

The debate on fascism in Japanese historiography¹

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This chapter focuses on the historical debate concerning the question whether or not Japan was a fascist state prior to 1945. The chapter does not attempt to provide an answer to this question, but recounts the highlights of the historiographical debate from its origins in the early 1930s down to the present day. After noting that the prewar views shaped to a significant degree the early postwar views and determined the initial course of the debate, I discuss the contribution of the political scientist Maruyama Masao and describe critical responses to Maruyama's interpretation made by empirical historians in the 1960s and the 1970s. The chapter also recounts briefly the influence of prewar Marxist-dominated Japanese discourse on fascism on postwar views of Japan as a fascist state. The domination of modern Japanese history and thus theories of fascism by Marxist scholars broke down in the 1970s. This breakdown began with the critiques launched in the 1960s by Itō Takashi and other historians who dispensed altogether with the concept of fascism as applicable to Japan. Next, having briefly discussed the reaction to Itō's work among Japanese historians, I survey the recent developments in Japanese historical research and its relevance to the fascism debate and round off the chapter with a short comment on the debate on Japanese fascism in Anglophone scholarship.

Aspects of continuity from prewar to postwar

The defeat in the war with the United States was a bewildering trauma for the Japanese people. The novelist Sakaguchi Ango (1906–55) in his essay on 'On Decadence' published in April 1946 observed that 'within half a year the world has changed' (Sakaguchi 2010). Heroic members of the kamikaze corps had turned into black-marketeters, and war widows were no longer pristine angels. They had lost their godlike qualities and 'reverted to their status as human beings'. This reference was an allusion to Emperor Hirohito (1901–89), who after the war had renounced his divine status and declared that he was a human being in the so-called Humanity Declaration (*ningen sengen*) of January 1946.

While transforming morality and depriving the emperor of his divinity, the defeat also revolutionized the social sciences. Political science and history had been among the fields under the most pressure to change. But with regard to research on fascism, little change took place between prewar and postwar. If one compares the 1932 essay 'Fascism and Contemporary Times'

by the political scientist Sassa Hiroo (1897–1948) with Maruyama Masao's postwar writings on fascism (Sassa 1932; Maruyama 1963a; 1963b), one can detect clear similarities both in their approach to, and their perception of, this issue. First, I will discuss these similarities as facets of prewar and postwar continuity.

In an attempt to 'make the [fascist] movement more easily understandable', Sassa outlined five 'aspects' of fascism: orientation and objective; stages; social context; and conceptual form. Moreover, he asserted that the definition of fascism did not depend upon the aspects that manifested themselves at each stage, but upon the 'true essence' at the base of those aspects. For Sassa, the essence of fascism was as follows: first, fascism was the domestic and international political trend of monopoly capitalism arising out of the general crisis of capitalism after the Great War; second, fascism served to defend or revise capitalism by preventively suppressing the proletarian movement; and, third, fascism was a centralizing, authoritarian politics of power directed toward establishing state capitalism. In short, fascism, Sassa held, was counterrevolutionary.

In the postwar period Maruyama (1914–94), professor of political science at Tokyo University, took essentially the same position. In his 1952 essay 'Various Problems of Fascism', Maruyama contended that 'fascism is the twentieth century's most radical and most aggressive form of counterrevolution'. From the postscript to this paper one can see that Maruyama's goal was to provide a contemporary 'guideline for judging conditions', rather than to offer a substantial understanding of monopoly capital or mechanisms of control and that he sought to codify as much as possible the process by which fascism solidified out of chaotic conditions. In the entry for a dictionary of political science published two years later, Maruyama broke fascism down into the five categories of general context, developmental form, function, ideology, and anti-fascist struggle, and he placed special emphasis on the category of function. Because fascism assumed different forms in different regions and periods, Maruyama asserted, it was impossible to analyze it by looking at actual social conditions or systems themselves, such as monopoly capital, bureaucracy, and fascist parties. Rather it was necessary to 'pay attention to fascism's political function and the process by which that function was universalized'. In those circumstances, it was clear that the most vital political function of fascism was forced homogeneity. In other words, as he made it clear in 'Various Problems of Fascism', Maruyama's position was to focus on the political function of fascism, rather than on economic conditions or political systems (Maruyama 1964). With this approach, Maruyama bolstered scholarly efforts to perceive the essence of 'fascization' (*fasho-ka*).

