Japan and the Question of Fascism, 1918–41[1]

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In the 1920s and the 1930s fascist ideas and fascist methods attracted countless Japanese admirers and imitators. By the late 1930s this Japanese enthusiasm for fascism had become so strong as to affect government decisions. Notably, enthusiasm for fascism was a significant factor in the Japanese government's decision to conclude an alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The popularity of fascism in prewar Japan makes it easy to understand why some scholars classify Japan as a fascist state. Such classification is wrong. As I will show, Japan did not become a fascist state. But fascist ideas gained such credence as to become an integral part of political discourse. Thus, fascism is of crucial

1 This article originated as a paper "The Origins of Fascist Thought in Japan, 1916–1932," presented at the International Convention of Asia Scholars, ICAS 8, Macao, 24–27 June 2013. My fellow panellists (Roger Brown, Katō Yōko, Sven Saaler and Kiyoshi Ueda) helped to clarify my ideas. This resulted in an article published in a Russian translation as "Razmyshleniya o Fashizmie v Noveishei Istorii Yaponii (1918–1941)" (Some Reflections on the Question of Fascism in Modern Japanese History, 1918–1941), *Bereginiya 777 Sova*, 4 (31) 2016, 276–90. The present article, though based on the Russian version, has been revised and expanded to such an extent as to constitute a different article. I also benefited from conversations with Ethan Mark, Paul Barclay and Maggie Clinton, participants in the panel "Visualizing Fascism across Asia: China, Japan, Manchuria, Taiwan, and Indonesia" at the International Convention of Asia Scholars, ICAS 10, Chiang Mai Convention Center, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 20–23 July 2017. Special thanks go to Roger Brown and Michael Schneider, who pointed out a number of problems with earlier versions of this article. I alone am responsible for any defects that remain.

importance for understanding pre-1945 Japan.

I will first explain why in my view Japan was not a fascist state. Japan's fascist reputation arose mainly due to its wartime association with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. But it was also a by-product of the debate on the nature of Japan's polity – whether Japan was a fascist state or not – that divided Japanese intellectuals in the 1930s and which, having subsided during the war years (1937–45), resurged in the postwar era. I will briefly summarize this debate which, though dominated by Marxist scholars, was by no means a Marxist monopoly. Next, I will identify some of Japan's home-grown fascists, for in interwar Japan there were many individuals who could plausibly be described as such.[2] They

2 Part of the problem of discussing fascism in Japan is that the concept is notoriously difficult to define (on this point, see, for example, Dietrich Orlow*, The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe: German Nazis, Dutch and French Fascists, 1933–1939,* Palgrave Macmillan 2009, 3). Fascism has many definitions. For example, Roger Eatwell defines fascism as "an ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based on a holistic-national radical Third Way, though in practice fascism has tended to stress style, especially action and the charismatic leader, more than detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichaean demonisation of its enemies." See his "On Defining the 'Fascist Minimum': The centrality of ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1:3, 1996, 303–19. Another authority, the late Ernst Nolte defines fascism as "anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvement of a radically opposed and yet related ideology and by the use of almost identical and yet typically modified methods, always, however, within the underlying framework of national self-assertion and autonomy." Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, translated from the German by Leila Vennewitz, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, Inc, 1969, 40. Criteria that have to be met for an individual to be described as a fascist include anti-liberalism, anti-communism, anti-conservatism, aiming to create a nationalist authoritarian state, "regulated, multi-class, integrated national structure, advocacy of territorial expansion, approval of violence," and espousal of "the organic view of society," a "tendency toward an authoritarian, charismatic, personal style of command." Stanley G. Payne. *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, Wisconsin University Press, 1980, 7, table 1, quoted in Szpilman, "Kanokogi Kazunobu: Pioneer of Platonic Fascism and Imperial Pan-Asianism," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 68:2, 2013, 269.

called for integration of society, mobilization of resources, and the creation of an autarkic economic bloc; they vituperated against so-called liberal values, laissez faire economics, individualism, decadence, hedonism, pacifism and international cooperation; they insisted in shrill social Darwinian terms on Japan's right to obtain "living space;" they longed for a great leader to emerge in Japan; they were convinced of the Japanese people's inherent superiority that entitled Japan to lead Asia; and, as if to dispel any doubts about the nature of their views, they did not hide their admiration for the fascist dictators in Europe. A minority of these even proudly claimed to be fascist. They are relatively simple to classify. But those − and this category was far more numerous− who spurned the label, but nevertheless closely resembled Western fascists both in the ideas they advocated and in those they rejected, are more difficult to pigeonhole. Although some Japanese thinkers came up with their own versions of fascism even before Mussolini, fascism was generally regarded as a foreign creed and attempts were made to "domesticate" it, that is, to make it compatible with Japan's tradition. I will describe these efforts briefly.

WHY JAPAN WAS NOT A FASCIST STATE

Let me state at the outset why I do not believe Japan was a fascist state.[3]

First, there was no fascist mass movement in Japan. Attempts to form such a movement were without exception unsuccessful. The most sustained effort resulted in the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA) founded by Prince

3 "What quality of fascism as practiced in other countries was so glaringly different that western scholars reject it so universally when applied to Imperial Japan?" wonders one mystified scholar. See Marcus Willensky, "Japanese Fascism Revisited," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 5:1 (Winter 2005) 65. The following paragraphs are intended to provide an answer to this question.

Konoe Fumimaro (1891–1945), who was prime minister at the time. Konoe and his associates came close to success in their attempt to impose what might be called "fascism from above."[4] But in the end his Association did not achieve the fascist form its originator had hoped for. It failed because Konoe's plans ran into strong opposition from politicians in the National Diet, Court officials, conservative bureaucrats and even the military who objected to being placed under civilian control.[5] As a result, the movement was rendered politically ineffective. In its final form, the IRAA cannot be plausibly described as a fascist party. There had been earlier attempts to form a fascist mass movement in Japan, albeit on a smaller scale, for example, Shimonaka Yasaburō's Aikoku Kinrōtō and Nakano Seigō's Tōhōkai, launched respectively in 1930 and 1936.[6] None succeeded in gaining much support; none came even close to seizing political power. Ultimately, for all their bluster and posturing, these failed movements, like their instigators, played only a marginal role in Japanese politics.

Secondly, no charismatic leader emerged in Japan. Konoe, who possessed charisma and harboured dictatorial ambitions, was not ruthless or determined enough to become a dictator, even if sometimes he imagined he possessed the right qualities to become Japan's Hitler. But, at least, he became prime minister.[7]

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4 On these associates, William Miles Fletcher III, *The Search for A New Order : Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan*, University of North Carolina Press, 1982.

5 Christopher W. A. Szpilman, "Conservatism and Conservative Reaction," in Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese History*, Routledge, 2018, 179–80 (hereafter RHMJH); Itō Takashi, *Konoe shintaisei*, Chūō kōronsha, 1983, 145.

6 See below for more information on the Aikoku Kinrōtō and the Tōhōkai, where references are provided.

7 Konoe served as prime minister from June 1937 until January 1939 and again in two successive cabinets from July 1940 until October 1941. For Konoe, see Oka Yoshitake, *Konoe Fumimaro*, Iwanami shoten, 1972; Tsutsui Kiyotada, *Konoe Fumimaro: kyōyōteki popyurisuto no higeki*, Iwanami shoten, 2009; Furukawa Takahisa, *Konoe Fumimaro*, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan,

Nakano Seigō (1886–1943), whom I have mentioned above in connection with the fascist Tōhōkai, had charisma but never achieved political importance. He was never seriously regarded as a potential prime minister; he never even served in any cabinet position. For all his charm, eloquence, and notoriety, he remained small fry, even if he and some of his admirers sometimes imagined he was a big shot. In the end, this self-proclaimed fascist was forced to commit suicide in 1943.[8] In contrast to Nakano, General Tōjō Hideki (1884–1948) was no small fry. Tōjō managed to concentrate more power in his hands than any other man in modern Japanese history. As prime minister, he served at various points of time also as army minister, home minister, munitions minister, and the chief of the Army General Staff. That is why many of his critics accused him of being a dictator. But his accusers were mistaken. Though Tōjō doubtless had dictatorial tendencies, he never succeeded, at any point in his career, in becoming an all-powerful dictator. True, in their wartime propaganda the Allies depicted him as a dictator just like Hitler and Mussolini, but that was a deliberate exaggeration. In reality, there was a qualitative chasm between Tōjō and those fascist leaders. Unlike these self-made, charismatic men who attracted a mass following, Tōjō was a highly efficient military bureaucrat, but otherwise a political non-entity. Far from controlling it, Tōjō was dependent on the army's bureaucratic machine, to which he owed his career. Hitler and Mussolini had formed mass movements and parties, which each controlled with an iron fist. Tōjō led neither a movement nor a party. Hitler and Mussolini mesmerized crowds, but Tōjō, without an iota of charisma, had no such ability. But, unlike the fascist dictators, he did not have to charm crowds. All he had to do was to function efficiently to the satisfaction of

2015.

8 Minagawa Masaki, *Nihon kindai no rekishi 5: Sōryokusen no naka no Nihon seiji*, Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2017, 172

the various segments of the government. When it was decided that he was no longer functioning efficiently, his services were simply dispensed with. In this respect, the difference between the fascist dictators and Tōjō could not be greater. Mussolini had to be deposed in a coup d'état; nobody was in a position to depose Hitler, who committed suicide while in office when Soviet troops were about to storm his Berlin stronghold. In contrast, Tōjō was forced to resign by a group of elderly men called *jūshin* (elder statesmen).[9] As this dismissal shows, powerful though he was while in office, Tōjō was not a powerful dictator in the mould of Hitler or Mussolini: he was constrained by the system that had produced him.

