

## **Marx's Political Theory in Japan after the 1990s: Toward Associational Revolution**

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### **Introduction: the Japanese Marxist Debate on the State**

In the 1970s, against the backdrop of the structural recession of capitalism and the rise of New Left Movement, there were a lot of controversies over the Marxist state theory in Western Europe. Until the 1980s, “the renaissance of state theory” introducing “the Miliband-Poulantzas debate” and “the state-derivation debate” was popular also in Japan, but after the end of the Cold War there were few researchers of Marx’s political theory<sup>1</sup>. However, since the Great Recession of 2008, policy makers in each country have a common understanding of “long-term stagnation” (i.e. growth slowdown, widening gap, increased debt) in capitalism, and outside Japan Marx's economic theory and political thought is in the limelight again. Though Marxism had great influence in post-war Japanese academia and social contradictions become more and more serious because of “long-term stagnation” since the 1990s, why recently has the interest in Marx’s theory fallen significantly?

One of the answers to this question can be glimpsed in the Japanese Marxist debate on the state. The state controversy in Japan, in contrast to that of U.K. and West Germany, was developed completely separate from the labor politics and New Left Movements. At the time, the academia was a major center of “Stalinism” in Japan, and the Marxist researchers, who criticized the traditional Marxism in response to the student movement since 1968, also fell into the left Stalinism or Leninism in general<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, for example, “the state-derivation debate” reflected New Left Movements in West Germany. The participants in this debate not only rejected “Real Socialism” including East Germany and “Marxism-Leninism” but also criticized the reformism of the Social Democratic Party. SPD, which left decisively Marxism since the *Godesberg Program* in 1959, has transformed into a national party, and its grand coalition with CDU/CSU has adopted social policies of left Keynesianism. In order to

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<sup>1</sup>As Marxian economics has maintained its influence to some extent in academia, the theory of state monopoly capitalism, which “the renaissance of state theory” harshly criticized, remained today.

<sup>2</sup> Ryusuke Oyabu [et al]: *Shinsayokuundo 40nen no hikari to kage [Light and Shadow of the New Left Movements' 40 years]*. Shinsensya. 1999.

counter SPD's socialist strategy by the parliamentary system, in the mid 1960s the student movements like the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* and the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (APO) practiced direct democracy outside the parliament. Then, in the late 1960s, the influence of APO also increased in SPD's adolescent organizations, and they became more radical than SPD itself. Therefore, "the state-derivation debate" reflected the following strategic controversies over Stalinism in East Germany, the establishment of "Social State" by SPD, and protest demonstrations outside the parliament: whether the capitalist state can play a leading role in the transformation into socialism. Furthermore, since the mid 1970s, many APO activists have formed citizens' action groups, resulting in the creation of "counter public spheres" across existing political organizations, educational institutions and media. Thus, they have developed "New Social Movements" on the theme of peace, gender and environment, and since the 1980s, these themes have been incorporated into the political system through their activities in "Green Party"<sup>3</sup>.

The history of labor politics and the New Left Movement in West Germany is suggestive in considering why the social movements are so backward in contemporary Japan. In the post-war Japanese capitalist system, the unique corporatist governance and developmentalist policies, which guaranteed "dictatorship of capital", prevented the formation of Social State like Western Europe<sup>4</sup>. When the neoliberal policies have been enforced after the 1990s, the political left informed by Marxism-Leninism, who survived the post-war Japanese capitalist system, lost much of its power. Certainly, since the Great Recession, a new labor movement has emerged on the background of social problems such as pauperism and the increase in non-regular employment, and in 2009 a change of government has been achieved, but it was not possible to establish the labor politics that would build Social State. Besides, since the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japanese social movements have been facing a series of issues (the nuclear power plant accident, military expansion, sexism, etc.) addressed by the APO movement in West Germany over several decades. However, in recent years the anti-nuclear movement and the peace movement have been destined to converge on the sidewalk demonstration (in the front of the Prime Minister's official residence) and the election

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<sup>3</sup> Tadahisa Izeki: 'The "1968" Debate in Germany: 40 Years after the Student Movement', *The Study of International Relations*, vol. 35, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Michio Goto: *Sengosshisohegemony no Shuen to Shinfukushikokkakoso [The End of Post-war Thought's Hegemony and the Conception of the New Welfare State]*. Jyunposha. 2006.

campaign led by the Japanese Communist Party. After all, contrary to Western Europe, even Eurocommunism and labor politics supported by strong labor movements has never existed in Japan. Moreover, there has not yet been the non-parliamentary opposition groups that try to radically overcome illusions of Social State, and the New Social Movements that claim civil rights by direct democracy.

