic power of certain domains relative to the shogunate. Köza-ha historians disagreed considerably on the extent and significance of the indigenous growth of capitalism in Tokugawa Japan. The issue came to the forefront of the debate on Japanese capitalism in the early 1930s, when Hattori Shisō criticized both Rōnō-ha and Köza-ha historical research, including his own pioneering study of "The History of the Meiji Restoration" (Meiji ishin shi), published in 1928–29, for assuming that the primacy of external forces in Japan's capitalistic development. In the series of essays that brought him into conflict with the Rōnō-ha's Tsuchiya and the Köza-ha's Hirano, Hattori asserted that even before the arrival of Perry's fleet in the 1850s, Japanese capitalism had already developed to the point that it was entering the era when manufacture—"cooperative production based on a division of labor, involving few capitalists and large numbers of workers, and done by hand and not by machine"—was the predominant form of capitalist production.91 This did not mean that capitalism had already advanced to the point that it predominated in

90 Ibid., 33–34.
91 Hoston, Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan, 105. This, was, according to Marx, one of the early stages of capitalist production. See Karl Marx, A Critical Analysis of Capitalistic Production, vol. 1, ch. 14 of Capital.
terms of the totality of social production, but this was an important claim, because, given "the revolutionary character" of manufacture, it meant that capitalism had begun to advance significantly in Japan before the advent of pressures from the Western powers.

Hattori’s proposition placed bakumatsu Japan at the same stage western Europe experienced from the mid-sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, according to Marx. Hattori went on to conduct painstaking studies of the silk goods, silk thread, cotton cloth, and striped cotton cloth industries in selected han to investigate the breadth and depth of the influence of manufacture in pre-Meiji Japan. As a result of this research, he concluded that in Japan the manufacture period was compressed into a fifty-year period from the 1840s through the early 1890s and thus that the Meiji Restoration itself was a product of an internal process inherent to the manufacture period. Noting that the Glorious Revolution in England and the French Revolution had occurred at the end of the manufacture period in Western Europe, Hattori contended that the contradictions caused by the rise of manufacture in the context of Tokugawa feudalism were already materializing before the ports opened. However, Japan’s bourgeoisie was still very weak and immature; and as the Meiji Restoration resolved itself in an equilibrium between the forces of entrenched feudalism and the forces of a burgeoning capitalism, the absolutist regime of the Meiji state was the result.

But who were the concrete historical actors who made the Meiji Restoration? What influence did the progress of capitalist production in Japan exercise on the roles these actors played? Hirano and others in the Kōza-ha protested that Hattori exaggerated the significance of capitalist manufacture in the Tokugawa era, but they did not gainsay the importance of new capitalist productive forces in abetting the demise of the shogunate. Hirano pointed out the importance not only of manufacture, particularly in the form of the putting-out system (toiya-sei), but also of promoting capitalist production un-

95 In this system of production, the capitalist, usually a merchant, paid a worker in advance in kind with raw materials, in return for which the worker would produce the baskets, cotton cloth or other items to the specification of the entrepreneur. The putting-out system is commonly associated with early manufacture.
der the tutelage of individual domains. The latter development separated the peasants from the land, causing them tremendous hardship (much as enclosure had produced the phenomenon of wandering vagabonds associated with nascent capitalism in Western Europe). This in turn contributed to the peasant uprisings to which Hani attributed major significance in precipitating the downfall of the shogunate. In addition, with the flourishing of manufacture, one began to see the transformation of commercial capital into industrial capital, which in turn had the effect of promoting the economic vitality of han in which such production was encouraged. At the same time, the financial pressures that Takahashi had observed caused the daimyō to resort to increased exploitation of their serfs through taxes and forced labor. In other words, the feudal lords of the Tokugawa era responded to the opportunities that capitalist production opened by developing new ways to exploit the peasantry while imposing heavier and heavier exactions in the traditional semi-Asiatic feudal mode that had characterized their entire feudal experience. By these means, Hirano concluded, the han, especially the domains most closely associated with the overthrow of the shogunate such as the Satsuma and Tosa hans, tended to evolve “towards a system of semi-serf capitalist centralized government.” This tendency would be consummated in the Meiji absolutist state.