Sassa wrote to provide facility for understanding a movement and Maruyama wrote to provide guidelines for judging conditions. Sassa argued for looking at essence, not at aspects; Maruyama argued for looking at function, not at form. In an effort to explain why it was necessary to look at essence and not aspects, Sassa observed in 1932 that the failure to explain the essence of fascism would 'lead to ignoring the fascist tendencies of the political current of American imperialism'. In 1952, Maruyama, echoing Sassa, argued that it was necessary to look at function, not at form, because to overlook function would lead one to ignore the problem of the fascization of America and the 'free world' (Maruyama 1964; see also Maruyama 1963a; 1963b).

There were clearly some parallels here between prewar and postwar. This is not to say that no progress had been made. But continuity was ensured by the fact that postwar scholars were able to draw on the store of research on fascism done by social scientists before the war.

Marxism and the postwar debate on fascism

From the perspective of continuity, the 1933–37 debate between two groups of Marxist scholars, the Kōzaha (Lecture School Group) and the Rōnōha (Workers and Peasants Group), is of crucial

importance. The debate ostensibly probed the nature of the Meiji Restoration. Specifically it asked whether or not it was a bourgeois revolution and whether or not the Meiji state was still partly feudal or had become fully capitalist. But the debate was really about the nature of Japan in the 1930s, namely, was Japan a fascist state or not? Fascism, the Marxist argument ran, was a crisis of capitalism at its highest stage, that of monopoly capitalism. According to this argument, the capitalists turned to fascism in a desperate and ultimately futile attempt to prevent a communist revolution, whose advent was guaranteed by historical dialectics. Historians associated with the *Kōzaha* argued that it was impossible for Japan to be fascist because the Meiji Restoration was an incomplete revolution and feudal elements continued to predominate within the Japanese state. In contrast, the *Rōnōha* scholars asserted that the Meiji Restoration *was* a complete bourgeois revolution, after which Japan entered the monopoly capitalism stage and thus fascism could (and did) occur there.

The Marxist debate on fascism resumed in the postwar period as, in the 1950s and the early 1960s, Marxist scholars, unrestrained by censorship or *lèse majesté* laws, more or less monopolized historical research in Japan (Abe 1973) and extended the prewar focus on capitalism to such topics as the political history of the Meiji Restoration (e.g., Tōyama 1951). Moreover, the enormous influence of Marxist historians on the shaping the historical consciousness of the Japanese public is indicated by the extraordinary popularity of *Shōwashi* (Shōwa history), a run-away bestseller, which sold more than 10 million copies in multiple editions since its initial publication in 1955 (Tōyama et al. 1955; revised edition 1959).

However, the Marxist hold on historical research weakened in the 1960s after the appearance of a number of empirically based studies that revolutionized the field of modern Japanese history (Itō 1969; see also Nihon Kokusai Seiji Gakkai 1963; Hata 1962). By the middle of the 1970s this new research had led to a major reappraisal of fascism as a concept of relevance to Japan and called into question the validity of Maruyama's views on fascism.

Debating the structure of fascism

The year 1976 was especially noteworthy in the debate on fascism, due to the publication of Tsutsui Kiyotada's 'A reconsideration of "Japanese fascism"' (Tsutsui 1976) and Itō Takashi's 'A perspective on researching Shōwa political history' (Itō 1976; 1983). Tsutsui (b. 1948) criticized Maruyama by concentrating on the following six elements, which Maruyama listed as defining the structure (*taisei*) of fascism: first, the emergence of a dictator and the subsequent glorification of his person amounting to the cult of the individual; second, rejection of conventional multi-party politics in favour of one-party dictatorship; third, the formation of non-constitutional government; fourth, a ban on free communication and freedom of expression, assembly, association, and organization; fifth, the use of technology and mass media to regiment the masses; and, sixth, a 'rule of terror' through terrorism and violence. Tsutsui then pointed out that these elements were in fact indistinguishable from the structural characteristics of totalitarianism. In addition to these definitions relating to the structure of fascism, Tsutsui noted that Maruyama held a more fundamental view of what constituted the core of fascism, which he located in Maruyama's characterization of 'fascism as the twentieth century's most radical and most aggressive form of counterrevolution'. At the same time, Tsutsui also raised the question whether Maruyama's approach implied that labels such as 'revolutionary' and 'counter-revolutionary' could be used in a completely arbitrary fashion.

