A Thesis

entitled

Yoshimoto Taka'aki, Communal Illusion, and the Japanese New Left

by

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It is customary in a note of acknowledgments to make the usual mea culpa concerning the impossibility of enumerating all the people to whom the author has incurred a debt in writing his or her work, but, in my case, this is far truer than I can ever say. This note is, therefore, a necessarily abbreviated one and I ask for a small jubilee, cancellation of all debts, from those that I fail to mention here due to lack of space and invidiously ungrateful forgetfulness.

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None named above, of course, is responsible for the mess I have made of their redoubtable help. The defects are mine alone and the merits theirs.
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PREFACE

Is our revolution in July or December?
The road saturated with dews of the valley lilies quietly goes bald
The clear blue sky on top of patched houses
Is like an eye of freight

When the bell rings once, we shall go down
Inside the earthen wall where the noonday stars look in
So that we can kneel down at the fragrance of aged pickles
Of lovers upon whom the skin-colored wind blows.

What is revolution? The choicest dusk with plenty of free time
A tiny gold bug that enters into their fucking ears
It is a sudden afternoon shower that appears a little like ice honey
In the far distance where the bones of the workers sleep

Kicking away the pot of cactus and cage of white-eye
The sky burns that intensely...
We still graffiti sad dialects
On each gate with chalk-white spittle of Death

きなのころがふのよかと
(Those who survive are the lucky ones).

Tanigawa Gan, "Revolution"¹

Writing the draft of this manuscript coincided with the death of the French
philosopher Jacques Derrida, who passed away on October 8, 2004. One of the
characteristic achievements of Derrida’s deconstruction was to critically
problematize the preface, to argue—rather perversely in the minds of some—that
the marginal discursive space of the preface "already always" unhinges, even
subverts, the foundational assumptions of the main text that follows it even as it
erases the possibility of ever becoming an alternative main text in its turn:
“Prefaces, along with forewords, introductions, preludes, preliminaries, preambles, prologues and prolegomena, have always been written, it seems, in view of their own self-effacement...But this subtraction leaves a mark of erasure, a remainder which is added to the subsequent text and which cannot be completely summed up within it.”

Literary theorists and philosophers who came under Derrida's influence more often than not treated this deconstructive "method" as an ahistorical strategy of reading texts, yet another tool of marketing post-structuralist and postmodern literary theory in the neoliberal academia. Long silent on the subject of Marxism, Derrida in his later years, on the other hand, conjured up through a deconstructive reading of the *Communist Manifesto* a critical, unabashedly historical specter of Marx against the neoliberal world order:

Upon rereading the *Manifesto* and a few other great works of Marx, I said to myself that I know of few texts in the philosophical tradition, perhaps none, whose lesson seemed more urgent today, provided that one take into account what Marx and Engels themselves say (for example, in Engels' "Preface" to the 1888 re-edition) about their own possible "aging" and their intrinsically irreducible historicity. What other thinker has ever issued a similar warning in such an explicit fashion? Who has ever called for the transformation to come of his own theses?

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2 “Outwork, prefacing” in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 9. It is worth noting that the logic of Derrida's formulation of prefacing here is analogous to the irreducibly antagonistic subjectivity of the working class that, in its autonomous self-activity that delimits the objectifying power of capital, seeks to efface itself as a class altogether, that is, to free themselves from the singularizing definition of endlessly imposed work and define instead themselves heterogeneously. Michael Ryan explains, "It should not be surprising that one slogan of the Italian Autonomy Movement is a quotation from Derrida--"the margins are at the center," meaning that the traditional leninist centrality of "productive workers," at the expense of the marginalized or proletarianized sectors, leads to exclusivist hierarchization within the movement"; Ryan thus proposes a synthesis--purged of its Hegelian connotation--of deconstruction, socialist feminism, and the theory of Autonomy for the making of a "postleninist marxism." See Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 194-212.
In completing this manuscript, I am also keenly aware of how much "transformation" I need to call for my own writing, which, unlike Marx and Engels's brilliant tract, is inspired with neither poetic nor analytical genius of compression. In fact, if I am to be utterly candid, the following essay is barely aware of its own "theses," let alone capable of calling for their transformation. Paradoxically, however, I believe this to be the major merit of what I have written here: that at the end of wading through the mires of lackluster, pedestrian prose and disorganized, redundant trajectories of thought I have finally come to realize just what my theses are. Sometimes this is indeed the case, that at the end of a struggle, even as half-hearted and somewhat convoluted as this one, one finds only the beginning of an investigation.