Kōza-ha scholars saw both revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces produced by these circumstances in the dissolution of Tokugawa feudalism. We have already seen how the heightening of economic pressure on the peasants contributed to the rise of peasant insurrections. In addition, a category of increasingly impoverished lower-level retainers and samurai came to be allied with the fledgling commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. In part, this occurred because these groups were associated with the industrial bourgeoisie in commercial towns and had begun to lose some of their own feudal character by engaging in commercial activities themselves; and in part, this was simply a response to their own declining economic situation under Tokugawa feudalism. In any case, this category of lower-level retainers and samurai became a progressive destructive force against their own feudal lords and against the shogunate itself. They allied with the weak bourgeoisie for tactical reasons only; hence, they lacked the commitment to the liberal democratic objectives associated with bourgeois revolution once they became the bureaucrats and leaders of the new Meiji regime. On the other hand, a second category of lower-level han retainers “was separated from the castle towns and remained attached to the village.” This group, which Hattori labeled “country samurai,” was a profeudal counterrevolutionary force that limited


the degree of change away from feudalism that could be achieved in the Restoration.99 As a result, Hani asserted, “the establishment of an absolute monarchy that paralleled the democratic revolutionary movement in the Restoration not only absolutely was not revolutionary, but rather was a counter-revolutionary bastion against the mass struggle of oppressed strata of people.”100 Hirano added that this outcome was exacerbated by the way in which capitalism, especially manufacture, had been nurtured by individual domains in the late Tokugawa era. Han efforts to encourage capitalist production by establishing government production offices had distorted the evolution of Japanese capitalism and stunted the growth of the bourgeoisie.101 In short, the Meiji Restoration may have involved bourgeois-democratic aspirations on the part of some of its primary actors, but it fell far short of a bourgeois revolution in its actual outcome. The Restoration was merely the product of the emergence of a capitalism heavily dependent on official initiatives adopted on the basis of a semiserf economic system. The transitional absolutist Meiji state would simply reorganize that same system on a national scale to support the further development of capitalism.102

Most Kōza-ha historians, then, disagreed emphatically with the Rōnō-ha position that the post-Restoration state had at any point been something other than an absolutist state. At times, especially in his early work on the history of the Meiji Restoration, Hattori seemed to accept Rōnō-ha notions that the Meiji regime, at the outset or subsequently, might have represented something other than an absolutist government.103 Perhaps, in the days before the abolition of the domains and the establishment of prefectures, it had been a feudalistic, status-differentiated monarchy with institutions like the French estates representing the interests of various status groups.104 In the final analysis, however, Hirano argued that the distinction that Hattori tried to draw between status and absolutist monarchies was untenable. This was particularly evident in societies such as Prussia and tsarist Russia, where status-based monarchy was included, in Marx’s and Engels’s analyses, in the experience of absolutism itself. Nor did the Meiji regime, even at the very outset, have institutions such as the French états généraux. Indeed, Hirano argued that the Meiji Restoration government was not in a position to “respond to high-level commodity production that already involved the embryo of bourgeois development” as had “the absolutist state in this stage in Western Europe.” Japan’s

105 See, for example, Hattori Shisō, Meiji ishin shi (Tokyo: Sanryū Shobō, 1948), ch. 5.
absolutism was less advanced because the capitalism existing at the time of the Meiji Restoration was not based on the total dissolution of feudal relations of production but rather on semiserfdom, which was the partial dissolution and yet strengthening of those relations in the countryside. The post-Restoration regime drew on "the ancient Asiatic system," reviving "slavery commodity production," rather than the more progressive form of commodity production copied from Rome after the French Revolution. In addition, the framers of the new Meiji state borrowed from the political forms of Emperor Friedrich’s Prussia when they designed the new state and planned its activities.

Most important, the new state continued to resort to "non-economic coercion"—a hallmark of feudal oppression—of peasants and of other direct producers to obtain the resources to accomplish its goals. There was, then, a mutual dependence between Japan’s weak and immature bourgeoisie and the new absolutist state in the effort to abet the primitive accumulation of capital that had only begun in the late Tokugawa period. Only by relying on the state’s power could the bourgeoisie make the transition to industrial capitalism. Conversely, the new government could act as the lever of primitive capitalist accumulation in post-Restoration Japan only by borrowing large amounts of usury capital from commercial capitalists and merchants, like the Mitsui family and from well-to-do landlords who dealt in such capital. This community of interests among the state’s modernizing bureaucracy, feudal or semifeudal landlords, and large commercial and usury capitalists gave Japan’s new monarchy the character of absolutism (or autocracy) in its more general sense.