Tsutsui's critique of the matter of structure (I will not make a strict distinction between broad and narrow senses at this stage; I will return to this point later) struck at a weakness in the analyses of both Sassa and Maruyama. Because both focused on the function of fascism and not on its structure and because they wrote to provide guidelines that would enable contemporaries

to evaluate fascism, their analyses failed to take into consideration actual social conditions or systemic aspects. System normally means the continuing or recognized frame or instrument of social life or, alternatively, the legitimate and acknowledged fixed behavioural forms of a society for the purpose of achieving particular objectives of value. However, it is not surprising that Maruyama, who did not touch on issues of system or political mechanism, also failed to discuss the higher-level concept of structure (*taisei*). As a matter of fact, at the beginning of *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics* Maruyama made a distinction between fascism as a state structure and fascism as a movement, but then declined to discuss the former (Maruyama 1963b). Yet he was clearly aware of the problem. Indeed, in a postscript to 'Nationalism, Militarism, and Fascism' Maruyama discussed the impossibility of understanding fascism without addressing its unequivocal corresponding connection to structure, and noted that 'looking at fascism as one historical *structure*, there were those who viewed the transition from bourgeois democracy to fascism historically as a transition to a higher stage, and therefore argued that it could only be followed by proletarian revolution'. However, he dismissed this view as erroneous. As this clearly shows, Maruyama was aware of the problem presented by the structure of fascism but deliberately declined to discuss it. Tsutsui's critique made this omission plain.

In contrast to Tsutsui, Itō (b. 1932) eschewed direct criticisms of Maruyama, probably because Maruyama was not involved in the debate over structure, and instead focused his critique on historical works that 'used the term "fascism" as a matter of course to explain the political structure that arose after the collapse of party cabinets in the early 1930s'. But such differences apart, it should be noted that both Tsutsui and Itō made their criticisms from the perspective of political structure.

Tsutsui's and Itō's critique had earlier roots. As early as 1963, Itō, together with Satō Seizaburō (1932–99), Takamura Naosuke (b. 1936), and Toriumi Yasushi (b. 1934), had complained that historical research was making no progress and suggested that 'difficult questions' were not being addressed because most historians were deeply in the thrall of Marxist theory (Itō et al. 1963). Too many historians, they protested, relied on the Marxist developmental stage theory to explain historical change through successive shifts in economic and social structure; moreover, if one accepted that the 'state authority' established at the time of the Meiji Restoration was a form of feudal absolutism, then one needed to deal with the undeniable fact of Japanese capitalism's rapid development and address the question of just when and how 'state authority' underwent this 'qualitative' change from feudal absolutism to capitalism. That was most likely why Maruyama did not address the question of actual economic conditions, political mechanism, system, and structure: he was fully aware of the pitfall of discussing fascism by assigning it one unequivocal corresponding connection to the substructure.

So how did historians working within the Marxist view of history react to these criticisms? Eguchi Keiichi (1932–2003) summarized the Marxist position by arguing that the definition of fascism as a violent dictatorship of finance capital was widely recognized and that absolutism, whether or not in essence a variety of feudal authority, was at minimum widely recognized as possessing feudal characteristics. If that was the case, then the problem caused by 'the view which emphasizes the imposition of fascism under the wartime form of government' was 'how to explain the transition from the qualitatively feudal emperor system absolutism (that was especially pronounced in the military component of the system) to the violent dictatorship of finance capital with its different historical and class character' (Eguchi 1977: 313). Marxist historians tried to resolve this problem by distinguishing between state type and state form. For instance, Nakamura Masanori (1935–2015) argued that, 'even if a state was capitalist at the level of "state type", which is where the true historical and class quality of the state was revealed, it was fully possible for the same state to maintain an absolutist essence at the level of "state form",

and the authority of prewar Japan's emperor system truly existed in this difficult-to-bridge gap between "state type" and "state form". (Nakamura 1975) However, although making theoretical distinctions between state type and state form may be valid in the fields of economic history and comparative social history, it is doubtful whether the introduction of such distinctions brought any progress to the field of political history (Eguchi 1976; 1978; 1984).

The international situation and perceptions of fascism

In his controversial essay, published in *Shisō* (Thought), Itō proclaimed that 'the word "fascism" was meaningless as an analytical term' (Itō 1983: 5). What stands out in this truncated and undocumented utterance is his assertion that 'a major reason for axiomatically using the term "fascism" to describe the prewar Japanese political system was the judgment of the International Tribunal for the Far East' (Itō 1983: 7).

