

the magnitude of the bureaucratic-fascist alliance, with its attendant terrorism, that was brought to bear against the political parties of Taishō democracy indicates how powerful the parties and parliamentary democracy had become.

There was nothing inevitable about the failure of Japan's prewar political parties and the death of Taishō democracy. The intellectual, social, and governmental pluralisms that constituted the "motley processions" of Taishō were not the stuff of which historical determinism is made. If Taishō democracy led to bureaucratic fascism at home and militarism abroad in the 1930s, it also bequeathed a democratic tradition that is basic to the successful functioning of parliamentary democracy and party government in today's Japan.

The Nonliberal Roots of Taishō Democracy

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Taishō society was increasingly democratic but not especially liberal. Let me first distinguish between democracy as a type of social and political structure and Democracy as a set of beliefs and prescriptions. It was for the most part in the structural rather than the attitudinal sense that Japan was becoming more and more democratic in the early twentieth century. This change was to some extent the result of deliberately engineered institutional reforms (such as an expanding electorate), but for the most part it followed willy-nilly in the wake of modern economic and technological development. Vastly expanded transportation and communications, higher levels of education, increasing social mobility, rising economic expectations: all these trends created a society more effectively "democratic"—that is, a society in which everyone had a growing ability and will to influence his (and even her) political and economic destiny. But democracy did not lead necessarily to Democracy; on the contrary, the very rapidity and seeming inevitability of these changes was often unsettling, even terrifying, thus encouraging attitudes that were commonly anti-Democratic.

A parallel distinction may be made between liberal and Liberal. In this case liberal may be regarded as a general political temperament favoring gradual change away from the bonds of the past in the direction of some ideal society at once more moral and "free" than the present; Liberal, on the other hand, may be regarded a historical political ideology derived from the English middle class and fundamentally committed to an individual freedom of economic and political activity. Originally Liberalism was liberal, but by the twentieth century, under changing perceptions of the past, it could as often be conservative.

It is my general argument that while there were doubtless many temperamental liberals in Taishō Japan (although no more, surely, than in the eras before or after), there were very few ideological Liberals: neither freedom nor the individual has ever been an overriding political ideal in Japan and the Taishō period is no exception. On the contrary, Taishō society was conspicuous for a variety of non-Liberal trends.

Four Limits to Taishō Liberalism

Limit 1

The Liberal character of the party movement has been exaggerated. This is not a particularly original assertion: it follows logically from the complementary studies by Tetsuo Najita (*Hara Kei in the Politics of Compromise, 1905–1915*; 1967) and Peter Duus (*Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taishō Japan*; 1968), both of whom suggest that Taishō party politics was rooted in a realistic quest for power rather than in an idealistic pursuit of ideological goals. Important structural reforms were made along democratic lines, but typically as a result of interparty and intraparty rivalries rather than from public pressure or grand Democratic ideals. Much as in the debate over the constitution in the 1870s, the issue was less the desirability of a more democratic form of government than the timing of the necessary reforms. In both cases, desirability was judged as much by adherence to contemporary Western practices as by an ultimate conception of Democracy. Universal male suffrage was accepted in the 1920s, as the Lower House of the Diet had been in the 1880s, as much because it was the universal trend of the times as for its ideological merits.

Limit 2

Taishō Liberalism as a significant political movement was very short-lived. It was only in the autumn of 1918—almost halfway through the Taishō period—that a coherent Liberal-Democratic movement began, inspired largely by wartime Allied propaganda but given considerable domestic impetus by the Rice Riots and growing labor unrest. Whatever the causes, this movement peaked in 1919 and rapidly waned. In domestic politics, Liberalism was laid to rest by the Kanto earthquake of 1923, a much-neglected turning point in modern Japanese cultural and political history. Even before the earthquake, Liberalism had

been largely supplanted by socialism among the middle-class intellectuals and labor leaders who had been its major advocates.

Limit 3

The most Liberal thing about the Taishō period was the international rather than the domestic political environment. The wartime and postwar ideologizing by the Anglo-American victors of 1918, particularly Woodrow Wilson, inspired a brief but heady mood of internationalist Liberalism throughout the world; Japan was no exception, and the cries for domestic “Democracy!” can be understood only in this global context. The struggle to devise a new peaceful multilateral world order in the 1920s in East Asia has been detailed by Akira Iriye in *After Imperialism* (1965). I think it fair to suggest that Japan’s commitment to this experiment was as much pragmatic as idealistic, scarcely surprising for a nation increasingly dependent on unrestricted world trade. A further limit to this internationalist Liberalism was its strict confinement to an imperialist frame of reference: even among the most dedicated of Taishō Democrats—Yoshino Sakuzō was the exception that proves the rule—Japanese colonialism was rarely called into question. Whatever the level of Japan’s commitment, the experiment had failed by the end of the decade, and it would be difficult to assign Japan any more than a modest share of the blame.