### **A Turning Point in Marx's View on Socialism: From Political Revolution to Social Revolution**

Since the end of the Cold War, the Marxist state controversy in Japan has come to an end, both within and outside of academia. However, in order to review his experience of engaging in a new left party and to overcome Marxism-Leninism theoretically, R. Oyabu has renovated Marx's political theory through detailed philological interpretation. According to him, Japanese new left parties in the 1970s planned a political revolution from the standpoint of Leninism. Their views on the revolution were generally party (or state)-centric, and they held up "proletarian dictatorship" and the state-owned means of production<sup>5</sup>. In other words, the New Left in Japan has attacked Stalinism and Soviet Socialism, but it has been trapped in the "Soviet Marxist" framework. As Oyabu emphasizes, Soviet Marxist thoughts on the transitional society originate from late Engels, but its state-centered model is definitely different from Marx's theory of associational society.

In *the Turning Point in Marx's View on Socialism*<sup>6</sup> published in 1996, Oyabu revealed Marx's conception of the transitional society that is different from late Engels and Lenin. According to him, Marx had a state-centered model during the revolutions of 1848, but from then, changed his evaluation of worker cooperative, and since the 1860s began to put more emphasis on the concept of associational society based on associated production<sup>7</sup>. In *the Communist Manifesto*, Marx claimed that the proletariat who became the dominant class after the capture of state power needed to take capital from the bourgeoisie and concentrate all means of production on the state<sup>8</sup>. In addition, his theory of "proletarian dictatorship", which was advocated in response to the intense

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<sup>5</sup> Oyabu [et al]: *Shinsayokuundo 40nen no hikari to kage* (Fn. 2)

<sup>6</sup> Ryusuke Oyabu: *Marx Syakaisyugizo no Tenkan*. Ochanomizusyobo. 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*. In: MEW. Bd. 4. S. 481.

development of the 1848 revolutions, completely rejected class compromise and reformism<sup>9</sup>. Thus, Marx regarded the centralized state as "the first step in the revolution by the working class" (MEW4, S.481) by opposing federal republics or municipalism.

According to Oyabu, after his full-scale economic studies during the 1850s, Marx began to more positively evaluate cooperative factories that sublated [*aufheben*] the relationship of wage-labour and capital. In *Address of the International Working Men's Association*, Marx looks back on the defeat of the 1848 revolutions and the subsequent development of capitalism and regards the development of the cooperative movement as well as the enactment of the Ten Hours' Bill in England as the victory of the working class<sup>10</sup>. According to Marx, the experience of cooperative factories shows that workers themselves 1) control production, 2) own means of production, and 3) are destined to engage in associated labor rather than wage labor. However, as Marx emphasizes, the cooperative system should to be developed to the national dimension, which requires the working class to conquer state power<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, in *Provisional Rules of the International Working Men's Association*, the following general principle is confirmed: "the economical emancipation of the working classes is [...] the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means"(MEGA I /20, S.13). As for this passage, Oyabu pays attention to Marx's claim that the political revolution should be subordinate to the social revolution.

Marx's theory of social revolution, which was fundamentally transformed from his state-centered theory in *Manifesto*, is especially developed in *The Civil War in France* written for the Paris Commune of 1871. In this article, according to Oyabu, Marx clearly abandons the plan of the general state ownership in *Manifesto*. In other words, Marx insists that capitalist private ownership should be transformed to "individual ownership" based on associated production. Therefore, in the transitional society, it is necessary for individuals to make progressive improvements in all spheres of society through cooperatives in which they freely associate with each other. In addition, in *The Civil War*, there are some mentions of what role state power plays in the economic structure of the transitional society. As Oyabu pointed out, Marx never uses the word "proletarian dictatorship" in *The Civil War* and, from his experience of the Paris

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx an Joseph Weydemeyer, 5. März 1852. In: MEW. Bd. 28. S. 508.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx: Address of the International Working Men's Association. In: MEGA I/20. S.10.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, S.11.