Here I wish to consider the intrinsic reason why Itō rather forcedly brought up the subject of the Tokyo Trials. First, he questioned the Tokyo Trials' ideological schema that lumped the victorious powers of the United States, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and China together in the democratic camp and the defeated Japan, Germany and Italy in the fascist camp. Second, he asked what was the decisive difference between the political structure of Stalin's Russia and that of fascism and totalitarianism and, third, he queried whether there were any decisive similarities common to Stalin's Russia, Chiang Kai-shek's China, and the Anglo-American democracies.

In this way, Itō, who had in his earlier co-authored article criticized the lack of concrete discussion of political structure in the discourse on fascism, approached fascism not as a domestic politics issue but from the perspective of international affairs. This perspective resembled the approach of Gordon M. Berger (b. 1943) who, in the same issue of the journal, pointed out that in 1941 Japan, which the Soviet Union had assigned to the fascist camp, embarked on war not with the Soviets, but with the European colonial powers and the United States, a fact that 'clearly contradicted the Comintern's concept of the way the fascist states behaved'. What linked Japan, Germany, and Italy together, Berger argued, was not a war against the Soviet Union or communism, but a war against 'the Anglo-American countries and the world system those powers were attempting to preserve' (Berger 1976).

That Itō raised the issue of fascist structure from the perspective of foreign affairs is of great interest and warrants further consideration. Before I discuss it, I would like to note that the issue of fascist structure was not completely ignored in Japan at that time. In fact, political scientist Ishida Takeshi (b. 1924) made a remarkable attempt to represent fascism as a total political structure, but he did so from the perspective of political science, not history (Ishida 1956). It would be instructive to take a look at political scientist Ōtake Hideo's criticism of Ishida, which has some similarity to Itō's argument in that it also placed emphasis on the international situation. Ōtake (b. 1943) viewed Ishida's work as flawed because it ignored the international situation and analyzed emperor-system fascism only from a domestic perspective, focusing on domestic integration and the structure of oppression. Ōtake argued that

the Meiji state was above all born out of an effort to deal with an external crisis, so it is futile to try to understand the significance of domestic integration without appreciating the foreign dimension. That is because the necessity of internal integration was brought about by external crisis (or perhaps a subjective crisis consciousness) and this sense of crisis was used to legitimize domestic integration.

(Ōtake 1994)

If one applies Ōtake's argument to early Shōwa Japan, it connects to the point raised by Berger in the sense that both America and Russia aimed to preserve and expand their own national interests within the realm of international politics by means of universalizing their own 'revolutionary' values (Berger 1976). Japan, too, which perceived the threat of an inclusion within a U.S.-Soviet world order as an external crisis, universalized values sanctified by its own particular national experience and traditions. Thus, it is also possible to regard Japan as having envisaged a world order that was different from those offered by the United States and Soviet Union. In short, this suggests that it is possible to look at internal integration from the perspective of the international situation.

At first glance, Itō's studies may appear to have nothing to do with the international situation. However, his first book-length monograph on early Shōwa politics examined the ways in which different political groups perceived and reacted to the naval limitations treaty worked out at the London Naval Conference in 1930 (Itō 1969). And in his aforementioned essay on researching Shōwa political history (Itō 1976), he argued that a detailed examination and analysis of historical sources were necessary to grasp how various states confronted the difficult problems that arose after the First World War. Only such an examination, Itō stressed, could clarify just how these states, and various groups within them, understood the challenging international environment.

The problem was that Itō, while making this point, made no attempt to clarify the political dynamics between the international situation and internal reorganization. The introduction to his monograph (Itō 1969) was based on a sophisticated methodology drawn from the American political scientist Seymour Lipsett (see Katō 2005). Itō set up two axes along which he arranged various political groups such as the political parties, the army, the navy, the right wing, and considered the conflicts and connections among these groups through the prism of shared or conflicting interests. Nevertheless, having read the book, one cannot but conclude that the connection between the analytical framework set out in the introduction and the ten chapters in which ten political groups are analyzed one by one is unexpectedly weak.