The Kōza-ha viewed the reforms that the new Meiji state implemented to accelerate the growth of capitalism as far more revolutionary than the upheavals from below that toppled the shogunate or the character of the new state per se. Yet Kōza-ha scholars tempered their appraisal of the revolutionary aspects of the Meiji Restoration in terms of the notion of a revolution from above because they viewed the Restoration as providing many circumstances for the maturation and accelerated growth of Japanese capitalism, although in such a way as to reinforce the semiserf character of economic arrangements left intact after the Restoration, especially in the agrarian structure. The capitalism that had sprouted and been nurtured by the state institutions of the shogunate and individual han had created an abnormal species of capitalism in Tokugawa Japan, and Kōza-ha scholars maintained that the abnormal aspects of this capitalism were exacerbated by the kinds of measures that were undertaken by the Meiji regime. The result was even less attractive than the cruel-

ties wrought by the classic bourgeois-democratic revolutions of England and France: In Japan the process of “primitive capital accumulation [was] a peculiarly violent one” because of the newly centralized power of the new state apparatus and the way that power could be used to enforce a semiserf, semislave mode of life on the vast majority of Japanese who actually produced that accumulation of capital. Nor did Japan benefit from a strong increasingly liberal bourgeoisie acting to ease at least the political aspects of this oppression. Rather, Japan’s bourgeoisie remained imbued with the “serf—landlord characteristics” that had been with it from its origins in the soil of feudal production in the Tokugawa era. Thus, in Hirano’s words, “the nascent bourgeois development itself” that “was based on . . . a serf system . . . reproduced” and “embossed the entire system with the form of semi-serf capitalism, the entire basis of [which] caused the political rule to be characterized in the same way.”

Nevertheless, the reforms implemented by the new regime were not without great significance. Like the Rōnō-ha, Kōza-ha scholars agreed that of all the reforms—the abolition of the han and the establishment of ken (prefectures), the lifting of the ban on the sale and purchase of land in place since 1643, and the legal establishment of private property in land—the most important was the land tax reform. However, in the Kōza-ha view, the land tax reforms were not important primarily for their revolutionizing impact on the land tenure system. On the contrary, the reforms represented the “rearrangement on a national scale” of what would remain an essentially semifeudal land system. The bureaucracy, in its progressive drive to establish a vigorous national capitalism, was not inclined to support the resurrection of wholly feudal institutions in the country. On the other hand, given its own partial basis in rural landlordism dependent on feudal rents and dues, it was not prepared to complete the dissolution of feudalism begun spontaneously during the Tokugawa era in any more than a compromising (dakyo-teki) fashion. The realization of the new national land tax epitomized this compromising attitude towards feudalism among the Meiji oligarchs.

Again, there was disagreement among Kōza-ha scholars on the nature of the land tax reforms. Noro argued in support of the notion that significant large-scale feudal landownership with Asiatic characteristics persisted in Japan despite the reforms implemented by the Meiji regime:

The pure relations of pure feudal landholding were abolished for a time, along with the restrictions that accompanied it, by the reforms of the Meiji Restoration. Even so, this
fact does not imply that it as [Inomata] says “abolished the land system of feudal agriculture” as the basis of feudal absolutism. [The reforms] merely accomplished the removal of pure feudal landholding relations, i.e., abolished pure feudal landholding relations of the shogunate and three hundred retainers, and in its place put unified land ownership under the sovereignty of the absolute monarch. . . . In our country, the state is the highest landlord, and sovereignty is the ownership of the land assembled on a national scale. Our country’s land taxes, both in their traditional conception and in reality, could not be anything essentially different from the form of ground rent.110