Limit 4

True Liberals did exist in Taishō Japan, but their numbers were few and their influence limited. Classic Anglo-American Liberalism has never been much more than a marginal political ideology in modern Japan, and even such textbook spokesmen as Fukuzawa Yukichi and Yoshino Sakuzō have been singled out for certain un-Liberal qualities. It is rather the continental European tradition of Democracy, with its statist emphasis, that has proved far more hospitable to Japanese political ideologues of both left and right. Nevertheless there were true Liberals in Taishō Japan—men like philosopher Kawai Eijirō, economic journalist Ishibashi Tanzan, educator Nitobe Inazō, and party politician Ozaki Yukio. Some, like Nitobe, were temperamentally quite conservative and came in time to be known by the patronizing tag of “Old Liberals” (*orudo riberaru*). As a whole, the true Liberals were isolated and in no way typical of the Taishō period in general. More numerous were a variety of individualistic artists, no-

tably the members of the Shirakaba-ha, who are often called bourgeois liberals. Yet politically they were more Romantics than Liberals, as suggested by their drift to cultural nationalism in the 1930s.

Four Varieties of Taishō Non-Liberalism

Bureaucratic Non-Liberalism

As E. Herbert Norman first stressed and Kenneth Pyle recently reemphasized, the bureaucracy is the most important and least understood area of modern Japanese political life. Certainly the bureaucracy was vastly more important in Taishō politics than the Diet—and yet almost all scholarly attention has focused on the party movement. This Democratic bias in favor of nonbureaucratic politics has blinded us to what was certainly the most influential form of Taishō Non-Liberalism: the bureaucracy. This powerful bureaucratism was characterized above all by its hostility to politics in the Liberal sense of open conflict and competition among diverse interest groups. Bureaucratism espouses instead reliance on elite technical expertise to solve social and economic problems; as a totalistic conception of society, it does not recognize privatized interests. Like any working political ideology, bureaucratism harbors a range of political temperaments. One thus finds Taishō bureaucrats who were temperamental liberals espousing extensive government efforts on behalf of the poor and oppressed. These liberals were distinctly non-Liberal, of course, in their totalistic conception of politics and basic distrust of such Democratic devices as local autonomy and party rule. Yet they were in a sense democratic in their tolerance and accommodation to the structural changes of an industrializing society. In formally terming this ideology “Non-Liberalism,” I hope to convey the idea that bureaucratism worked not in direct opposition to Liberalism but rather within a wholly different political world view.

I should interject at this point a caveat: we must not forget that Taishō Japan was a capitalist nation and that private enterprise was not only tolerated but positively supported by the state. Bureaucratism, in short, admitted a distinction between public and private; it did not, however, admit of a firm and litigable distinction. It is this blurring of public versus private that has led to the contemporary concept of Japan Incorporated—a perfect description of bureaucratist ideology and a term of abuse only when pronounced with a Liberal accent. I suspect that the Taishō period is in fact the place to search for

the origins of Japan Inc. and, moreover, that future research will unearth the emergence of bureaucratist Non-Liberalism in big business as much as in government.

Socialist Post-Liberalism

The true bourgeois liberals—that is, middle-class advocates of progressive social change—in Taishō Japan were to be found in the socialist movement rather than among the advocates of the established parties that are conventionally labeled bourgeois by Japanese historians. In its communist wing to the left, the socialist movement of the late Taishō period also harbored many temperamental radicals hoping for abrupt rather than gradual change. But whatever their political temperament, all Taishō socialists shared one crucial form of non-Liberal sentiment: they believed in more government rather than less, and they looked in particular to a strong central state as the means of achieving their ideals. The emphasis was, in other words, far more on egalitarian goals than on libertarian ones, an emphasis confirmed in the course of the Taishō period by the total victory of the Bolshevik over the anarchist wing of the left-wing movement. (Given the obvious vulnerability of libertarian anarchism in a nation with such strong statist traditions, it is surprising that Taishō anarchists were as prominent as they were; perhaps it is time we paid closer attention to these anomalous radicals.)

The general appeal of socialism over Liberalism among Taishō Democrats is explained not only by the strongly statist and collectivist emphasis of traditional Japanese political thought but also by Japan's position as a latecomer to modernization. As sociologist Robert Bellah has proposed, radical socialism (along with romantic nationalism) has emerged with particular strength in such latecomer nations as Japan and Germany as counterideologies to the firstcomers' Liberal Democracy, the “primary ideology of modernization.” It is in this broader sense that Taishō socialism was a form of Post-Liberalism—sharing the progressive and modernizing stance of classic Liberalism yet seeking to avoid the obvious pitfalls to which an excess of liberty had led.