In the great likelihood that these theses that I have only retrospectively discovered may not be self-evident in the main body of the text, I shall note them here, in necessarily telegraphic, open-ended, incomplete fashion, with the dual purpose of self-criticism and reminder that the thesis itself is nothing more than a self-effacing preface to an as-yet unwritten work. That there is also a specter that haunts this "preface" masquerading as a thesis, a specter that traces an embryonic outline of a work that was never written but might yet be, hinting at premonitions for writings that were implicitly promised but remain potential, unarticulated, dormant, demanding an unexpected arrival in a future work:

1. The Japanese working class: Yoshimoto Taka'aki is an "organic intellectual" of the Japanese working class, but the Japanese working
class is virtually invisible in my narrative, appearing marginally—on the few cameo occasions that they do—like shadows at the expense of overwhelmingly immaterial history. Not only Yoshimoto's factory and union-organizing experiences in the immediate postwar years but the general trends among chemical industrial workers need to be elaborated in the larger context of the postwar Japanese proletarian class composition, particularly those in the manufacturing and energy industries that made up the critical motor of Japanese capitalism. Both the historical and personal relevance of Marx, one of the most penetrating analysts of classical industrial capitalism, for Yoshimoto's intellectual development would have another material grounding (the other one being the dissolution of the state and its quasi-religious illusion) this way. No less importantly, Yoshimoto's comrade Tanigawa Gan worked as an organizer in the coalmines, the very site of last great industrial proletarian upheaval among postwar Japanese workers. From the early 1960s—after the defeat of both the Miike coal miners' and anti-Ampo struggles (both inseparably related to each other), dual working-class insurrections that simultaneously contested the economic power of capital to reorganize the labor-process for more efficient extraction of surplus value and the political power of capital to establish the international military framework for this new labor-process—to the early 1970s, which coincides with the period of the rise and fall of the Japanese New Left, the Japanese working class were changing themselves and the world around them; more than

Marxism," 92.
anybody else, Yoshimoto was acutely attuned to these changes from below, later breaking with the New Left, which he helped make as much as--or precisely because--he himself was being remade, over the newly emergent forms of capitalism and working class composition in Japan.

2. Yoshimoto-Thompson nexus: Yoshimoto Taka’aki and Edward Thompson are two of the most important thinkers of the commons in the latter half of the twentieth century. This essay originated as a comparative analysis of Thompson and Yoshimoto, who were born in the same year, played similar roles in the New Left of their own country, and had parallel intellectual and political preoccupations. Very little of this initial seed of an idea remains; for it to break its shell and blossom into, if not a decorously efflorescent garden, at least a secure seed bed with visibly firm growth indicating vivid cross-pollination, a few elementary themes need to be surveyed. One is the decisive weight of World War II on both Yoshimoto and Thompson and the distance they each traveled, respectively, from a fascist working-class commonist and anti-fascist Communist to an anti-statist radical thinker of communal illusion and socialist humanist historian of the commons. Another is their relationship to Marx and Marxism: both sought, on the one hand, to critically rethink the spirit of Marx in their work through his writings in 1844 and *Capital*; on the other hand, each of them rejected the orthodox Marxist dogmas that prevailed within their respective countries, though with explicitly distinctive styles of reasoning. Yet another is their independent position in relation to the intellectual centers
of major academic institutions, Thompson through his postwar involvement in the extra-mural educational activities and teaching at Warwick University, Yoshimoto through his work at the factory and the patent office. The different relationship each man had to the anti-nuclear movement in the 1980s is also worth comparing: Yoshimoto's 1982 *Hankaku iron* 「反核」異論 (*Dissenting View on the "Anti-Nuclear") was a crucial intervention in the political debate of the period as it criticized the Japanese anti-nuclear movement for its one-sided attack on U.S. nuclear proliferation (while ignoring similar developments in the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence) and its lack of appreciation for the working-class self-activity of the Polish Solidarity movement; Thompson sought to precisely transcend such one-sided ideology of the Cold War by helping organize the European anti-nuclear movement on an Atlantic basis, across the East-West divide.