The land tax itself, then, had a dual nature. At once both feudal and modern, the land tax was modern in that it was premised on currency circulation (because the taxes would be paid in cash), was mediated by land values and thus was tied to the abolition of feudal limitations on land ownership, and was unified nationally rather than being payable only in certain individual feudal domains. Nevertheless, the tax was feudal in character in that it became the dominant expression of surplus value and matched the high rates of feudal ground rent and feudal tributes levied under Tokugawa feudalism. All the Kōza-ha analysts agreed on this dual character of the land tax reforms. Noro differed in that he insisted that the reforms also “opened a free path for the concentration of land, even if it did not deliberately seek to advance the development of large landownership.”111 Other Kōza-ha scholars, drawing on research completed after the publication of Noro’s work, contended that the pre-Meiji land system had been based on “too small a scale for land cultivation” and that this was what was carried over into the Meiji era after the land tax reforms. Yamada and Hirano, who agreed with the Rōnō-ha’s Inomata, asserted that “not only was capitalistic large agricultural management not carried on as we have seen in the case of England; it did not even develop into the Junker pattern of management as in the cases of Germany and old Russia.” Contrary to the Rōnō-ha’s claims, landlords did not become bourgeoisified but continued to live parasitically off a peasantry that was not free to engage in small-scale cultivation like the peasantry of the much more advanced France.112

The Meiji land tax took the form of a modern tax and acted as a “powerful lever of primitive capitalist accumulation” for the Meiji government.113 Given this enormous role of the Meiji state, however, Yamada and others concluded that the resulting form of “militaristic semi-serf” capitalism took a course of development that was “completely the reverse of the case of West-

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110 Noro, “Nihon ni okeru tochi shoyū,” 203. One of the most characteristic features of the Asiatic mode of production is said to be the unity of rent and taxes, because the oriental despot is said to be the sole or highest landowner in the society.

111 Ibid., 205–6.

112 See Uchida and Nakano, Nihon shihon-shugi ronsō, 194, 196–198; and Hirano, Nihon shihon-shugi shakai no kikō, 257n, 258n. Hirano did agree with Noro on the Asiatic characteristics of the old feudal landholding system.

113 Ibid., 259n.
ern European capitalism." Moreover, as long as serfdom, even semi-serfdom, was not completely eliminated, the state would have to provide for the suppression of the peasant uprisings and movements for democratization that would ensue. Hence, the Meiji government established the Metropolitan Police Headquarters, and the state’s leaders were determined to prevent such movements from making enough gains to threaten the new regime. The conferral of the Meiji Constitution and its establishment of the Diet could be understood in this light. It gave the bourgeoisie and landlord class, the right to participate in government but continued to exclude the peasants and townspeople used by the landlord and bourgeois classes to attain these political goals. Therefore, the Kōza-ha was unable to view these actions as evidence of the victory of a bourgeois-democratic revolution originating in the Restoration.

Thus, for the Kōza-ha, the problem posed by the persistence of feudal elements for Rōnō-ha scholars examining the Restoration as a bourgeois-revolution was not simply a question of “feudal remnant forces.” On the contrary, these forces were not dismissed as inconsequential to the basic configuration of the absolutist political system and its economic substructure. Kōza-ha scholars argued that the Rōnō-ha took entirely too sanguine a view both of these forces’ superstructure and substructure. Even though the Rōnō-ha scholar Tsuchiya concurred with Hirano on the limitations of the indigenous origins of capitalism in Japan, Hirano charged that among the Rōnō-ha scholars—and Takahashi Kamekichi— were many who “saw a capitalist mode of production in the [mere] fact that agricultural products circulated as commodities” or failed to distinguish between commercial usury capital, which was not revolutionary, and industrial capital, which was. In short, where the Rōnō-ha concentrated on the universal aspects of the Meiji Restoration as a bourgeois-democratic revolution, the Kōza-ha, supported by detailed comparative studies of the development of capitalism in Japan, England, France, and Germany, remained unconvinced that what occurred in Japan in the Meiji Restoration and its aftermath was sufficiently similar to the outlines of bourgeois-democratic revolution in England and France for this appellation to apply. Perhaps the Kōza-ha was excessively true to a model that had required considerable departure from the details of events in England and France to produce the model at the outset. In any case, there is no question

118 See Hirano, “Ishin seiji,” 58n–59n for a statistical comparison of the development of capitalism in England and Germany, for example.
that, for the Köza-ha, the consequences of the Meiji Restoration could not be made to resemble adequately the dissolution of feudal structures, achievement of high levels of capitalist development, and realization of bourgeois-democratic politics that it regarded as essential elements of bourgeois-democratic revolution.