Foreign crisis and domestic reorganization

Whereas Itō critiqued the existing discourse on fascism in terms of the international situation, when discussing the domestic situation, he merely provided his own '*kakushin*'-*ha* (renovationist faction) analytical axis and failed to investigate the relationship between foreign crisis and domestic reorganization. Itō's failure to address this important aspect is hinted at in the poor reviews his work received in *Symposium Japanese History 3, Fascism and War* (Fujiwara 1973; 23–5, 30–31, 88). Yet if one reads this book with a fresh mind, it is not really difficult to see that it examines what Maruyama called an ideology 'linking domestic reorganization and international claims'. Or to put it differently, the book focuses on Maruyama's third characteristic of the ideology of Japanese fascism, Pan-Asianism, that is, a call to liberate the peoples of Asia from the yoke of Western imperialism. In my view, the most interesting statement in *Fascism and War* was made by Hashikawa Bunzō:

The particular character of Japanese fascism was pretty much determined by the experience of the Sino-Japanese War. If Japan had started the Pacific War without being embroiled in the Sino-Japanese War, then most probably the character of so-called fascism during the Pacific War would have been quite different. . . . For that reason, the various so-called special characteristics of fascism we have just been discussing also influenced domestic rule and the control of the Japanese people.

(Fujiwara 1973: 244)

These words by Hashikawa refer to the change brought about in domestic Japanese politics by the moves toward outlawing war as exemplified in the articles of the League of Nations, the 1922 Nine-Power Treaty, the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, and the Neutrality Acts (Shinohara 2003; Ikō 2002; Kobayashi 2002). This perspective overlaps with the work of Sakai Tetsuya, who has analyzed in great detail the historiography on Japanese politics in the 1930s, concluding, like Hashikawa, that there is a need for more analysis of the relationship between international and domestic politics and for closer study of the social impact of the Sino-Japanese War (Sakai 1988; 1992).

Likewise, from early on Arima Manabu (b. 1945) has been consistently aware of the political dynamism of the relationship between foreign crisis and domestic reorganization. In his ‘The World View of the “Movement for National Reorganization”’, Arima focused on the political organizations that were formed in Japan after the First World War (Arima 1977). He described their ideology as ‘state socialism’ (*kokka shakaishugi*) and examined the reasons why they wielded such powerful influence in Japanese politics at that particular moment. Having also analyzed the organizational details of these groups, he located the source of their influence in their offering prescriptions how to resolve both agricultural problems and the perceived external crisis. Through this approach Arima succeeded in shedding light on the linkages between external crisis and internal reorganization prior to the outbreak of Sino-Japanese War (Arima 1973; 1992).

I, too, have written on the linkages between the foreign crisis and domestic politics during the period from the outbreak of that war in July 1937 to Japan’s attack on the Anglo-American powers in December 1941. For instance, it was in this period that Hiranuma Kiichirō (1867–1952), who had since the mid-1920s headed one wing of the domestic reorganization movement and been generally regarded as a member of the ‘renovationist Right’ (*kakushin uyoku*), changed his views and formed a moderate pro-Anglo-American faction together with the upper ranks of the navy and members of the business world who wished to avoid war with Great Britain and the United States (see Katō 1993: ch. 4). At the same time, Konoe Fumimaro (1891–1945), who became prime minister for the second time in June 1940, with the help of the Shōwa Kenkyūkai (Shōwa Research Association) and other members of the renovationist faction, proceeded with peace overtures toward the Chinese Nationalist government, while pushing ahead with his plans to create a new nationwide totalitarian political party that consciously imitated Western fascist parties; however, the failure of the peace initiative weakened Konoe’s domestic position. As a result, the new party movement, which had encountered much opposition from various conservatives, failed to take power and turn Japan into a fascist state, and morphed into a largely ineffectual Imperial Rule Assistance Association. In sum, the ebb and flow of the war with China was determining the tempo of domestic political reform (Berger 1977; Katō 2015).

Research on the military and comparative fascism

I will now describe the remarkable strides in research on the military, made particularly by Marxist historians, that resulted from the debate initiated by Itō. As Ōtake’s review of Ishida’s work showed, research on Japanese political history from the perspective of political science focused mainly on the Home Ministry’s mechanisms of domestic integration and coercion. This resulted in interpretations of emperor-system fascism (*tennōsei fuashizumu*) that completely ignored the role of the military, even though the military was considered to constitute the core of fascism. This oversight was a serious problem if only because it was the military who subjectively inflated the sense of external threat. At the same time, Marxist historians alleged but failed to demonstrate a connection between a military supposedly possessed of feudalistic, absolutist

characteristics and finance capital. By exposing these oversights, Itō's critique stimulated historians to address both the role of the military and its links to finance capital. This resulted in new important research published by Yui Masaomi, Yoshida Yutaka and others (Yui 1976; Yoshida 1978; Kindai Nihonshi Kenkyūkai 1979; Kitaoka 1978; Kobayashi 1996; Kurosawa 2000; Saitō 2003; Kōketsu 1987; Yamada 1990).