Thirdly, there was no take-over of power by a fascist movement in Japan (this follows from the first point). True, in the 1930s several conspiracies to stage coups and one attempted coup took place. These plots were hatched by army men, in some cases in cahoots with civilian activists, who were influenced by a variety of ideas, including fascism. All these plots were poorly planned and badly, if at all, executed; all, without exception, failed.[10] In spite of such incidents, throughout the

9 Tsutsui Kiyotada, *Konoe Fumimaro,* 260–64.

10 I am not drawing a distinction here between coups and terrorist incidents. The botched coups include the May 15th Incident of 1932 (strictly speaking, this was not a coup, but an attempt to trigger a coup: the plotters had naively assumed that after assassinating the prime minister, Inukai Tsuyoshi, and causing havoc by destroying power generators and attacking police stations, the military would intervene and a military government be imposed. The military, however, did not budge; their plans thwarted, the plotters turned themselves in to the police) and the February 26th Incident (in contrast to the May 15th incident, this was a massive coup, though ultimately just as futile: the rebels murdered a number of prominent figures whom they regarded as hostile to their cause, but were forced to surrender after four days' stand-off). There were also conspiracies to stage coups, the so-called March and October Incidents (both in 1931), which ended up as non-events either because the conspirators abandoned their plans or because they were prevented from executing them by authorities. The Shinpeitai and the Saitama Teishintai incidents (both in 1933) also failed. All these "incidents" were amateurishly planned and, in the two cases when they actually took place, poorly executed. Ben Ami Shillony, *Revolt in Japan:*

period constitutional niceties were observed religiously and the rule of the law continued to be meticulously upheld. The growing repressiveness of the Japanese state was the result of the war situation, not of fascism.[11]

4) In spite of claims to the contrary (the dark valley argument, the *kenpeitai* [military police] repression, etc.),[12] there was little state-sponsored terror in Japan of the sort that was routine in Germany and Italy. In other words, only few opponents of the government met violent ends. There certainly was repression in Japan, but it was remarkably bloodless, certainly bloodless by comparison with Germany, Italy or Franco's Spain or for that matter Soviet Russia, which was not fascist. Communists who were arrested were treated relatively gently.[13] True, some

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The Young Officers and the February 26th, 1936 Incident, Princeton University Press, 1973, is the standard work in English. For the latest on the historiography of these incidents, see Tsutsui Kiyotada, "2.26 jiken to Shōwa chōkokkashugi undō," in Tsutsui Kiyotada (ed.) *Shōwashi kōgi: saishin kenkyū de miru sensō e no michi*, Chikuma shobō, 2015, 121–39; Tsutsui Kiyotada (ed.), *Fifteen Lectures on Showa Japan: Road to the Pacific War in Recent Historiography*, transl. by Noda Makito and Paul Narum, JPIC, 2016, 121–39; and Hasegawa Yūichi, "Ketsumeidan jiken to 5.15 jiken," in Tsutsui Kiyotada (ed.) *Shōwashi kōgi 2: senmon kenkyūsha ga miru sensō e no michi*, Chikuma shobō, 2016, 79–98.

11 On this point, see Sheldon Garon "'Total War' or 'Fascism'? Reflections on *Grassroots Fascism: The War Experience of the Japanese People*, "Collaborative Review of *Grassroots Fascism: The War Experience of the Japanese People*" in *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, 2:2, *Asian Empires & Imperialism* (Fall 2016), 26–27.

12 Thomas R. Havens, *Valley of Darkness :The Japanese People and World War Two*, New York: Norton, 1978; Saburō Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931–1945: A Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II*, Pantheon Books, 1978.

13 While pointing out this difference, I do not wish to minimize political repression in pre-1945 Japan. It is clear that leftists and other dissidents were treated brutally. Perhaps the best known is the case of the proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji (1903–33) who was murdered while in police custody. On the relatively "gentle" treatment of political prisoners, see, for example, Richard H. Mitchell, *Janus-Faced Justice: Political Criminals in Imperial Japan*, Hawaii University Press, 1992, but it must not be forgotten that such treatment was "gentle" only by the horrendous standards of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia.

were kept in prison, but most "converted" and were released and given jobs. After their release, they were generally kept under police supervision but they were not murdered or put in concentration camps like their German counterparts.[14]

Taking these points into consideration, it is very difficult to argue that Japan was a fascist state.[15]

Despite the absence of these defining characteristics of fascism, the Japanese state, nevertheless, acquired a fascist reputation. As I have mentioned above, this reputation arose partly because of Japan's alliance with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Because of it, wartime Allied propaganda routinely represented Japan as a fascist state. Emperor Hirohito (1901–1989, known posthumously as the Shōwa emperor) and sometimes General Tōjō were cast in the role of a fascist leader, alongside Hitler and Mussolini. The effects of such propaganda lingered on in the postwar period and affected, to some extent, Western perceptions of Japan.[16]

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14 On the Japanese phenomenon of *tenkō* (apostasy or conversion) see for example, Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Tenkō kenkyū*, Chikuma shobō, 1976.

15 Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto, "Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan: The Failure of a Concept," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 39 (November 1979) 65–76.

16 Harry Harootunian and, most recently, Reto Hofmann have argued that in the postwar period Japan was "the first country to be separated from fascism," which presumably means that Japan's fascist past had been deliberately suppressed by the United States. See Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915–1952*, Cornell University Press, 2015, 140 and note 12, 174). But, although such "separation" may have been attempted for political reasons by American authorities, it had no perceptible impact on Japan's historians and political scientists who in the post-1945 decades routinely described pre-1945 Japan as a fascist state. After all, Maruyama Masao's "Nihon fuashizumu no shisō to undō" (The thought and behaviour of Japanese fascism) was published in 1947. It was translated into English by Andrew Fraser as "The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism," in Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics,* ed. by Ivan Morris (Oxford University Press, 1963), 25–83.

THE FASCISM DEBATE IN JAPAN

The opinion that Japan was a fascist state is not, however, the product of wartime propaganda alone. It arose long before the war. Let us recall that some Japanese observers regarded Japan as a fascist state in the early 1930s.[17] The well-known 1933–37 debate between two groups of Marxist scholars, the Kōzaha (Lecture School Group) and the Rōnōha (Workers and Peasants Group), appeared on its surface to focus on the nature of the Meiji Restoration (was it a bourgeois revolution or not? Was it a complete revolution or a revolution *manqué*? Was the resultant Japanese state still feudal or had it become capitalist?). But in fact it was really a debate over the nature of Japan in the 1930s, namely, was Japan a fascist state or not?[18]

Marxists scholars took the view that fascism was "a crisis of capitalism at its highest stage, that is, that of monopoly capitalism."[19] As this crisis would inevitably usher in a communist revolution, such scholars argued, capitalists used fascism as a tool to forestall such a revolution. They dismissed such capitalist efforts as ultimately futile because, as they saw it, both the collapse of capitalism and a consequent communist revolution were inevitable. That much they agreed

17 Yoshino Sakuzō, "Fascism in Japan," *Contemporary Japan*, 1:2 (September 1932), 186–97; Thomas A. Bisson, "The Rise of Fascism in Japan", *Foreign Policy Reports*, 8 (26 October 1932) 196–206. In October 1932, the journalist Zama Shōhei (1884–1973) noted that "in contemporary Japan the term fascism is used in a very broad sense, sometimes denoting simple reaction." Zama, just as broadly, defined Japan's fascist movement as aiming to realize the following goals: "1) politics centred on the emperor; 2) rejection of party politics; 3) reform of the capitalist economic system; 4) realization of a national control economy; 5) liberation of the peoples of Asia." Zama, *Nihon fuassho undō no tenbō*, Nittō shoin, 1932, 8.

18 See, for example, Abe Hirozumi, *Nihon fuashizumu kenkyū josetsu*, new expanded edition, Miraisha, 1995, 12.

19 See Katō Yōko, "The Debate on Fascism in Japanese Historiography," in RHMJH, 227. My description of this Marxist debate is based on Katō.

upon. But they disagreed on whether Japan had entered the highest stage of capitalism. Historians associated with the Kōzaha argued that the Meiji Restoration was a revolution *manqué.* As they saw it, Japan could not possibly be a fascist polity, because remnants of feudalism continued to be a dominant feature of the state. The Rōnōha group on the other hand insisted that the Meiji Restoration had been a completed bourgeois revolution and that as subsequently Japan had entered the highest stage of capitalism (monopoly capitalism), their contemporary Japan could be and in fact was a fascist state.

But it would be wrong to assume that only Marxists regarded Japan as a fascist state. There were also some liberals who shared this view.[20] Other prewar scholars too saw Japan as fascist, even if in contrast to Marxists and liberals, they held a positive view of fascism and often defined fascism in highly idiosyncratic ways. For example, Gorai Kinzō (1875–1944), professor at Waseda University, maintained that Japan was fascist on account of its imperial institution. "According to the spirit of Japan's imperial way (*kōdō*)," Gorai reasoned, "the emperor and the state are one and the same. Emperor totalitarianism (*tennō zentaishugi*) fuses the two for the benefit of the state and the entire people. The concept of emperor totalitarianism within the spirit of Japan's imperial way includes both totalitarianism discussed here and [fascist] statism as advocated by Rocco and Dietrich."[21] If one were to accept Gorai's idiosyncratic views, then

20 In the 1930s Yoshino Sakuzō (1878–1933) and Hasegawa Nyozekan (1875–1969) warned against Japanese fascism. Yoshino, "Fascism in Japan;" Hasegawa, *Nihon fuashizumu hihan*, Ōhata shoten, 1932.

21 Gorai Kinzō, *Fuashizumu to sono kokka riron*, Seinen kyōiku fukyūkai, 1937, 166. Alfredo Rocco (1875–1935), Italian theoretician of fascism, author of *La formazione dello Stato fascista*, 1925; Jacob Otto Dietrich (1897–1952) Press Chief of Nazi Germany, author of *Die philosophischen Grundlagen des Nationalsozialismus*, 1935, and *Der Führer und das deutsche Volk,* 1936. Gorai was not alone in his admiration for Rocco. Rōyama Masamichi (1895–1980)

fascism in Japan had predated Western fascisms; certainly, as Gorai saw it, there was nothing in fascism that was inconsistent with Japan's ancient polity. But Gorai's positive views on fascism were quickly forgotten after the 1945 defeat. That was not the case with the Marxist interpretation of fascism.

No doubt, the Marxist debate on Japanese fascism would have also been consigned to oblivion, had the two groups not resumed their debate in the postwar period, unrestrained by censorship and *lèse majesté* laws. In fact, in the 1950s and the early 1960s the Rōnōha and the Kōzaha scholars more or less monopolized historical research in Japan.[22]

The commanding position of the Marxist school of history in the first decades after the war helps explain why the overwhelming majority of Japanese historians at the time characterized pre-1945 Japan as a fascist state. These historians were of course aware of the differences between Japan and Europe's fascist powers, but they explained them away by pointing out that "[Japanese] fascism had special characteristics."[23] Besides, they were not bothered by the absence in Japan of a charismatic leader, a mass movement, or a power take-over, because they dismissed these three characteristics as superficial features of fascism. For them, Japan was a fascist state because (they insisted) it was characterized by authoritarian government, totalitarian ambitions, terrorist violence, strong opposition to communism, and virulent nationalism.[24] To such historians any form

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and Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945), too, were influenced by Rocco, even if Rōyama saw "fascist doctrines as a source of ideas rather than a rigid program to be borrowed in finished form from Europe." See Miles Fletcher, "Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Shōwa Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 39:1, November 1979. Discussion of Rōyama's views, 44–6 (quotation, 46), for Miki and Rocco, see 51.