3. Horizon of international intellectual history: Yoshimoto's significance in the twentieth-century history of ideas lies in his attempt to create a global philosophy from below by deepening his own working-class experience and the historical roots of the Japanese commons. This continues the bid in the introduction to situate Yoshimoto as a world-historical thinker in the second half of the twentieth century. There is both danger and necessity in taking this route of approaching Yoshimoto. The danger lies in reifying him into an iconic, larger-than-life figure that undercuts the critical impulses of social history at the expense of "great men's history" by
another name. The latter is the fallacy of bourgeois individualist history. On the other hand, presenting his ideas as merely an expression of the larger social and economic forces of his time will not do either. Nor will it do to resuscitate the dead dog of long-drawn-out debates on the ceaseless interaction between the base and superstructure—which, in tandem, makes up a mechanical apparatus, a metaphor that has the considerable danger of naturalizing and presupposing technological domination under capitalism into an epistemology and social theory for understanding history. Moreover, this narrowly focused, economically reductionist Marxist approach makes us neglect the existential urgency and power of human imagination, which Marx himself recognized and Yoshimoto, as well as Thompson, did their utmost to actualize in their works. Of course, some form of reductionism—in the sense of critically grasping the totality, to use a much-maligned term in postmodern discourse—is necessary but ought to be initiated by the imaginative indeterminacy of desire and not the determinist closure of necessity (which is another way of saying, Clio’s fountain of inspiration is poetry, not science). Hence there is a need to present Yoshimoto as a thinker, among others, on a world scale who was pitching the force of his imagination against the historically determined canvas of necessity, producing ideas that were intended to endure on the world stage of intellectuality. I have already mentioned the parallel significance of Yoshimoto and Thompson. Other comparisons, focusing on particular
aspects of Yoshimoto’s work, along with those who had influenced him, would be useful (this is merely an abbreviated list): A) a thorough comparison between the Northeastern Japanese agrarian poet Miyazawa Kenji, who had tremendous impact on Yoshimoto’s early thought, and the Romantic socialist poet William Morris could yield not only further understanding of the Yoshimoto-Thompson nexus but also serve as an entryway into taking us back to the agrarian roots of prewar Japanese Romanticism in the context of English Romantic history; B) Yoshimoto's critical relationship to Hegel in his reading of Marx needs further research, particularly important in relation to other contemporary readings of Hegel vis-à-vis Marx (Raya Dunayevskaya, Alexandre Kojève, Louis Althusser, Lucio Colletti, etc.); C) Yoshimoto's theory of literary language has a range and aim similar to those of Kenneth Burke's theory of rhetoric, which also played a dissenting part to the orthodox Marxist literary theories of his day; D) Yoshimoto's dialogues with French thinkers who had visited Japan, such as Michel Foucault, Felix Guattari, and Jean Baudrillard, along with his own writings on them (including Jean-Paul Sartre, Georges Bataille, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida), as well as other comparative thinkers from Asia, Africa, America, and Europe, will disabuse the dominant characterization of Yoshimoto as a romantically proto-nationalist populist thinker within Anglophone scholarship, such as it is, and to stake out straightforwardly the substance of Yoshimoto's original contribution to postwar intellectual history of the world; E) Yoshimoto's work on "hyper-
capitalism,” which zeroed in on the specific character of Japanese capitalism after the 1970s, bears comparison with Antonio Negri’s post-Autonomia work based on the Marx’s “Fragment on the Machine” from Grundrisse, as with the general discussion at the time on the post-industrial/post-Fordist working class associated with the journal Futur Antérieur; F) Yoshimoto’s relationship to contemporary Japanese thinkers, intellectuals, writers, etc., requires fuller elucidation (e.g., I have barely scratched the surface on such foundational confreres of the New Left as Tanigawa, Murakami, Takeuchi, Haniya, etc., while leaving completely unmentioned other important figures, such as the independent Marxist novelists Inoue Mitsuharu and Ōnishi Kyojin, Trotskyist theoretician and activist Kuroda Kan’ichi, radical writer Takahashi Kazumi, to say nothing of Yoshimoto’s literary rivals and intimates more generally, such as Etō Jun, Shimao Toshio, and Hanada Kiyoteru, all of whom were formidably influential in their own right); and G) the schematic contextualization of all of the above and all other passages dealing with intellectual history in relation to the materiality of social history. The last spreading of the wingspan of social history must make one of its primary tasks the regrounding of Yoshimoto’s theories of linguistic expression, psychic structure, and communal illusion through the historical vicissitudes of the Japanese commons, with their extraordinarily differentiated and localized expressions throughout the island. Intimately related to this is the rethinking of Marx and the function of intellectuality through the religious
constitution of the medieval Japanese commons and the teachings of the thirteenth-century Buddhist monk Shinran, its most eloquent expositer of the period, about whom Yoshimoto had spent the greater portions of his life critically exploring.