Itō's criticism also provided an opportunity to refine discussions of comparative fascism. One of the best examples of this refinement is the work of political scientist Yamaguchi Yasushi (1934–2013). Rather than address the general question of what constitutes fascism, Yamaguchi broke the question down into three components: movement, thought, and structure. Let's take a close look at Yamaguchi's analysis of structure. Thus far I have not distinguished between the meaning of structure in a general sense (i.e., historical unity given order via the fundamental principles that provide unambiguous rules to social phenomena) and structure in a narrow sense (i.e., the form of political rule). One reason for this is that prior to Yamaguchi participants in the debate on fascism had not made this distinction. However, Yamaguchi argued that the question whether or not a certain structure (in its general meaning) was established was tantamount to the question whether or not the form of the state had changed. He further argued that the form of the state changed when fundamental alterations occurred in the following three areas: the principles legitimizing state authority, the mechanisms of state policy-making, and the nature of the relationship between state and society. Drastic changes in these three areas signified the emergence of a new structure (Yamaguchi 1979).

Furthermore, Yamaguchi listed the following four points as benchmarks of a fascist structure: 1) the reactionary transformation of certain elements within the established ruling class and the emergence of a general political alliance between them and the so-called false revolutionary forces (*giji kakumei seiryoku*); 2) a one-party dictatorship and the realization of the political and social 'forced homogenization' making that party possible; 3) the complete suppression of various liberal rights and the complete, systematic institutionalization of terror centred on the secret police; 4) mass mobilization directed toward the formation of a 'new order' and a 'new man'. The setting up of these groundbreaking benchmarks provided multiple directions for historians embarking on empirical research (Yamaguchi 1979: 180–2).

Further research

In the 1980s the debate over fascism moved toward resolution. In the wake of Itō Takashi's 'renovationist' faction thesis and Yamaguchi Yasushi's refined explanation of fascist structure, a number of outstanding works were published based on empirical research. One of these was Amemiya Shōichi's fascinating portrayal of a Japan that, in contrast to Germany with its 'false-revolutionary' transformation by outside political forces, became fascist as a consequence of 'self-renovation' (*jiko-kakushin*) on the part of established and increasingly reactionary political elites. Amemiya (b. 1944) introduced the concept of the authoritarian-democratic faction (*ken'ishugi-teki minshushugi-ha*) to describe those who gathered around Konoe Fumimaro during the period of the New Order Movement to promote national reorganization and their backers in the farm villages and provincial towns and cities (e.g., small-to-medium merchants and industrialists, landowners, and farmers). Amemiya brought to light demands for the political and social liberation of the masses (Amemiya 1983; 1999). Eguchi Keiichi's research brought to light the existence of an 'imperial' consciousness that manifested itself in the idea of a 'unity of sovereign and people' and in a liberation consciousness that led to the Asian Monroe doctrine (Eguchi 1978). In a similar vein, Yoshimi Yoshiaki identified what he called grass-roots emperor-system democracy (Yoshimi 1987). Combined, these three scholars succeeded in pioneering

a completely new field that examined the war responsibility of the Japanese people (on war responsibility, see Chapters 29 and 30 in this volume).

Meanwhile, other scholarly responses to Yamaguchi also resulted in the publication of studies illuminating the links between politics and society on the local level. Especially notable are the following works: Ikeda Jun's study of farm villages as regions where lifestyles and production remained undifferentiated and that served as sites of rivalry between the Home Ministry and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry that focused on the fundamentals of fascist organization (e.g., whether to prioritize organizing for regional purposes or to enhance wartime capabilities) (Ikeda 1997); Suzaki Shin'ichi's study, which clarified state efforts at integration and the response of the people as revealed through his analysis of the Shinshū Gunkyō Dōshikai in Shimoina (Nagano Prefecture Military and Countryside Fraternal Association) (Suzaki 1998); and Hirai Kazuomi's study of the relationship between local politics and society and the nationalist (*kok-kashugi*) movement, which had been left largely untouched by previous studies of nationalism (Hirai 2000).

Likewise noteworthy is the work of Furukawa Takahisa who, determining that the pre-1945 political system was authoritarian, analyzed the operations of the Diet and concluded that in wartime Japan the Diet was much more influential than had been generally assumed. This, of course, cast doubt on the view that regarded wartime Japan as a monolithic totalitarian state (Furukawa 2001; 2005). The strength of the established parties and the tenacity of the wartime Diet as a political force have been explored further by Yano Nobuyuki (1993) and Kanda Aki-fumi (2004a; 2004b; 2016). Their work seeks to revise the view of the Fifteen Years' War as a single chain of interrelated events, each causing the next, beginning with the Manchurian Incident in 1931 and ending in Japan's defeat in 1945, the view which was given its most perfect expression by Banno Junji (Banno 1996).