22 For an overview of this debate, see Abe, *Nihon fuashizumu kenkyū josetsu*, Miraisha, 1995.

23 Richard Sims, "Japanese Fascism," *History Today*, 32:1, 1982, 10–13.

24 Sims, "Japanese Fascism."

of political reaction amounted to fascism. As one of them, Abe Hirozumi (b.1929), who was still active in the 1990s, wrote: "fascism is the special form of preventive counter-revolution in the general crisis of capitalism." Fascism, Abe maintained, did not limit itself to playing a purely negative role of "suppressing the revolutionary movement and shutting off the growth of anti-establishment forces," but was actively responsible for "drawing off the nation's energy and turning it towards foreign aggression."[25]

Critics of this line of reasoning concede that Japan shared these (and possibly some other) characteristics with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, but point out that these features are found in all authoritarian or militaristic regimes, so their presence does not conclusively prove that Japan was a fascist state.[26]

Abe's view is reminiscent of that of Maruyama Masao (1914–96), professor at the Law Faculty, Tokyo University, and postwar Japan's preeminent political scientist, who, from a non-Marxist perspective, though clearly influenced by Marxist views, described fascism as "the twentieth century's most radical and most aggressive form of counter-revolution."[27] I will now briefly recount Maruyama's views on fascism.

Maruyama divided the development of the fascist movement in Japan into three

25 Quoted in Sims, "Japanese Fascism."

26 See, for example, Tsutsui Kiyotada, "'Nihon fuashizumu' ron no saikōsatsu: Maruyama riron e no hihan" in Tsutsui Kiyotada, *Shōwaki Nihon no kōzō: 2.26 jiken to sono jidai*, Kōdansha, 1996, originally published in *Chi no kōkogaku*, 6, 1976, 11–13.

27 Maruyama Masao, "Fascism— Some Problems: A Consideration of Its Political Dynamics," translated by Ronald Dore, in Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, Expanded Edition, ed. by Ivan Morris, Oxford University Press, 1969, 159. Quoted also in Katō, op.cit., 226. Yet even Maruyama conceded that that "fascism is necessarily reactionary, but conservative reaction is not necessarily fascism." Maruyama, "Fascism — Some Problems," 160.

stages. The first of these, the preparatory period, lasted from 1919 until 1931 (i.e. Manchurian Incident). It was dominated, according to Maruyama, by right wing movements among civilians. The second stage was the period of maturity. It was characterized by a number of attempted coups d'état and other terrorist incidents, which lasted between the Manchurian Incident and the 26 February Incident of 1936. It was in this second stage, Maruyama claimed, that the military, supported by civilian rightists, took over as the driving force of the fascist movement. The third stage, which Maruyama called "the consummation period of Japanese fascism," continued from March 1936 until the ultimate collapse of Imperial Japan in August 1945.[28]

The first two stages were characterized by what Maruyama called "fascism from below." The final stage represented "fascism from above." By "fascism from below" he meant a fascism that is put into effect when a fascist party seizes power. In contrast, Maruyama defined "fascism from above" as a fascism that succeeds largely by permeating the existing power structure from inside.[29] From this perspective, Italy and Germany were examples of "fascism from below," while Japan represented the case of "fascism from above."[30] Maruyama qualified this

28 Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, 26–27.

29 As I argue below, fascist ideas and values shaped Japan's foreign and domestic policy. In this limited sense, it is possible argue that there was in Japan "fascism from above." However, this does not mean that Japan was a fascist state, for, as I note, these ideas and values failed to transform the structure of the Japanese state into a fascist polity.

30 Maruyama, 167. Interestingly, Maruyama detects the presence of "fascism from above" in the United States in the 1950s. 167. The terms "fascism from above" and "fascism from below" were first used by the Marxist historian Gushima Kanezaburō (1905–2004) in his "Shinryaku sensō no shutai: Nihon fuashizumu no tokushitsu," *Genron* 1:1 (January 1946), a year before Maruyama's much better-known work. See Kumano Naoki, "Sengo Nihon ni okeru fuashizumu ron no saikentō," *Hōsei kenkyū*, 81:4 (March 2015) 61–62. I am indebted to Roger Brown for bringing this to my attention.

below/above dichotomy by saying that fascism from below is bound to coalesce with fascism from above. “In practice,” he observed, “the two always go hand in hand.”[31]

Maruyama accounted for the absence of a fascist party and a fascist take-over of power in Japan as follows: “In the process of fascist development one can say that fascist parties and organizations proper are a kind of unofficial army, and conversely the army is a kind of unofficial fascist party.”[32]

Yet Maruyama’s position is just as vulnerable to criticism as Marxist arguments. For, as Tsutsui Kiyotada (b.1948) points out, Maruyama’s criteria for defining Japanese fascism could apply to any totalitarian regime, right or left. In fact, they closely resemble the Friedrich/Brzezinski criteria for totalitarianism.[33] Besides, Maruyama’s claim that the Japanese army acted as an unofficial fascist party makes no distinction between fascism and plain militarism.

As a response to such criticisms, Furuya Tetsuo (1931–2006) and Kōketsu Atsushi (b.1951) have argued that Japan was a fascist state because “integration” and “mobilization” were defining aspects of fascism.[34] But, as critics have pointed out, this approach is also problematic. For, if one uses “integration” and “mobilization” to define fascism, then what is one to make of socialist or

31 Maruyama, 167.

32 Maruyama, 166.

33 Tsutsui, “‘Nihon fuashizumu’ ron no saikōsatsu,” 12–14. On totalitarianism in the context of the Cold War, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Harvard University Press, 1965. See also Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd expanded edition, New York: Meridian Books,1958.

34 E.g., Furuya Tetsuo, “Nihon fuashizumu ron,” *Iwanami kōza Nihon rekishi* 20, *Kindai* 7, Iwanami shoten, 1976; Kōketsu Atsushi, *Sōryokusen taisei kenkyū: Nihon rikugun no kokka sōdōin kōsō*, San’ichi shobō, 1981, and *Kindai Nihon no seigun kankei: gunjin seijika Tanaka Giichi*, Daigaku kyōikusha, 1987. For a positive appraisal of Furuya’s views on fascism, see Ethan Mark, “Japan’s 1930s: Crisis, Fascism and Social Imperialism,” in RHMJH, 242.

communist states such as the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, North Korea or Cuba? Surely, the same criteria apply also to them (and arguably to Britain and the US during World War II), yet most historians would agree that these states are not (were not) fascist.[35] Other historians, like Yoshimi Yoshiaki (b.1946), talk of "grass-roots fascism," but their fascism appears to be a mere synonym for the Japanese masses' active support for the war and the government.[36] "Grass-roots fascism" may help explain the lack of opposition or resistance to Japanese militarism, but is not helpful in settling the question whether Japan was a fascist state or a fascist polity.

Perhaps as a result of such problems with defining fascism, many historians in Japan have altogether discarded "fascism" as an analytical category.[37] For

35 Interestingly, Franz Borkenau (1900–57) regarded fascism as a transitional phenomenon in the context of revolutionary developmental regimes which prepare the way for the establishment of industrial capitalism. From that position, he expanded the concept of fascism to include such diverse figures as William of Orange, Cromwell, Bismarck, as well as his contemporaries Ataturk, Chiang Kai-shek, and the leaders of the Japanese government. It should be noted that he did not classify Germany as fascist on the grounds that it had already completed its developmental stage by the late 1920s. But, in the late 1930s, he concluded that Stalin's Russia had become fascist by 1929. See Gavan McCormack, "Nineteen-Thirties Japan: Fascism?" *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 14:2 (April–June 1982), 22–23.

36 Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Kusa no ne fuashizumu*, Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1987, translated by Ethan Mark as *Grassroots Fascism: The War Experience of the Japanese People*, Columbia University Press, 2015. See Garon, note 11 above, for problems with using the term fascism in such a sweepin sense.

37 Though there is no consensus among Japanese historians as to whether Japan was a fascist state, a majority active today do not use this term to describe Japan. In addition to Itō, these historians include Tsutsui Kiyotada, Arima Manabu (b.1945), Kobayashi Michihiko (b.1956) and Tobe Ryōichi (b.1948), to mention just a few. On the other hand, historians such as Suzaki Shin'ichi (b.1946, see his *Nihon Fuashizumu to sono jidai: tennōsei, gunbu, sensō, minshū*, Ōtsuki shoten, 1998). Okabe Makio (1941–2010), Otabe Yūji (b.1952), Amemiya Shōichi (b.1944; for the last three historians' views in concise form, see Nihon gendaishi kenkyūkai (ed.),

example, Itō Takashi (b.1932), a doyen of modern Japanese history, is adamant that pre-1945 Japan was not a fascist state. Itō classifies Japan's right wing into the traditional (*fukko*) and the radical (*kakushin*) right wing.[38] This classification has found acceptance among many historians in and outside Japan.[39] But Itō's classification, too, is not without problems. It seems to treat Japan as a unique country where ordinary historical categories used for explaining historical phenomena in other countries do not apply. As a rule, historians have not used it to draw comparisons between them and Japan.[40] In addition, the distinction between *fukko* and *kakushin* is much less clear-cut than Itō suggests.[41]

Nihon Fuashizumu: 1) kokka to shakai, Ōtsuki shoten, 1981), Takeyama Morio (1943–87, see his *Kindai Nihon no bunka to fuashizumu*, Meicho kankōkai, 2009, Yamaguchi Yasushi (1934–2013, see his *Fuashizumu*, Yūhikaku, 1979) and Yoshimi Yoshiaki (op.cit.), insist that Japan was fascist from what is essentially a Marxist perspective. For a detailed look at the fascist debate, see Katō Yōko, op. cit.

38 For example, Itō Takashi, *Shōwa shoki seijishi kenkyū*, Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1969; Itō Takashi, *Taishōki no "kakushin"ha no seiritsu*, Haniwa shobō, 1976.

39 Gordon Mark Berger, *Parties Out of Power in Japan, 1931–1941*. Princeton University Press, 1977; Gregory Kasza, "Fascism from Above? Japan's *Kakushin* Right in Comparative Perspective," Stein Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe. The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism*, Social Science Monographs, 2001, 183–232; Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan*, Princeton University Press, 1987.

40 As Gregory Kasza suggests in "Fascism from Above? Japan's *Kakushin* Right in Comparative Perspective," Stein Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe. The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism*, Social Science Monographs, 2001, 190. In his article Kasza makes an attempt to compare Japan's *kakushin* with the Polish, Portuguese and Rumanian regimes of the late 1930s. To my knowledge, this intriguing approach has not been emulated by other scholars, 225–8. Itō's framework is based on Seymour Lipsett's classification (see Katō in Saaler and Szpilman, 230). It parallels the distinction made by some Western scholars between the radical and conservative right. See, for example, Javier Tusell, *La Dictadura de Franco,* Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988. 33–4.