4. Expanded chronology: Yoshimoto’s work, from the late 1940s to today, is one of the most critically incisive indices of postwar Japanese intellectual life. The chronology of this essay ends in the late 1960s, with slight intimations of developments in the early 1970s. Yoshimoto’s trajectory from then to now, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a period of thirty-five years (ten years longer than the period I have spottily covered), of course, demands thorough analysis. This is the time when Yoshimoto takes a different turn from his erstwhile comrades in the New Left, when he completes his magnum opus on Shinran, undertakes a thorough investigation of the new culture of consumer capitalism and its associated cultural expressions (from architecture, literature, and economics to lyrics of pop songs, television commercials, and comic books) with the same intellectual commitment and energy with which he studied the Japanese state and popular customs, literary language, and human psychic structure in the previous decade. It is important to grasp how Yoshimoto changes (according to his perception of changing class composition and capitalism) and how he stays the same (Yoshimoto’s work on the "mass image"—a shorthand of the new consumer capitalist culture—is also a continuing diagnosis of the fate of Japanese communal illusion). This
analysis should also include a chronicle of Yoshimoto’s running arguments with former comrades—perhaps the most important in this respect is the one he had with Haniya over the principle of political solidarity and the logic of Japanese consumer capitalism—and intellectuals who came to prominence after the 1970s, such as the *New Aka* thinkers and the young generation of ascendant cultural producers and novelists. This is an update on #1, a work of assessing Yoshimoto’s failure and success in grappling with the changing composition of the Japanese working class and their relationship to the commons, along with Japanese culture more generally.

5. Pan-Asian and Japanese commons: The historical possibility of a pan-Asian revolution in the first two decades of the twentieth century brought together a continent-wide anti-capitalist struggle with a trans-Pacific struggle for the commons, leaving a significant imprint in the making of the Japanese New Left. I consider this the most controversial, essential, and underdeveloped theme of this essay. Most controversial because the charge of rightwing fascism, Oriental despotism, and imperialism that have hounded the steps of prewar Japanese invocation of pan-Asianism persists in confounding the debates on this subject in ways similar to the way the Cold War, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, had severely delimited the debates on communism and capitalism. Needless to say, the Cold War is over, if not in the imaginary of the neoliberal rulers and its intellectual priesthood, then certainly on the grounds and in the
movements that have sprouted since 1989, from the 1994 Zapatista uprising and 1999 anti-capitalist-globalization struggle in Seattle to the global antiwar forces that refuse to countenance the state terror that the U.S. is perpetrating in Iraq and other parts of the world. One important demand that these multilateral voices from below have raised is the reclaiming of the commons, from the airwave and the internet to ecology, means of production and reproduction, and preservation as well as reinvention of traditional popular customary rights, laws, and traditions. The meaning of what this "commons" is still not entirely clear and is an ongoing part of our struggle. It is at this conjuncture of radical democratic ferment from below that I initiated my investigation of Yoshimoto's work for the purpose of self-clarification (at least, this is what I realized in retrospect). What I have symptomatically uncovered--which certainly require further uncovering and buttressing of evidence, it is to be hoped, in a collective context--is that the rise of Japanese militarism in the 1930s, as with the formation of the Bolshevik bureaucratic state in Russia in 1917, the consolidation of the white slavocrat republic of United States in 1776, and Maoist famine-inducing "Great Leap Forward" and fratricidal cultural revolution in China, was a watershed moment of a revolution betrayed. This lost revolution was fueled by an international pan-Asian movement that sought to preserve and reinvent the commons. The nature and extent of this lost revolution, with its distinct reverberations in the New Left, are what I would like to consider at length in the future, particularly through the
prism of Japan (not for want of materials elsewhere or because I think Japan is at the center of this movement--China is most likely a better candidate in this respect--but solely due to the limitation in my linguistic and geographic knowledge as well as my rather subjectively driven focus on Yoshimoto). Unlike the pan-African struggles that have in recent years enjoyed scholarly legitimacy that they have long deserved through such major works as Peter Fryer's *Staying Power*, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, and Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*, the idea--let alone the history--of pan-Asian struggles is still woefully understudied. Yoshimoto's relationship to this tradition is certainly not one of a latter-day pan-Asianist. But, as someone who fell under the spell of Japanese imperialist ideology that made this pan-Asianism the center of its wartime state propaganda and, in the postwar years, put most of his intellectual energy to commence reasoning against it, to exorcise its spectral power, Yoshimoto is one of its most significant thinkers in postwar Japan.