CONCLUSIONS

On closer scrutiny, one might ask precisely which elements are essential to the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Surely in western Europe there was no clear and immediate progression from feudal to capitalist modes of production, as the concept of bourgeois revolution would seem to imply. Nevertheless, such a cataclysmic view of the revolutionary process remains attractive even to contemporary Marxist scholars who caution against the assumption that what occurs in the transition from one mode of production to another involves the complete dissolution of one mode and the immediate flourishing of another. Part of the responsibility for this difficulty is rooted in writings of the founders themselves. As English historian Perry Anderson notes, “Marx rightly insisted on the distinction between the genesis and the structure of modes of production. But he was also wrongly tempted to add that the reproduction of the latter . . . absorbed or abolished traces of the former altogether”:

Concrete social formations, as we have seen typically embody a number of coexistent and conflicting modes of production, of varying date. . . . [R]ather than presenting the form of cumulative chronology, in which one phase succeeds and supercedes the next, to produce the successor that will surpass it in turn, the course towards capitalism reveals a remanence of the legacy of one mode of production within an epoch dominated by another, and a reactivation of its spell in the passage to a third. 119

Yet Anderson himself goes on to assert that “the mechanisms of the transition to feudalism in Japan were . . . totally different from those in Europe,” in that they were exogenous:

There was no cataclysmic collapse and dissolution of two conflicting modes of production, accompanied by a profound economic, political and social regression, that nevertheless cleared the way for the dynamic subsequent advance of the new mode of production born of their dissolution. Rather, there was an extremely long drawn-out decline of the central imperial state, within the framework of which local warrior nobles imperceptibly usurped provincial lands and privatized military power, until eventually—after a continuous development of seven centuries—a virtually complete feudal fragmentation of the country had occurred. . . . The Tokugawa Shogunate represented the arrested end-product of this secular history. 120

Thus, for contemporary Western Marxists, as well as for the scholars of the two prewar Japanese Marxist factions, “The bourgeois revolution [has continued to be] regarded as the crucial factor in the modernisation of Western

119 Anderson, Lineages of the Absolutist State, 420–1 (emphasis in the original).
120 Ibid., 415, 418.
politics, technology and society.” On examination, however, as historian Bryan Turner suggests, perhaps “there is no such thing as a typical model of the bourgeois revolution.” The French Revolution might have destroyed the old monarchy, but it also increased “the political and economic significance of the peasantry by the legislation of smallholdings” and the “post-revolutionary structure of rural France had the consequence of delaying capitalist development in the first half of the nineteenth century.”121 In this sense, the Meiji Restoration might have been something more advanced—rather than backward—by comparison with the French model. In England, Turner argues, capitalism developed in large-scale rural landholdings before the emergence of an urban industrial bourgeoisie; and in Germany, “political and economic development was brought about ‘from above’”: This was the achievement of “a feudal Junker class which excluded the industrial bourgeoisie from political power in exchange for an advantageous tariff system and which intensified pre-capitalist forms of exploitation in the large estates of East Germany.”122 Both these cases carry significant similarities and differences with the phenomenon of the Meiji Restoration in Japan.

As in England, Germany, and France, the controversy over the place of the Meiji Restoration in Japan's past held important implications for its present and future. In the 1920s and 1930s, Marxist scholars were drawn to the Meiji Restoration because they were seeking clues as to why democracy had emerged with such fragility in Japan in the intervening years. The Kōza-ha stressed that the post-Restoration state had been absolutist in character, in large part because they were trying to explain why the parliamentary democratic structure on the surface of Japanese politics in their own era did not operate in a manner consistent with what they envisioned (as a result of the myth of the European experience) as democratic. Despite these institutional arrangements, Japanese culture and society did not appear to be suffused with democratic values. For these scholars Japan seemed to have adopted Western forms but not Western values; yet the disenchantment of Restorationists and their supporters throughout Japanese society seemed to contradict this view. Thus, regardless of its outcome in the supremacy of the absolutist thesis of the Kōza-ha, the controversy over the Meiji Restoration clearly delineated not only opposing factions in Japanese politics but also conflicting interpretations of Japan’s essence and mission. As Marxists, the conflicting Marxist factions stood in agreement on the importance of the socioeconomic circumstances that had contributed to Japan’s recent past for understanding Japan’s present and future. To this day, Japan’s scholarly community remains divided on this issue of the Meiji Restoration along the line between the Kōza-ha and the Rōnō-ha, and the salience of the issue has shaped the research agendas of