Grass-Roots Il-Liberalism

This is a controversial issue in Japan these days. On the one hand, some Japanese scholars (notably Matsuo Takayoshi) have argued that Liberalism was strong in provincial Japan. I tend to support this view

with respect to certain local politicians, journalists, and intellectuals; but I consider these figures as mere extensions of Liberalism in the metropolitan centers and subject to the same four limits outlined above. The grass roots I have in mind correspond rather to what Kano Masanao and other Japanese historians call the *minshū*, translatable perhaps as “the common people.”

I consider the Taishō period to be notable for the widespread growth of local voluntary organizations at all levels of Japanese society. By their voluntary and often communal nature, such groups were structurally democratic. Yet in political temperament and ideology, they tended to be conservative and “il-Liberal”—that is, espousing values at odds with those of both liberals and Liberals. Although they varied widely, such groups were typically formed for the purpose of *fraternity*—after liberty and equality the third and most neglected ideal of the democratic revolution in the West—in the face of growing alienation and uncertainty in a rapidly industrializing society. Typical of these groups were urban neighborhood associations (*chōnaikai*), rural youth groups (*seinendan*), school alumni organizations (*dōsōkai*), student governments (*gakuyūkai*), labor and tenant unions, urban prefectural clubs (*kenjinkai*), village religious unions (*kō*), new religions—and many more. In virtually all these groups, solidarity rather than freedom was the ideal and political attitudes tended to be conservative, nationalistic, and supportive of the state. One can doubtless find progressive and even Liberal exceptions, but they would be a minority.

Nationalist Anti-Liberalism

Of all the forms of Taishō Non-Liberalism, nationalism was the most explicitly and belligerently opposed to Liberalism—hence Anti-Liberalism. Nationalist groups thrived in the Taishō period, although the generally Liberal international climate of the First World War and its aftermath made them less conspicuous and popular than they would be in the 1930s. Still, there was a fair amount of right-wing nationalist activism in these years and it deserves more attention. Remember, for example, that Kita Ikki wrote his *Outline Plan for the Reorganization of Japan* in 1919 and that Prime Minister Hara Kei in 1920 and *zaibatsu* leader Yasuda Zenjirō in 1922 were both assassinated by right-wing nationalists. In the nationalist mind, Liberalism was identified with a world order dominated by white Anglo-Saxon interests and dedicated to the oppression of the Asian races and the destruc-

tion of Japan’s non-Liberal cultural traditions. The very popularity of internationalist Liberalism in the mid-Taishō period helps explain the virulence of the nationalist reaction. One might finally suggest that many Taishō nationalists were in a sense Democratic by virtue of their professed concern for the welfare of the Japanese common people and their emphasis on the equality of all Japanese under the emperor. It was a highly anti-Liberal conception of Democracy.

Making Sense of the 1930s

The study of Taishō political life has been dominated for three decades now by the hopeful search for Liberal Democracy. Despite differences in the ideological climate within which they work, both Japanese and American scholars have pursued this search with equal vigor, the former tending to view it as a necessary stage on the way to socialism and the latter as a healthy foundation for the reforms of the occupation. Although I would grant a degree of truth to both interpretations, I offer the following refinements.

To Japanese Marxist scholars in search of bourgeois Liberal Democracy, I would suggest that Japan was able, indeed compelled, to *skip* the stage of classic Liberalism for two important reasons. First, as Ronald Dore has pointed out, the modern Japanese middle class was the product and not the cause of political revolution; hence it maintained a spirit of un-Liberal obligation to the state. Second, Japan as a latecomer believed it possible to avoid the obvious mistakes of nineteenth-century England by reliance on the close engineering of political and economic life rather than leaving things to the *laissez-faire* economics and local autonomy politics of classic Liberalism.

To American scholars (like myself) I would make two points. First, we have greatly overemphasized Taishō Liberalism and need to turn our attention to the forms of Non-Liberalism outlined above. Second, it is not necessary to give up our genuine commitment to Democracy and its survival in Japan by admitting that there are viable forms of non-Liberal Democracy. Indeed I would suggest that contemporary American Democracy, despite the obvious persistence of strongly rooted Liberal (in the American variant, highly libertarian) sentiment, is bearing an increasing *de facto* resemblance to the amalgam of bureaucratist Non-Liberalism and socialist Post-Liberalism which flourishes in Japan today.

Let me finally emphasize that to focus on Taishō non-Liberal trends is by no means to paint a bleak picture of the era. It is true that such

an approach makes more sense of the 1930s. But it makes even more sense of the 1970s. The simple point is that Taishō political life was complex, contradictory, and multivalent, leading no more surely to fascism than to communism or to social democracy. The great imponderable in assessing both Taishō and contemporary politics in Japan remains the specter of a new wave of nationalist Anti-Liberalism, both in Japan and in the world at large.

PART VIII

Japanese Colonialism: Enlightened or Barbaric?