So we come back to the specter and the act of exorcism. It is my contention that certain specters can never be exorcised, that repressing them in the historical unconscious eventually forces their return, often with the kind of energy, laced in vengeance and apocalyptic power, that we may personally find disagreeable but will have no choice but to accept. And whether this return will be messianic or infernal depends on no historical law or theological dogma.

Even as I intimate here those spirits that I have failed to conjure into being in the following pages, I am also acutely aware that they unquestionably lack
another crucial spirit. I mean that it lacks the spirit of being possessed, for in
order to conjure spirits, one must prove through the deed of words (which, in
writing, is the only deed that matters) that one is possessed by what one is
writing. Apropos of his biography of William Morris, Edward Thompson said,
"Morris seized me. I took no decision. Morris took the decision that I would have
to present him. In the course of doing this I became much more serious about
being a historian."

In history this is equivalent to yielding oneself to the
necessity of desire that fuses empirical facts into a passionate act of self-inquiry,
for nothing short of excessive passion that incinerates all traces of effort and
ambition can ever lead us into the true exile and silence of self-discovery that is
precisely useful and effective for its viscerally personal resonance for the author.
Spirit issues from the breath and the breath is what makes poetry come alive,
resonant, incendiary, able to take possession of one’s consciousness. I am
obviously still far removed from breathing and manifesting this spirit, from
declaring in my own way that "Yoshimoto seized me," but I know that, eventually,
this will be the only way I can do justice to the man’s work.

Spirit, of course, can manifest different forms. One form, as noted at the
beginning, was announced in the Communist Manifesto.

In November 1850, the Scottish socialist feminist Helen Macfarlane gave
the first English rendition of the famous opening line of the Manifesto--"Ein
Gespenst geht um in Europa--das Gespenst des Kommunismus"--on the front
page of The Red Republican, a paper edited by the ex-Chartist socialist George
Julian Harney:

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A frightful hobgoblin stalks throughout Europe. We are haunted by a ghost, the ghost of Communism. All the Powers of the Past have in a holy crusade to lay this ghost to rest--the Pope and the Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police agents.\textsuperscript{5}

Macfarlane was in Vienna during the 1848 European Revolution, most likely as a student who had come to the city to learn the German and French languages, and found herself radicalized by the experience of witnessing the Viennese people's overthrow of Metternich's autocratic government and establishment of a representative Diet and a new constitution--an event she called a "joyful spectacle."\textsuperscript{6} Chartists such as George Harney, Ernst Jones, and Philip McGrath had also traveled to Europe in that momentous year, visiting Paris at the invitation of the Tuileries revolutionary government. During this visit Harney even had the occasion of sitting in Louis Philippe's vacant throne, imagining a similar act of playful dethronement at Buckingham Palace.

After the Chartists called for a mass demonstration on April 10, 1848, tens of thousands of people marched in the driving rain to deliver a petition to Westminster. Some, seeking a more direct-action form of struggle, plotted with Irish radicals for armed insurrection, and the English rulers suppressed their uprising, along with that of the coterminous Irish peasants. A leader in one of the failed insurrectionary plots ("the Orange Tree conspiracy") was the tailor William Cuffay, a National Charter Association executive member born in 1788 on the ship from St. Kitts to Chatham as the son of an African slave and a white woman. Respected for his "extremely meticulous and outstandingly honest and reliable"

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 44.
character, he was "an acknowledged leader of London Chartism, and a member of the National Convention" in 1848 and, for his role in the conspiracy, deported to Australia, where "he again took up radical politics" until dying in poverty at eighty-two in 1870, a year before the proletarian revolution of the Parisian Communards. 1848 was thus not only a watermark of continent-wide European revolution but also an essential conduit of trans-Atlantic working-class revolution, with African, Irish, Scottish, and other inextricably bound multiethnic strands.