41 Christopher W. A. Szpilman, *Kindai Nihon no kakushinron to Ajiashugi*, Ashi shobō, 2015,

In the United States the concept of fascism as applicable to the Japanese state appeared to have been effectively demolished by Peter Duus and Daniel Okimoto.[42] Besides, it is fair to say that most Western historians found no need to resort to the concept of fascism when discussing the nature of prewar Japan.[43] There were however some notable exceptions. They included Herbert Bix, who talked of "emperor-system fascism" and a "composite fascist state,"[44] Andrew Gordon, who introduced the concept of "imperial fascism,"[45] and E. Bruce Reynolds who concluded that Japan was a fascist imperial state whose "emperor-centered ideology [was] a form of Japanese style-fascism."[46]

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42 Duus and Okimoto, 65–76. See also George M. Wilson, "A New Look at the Problem of Japanese Fascism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1968), 401–12. Gregory Kasza, "'Fascism from Below'?: A Comparative Perspective on the Japanese Right, 1931–1936," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19:4, October 1984; in his "Fascism from Above?," Kasza argues that the concept of fascism is relevant in Japanese history, noting that neither Gregor's "developmental dictatorship" nor "imperial absolutism" theory "settles the issue of whether there was 'fascism' in Japan." Even Itō Takashi, he observes, "has not argued that it [fascism] is irrelevant in the Japanese context. He has only criticized the way others have applied the term." 190.

43 I rely heavily here on Roger Brown's presentation at ICAS 8, Macau, 24–27 June 2013, and his "Perceptions of Fascism and the New Bureaucrats in Early Shōwa Japan," *Saitama University Review*, 54(1) (2018). In the early postwar period, Western scholars used fascism without any methodical rigour. They thought fascism was simply "a basic attack upon individualism, democracy, Marxism and internationalism." For example, Robert Scalapino, *Democracy and the Party Movement in Pre-War Japan*, University of California Press, 1953. See E. Bruce Reynolds (ed.), *Japan in the Fascist Era*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2004, 179.

44 Herbert Bix, "Rethinking 'Emperor-System Fascism': Ruptures and Continuities in Modern Japanese History," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 14:2 (April–June 1982), 2–19. The reference to Japan as a "composite fascist state," 6.

45 Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, University of California Press, 1992.

46 E. Bruce Reynolds, "Peculiar Characteristics: The Japanese Political System in the Fascist

The Duus-Okimoto article may have dissuaded most Western historians of Japan from using the concept of fascism, but the last decade has witnessed a revival of interest in fascism in Japan among Western scholars.[47] This recent resurgence is a reaction to a relative neglect of Japanese political history in the United States over the last two decades, partly connected to a growing tendency to apply literary theories to the analysis of Japanese thought and culture and an intensifying disdain for "archival fetishism."[48] This has led some scholars to apply the concept of fascism in their analysis of the crisis engendered by Japan's transition to modernity.[49] Alan Tansman's work is a case in point.[50] Tansman and

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Era," in Reynolds, 187. See also a defence of the concept of fascism as applied to Japan by Hilary Conroy "Concerning Japanese Fascism," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 40:2 (February 1981), 327–8.

47 The following examples will suffice to illustrate this revival: Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (California University Press, 2009); various contributions to Alan Tansman (ed), *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* (Duke University Press, 2009). Max Ward, "Crisis Ideology and the Articulation of Fascism in Interwar Japan: The 1938 Thought War Symposium," *Japan Forum* 26: 4 (December 2014), 462–85; Max Ward, "Displaying the Worldview of Japanese Fascism: The Tokyo Thought War Exhibition of 1938," *Critical Asian Studies*, 47: 3 (September 2015), pp. 414–39. Reto Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect, Japan and Italy 1915–1952* (Cornell University Press, 2016); the special issue of the *Journal of Global History* edited by Reto Hofmann and Daniel Hedinger; Daniel Hedinger, "Universal Fascism and Its Global Legacy: Italy's and Japan's Entangled History in the Early 1930s," *Fascism*, 2: 2(2013), 141–60. For a critique, see Roger H. Brown, "Perceptions of Fascism and the New Bureaucrats in Early Shōwa Japan," *Saitama daigaku kiyō: kyōyō gakubu*, 54:1 (2018), 72–74.

48 For the use of this term, see, for example, Giulia Bassi, "Against Historiographical Positivism: Some Skeptical Reflections about the Archival Fetishism," *Mnemoscape*, 1, 2015. See also Louise J. Kaplan, *Cultures of Fetishism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 93–4, who, influenced by Derrida, talks of "archive fever."

49 See, for example, Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

50 E.g., see Alan Tansman (ed.), *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, Duke University Press, 2009; Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, University of California Press, 2009.

other contributors to his edited volume show only passing interest in definitions of fascism or in the question how fascism relates to political power and state authority. As Tansman puts it, their concern is more "with the diffusion of fascism as ideology and representation than with its origins and consequences as a political movement or regime." From that position, they argue for "the presence of a fascist culture in Japan and for the presence of fascistic ways of healing the crisis of interwar modernity." Such logic could just as well be applied in the analysis of the United States and Britain where it would no doubt detect the presence of a "fascist culture" or of a "fascist aesthetics," not to mention "fascistic ways of healing the crisis of interwar modernity."[51] As these quotations show, this approach does not seem rigorous enough to yield any constructive results.[52] For it should not be forgotten that, although there were some very important and influential fascists and fascist sympathisers in the United States and Britain, it would be difficult to argue convincingly that the United States and Britain were fascist in the 1930s. The presence of fascists in a country does not necessarily make that country fascist.

The concept of fascist culture is vague and, as such, it adds very little, if anything at all, to our understanding of what took place in Japan in the 1930s. See Peter Duus's review of *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 69:2, May 2010, 612–15.

51 Tansman, "Introduction," in Tansman (ed.), *The Culture of Japanese Fascism,* 1. See also Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*. Also cited in Roger H. Brown, "Perceptions of Fascism and the New Bureaucrats in Early Shōwa Japan," 72. My understanding of literary-culturalist approaches to fascism has benefited immensely from the insights contained in Roger Brown's paper presented at the Macau 2013 ICAS Conference and our subsequent discussions. See also Roger H. Brown's review of *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* in *Social Science Japan Journal,*12(2) (2009): 288–92.

52 Limitations of space prevent me from addressing this issue at length. For doubts concerning the applicability of "fascist aesthetics" and "the fascist style," see Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism,* 9, and Brown, "Perceptions of Fascism…"74–6.

FASCISTS IN JAPAN

In the circumstances it seems that, instead of asking whether "Japan was a fascist state" or a "fascist polity," it would perhaps be more productive to ask to what extent fascist ideas became "common sense" that was acceptable both to the ruling class (widely conceived, synonymous with the establishment) and public opinion. In this connection, it is also important to enquire whether and, if so, to what extent fascist ideas influenced actions of the Japanese government.

A distinction must be made between the presence of fascist (and national socialist) ideas and the emergence of fascist regimes that controlled states. Fascist and national socialist ideas abounded everywhere, including Britain and the United States. They were advocated with various degrees of success practically in every country by self-proclaimed fascists and others who latched on to certain aspects of fascism that appealed to them.[53] Yet, though fascists were active in most countries, only few countries became fascist, that is, countries with fascist systems of government ruled by fascists.

Yet, although Japan was not a fascist state, it is an undisputed fact that there were fascists in Japan. In the 1920s and 1930s numerous persons in Japan espoused and propagated a wide range of fascist and national socialist ideas. Their presence may explain the coming-about of a "fascist culture," but does not in the least make Japan a fascist state, any more than the presence of Marxists in Japan

53 Mussolini's seeming successes inspired admiration among Western politicians. Even Winston Churchill, later a consistent and uncompromising critic of Hitler and Mussolini, waxed enthusiastic about the Duce after meeting him in 1927. "If I had been an Italian, I am sure I should have been whole-heartedly with you from start to finish…" Yet Churchill, in the same breath, was quick to distance himself from fascist methods. "In England we have not had to fight this danger in the same deadly form. We have our way of doing things," he qualified. Arnold D. Harvey, *Collision of Empires: Britain in Three World Wars, 1793–1945*, London: Hambledon Press, 1992, 511.

makes it a communist state; or the presence of Sir Oswald Mosley and other fascists makes Britain fascist.[54]

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the presence of fascist ideas should be neglected or completely ignored. For it is clear that fascists and the views they advocated left a powerful imprint upon the countries where they were active. In other words, though fascists may have failed to seize power and form a fascist state, their views and values, that is, fascist ideology, affected the thought and behaviour of those in power and in direct and indirect ways influenced government decisions. As I argue below, that was the case in Japan.

Let me illustrate the importance of fascist influences with a somewhat irreverent example.

A. J. P. Taylor once mischievously suggested that it would have made things difficult for Roosevelt and Churchill, if Hitler, upon receiving the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, had declared war on Japan instead of on the United States. But, as we know, Hitler was a prisoner not only of his own hubris, but also of his own ideology. Ideological rather than strategic considerations caused him to attack the Soviet Union at a time when Nazi Germany was not even close to defeating Britain. Hitler thus started a two-front war that was the nightmare of any sober-thinking German strategist. The decision to attack Russia was a fatal blunder and ultimately proved his undoing, but it was a blunder that cannot be explained without taking Hitler's ideology into consideration. Similarly,

54 "The main problem with cultural studies of fascist imagery and rhetoric is their frequent failure to ask how influential these were….Generally, …the study of fascist culture by itself does not explain how fascists acquired the power to control culture, or how deeply into popular consciousness fascist culture penetrated in competition with either pre-existing religious, familial, or community values or with commercialized popular culture." "It is hard to find any cultural program common to all fascist movements, or to all stages." Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Penguin, 2004, 215. See also Roger Brown, "Perceptions of Fascism," 73.

only ideology can explain why declaring war on Japan after 8 December 1941 was not an option for Hitler.

Let me now reverse Taylor's suggestion and ask why the Japanese government did not declare war on Germany. Presumably, Britain, which was fighting for survival against Germany, would have offered all kinds of concessions to Japan in return for her support. Winston Churchill once said that "if Hitler invaded hell I would make at least a favourable reference to the devil in the House of Commons"[55] and after all in his war against Hitler, he allied himself with Stalin, so it is plausible that he would have accepted Japan as an ally, too. To show that I am not indulging in idle speculation, let me point out that this idea occurred to some observers in the 1940s. For example, in a dispatch from Tokyo, the American journalist Otto Tolischus (1890–1967) considered this possibility, which was obvious to a foreign correspondent newly arrived in Japan, but unacceptable to all experienced Japanese politicians and diplomats.[56] Tolischus wrote: "There is fear that in their aid-to-Russia program, the United States and Britain might make Vladivostok another base against Japan, …, completing her encirclement. *There is, of course, one solution to this dilemma, and that would be for Japan to join the "encirclers" who do not threaten Japan itself, and help eliminate the power which holds the greatest potential menace to all*" (emphasis mine). But this option did not exist for the Japanese, because, as Tolischus pointed out, "such a volte-face would mean going back on all that Japan has stood for during the last ten years. It would be difficult for the nation, and impossible for the present Cabinet."[57] Of

55 Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol.3, *The Grand Alliance*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1986, 460.