Nagai Kazu, Itō Yukio, and Furukawa Takahisa have meanwhile written authoritative biographies of the Shōwa Emperor (Hirohito) (Nagai 2003; Itō 2011; Furukawa 2011). All of these in different ways, by showing Hirohito as a complex and far-from-dictatorial figure, undermine the somewhat one-dimensional image of the emperor as a fascist 'war criminal' presented by Marxist or Marxist-influenced historians as exemplified by the extremely influential works of Inoue Kiyoshi, Nakamura Masanori, and Herbert Bix (Inoue 1989; Nakamura 1992; Bix 2002).

The difficulty of explaining the transition from liberal 'Taishō democracy' to 'Shōwa fascism' is what had led Itō Takashi to conceive of his 'renovationist faction' thesis in the first place. But Itō's schema was not without its problems, and this has led some historians to question its validity.

Recently, for example, Christopher Szpilman, in his analysis of the ideology of the Kokuhonsha (National Foundation Society) and the Yūzonsha (Society of Those Who Yet Remain) – the latter viewed by Maruyama Masao as Japan's first fascist organization – pointed out a number of ambiguities in Itō's distinction between the 'renovationist Right' and the 'idealist (*kannen*) Right' and argued for a reconsideration of Itō's thesis (Szpilman 2015). Suetake Yoshiya, on the other hand, attempted to overcome the problems posed by Itō's framework by focusing on the various calls for 'national unity' put forth to deal with the crisis of the Great War. By offering this as a new way to bridge the eras of Taishō and prewar Shōwa, Suetake has shed new light on the linkages between external crisis and domestic reform (Suetake 1998).

Arguments for continuity between the prewar control economy and the postwar priority production system have of course been made before (e.g., Johnson 1982). However, recent research on the Imperial Diet, the emperor, right-wing ideology, and on discourses on national unity, is based on original frameworks and maintains a distance both from the 'renovationist' faction thesis and from the 'fascism' thesis. Therefore, I cannot help but feel that in the near future we can expect fresh solutions to the 'perennial problem' of continuity and discontinuity

between prewar and postwar, solutions made from a completely new perspective. Indeed, one can say that younger researchers trained in the vortex of the fascism debates have created a new field of research into modern history.

The work of Anglophone historians

This chapter would not be complete without a cursory survey of the fascism debate among Anglophone historians, which was to some extent influenced by, and in turn influenced, if perhaps to a lesser degree, the twists and turns of the Japanese debate. Although Anglo-Saxon wartime propaganda sometimes described Japan as a fascist state and this view found some expression in postwar works on Japan, it is fair to say that most Western historians of Japan eschewed the concept of fascism in their analyses of Japan. Even before the war with the United States erupted, the prominent historian-diplomat E. Herbert Norman concluded in 1940 that Japan 'lacks the distinctive features of a fascist dictatorship' (Norman 1940). The occupation authorities also took the view that Japan had not been a fascist state, but a state controlled by 'militaristic cliques'. This view more or less continued to dominate Western scholarship on Japan over the next two decades (a concise summary of this debate in McCormack 1982). This view was accepted by the contributors to the influential modernization series published in the 1960s, who on the whole did not see it necessary to use fascism as a concept to explain the situation in prewar Japan (e.g., Ward 1968; Morley 1971).

If the modernization series paid little heed to the concept of fascism, Peter Duus and Daniel Okimoto launched a frontal attack on it in a 1979 article (Duus and Okimoto 1979). Pointing out all kinds of ambiguities and contradictions in the existing definitions of fascism, they concluded that fascism as a concept was a failure, for, far from offering any insights, it only added confusion to the understanding of prewar Japan. The article exerted such a strong influence on Western historians that for the next two decades few Western historians considered it necessary to look at prewar Japan in terms of fascism. Indeed, Western studies of the issue published in the 1980s rejected the concept's applicability (Kasza 1984; 2001; Fletcher 1982). An exception who kept the concept alive included Herbert Bix, who continued to insist that Japan experienced emperor-system fascism (Bix 1982). A decade later, Andrew Gordon coined the concept of 'imperial fascism' to explain the transition from the period of peaceful Taishō democracy, or as Gordon described it, 'imperial democracy', to the fascist era of militarization, mobilization and repression at home and aggression abroad (Gordon 1991). Yet even after Gordon, references to Japan as a fascist state remained relatively infrequent. And although in 2004 a book was published which explicitly categorized Japan as a fascist state, it based this judgment not on any fresh empirical evidence, but on the basis of a new look at the existing published English-language sources (Reynolds 2004).