Macfarlane was also the first British translator of and commentator on Hegel, whose ideas marked Yoshimoto's reading of Marx and analysis of "communal illusion" of the Japanese commons. Hegel's philosophical interpretation of Christianity as a transmitter of the democratic conception of freedom provided for Macfarlane a theoretical basis for her "Red Republican" pantheism. This pantheism was at once "a protest against the using up of man by man" and at once "a Hegelian, universalist negation of all religious dogmas, whether ancient or modern." And the material ecology of pantheism is the complexly diverse forms of commons that we find throughout the world.

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7 Ibid., 36-37; Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 189-190.
8 "I think either way I received considerable influence from Hegel and borrowed the idea of communal illusion from Marx's state theory to make sense of the state as communal illusion. But what I was trying to do in Communal Illusion was to go back a little further back in the sense of Hegel making the model of the modern state and Marx doing the same, trying to include in communal illusion the period in which the state most likely could not be distinguished from communality of religion and customs, that's what I think I was trying to do at the time." Yoshimoto Taka'aki, Umehara Takeshi, and Nakazawa Shin'ichi, Nihonjin was shisō shitaka (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1995), 19.
9 Black, op. cit., 71, 66.
Perhaps in choosing the word "hobgoblins" for "Gespenst," Macfarlane was suggesting that the abstract universality of communism could only be realized through the concrete universality of such commonage.

Macfarlane tries to give Ein Gespenst a double meaning. It is not just a ghostly apparition that haunts the castles of Shakespeare's Macbeth and Hamlet, foretelling doom and retribution for the incumbents. It is also the scary spirit that country folks tell their children lurks in the woods, in order to discourage them from wandering off on their own.¹⁰

Indeed hobgoblins, which belong to the historical imaginary of the Scottish fairyland, are creatures that inhabit the daily world of peasant commoning. This world had ready access to demotic curses, often expressed in such fairytales and premised on customary laws that were intended to protect traditional popular rights from the cupidity of self-interest, the central tenet of bourgeois rationality whose bloody acts of exorcism took the form of enclosures, privatization, imperialism.

Fairies were firmly connected to the landscape and deeply rooted in the soil. The importance of respecting the land which they frequented was widely recognized. It was bad luck to interfere with, or try to remove, trees, bushes, stones, ancient buildings or anything else believed to have fairy associations. Misfortune, illness, or even death might result from tampering with fairy property.¹¹

Marx explicitly stated at the end of the Manifesto that the communist movements "bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter its degree of development at the time," and the struggle for the "fairy property" of the commons is nothing if not such a question. If "specter" is a more philosophically mediated, reified term divorced from the earthly spirits that directly haunt the peasant imagination, its Hegelian origin nonetheless lay in the

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¹⁰ Ibid., 94.

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commons, as Marx himself recognized with genuine surprise twenty years after composing the *Manifesto*: "But what would old Hegel say in the next world if he heard that the *general* [Allgemeine] in German and Norse means nothing but the common land [Gemeinland], and the *particular*, Sundre, Besondere, nothing but the separate property divided off from the common land?"\(^{12}\)

On November 13, 1904, over a half a century after Macfarlane published her translation of the *Manifesto*, the first Japanese version appeared on the pages of the fifty-third edition of *Heimin shinbun* (*The Commoners Newspaper*) to commemorate the paper's one-year anniversary. Basing themselves on Samuel Moore's English version, with which most Anglophone readers are familiar today, Kōtoku Shūsui and Sakai Toshihiko translated the opening paragraph thus:

> 一個の怪物ブロムズ、何ぞや、共产主義の怪物是れ也、今や古欧州の権力者は、此怪物を退治せんが為めに、挙って神聖同盟に加盟せり、羅馬法皇も露國皇帝も、メテルニヒもギゾーも、仏國の急進党也獨逸の探偵も。\(^{13}\)

> A certain monster wanders through Europe, what, it is the monster of communism, and, in order to defeat this monster, the rulers of old Europe now have all joined a holy alliance, including the Roman Pope and Russian Emperor, Metternich and Guizot, the French radical parties and German detectives.