56 Naturally, various policy options were discussed, but declaring war on Germany was not one of them.

57 Otto D. Tolischus, *Tokyo Record*, New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1943, 143–4.

course, I realize that the "going back" in this instance goes far beyond ideological issues. It would have meant giving up large areas grabbed by Japan since 1931. But the fact that such an option was disregarded by Japanese policy-makers suggests that their minds were closed to alternatives and in this shaping of minds ideological influences were of paramount importance. Fascists had been shaping public opinion for the previous decade and it was their influence that blinded the Japanese to other options. That is one reason, though by no means the only reason, why Japan's prewar fascists, their views and the effect these views had on policy makers in Japan, deserve attention.

FASCIST INFLUENCES IN JAPAN

The key question is: how influential were fascist ideas in Japan in the 1930s? As I will show below, they were influential enough to affect the policies of the Japanese government to a significant degree. Indeed, the alliance that Japan formed with the two fascist dictatorships can partly be explained by this influence. This far-reaching influence had led many Japanese to conclude that Britain and the United States were old worn-out democracies whose political systems based on outdated liberal and democratic principles could not possibly offer effective solutions to Japan's problems. In contrast, many believed that fascism, a new ideology, offered effective solutions.

Fascism came to the attention of Japanese journalists as early as in the beginning of the 1920s. Immediately after the Fascist March on Rome in October 1922, which resulted in Mussolini's appointment as prime minister, Japanese newspapers and periodicals began to report the Fascist leader's achievements in great detail.[58] *Kokuhon*, the organ of the Kokuhonsha (National Foundation

58 For expediency's sake, I limit my discussion to *Kokuhon*, but it would be easy to find

Society), led from behind the scenes by Hiranuma Kiichirō (1867–1952), a future prime minister (January 1939–August 1939), chose to concentrate on what the editors and contributors considered the positive aspects of Mussolini and his movement. They admired his "ardent spirit" that rejected Wilsonian values and repudiated the International Labor Organization. Mussolini, they intoned, had restored the atrophied Italian national polity to its ancient splendour and, admirably, had demonstrated loyalty to the Italian monarchy.[59] By 1925, Hiranuma's sidekick and his front man at the Kokuhonsha, Takeuchi Kakuji (1875–1946), argued that Japan needed a Japanese equivalent of Mussolini, a leader that would smash party politics and destroy labour unions, eradicate liberalism and individualism, and thus build a "new Japan."[60] One such possible Japanese Mussolini was Hiranuma.

Hiranuma, a grim-faced and taciturn bureaucrat, a former procurator-general and justice minister, is probably best described as a conservative nationalist.[61] But, conservative or not, there is no doubt that Hiranuma fell under the spell of fascism. In the 1920s he did not hide his admiration for Mussolini and his methods. But his admiration for Mussolini and fascism did nothing to advance Hiranuma's career. Quite the opposite, in fact. Let me explain.

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examples in other publications.

59 "Henshūshitsu yori," *Kokuhon*, 2:12 (December 1922) 136; Ōta Kōzō, "Nan-Ō ni tatsu Mususorini," *Kokuhon*, 2:12 (December 1922), 29–35; Ishiyama Iwao, "Mususorini no kokkakan," *Kokuhon*, 4:9 (September 1924), 61; Nagai Zenzō, "Fuashisuchi no shūseika no Itari rōdō kumiai," *Kokuhon*, 4:3 (March 1924), 58–66.

60 Takeuchi Kakuji, "Mondai no kenkyū," *Kokuhon*, 5:6 (June 1925), 34.

61 Itō Takashi, *Shōwa shoki seijishi kenkyū*, Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1969, 359–61; Richard Yasko, "Hiranuma Kiichirō and Conservative Politics in Pre-war Japan," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973.

In December 1926 Baron Hiranuma[62] was introduced to Prince Saionji Kinmochi (1849–1940). Saionji, the last surviving genrō (Meiji oligarch or elder statesman) and, next to the emperor, the most important figure in Japanese politics, was entrusted with selecting prime ministers. Naturally, Hiranuma did his best to impress the prince. And impress him he did, though not in the way he had intended. After listening to Hiranuma for over an hour, Saionji commented that Japan was not yet ready for her Mussolini.[63] In other words, based on this conversation, Saionji concluded that Hiranuma was a fascist. From that time on, Saionji, who espoused liberal ideas, turned into an implacable enemy of Hiranuma and blocked the latter's prospective promotions whenever opportunity arose. Prince Saionji's view of Hiranuma was by no means idiosyncratic.[64]

In fact, by the early 1930s Hiranuma's reputation was such that journalists and academics routinely referred to him and his Kokuhonsha as fascist. For example, in 1932 economist Ishihama Tomoyuki (1895–1950),[65] in the influential monthly *Kaizō* (Reconstruction), described the Kokuhonsha as a "fascist organization."[66]

By 1932 Hiranuma had realized that his fascist reputation posed an insurmountable obstacle to his prospects of becoming prime minister or a promotion to the Imperial Household (which was his other ambition). He thus held a press conference specifically to deny that either he or the organization he

62 Hiranuma was created a baron in October 1926.

63 Oka Yoshitake et al., eds., *Taishō demokurashii-ki no seiji: Matsumoto Gōkichi seiji nisshi*, Iwanami shoten, 1969, 544, entry for 2 December 1926.

64 Prince Saionji and other (fairly conservative) advisors of the emperor represent a group, perhaps the only political group, that consistently rejected fascist ideas and blocked as much as they could the advance of men with fascist reputations like Hiranuma.

65 Ishihama, a communist, had been forced to resign his professorship at Kyushu Imperial University in 1928.

66 "Nihon Kokumin shakaishugi no shochōryū," *Kaizō*, 14:5, May 1932, 54.

led had anything to do with fascism. But such belated protests had apparently little effect: the press, just as before, continued to refer to Hiranuma as a fascist.[67]

Baron Hiranuma and the Kokuhonsha, it may be retorted, may not suffice to prove the point. But other examples of admiration for fascism can easily be adduced. Consider the cases of Kanokogi Kazunobu (1884–1949), Kita Reikichi (1885–1961), Hayashi Kimio (1883–1947), and the aforementioned Nagano Seigō (1893–1943). None of these individuals made any effort to hide their fascist views.

In 1930 the philosopher Kanokogi Kazunobu (1884–1949) took part in setting up the Aikoku Kinrōtō (Patriotic Workers' Party) modelled on Germany's NSDAP and in the late 1930s, he used to end his speeches with "Heil Hitler;"[68] the philosopher Kita Reikichi, younger brother of the famous radical Kita Ikki (1883–1937), described himself as "Japan's leading fascist" and declared his intention to travel to Europe to study fascist thought and methods at first hand.[69] The journalist-turned-politician Nakano Seigō, inspired by the Black Shirts, founded the Tōhōkai (Eastern Society): the Tōhōkai's members wore outfits which closely resembled fascist uniforms.[70]

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67 E.g , two years later Hiranuma was described as the leader of Japanese fascism. See Takata Suekichi, *Yakushin Nihon o ayatsuru hitobito: seikai, zaikai*, Marunouchi shuppan, 1934, 160–61.

68 Szpilman, "Kanokogi Kazunobu," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 68:2, 2013, 233 and 249.

69 "Active Japanese Fascist Closes Cambridge Visit," *Harvard Crimson*, 31 October 1932. For a discussion of Kita Reikichi's fascism, see Christopher W. A. Szpilman, "Kita Reikichi no senkanki: Nihonteki fuashizumu e no michi," in Itō Yukio and Nakanishi Hiroshi (eds), *Nihon seijishi no naka no rîdâtachi*, Kyoto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2018, 125–51.

70 On Nakano Seigō, see Leslie R. Oates, *Populist Nationalism in Prewar Japan: A Biography of Nakano Seigō*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985, and Stefano von Loë, "Nakano Seigō and the Politics of Democracy, Empire and Fascism in Prewar and Wartime Japan" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2012).

Hayashi Kimio, a professor of economics at Waseda University, who was an expert on social policy and labour problems and a leading advocate of a control economy in Japan, described himself bluntly as a national socialist. As if to dispel any doubts as to where his sympathies lay he founded in April 1932 the Nihon kokka shakaishugi renmei (Japan State Socialist League) and served as that body's secretary-general.[71] It is highly relevant that one of the component bodies of this League was the Nihon fuashizumu renmei (Japan Fascism League), of which Hayashi was also a member.[72]

There were many other fascist sympathizers. "Many people in today's Japan think that 'national socialism' [kokka shakaishugi] is fine,'" noted the right wing political commentator and foreign relations expert Ninagawa Arata (1873–1959), who found national socialism objectionable.[73] Indeed, by the early 1930s, fascist ideas had become so common that popular journals attempted to gauge their influence within the ranks of the Japanese intelligentsia.[74] For example, in 1932,

71 On the League, Kawanishi Hidemichi, "'Nihon fuashizumu renmei' oboekaki," *Jōetsu kyōiku daigaku kenkyū kiyō*, 5(2) 1986: 133–49. In this endeavour, Hayashi joined forced with other fascist sympathisers Shimonaka Yasaburō (1878–1961) and Ōkawa Shūmei (1886–1957). On Shimonaka, see Shimonaka Yasaburō den kankōkai (ed.) *Shimonaka Yasaburō jiten*, Heibonsha 1965; For a readable overview of Shimonaka's career as a pan-Asianist, see also Nakajima Takeshi, *Shimonaka Yasaburō: Ajiashugi kara sekai renpō undō e*, Heibonsha, 2015.

72 Hayashi was convinced that Japan would become fascist because he believed that fascism was "an historical inevitability in the present stage of social development." Hayashi Kimio, "Fuashizumu no honshitsu to Nihon no shōrai," *Kokuhon*, 12:3 (March 1932), 29. He believed moreover that it would be a positive development: Japan, he insisted, must become "fascist" and "national socialist," the better to resist foreign pressure. Ibid., 32. By foreign pressure, he meant "the Versailles Peace Treaty, the activities of the League of Nations, aggression by foreign finance capital, political interference by foreign powers, and such like." Ibid. 30–32. Also in Szpilman, Reynolds, 95.