Fascism began to receive renewed attention at the end of the decade with the publication of two volumes, one authored and one edited, by Alan Tansman. Tansman approached the fascism debate as a specialist in Japanese literature, not as a historian. This allowed him to circumvent the documentary obstacles that had apparently shackled the efforts of Western historians to detect fascism in Japan. In contrast to such historians, Tansman was interested in 'the diffusion of fascism as ideology and representation', not in 'its origins and consequences as a political movement or regime'. Based on this approach, he and his co-authors analyzed fascism as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon, by and large setting aside timeworn questions of political structure and generic definition. Instead, they focused on identifying a 'culture of fascism' and 'fascist moments' in the literary and cultural discourses of the 1930s. In spite of this culturalist approach,

Tansman and other like-minded practitioners recognized the importance of such mainstays of historical research as the reformist bureaucrats whom they described as representatives of state power and promoters of fascism (Tansman 2008; 2009; Hijiya 2011). These reformist bureaucrats received much closer attention in Janis Mimura's remarkable study, which maintains that their integrated notions of technological innovation, centralized economic planning, and expansionist ethnic nationalism is best understood as 'techno-fascism', even if it still remains to be shown how this techno-fascism affected Japan's political process (Mimura 2011; Moore 2013).

On the other hand, Roger H. Brown's research on reformist bureaucrats in the Home Ministry tends to contradict the fascism argument. Drawing upon an impressive range of primary sources including police records, the ministry's newsletter, pamphlets, and reform plans, he provides new evidence on the administrative thought and activities of officials operating within the civil bureaucracy's most powerful institution. Brown has detailed the decisive influence of the nationalist ideologue Yasuoka Masahiro on the ministry's Yoshida Shigeru (not to be confused with the diplomat and prime minister of the same name) and other representative 'new bureaucrats' (*shin-kanryō*). Providing the first close analysis in English or Japanese of the connection between Yasuoka's 'Oriental thought' (*Tōyō shisō*) and the ministry's elitist '*bokuminkan ishiki*' (sense of being shepherds of the people), Brown demonstrates the historical significance of Confucian-influenced ideas of governance for understanding bureaucratic thought in modern Japan and makes a compelling argument that these particular bureaucrats, rather than embracing fascism, were political and social conservatives who viewed themselves first and foremost as the emperor's officials (Brown 2009; 2012). Brown's argument has clear implications for the fascism debate, for the idea that in prewar Japan reformist bureaucrats represented fascist influence and facilitated the establishment of Japanese fascism was long accepted by Japan's Marxist historians and recently argued for by Anglophone scholars, such as Mimura (2011).

Finally, despite the fact that fascism as an ideology arose first in Italy, comparative studies of developments in Japan have generally focused on Germany; however, Reto Hofmann's recent study of interwar Japanese interest in Italian fascism remedies this defect and at the same time argues that the Japanese variant of fascism exemplifies the ideology's concurrent origins in national and global settings (Hofmann 2015). Similarly, though from a completely different perspective, Christopher Szpilman's close study of the long-neglected philosopher Kanokogi Kazunobu contends that fascist thought in Japan predated and thus did not owe its origins to European variants (Szpilman 2013). Drawing partly upon this approach, in a recent publication a historian spurned the issue of definition and concentrated instead on a 'fascist worldview', which he asserted, 'was coalescing in the Japanese state in the late 1930s' (Ward 2014).

In sum, this recent scholarship shows that Anglophone scholars, like their Japanese colleagues, are bringing new perspectives to bear in considering the question of fascism in prewar Japan.

(Translated by Roger H. Brown)

Note

- 1 This chapter is a translation of Katō 2006; it has been adapted and updated for this Handbook in cooperation with the author.

Further reading

- Duus, Peter, and Okimoto, Daniel I. (1979) 'Comment: fascism and the history of Pre-War Japan: the failure of a concept', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 39(1): 65–75.

Proof

Katō Yōko

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Reynolds, E. Bruce (ed.) (2004) *Japan in the Fascist Era*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tansman, Alan (ed.) (2009) *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

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