122 Ibid.
scholars on both sides. In political life, they define the difference between the JCP’s continued advocacy of a two-step revolution commencing with the completion of Japan’s abortive bourgeois revolution, on the one hand, and the JSP’s at once more radical yet moderate espousal of immediate transition to social democracy.

Perhaps the key to understanding the difference between the arguments for and against the thesis that the Meiji Restoration was a bourgeois-democratic revolution lies in the importance of the democratic element of the paradigm of bourgeois revolution in the views of the individual parties. For the Rōnō-ha, which was, partly as a consequence of its judgments, subjected to the discipline of the state after, and in lighter doses, than the Kōza-ha, the lingering problems of the maturation of democracy in prewar Japan could be subsumed under the rubric of the notion of feudal remnants. Japan in the 1920s and 1930s was not fundamentally undemocratic in their view. England, the site of a classic bourgeois revolution, continued to have a monarchy alongside flourishing democracy; and Japan did, could, or would have the same. The problem for the Kōza-ha, however, lay precisely in the difference between potentiality and actuality. Japan had not attained a bourgeois monarchy in the English sense because the incompleteness of the Meiji Restoration had resulted in limitations on parliamentary initiative and other democratic elements in Japan. One might venture that the Kōza-ha had excessively high expectations for bourgeois revolution. After all, the reality of Victorian England, well after the Glorious Revolution, was that “scarcely ten percent of the adult population enjoyed political rights.” The bourgeoisie in England, as elsewhere, needed “a capitalist State, both bourgeois and liberal, but not necessarily democratic,” and most of the revolutionizing aspects of the bourgeois revolution occurred not at the behest of the bourgeoisie, but as “the result of political mobilization by the subaltern classes.” Perhaps, as the long experience of the French Revolution would suggest, the expectation that bourgeois revolution should embrace democratization is part of the myth of bourgeois-democracy itself. Perhaps there was never any realistic reason to assume that a cataclysmic revolution of the sort described by Anderson, like Marx before

123 Generally, Rōnō-ha scholars tend to stress the universal characteristics of Japan’s capitalist industrialization, and thus they have produced some of the most innovative studies available on such concepts as the theory of value and state capitalism. Scholars of the Kōza-ha, which has always stressed the importance of a comparative perspective on socioeconomic development in identifying areas of Japan’s “backwardness” have concentrated their efforts in comparative economic and political historical studies. See Hoston, Marxism and the Crisis of Development, ch. 9 passim.


him, could have produced a necessarily liberal and democratic political outcome.

When one is speaking about revolutionary change in societies experiencing late industrialization and confronting economic and military pressures from more advanced industrial societies, that probability recedes still further from view. The greater the role the state is pressed to take in fostering rapid industrial development, the more powerful its organs become, relative to the more loosely and informally organized groupings of citizens acting as so many private or public women and men. There is a constant tension between the strength that comes from acting in unison and the kinetic energy that arises out of the free and dynamic interaction among creative individuals in a liberal polity. In Japan, a fully functioning political democracy emerged only as a result of the traumatic defeat in war of a powerful militaristic state; yet the continued predominance of bureaucratic over legislative and party initiative and the complete absence of any alternation of the party in power for thirty-five years signal for many that political democracy in Japan continues to be tenuous, threatened by the legacy of the powerful Meiji state and its pivotal role in Japan’s industrialization. The virtue of Kōza-ha and Rōnō-ha scholarship lies in the determination of these scholars to fathom the dynamics of this historical outcome by questioning wherein revolutionary change lies, whence it comes, and what are its very real limitations. As we witness events in eastern Europe and mainland China two centuries after the French Revolution, there is ample reason to suspect that these concerns will remain as important in decades to come as they have been in the past.