73 Ninagawa Arata, *Kokka shakaishugi no higōrisei*, Jieisha, 1932, 3.

74 See Imasato Katsuo, *Kokkashakaishugi to fuasshizumu*, Daigaku shobō, 1932. Imasato

that is, less than a year before Hitler came to power, a popular journal, *Hito no uwasa* (Gossip about People) sent out a questionnaire[75] that consisted of one simple question: "How do you view fascist tendencies?" Of the seventeen respondents, only a small number unequivocally opposed fascism (nobody, however, bothered to ask whether the respondents understood what fascism represented). The lawyer Fuse Tatsuji (1880–1953) was "decidedly against fascist tendencies" as was the writer Nii Itaru (1888–1951), who stated he had "no interest in fascist groups and deplored "fascist tendencies" in Japan. The novelist Hirabayashi Taiko (1905–72) also was opposed to fascism.

Others, however, regarded the ongoing fascization of Japan as inevitable and they appeared to welcome it even if they refused to state so clearly. The feminist Takamure Itsue (1894–1964), for example, opined that fascism was inevitable regardless whether or not one approved of it. Though she did not clearly say she was in favour, she revealed her sympathies when she explained that internationalism was a quixotic idealistic concept that would be "put into liquidation." As she saw it, fascist-style nationalism was much more realistic than internationalism.

Kazami Akira (1886–1961), a member of the House of Representatives and a future cabinet minister, concurred that fascism was inevitable and professed to be greatly interested in it. The journalist Chiba Kameo (1878–1935) was also interested. He believed that social conditions in Japan had been conducive to the rise of fascism and thought that fascist tendencies in Japan had been on the increase. The actress Kurishima Sumiko (1902–87) approved of fascism, thought she added somewhat incongruously that she was not particularly interested. The

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wrote: "since last year the terms 'fuassho' and fascism have become universal in Japan," 1.

75 "Fuasshoka no keikō o kō miru," *Hito no uwasa*, May 1932.

poet Noguchi Ujō (1882–1945) opined that, although fascism was unlike "Japan's bushidō," it was important from the point of view of "protecting the state." Some respondents approved of fascism but thought it would be necessary to adapt it to the local conditions. For example, Rear-Admiral Viscount Ogasawara Naganari (1867–1958), the aristocratic private secretary of Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō (1848–1934), observed that "fascism is not bad, provided it is Japanized and does not go to extremes." Hayashi Kimio, whom we have already encountered above, "greatly approves" of fascism, but he qualified that fascism "must not be an imitation of Italy or Germany. It must be in the final analysis a method of realizing national socialism while preserving Japan's unique tradition and culture."[76]

The *Hito no uwasa* questionnaire is valuable as it shows the degree to which the concept of fascism, albeit vaguely and inchoately, had pervaded Japanese society by 1932: though most would have been hard pressed to define it, it was taken for granted and accepted as common sense even before Hitler came to power in January 1933!

There is no doubt that Japanese admiration for fascism was stimulated by the rise of fascism/national socialism in Europe and intensified even further under the impact of Hitler's apparent spectacular successes. Yet, as the above questionnaire shows, Hitler's rise to power alone is not enough to explain this admiration. To get a full picture, one must also consider the extent to which largely imported fascist values coincided with Japan's native authoritarian tradition, a tradition which some historians regard as totalitarian.

Maruyama Masao's analysis is of relevance. In an essay published in 1959 Maruyama traced the roots of Japan's totalitarian tradition to the Edo period. Specifically, he described Tokugawa Japan as a totalitarian "garrison state" (*heiei*

76 Ibid.

kokka),[77] that is, a highly regimented, authoritarian and militaristic state. One can quibble about the degree of this authoritarianism, the rigorousness and extent of control by the Tokugawa government over its subjects, or the degree of militarization, but it is difficult to dispute Maruyama's contention that Tokugawa Japan was an authoritarian and highly regimented state. It was certainly a hierarchical state ruled by a narrow elite that looked askance at any display of individual freedom and was disdainful of commercial activity and pursuit of profit.

The question is then: to what extent the authoritarian values of the Edo period, such as preference for hierarchical society, elitism, admiration for military virtues and hostility to commerce and money-making informed the mindsets of post-Meiji Japanese? How important were these Edo-period values in determining the Meiji elite's attitudes toward society and more specifically toward democracy, liberalism, party politics and laissez-faire capitalism? Confucian disdain for pursuit of profit and commercial activity prevalent in the Edo period is well known and the efforts of Ishida Baigan (1685–1744) and other theorists of Confucian-sanctioned profit-making did little to weaken it.[78] A tendency to idealize military prowess, as encapsulated in the word *bushidō* (the way of the warrior), was another relic from the Edo period that was given a new lease of life in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[79] This glorification of military might was antithetical to pacifism and it and it surely was a factor that prompted a large

77 Maruyama Masao, "Kaikoku," in Maruyama, *Maruyama Masao shū*, Iwanami Shoten, 1996, 50.

78 On Ishida Baigan, see Tetsuo Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan*, University of Chicago Press, 1987. Also Kiri Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism: A Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, esp. chapter 5, 141-66.

79 See Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Bushido in Modern Japan*, Oxford University, 2016.

and influential segment of Japanese society to reject cooperation with the Western powers and armament reductions. In general, these surviving traditions from the Tokugawa age, *a priori* hostile to democracy, liberalism, party politics and laissez-faire capitalism, served as fertile ground for the reception and growth of anti-democratic, anti-liberal and anti-individualistic, anti-capitalist and ultimately fascist ideas from the West.

This helps explain why the spread of liberal ideas and parliamentarism throughout Japan engendered violent hostility. It also, at least partly, accounts for the popularity in Japan of ideas that were also components of Western fascism. Sometimes these ideas were borrowed from the West, but in many cases they arose in Japan independently and were simply reinforced by Western examples. It will be helpful to discuss some of them below.

JAPAN'S HOME-GROWN FASCIST THOUGHT AND WESTERN INFLUENCES

Let's consider totalitarianism first. Western historians maintain that the concept of totalitarianism was first applied in a negative sense by critics of Mussolini in the early days of his rule. It was only later, in 1925, that Mussolini began to use it in a positive sense and made it "the essence of Fascism."[80] That may have been the case in Italy, but in Japan the concept of totalitarianism appeared earlier. It had been first propounded by Kanokogi Kazunobu, in a positive sense, years before Mussolini and his critics. As a totalitarian, Kanokogi wanted to reorganize the state in a way that would channel everything toward national greatness by eliminating any private interests. The economy would be managed centrally and

80 Richard Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Historical Writing and the Second World War, 1945–1990*, London: Routledge, 1993, 20.

society would be regimented. Luxury would be banned, "thought unity" enforced and no waste or frivolity tolerated. Kanokogi advocated such ideas as early as 1917. In August 1919 Kita Ikki put forth similar ideas in his famous *Kokka kaizōan genri taikō* (The Outline of a Plan for National Reorganization). Kita's views have received much attention, but Kanokogi's earlier contribution has been largely ignored.[81]

Kanokogi's and Kita's vision of a totalitarian state, a state that would impose a centrally planned economy and even eliminate the private sphere paralleled the views of Nagata Tetsuzan (1884–1935) and other army general staff officers, who at the same time as Kanokogi were developing their own ideas of total war and total national mobilization.[82]

Like Kanokogi and Kita Ikki, Japan's military planners drew upon the lessons of the Great War. Such ideas, which had been developed throughout the 1920s, became common sense in army circles. In 1925, for example, General Hata Eitarō (1872–1930), twelve years Nagata's senior, and generally not considered a radical, argued for the need to impose what he called "national totalitarianism" in Japan. Just as was the case with Kanokogi, Kita and Nagata, the First World War had provided an inspiration for Hata. That war, the general noted, had transformed a "simple struggle between armies" into a struggle between national powers that relied upon total state power and necessitated the channelling of all national resources available" for the benefit of the state. This required, he argued, the "discipline, diligence," and "total mobilization" of Japan's resources. To this end, Hata called for the imposition of strict state control over industry, mass media,

81 See Szpilman, "Kanokogi."

82 See, for example, Kurosawa Fumitaka, *Taisenkanki no Nihon rikugun*, Misuzu shobō, 2000, 76–103; on Nagata in general, see Mori Yasuo, *Nagata Tetsuzan: heiwa iji wa gunjin no saikō no sekimu de ari*, Kyoto: Minerva shobō, 2011.

transportation, financial institutions and academia. Only such wide-sweeping measures, he was convinced, would ensure the most rational and efficient use of resources in war time and thus give Japan a chance to emerge victorious from such a war.[83]

Such totalitarian views gained a wider circle of advocates in the 1930s, stimulated both by the crisis over Manchuria and by the fascist successes in Germany and Italy. By then, ironically, they had even gained currency among party politicians, whom advocates of totalitarianism wanted to remove from power. For example, the politician Mori Kaku (Tsutomu, 1882–1932), a mainstream Seiyūkai politician who had served as parliamentary secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Tanaka Giichi cabinet and cabinet secretary in the Inukai Tsuyoshi cabinet (1931–32), decided that the principles of party politics were ineffective and obsolete. In the early 1930s he talked of smashing "various laws and regulations that prevented the freedom of action by the Japanese." Among these laws he included the universal manhood suffrage act and the law allowing workers to form trade unions. Mori wanted Japan to abandon a laissez-faire economy. Specifically, he called for the introduction of rigid government control over banks, insurance companies and over the entire agricultural and fisheries sector, and the imposition of a rice monopoly.[84]

Kanokogi, Kita, Nagata, Hata, Mori and other Japanese advocates of totalitarianism, while calling for integration, mobilization of resources, and creation of an autarkic economic bloc, unequivocally rejected liberal values,

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83 Hata Eitarō, "Kokka sōdōin no hitsuyō ni tsuite," *Kokuhon*, 5:12, 11–17. Quoted in Szpilman, "Fascist and Quasi-Fascist Ideas in Interwar Japan, 1918–1941" in Reynolds, 77.

84 See Szpilman, "Fascist and Quasi-Fascist Ideas in Interwar Japan, 1918–1941" in Reynolds, 76. On Mori in general, see Koyama Toshiki, *Hyōden Mori Tsutomu*, Weji, 2016.

laissez faire economics, individualism, international cooperation and pacifism.[85] They closely resembled Western fascists both in the ideas they advocated and in those they rejected.

This vision to integrate the masses, mobilize all resources and achieve an autarky which Kanokogi and others called totalitarianism often came in tandem with advocacy of social Darwinism, which also happened to be an integral part of European fascism.[86] In Japan, in the first decades of the twentieth century advocates of social Darwinism jettisoned the individualistic aspects of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism and fused it with the organic theory of the state. It was this kind of social Darwinism that informed Kanokogi's views on war and peace.