Commune, grasps the importance of a new democratic state rather than proletarian dictatorship. Indeed, after clarifying the concept of associational society, Marx has not insisted on conquering political power independently of the association in the direct and social relations of production. In short, Marx has realized that the transition to the associational society would take a very long time, as it would require full economic and political improvement. In *The Civil War* (the first draft), he noted the following:

The working class know that they have to pass through different phases of class struggle. They know that the superseding of the economical conditions of the slavery of labour by the conditions of free and associated labour can only be the progressive work of time, (that economical transformation) that they require not only a change of distribution, but a new organization of production, or rather the delivery (setting free) of the social forms of production in present organized labour, (engendered by present industry) of the trammels of slavery of their present class character and their harmonious national and international coordination. (MEGA I/22, S.59)

As discussed above, the use of political power by the working class must be aimed at the economical liberation from wage labor. “The Commune—the political form of the social emancipation, of the liberation of labour from the usurpation of the monopolists of the means of labour” (ibid, S.58) would coordinate and control the production of each association within the national sphere. In this sense, contrary to Marxism-Leninism, it is necessary to analyze the mechanism of the state power in transitional society rather than the withering away of the state by “proletarian dictatorship”.

The first problem is how a centralized executive power embodied in state apparatuses such as a standing army, police and bureaucracy is absorbed by the commune which coordinates the associations. Marx emphasized that among the series of social reforms implemented by the Paris Commune, the policy of abolishing the standing army and replacing worker’s militia is the primary economic imperative. According to Marx, if the Commune of the armed people should replace the executive power, tax and state debt would cease to be the economic basis of the capitalist state, and the state finance could not maintain the standing army and bureaucracy. Thus, the executive machinery separated and centralized from the bourgeois society would also be managed by the members of the Commune themselves: The Commune is defined as “the reabsorption of the State power by society, as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own

force instead of the organized force of their suppression” (ibid, S.56). Therefore, it is possible to gradually transform the centralized executive power into the commune only through the proletarian association, not the "proletarian dictatorship".

Secondly, how would the commune as a working “executive and legislative at the same time” (ibid, S.105) body realize its common interests without conflict with the popular masses? The Commune in Paris consisted of members elected by the general election in each district of the city, but they were all responsible for the electors and could be dismissed immediately. In “the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate [was] to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents” (ibid, S.140). As Oyabu pointed out, "delegational system" of the Commune, unlike the representative system and party politics that legitimize the executive power in the capitalist state, does not represent the *will* of electors. In other words, the delegates as members of the Commune were literally just *agents* of the electors. Moreover, not only workers in a central city, but also peasants in each province were members of the Commune. “The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town” (ibid). Thus, through "delegational system" and "assembly", all public functions of the political community would be self-governed by each commune, rather than being managed by the executive power separated and independent from society.

Hence, as Marx stressed also in the 1872 German edition’s preface to *Manifesto*, “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes” (ibid, S.137: MEW4, S.574). The “ready-made state machinery” must be progressively transformed into a communal state, whether peacefully or violently. In particular, Oyabu emphasizes that the federal system of the communal state is inseparable from “individual ownership” based on the associated production. This is because decentralization and municipalism in the transitional new democratic state is the only way to wither away the state itself. In this way, Marx completely wiped out his state-centered model and proposed "Associational Revolution" against the state itself<sup>12</sup>.

### **The Form Analysis of State: The Limitations of Oyabu’s Theory of Associational Revolution**

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<sup>12</sup> For its contemporary implications, see Minoru Tabata: *Marx to Association [Marx and Association]*. Syakaihyoronsya. 2015[1994].