Kanokogi rejected pacifism on strategic and geopolitical grounds. Pacifism, he suspected, had been propagated to prevent Japan (and other "have-not" powers) from territorial expansion and thus preserve the status quo advantageous to the "have" Western powers (the United States and Great Britain). But in addition, Kanokogi criticized peace and pacifism also on spiritual grounds. He feared that peace would corrupt Japanese by undermining their moral and spiritual virtues; it would render them effete, usher in degeneracy and eventually lead to racial extinction. While he deplored peace and pacifism, Kanokogi hailed war for its positive effects on human society. War, he observed, brought about racial improvement because it eliminated human detritus: "all elements that are weak, corrupt, or negative."[87] On this basis Kanokogi came up with a general historical law: nations that refused to engage in war inevitably perished. But Kanokogi went

85 Szpilman, "Fascist and Quasi-Fascist Ideas," 77.

86 Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1980, 12.

87 Szpilman, "Kanokogi," 245.

further than that. He asserted that "only nations that possess a strong fighting spirit have the right to exist."[88] Fit-to-survive nations engaged in a ceaseless Darwinian struggle. This struggle explained why they deserved to survive. As he put it, "with the help of this unending war history always extinguishes the weak, the dishonest, and the shallow, i.e., all those who are evil, while ensuring the prosperity of all those who are noble, strong, straight, and honest, i.e., all those who are good."[89] War, in his view, "ennobles the national spirit. The greater the danger, the greater this nobility."[90] From this social Darwinian perspective Kanokogi held war to be both desirable and "historically inevitable."[91]

Social Darwinism spawned a pernicious pseudo-science known as eugenics. Nagai Hisomu (1876–1957), a professor of medicine at Tokyo Imperial University, who was a leading proponent of eugenics in Japan, was convinced that modern society was in the throes of racial deterioration which if not halted, would lead to the extinction of the Japanese as a nation. That was because the process of natural selection had ceased to function properly due to the advent of civilization. He thought he had found a solution to this perceived problem in eugenics and tirelessly lobbied the government to introduce sterilization programs to rid Japan of all "inferior" individuals, including all "idiots, imbeciles, morons and other mentally and morally defective individuals."[92] Japanese authorities, to their credit, ignored Nagai's campaigns. He deplored this indifference, which he compared unfavourably with the sterilization policies of the Nazi government. As the

88 Szpilman, "Kanokogi," 245.

89 Szpilman, "Kanokogi," 245.

90 Kanokogi, *Sentōteki jinseikan*, Dōbunkai, 1917, 58.

91 Kanokogi, *Sentōteki jinseikan*, 58.

92 My discussion of eugenics relies on my "Fascist and Quasi-Fascist Ideas in Interwar Japan, 1918–1941," in Reynolds, 80.

quotation below shows, Nagai was greatly impressed by Nazi policies.

> In just the three years since the Nazi government enacted the [sterilization] law, they have already sterilized many more than 100,000 people, with as many as 56,244 sterilized last year alone. The [sterilization] program is thriving [in Germany]. I cannot help exclaiming: "Heil Hitler."[93]

Nakatani Takeyo (1898–1990), whose career in the right wing movement had begun in 1921 at the feet of Ōkawa Shūmei, Kita Ikki and Kanokogi Kazunobu in the Yūzonsha, paid little attention to eugenics, but he was just as impressed by fascist ideas as Nagai. As early as July 1929, he grew alarmed by what he perceived as the dysfunctional failure of Japan's political system. In his view, the only solution to "the appalling mess that was parliamentary politics" was to "start a fascist movement"[94] and "fundamentally restructure [Japan's] domestic organization."[95] Subsequently, things moved in the right direction, for, in 1932, Nakatani gloated at the impressive advances of fascism in Japan over the previous six months. Interestingly, Nakatani defined fascism as "radical, active nationalism with anti-socialist and anti-capitalist tendencies" and as "anti-international, anti-individualistic and anti-class." Fascism, he said, would replace laissez-faire capitalism with "a control economy."[96] Beyond this basic definition, Nakatani was aware that fascism, far from being monolithic, came in many varieties. "Italian Fascism strives to realize the spirit of the great

93 Szpilman, "Fascist and Quasi-Fascist Ideas" 80.

94 Letter from Nakatani to Mitsukawa Kametarō, 27 July 1929, in Hasegawa Yūichi, Christopher W.A. Szpilman, Imazu Takaaki (eds.), *Mitsukawa Kametarō shokanshū*, Ronsōsha, 2012, 142 (NB. in the book the letter is wrongly dated as 1928).

95 Letter from Nakatani to Mitsukawa Kametarō, 27 July 1929, 142.

96 Nakatani Takeyo, "Fuashizumu no honshitsu to sono kokka kannen," *Kokuhon* 12:4 (April 1932), 19–20.

Mazzini in modern Italy. German fascism is a national movement that tries to realize the spirit of the great patriotic philosopher Fichte who was active a hundred years ago. And the essence of Japanese fascism is clear without any explanation."[97] But whatever its shape, for Nakatani fascism was the ideology of the future. It was "inevitable." Even in Japan, he observed, it "represents the main current of social and political thought."[98]

There is no space here to provide a full list of Japanese admirers of Hitler's various policies. There were many enthusiasts even for Nazi anti-Semitism. They ranged from admirals (Katō Hiroharu, 1870–1939), generals (Ōshima Hiroshi, 1886–1975, Shiōden Nobutaka, 1879–1962, Hata Shinji, 1879–1950), bureaucrats and politicians (Akaike Atsushi, 1879–1945), Hiranuma Kiichirō), to journalists and academics (Wakamiya Unosuke, 1872–1938, and Imai Tokio, 1889–1972).[99]

AUTHENTIC JAPANESE FASCISM?

Japanese proponents of fascism generally stressed the need for producing a version of fascism that would be authentically Japanese while retaining its fascist essence. Fascism/national socialism, they insisted, could (and should) be made to fit Japan's conditions. It had to tap into Japan's indigenous traditions and practices. They argued in this way partly to evade criticisms concerning the foreign provenance of fascism and partly because of their nationalism. A few examples will illustrate this position. In a book published in 1933, the journalist and right wing activist Tsuda Kōzō (1889–1956), pointed out that fascism varied from

97 Nakatani, "Fuashizumu no honshitsu," 21. See also Szpilman in Reynolds, 95.

98 Nakatani, "Fuashizumu no honshitsu," 23. See also Szpilman in Reynolds, 95.

99 For a discussion of this subject, see my "Fascist and Quasi-Fascist Ideas in Interwar Japan, 1918–1941," and Gerhard Krebs, "The 'Jewish Problem' in Japanese-German Relations, 1933–1945," in Reynolds, ibid., 107–32.

country to country depending on local conditions and insisted that in Japan fascism must be authentically Japanese:

> Hitler's patriotic movement in Germany takes the same form as Mussolini's patriotic movement, that is, his fascist movement, but Hitler himself never calls it fascism. As is to be expected, he uses his own language and calls it 'Nazism.' If Japan's patriotic movement has arisen also based on the sense of respect for Japan's unique culture, then it surely must have its own unique Japanese name. I think it would be appropriate to call it the movement to revere the Emperor (sonnō undō). That is the meaning of Mussolini's words that fascism is not for export.[100]

For Tsuda, Japanese fascism was simply a patriotic movement centred on the emperor. "The Japanese words: 'national solidarity' and 'ethnic solidarity,'" he believed, "most aptly express the essence of fascism."[101] Similarly, Makino Yoshirō equated "Japanese fascism" with "Japanism" (Nihonshugi). Japanism, in Makino's opinion, possessed a "special individuality" and was "capable of realizing the ideals of international society." While extolling the virtues of Japan's authentic fascism, Makino had some harsh words to say about Italian Fascism and Hitler's National Socialism. The former, he accused of the failure "to grasp the true concrete essence of national life;" the latter of being "egocentric" and "anti-foreign." But Makino did not consider these defects as fatal. They paled to insignificance when compared with what Makino regarded as the positive aspects of these foreign fascisms, such as their triumph over "the evil trinity of Marxism, parliamentarism, and finance capitalism" and Nazism's success in liberating the

100 Tsuda Kōzō, *Nihon fuassho no gensei: kaisetsu, hihan oyobi kensetsu riron*, Tokyo kyōikusha, 1933, 4.

101 Tsuda, 4.

Germans from "a completely slave-like dependency upon the League of Nations and armament reductions treaties."[102]

The tendency to place stress on the indigenous origins of Japanese fascism intensified in the wake of the so-called national polity clarification movement of 1935 and strengthened even more after the bloody but ultimately unsuccessful 1936 coup d'état known as the 26 February Incident. This rebellion by young officers was inspired by a hodgepodge of renovationist ideas and incited by some senior military figures. The rebels succeeded in killing a number of politicians but failed to achieve anything else: after four days' stand-off, they surrendered. The troops involved in the coup were sent back to the barracks; the officers who had led them were tried *in camera* by a court martial, sentenced to death, and executed, along with some civilians, notably Kita Ikki and his associate Nishida Mitsugi (1901–37), who had been charged with instigation and leading the coup, though in fact they had opposed it.[103]

In a way, the judicial murder of Kita was not unexpected. In his 1906 book Kita had ridiculed the concept of the national polity and laughed at the imperial myths the gullible Japanese had been forced to believe. His 1919 work had challenged Japan's inviolable "national polity" (*kokutai*), and proposed to suspend the constitution and impose curbs on private property. Kita in effect advocated turning Japan into a totalitarian, national socialist state. His iconoclastic views included contempt for Japan's hallowed traditions, and, what was even worse, smacked of communism. More decisively, Kita was feared as an extortionist: he had spent several months in detention on charges of blackmailing senior officials in the

102 Makino Yoshirō, "Fuasshizumu no tetsugakuteki kiso kentō," part 2, *Kokuhon*, 14:3 (March 1934), 45–50; see also Szpilman in Reynolds, 96.