By thoroughly reviewing “twentieth-century socialism”, Oyabu confirmed that the seizure of political power and the state-owned means of production were only auxiliary measures of association in direct and social relations of production. However, his political theory, in contrast to “the state-derivation debate”, ignores Marx’s “Form Analysis” of the state. Marx’s critique of political economy analyzes not a narrowly-defined economic society, but the capitalist social system (including the state) as a totality. As Marx describes in *Capital*, Volume I, although classical political economy discovered the hidden content (labor) in the form of value, it could not ask why this content takes the form of value<sup>13</sup>. The Form Analysis is also crucial to Marx’s political theory. The reason is that, just as classical political economy *prior to* Marx missed the Form Analysis of value, Marxist political theory *after* Marx also has fundamentally abandoned its attempt to analyze the determinations of “political form” such as legal form and state form. In fact, Marxist political theory has tended to analyze not the form of law or the state form, but its content, i.e., coercion, physical violence and domination<sup>14</sup>. In contrast, a former Soviet jurist E. Paschukanis criticized late Engels’ class-centric state theory from the point of view of Form Analysis and elucidated why and how the content of class domination such as coercion and physical violence, takes the form of public power that “epitomizes the bourgeois society”<sup>15</sup>.

In the preceding studies of Marxist political theory (including Oyabu’s one), the law form that Paschukanis emphasized has only been understood as an ideological appearance that concealed the relationship of exploitation between capital and wage labor. However, Paschukanis’ argument raised the practical problem of how to alleviate the equivalent exchange of commodities and its complement, the legal form, without utilizing the state in the transition to communism. Indeed, scholars such as J. Holloway and J. Hirsch who inherited “the state-derivation debate” regard the decommoditizing action of Social State as the process of “the reabsorption of the state power by society”<sup>16</sup>. On the contrary, Oyabu’s theory of Associational Revolution never takes the issue of the

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<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx: *Das Kapital*. Bd. 1. Hamburg 1872. In: MEGA II/6. S. 110/111.

<sup>14</sup> See Takayoshi Shibata: *Marx Seijigaku Genron [Marx’ Principles of Politics]*. Ronsosya. 2012.

<sup>15</sup> For details, see Soichiro Sumida: ‘Die Zusammenfassung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft in der Staatsform. Zu Marx’ Theorie des Staats’. *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch 2017/18*. De Gruyter. 2018.

<sup>16</sup> John Holloway: ‘Die Staatsableitungsdebatte: Eine erinnernde Reflexion’. in: *Zur Aktualität der Staatsform: Die Materialistische Staatstheorie von Joachim Hirsch*. Nomos. Baden-Baden. 2018.

possibility and limitation of Social State in the transition period to associational society.

To consider the political form of association makes it possible to distinguish between social democracy, which accepts Social State as given, and “socialist democracy<sup>17</sup>” which reformulates Social State as a transition period to associational society. The Commune as a specific political form based on the associated mode of production implies the classical tradition of direct democracy, i.e. the self-governance of producers, not the representative system that social democracy presupposes. As also emphasized by E. Wood<sup>18</sup>, the democracy taken solely from a formal or legal point of view is qualitatively different from the communal democracy, which is the self-organization of the free and associated producers. In the commune as a political form of the association, the associated producers themselves would control the relations of production by democratic self-determination.

As a result of ignoring the Form Analysis as critique of political economy, Oyabu could not recognize the importance of “socialist democracy” to reorganize Social State in transitional society. He often emphasizes that Marxist-Leninist political theory has neglected the significance of modern bourgeois democracy, such as representative system and the separation of powers. As a corollary to that, he exaggerates the advantage of parliamentary democracy in socialist strategies. However, as represented by J. Agnoli<sup>19</sup>, who had a major impact on APO, the limitations of representative democracy have always been controversial in "the state-derivation debate". In other words, parliamentary democracy in the modern bourgeois state does not inherently establish a free and democratic order, but rather only penetrate the political form that complements the capitalist social system. From the results of "the state-derivation debate", it could be concluded that there were still some Marxist-Leninist remnants in great Oyabu's theory of Associational Revolution.

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<sup>17</sup> Oskar Negt: *Keine Demokratie ohne Sozialismus: Über den Zusammenhang von Politik, Geschichte und Moral*. Suhrkamp. Frankfurt a. M. 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Ellen Wood: *The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader*. Brill. Leiden/Boston. 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Johannes Agnoli: *Die Transformation der Demokratie und andere Schriften zur Kritik der Politik*. ça-ira-Verlag. Freiburg. 1990.