103 Szpilman, "Kita Ikki and the Politics of Coercion," *Modern Asian Studies*, 36:2 (2002) 472, 488.

Imperial Household Ministry. The powers-that-be may have judged it expedient to use the rebellion as an excuse to get rid of this troublesome intriguer who knew and talked too much.[104]

It is not surprising that, amid the military purges and trials of the rebel officers, proponents of fascism attempted to distance themselves from association with the likes of Kita. One example of this distancing can be found in a book edited by Kita Reikichi, Kita Ikki's younger brother, in 1937. Kita drew a distinction between fascism (good) and national socialism (evil and tainted by communism). Fascism and national socialism, he expostulated, were not to be confused as they were completely unlike. To fail to see the difference, Kita noted, showed "the shallowness of one's consciousness."[105] As Shimoi Harukichi (1883–1954), whose admiration for Italian Fascism was boundless and completely uncritical, pointed out in the same volume, fascism, unlike national socialism, was compatible with Japan's tradition. Fascism, he averred, was nothing but an "extreme statism" that "respects the national polity and national character" and "unifies national spirit."[106] Sugimori Kōjirō (1881–1968), professor at Waseda University, chimed in to declare that, in contrast to fascism, national socialism in Japan was the same as Stalin's socialism in one country and as such could not be tolerated in imperial Japan; Japan's national socialists, the lawyer Ayakawa Takeji (1891–1966) added, were simply closet communists. But was not Hitler, who invariably described himself as a national socialist, a national socialist? Apparently not. Hitler, the

104 Szpilman, "Kita Ikki," 467–90.

105 Kita Reikichi (ed.), "Nachisu to kokka shakaishugi," in Kita Reikichi (ed.), *Fuassho to kokka shakaishugi*, Nihon shosō, 1937, 166.

106 Shimoi Harukichi, "Mussorîni to kokka shakaishugi," in Kita Reikichi, *Fuassho to kokka shakaishugi,* 20; see also Szpilman in Reynolds, 97. On Shimoi in general, see Reto Hofmann, *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915–1952*, Cornell University Press, 2015.

contributors strained to prove, was no national socialist; he was a fascist. As Kita Reikichi explained, the Nazis had been pursuing policies completely unlike national socialism.[107]

Intellectual contortions made by contributors to Kita's volume to "prove" that Hitler was not a national socialist become understandable only in the context of the failed coup of 26 February 1936, which the authorities chose to regard officially not as the consequence of army factionalism, but as inspired and instigated by "Bolshevik-like national socialists."[108] But it is relevant for my argument that contributors to this volume had no qualms about asserting their position as fascists. They regarded fascism as a positive phenomenon, while dismissing the label "national socialism" as a form of communism.

FASCIST INFLUENCES AT THEIR PEAK

Fascist influences reached their peak during the Konoe administrations, (1937–1939, 1940–41). Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that it was during the second Konoe cabinet that Japan came closest to becoming a fascist state, but Prince Konoe had already taken steps in this direction during his first stint as prime minister. It was the first Konoe cabinet that in 1938 introduced such laws as the Kokka sōdōin hō (National Mobilization Law) and Kokumin chōyōrei (National Service Draft Ordinance), which aimed to make Japan's war effort more efficient. Despite his aristocratic descent, Konoe had been attracted to radical socialist ideas from early on. This head of the most senior branch of the ancient Fujiwara family had from childhood harboured resentment toward "the privileged class,"[109] which in his view included the zaibatsu in Japan and the Anglo-Saxon "have" powers

107 Kita, "Nachisu to kokka shakaishugi," 167.

108 Szpilman in Reynolds, 98.

109 Oka Yoshitake, *Konoe Fumimaro: unmei no seijika*, Iwanami shoten, 1972, 5.

internationally. His views on the subject had been formed by 1919, when in a magazine article he expressed sympathy for defeated Germany and condemned the peace arrangements in Paris as grossly unfair to Japan.[110] Konoe's resentment, which continued unabated throughout his career, caused him to oppose the world status quo as represented by the Anglo-Saxon powers and by the League of Nations. At the same time, Konoe showed little patience with the established political parties and the existing parliamentary system, which he thought inefficient and socially unfair.[111]

Given his radical views, it is no surprise that no sooner had Konoe occupied the office of prime minister than he was involved in schemes to destroy the parliamentary system. There is even evidence which strongly suggests that he supported an abortive putsch hatched by Nakamizo Tamakichi (?–1940) and other leaders of the Bōkyō gokokudan (Group to Protect the State against Communism) in February 1938.[112] The plan was to arrest elected parliamentarians thought hostile to the sweeping reforms planned by the Konoe cabinet. Once arrested, these parliamentarians would be banished under armed guard to a camp in Izu Ōshima. With the opposition silenced in this way, Konoe, the plotters hoped, would find it easy to enact radical reforms including the formation of a mass party

110 Konoe Fumimaro, "Eibei hon'i heiwashugi o haisu," *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin*, 15 December 1918, 23–26.

111 Konoe showed impatience with party politics as early as the second half of the 1920s and was "seeking to restrict the extension of its influence" in the House of Peers and was "anxious to reduce party domination of the Lower House as well." See Gordon M. Berger, "Japan's Young Prince: Konoe Fumimaro's Early Political Career, 1916–1931," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 29:4 (Winter 1974), 469. Also Tsutsui Kiyotada, *Konoe Fumimaro: kyōyōshugiteki popyurisuto no higeki*, Iwanami Shoten, 2009 and Furukawa Takahisa, *Konoe Fumimaro*, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2015.

112 Itō Takashi, *Konoe shintaisei*, Chūō kōronsha, 1983, 72–73.

and the introduction of a control economy. The plotters gave advanced notice of their schemes to Konoe, the cabinet secretary Kazami Akira and the home minister, Admiral Suetsugu Nobumasa (1880–1944).[113] But, in the end, those involved and their supporters got cold feet and the coup was called off. Had the coup planned by Nakamizo succeeded, there would have been no debate about whether Japan was a fascist state or not. For it would have indisputably transformed Japan into a fascist polity.[114]

The half-baked Nakamizo plot was an aberration. Subsequently Konoe observed the letter of the law. There was nothing illegal about the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA), which he set up during his second cabinet. The Association had been planned by the best and brightest within the coterie of Konoe's radical advisers as part of his so-called New Order even before he had been reappointed as prime minister in July 1940. The intention was to form a nation-wide party/movement which, in its conception, bore a striking resemblance to Italy's Fascist Party and the Nazis.

If Konoe had intended in this way to become dictator in the mould of Mussolini or Hitler, he clearly underestimated the opposition his initiative had engendered. Immediately, a wide range of critics attacked the move. The industrialists and financiers were fearful of losing the rest of their autonomy, which had already been heavily encroached upon by the General Mobilization Law, and opposed Konoe's *Keizai taisei yōkō* (Guidelines for the New Economic Order). The mainstream/conservative party politicians were anxious not to lose the remnants of their political power. Most bureaucrats feared they too would lose their political

113 Itō, *Konoe shintaisei*, 72–73.

114 The success of this scheme would have amounted to a "take-over" by means of a coup led by a charismatic leader who headed a mass movement.

sway.[115] Even the military were against the IRAA and declared they would support it only if it did not violate the prerogative of imperial command.[116] The bureaucrats, the parliamentarians and the army objected to the IRAA for their own, often mutually incompatible, reasons. But collectively this opposition proved too much for Konoe, who was neither persistent nor ruthless enough to overcome it. So in this instance he did what he had done so many times before (and would do again) when the going got tough: he abandoned his plans and ditched his radical supporters. On 21 December 1940 he replaced Home Minister Yasui Eiji (1890–1982) with Baron Hiranuma, former prime minister, who was a known opponent of the IRAA. Hiranuma's objections to the IRAA were most likely grounded not in ideology (for, as we have seen, some in Japan regarded him as a fascist), but in his fear that the IRAA would dilute or even completely deprive him of political influence. But whatever his motives, the new home minister put the final nail in the coffin of the IRAA by decreeing in a speech in the Diet (28 January 1941) that the new organization could not engage in political activities as that would violate the Peace Preservation Law. Under the barrage of criticism, the IRAA that finally emerged was a neutered and ineffectual version that had very little, if anything, to do either with the fascist models which had inspired it or with

115 On Japan's bureaucrats, reformist and conservative, see Roger H. Brown, "The Bureaucracy and Politics," in RHMJH, 220–22. For their evisceration of the IRRA, see 222. On reformist bureaucrats, see also Janis Mimura, *Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Wartime State,* Cornell University Press, 2011.

116 Army Minister Tōjō Hideki expressed the army's reservations in the following words: "we agree in spirit about the unity of military, bureaucrats and civilians, but the word "military" (*gun*), I believe, includes the army. The army is under the command the supreme commander, His Majesty the Emperor, so it requires further study to find out how to reconcile this fact with the idea of unity," Itō, *Konoe shintaisei*, 145. As Tōjō's statement shows, the Army may have welcomed Konoe's reforms that placed Japan on a war footing, but it had no intention of allowing itself being controlled by civilian dictators as was the case in Germany and Italy.

the visions of its radical proponents.[117] So in the end the movement failed to take off and Japan failed to become fascist. Though thwarted in his attempt to create a Nazi-like mass party, Konoe nevertheless managed finally to conclude the Tripartite (Axis) Pact with Germany and Italy (September 1940).[118]

CONCLUSION

Above I have argued that fascist ideas influenced the thinking of many Japanese bureaucrats, politicians and soldiers and thus played a decisive role in shaping Japanese foreign and domestic policy. As such, they go a long way toward explaining Japanese enthusiasm for an alliance with Germany and Italy; they help explain the implementation of radical reforms that imposed a control economy and placed Japan on a war footing; and they help shed light on the creeping regimentation and mobilization of the Japanese masses. After all, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany seemed to provide better models to emulate than those offered by the seemingly obsolete and discredited Anglo-American liberal states. Moreover, the conviction that fascism was the ideology of the future played a significant role in Japan's decision to go to war against the United States and Britain, even if Germany's military triumphs over France, Holland, Belgium and Britain in May and June 1940 were more important than ideology in prompting this decision.

Yet fascist influences, strong though they were, were not powerful enough to turn Japan into a fascist state. A fascist take-over failed to happen, because the entrenched interests proved too strong and the government structure too resilient, even if they proved too weak to control the military and prevent the catastrophe of

117 Christopher W. A. Szpilman, "Conservatism and Conservative Reaction," in RHMJH, 179–81.

118 See, for example, Itō Takashi, *Jūgonen sensō*, Shōgakukan, 1976, 267–8; Kitaoka Shin'ichi, *Seitō kara gunbu e, 1924–1941*, Chūō kōron shinsha, 1999, 347–8.

the Pacific War.

For reasons of space I have not attempted in this article to answer the question whether fascist influences were more important than ideology-free considerations in Japanese attempts to maximise the war effort through mobilization and regimentation, the introduction of a controlled economy and such like. Nor have I tackled the question why Japan proved so receptive to fascist ideas as compared with countries like Britain or the United States. Another full-length article would be necessary to address these questions adequately. For now, let me conclude by reiterating what I stated at the beginning of this article. Japan was not a fascist state but fascism played an important role in its pre-1945 history, a role that should not be ignored.