In the revised version of this translation legally published two years later, with the originally omitted third section inserted, in the first issue of *Shakai-shugi kenkyū* (*Socialist Studies*), this energetic run-on passage is parsed into several complete sentences, with the names "Metternich" and "Guizot" left in their original, but the

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Japanese rendering of "communism" as 怪物 (kaibutsu), "monster," remains the same.

In the more widely used, modern 1951 Japanese translation, Ōuchi Hyōe and Sakisaka Itsurō rendered "Gespenst" as 幽霊 (yürei). Like fairies and hobgoblins, kaibutsu, which literally means "strange things," is a term closer to the cultural imaginary of the Japanese commons, with its inclusion of non-human entities and creatures, than the more spectral and usually human yürei (ghost). Kaibutsu belongs to the linguistic field of traditional Japanese folklore next to such related words as 物の怪 (mononoke), 化け物 (bakémono) or お化け (obaké), and 妖怪 (yōkai). For the ethnologist Yanagita Kunio this distinction was directly traceable to urban modernization:

Yürei most easily emerges under the complicated conditions of life in the city... Yürei is itself a phenomenon worthy of study. It may also have had a point of convergence with the first communication, but, at least in the modern period, it was something completely different, within, so to speak, the jurisdiction of the temples. There may be those who call this obaké but to say that it is bakémono sounds a little strange. Oiwa and Kasané are frightful precisely because they are familiar to us, and to say that they come out metamorphosed (bakété) is a misuse of words.

There was a clear distinction between obaké and yürei that everybody recognized. First, the place where the former appeared was, in most cases, fixed. If one avoided passing through that area, it was possible to not meet it during one’s entire life. In contrast, yürei—in spite of the theory that it did not have any feet—came walking step by step from the other side. Once it attacked you, it would keep on chasing you even after you tried to get far away from it for a hundred of miles. One can definitively say that obaké could never do such a thing. Second, whereas bakémono did not choose a particular person but, in fact, appeared to communicate with the ordinary and common many, yürei went only after a particular person in mind...Finally, another crucial distinction had to do with time: while yürei started to knock on the door or slid open the folding

14 Marx and Engels マルクス エンゲルス, 「共産党宣言」 Kyōsantō sengen, 大内義衡・向坂信郎訳(Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1971), 37. Both Ōuchi and Sakisaka are leading Marxist scholars of the Old Left, both associated with prewar Rōnō-ha Marxism and long active as left-wing figures in the postwar Japanese Socialist Party.
screen when an internally echoing strike on the bell signaled around two to two-thirty in the morning, *bakémono* appeared on various occasions.\(^\text{15}\)

With its intimacy with capitalistically modernized urban setting, lack of fixed ties to the land, individuated focus on their potential hosts, and bondage to time, *yūrei* shared those characteristics of quotidian experience that the Japanese industrial proletariat had themselves undergone in the first two decades of the twentieth century when Kōtoku and Sakai were translating and publishing the *Manifesto*.

One of most significant cores of this new working class were the *yūrei* of dead Japanese coalminers who were starting to haunt the underground hell of Japanese capitalism. Restricting ourselves only to the Chikuhō region between the years 1907 and 1918, we find that 1656 miners died from a handful of gas explosions in coalmines owned by Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Nittetsu, and other companies.\(^\text{16}\) Fused with legends of the Japanese commons, these coalminers developed their own proletarian folklore of ghosts and spirits. Many of these stories featured ghosts of miners who died inside the mines and, condemned to wander in search of an exit aboveground, sought their desperate escape by humping on the backs of the living miners; these tales usually ended with the dead and living achieving liberation through proper burial rituals conducted by the living. In the early years of the coalmining industry when many of the miners were women, many of these ghosts took female forms. The most important characteristic of these underground legends, however, concerned "the cooperation of labor between the dead and the living."

\(^{15}\) Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男, *Yōkai dangi* 妖怪談義 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1977), 14-16.
From a singular desire to come up aboveground, the dead voluntarily helped the work of the living...The dead appeared just as they were while they were alive, as workers, and, for a period of time, worked with the living as direct extractors of coal and as transporters. They had no aim except to climb up aboveground. Coming up aboveground was here inextricably and firmly bound up with the act of working together. Moreover, as noted in the previous story, without exception they appeared next to the living at a time when the latter were driven to struggle desperately in despair under the dangerous condition when the coal face was about to collapse at any moment. We can clearly observe in such a fantastic ghost story what great weight of fateful solidarity even the extremely elementary and simple labor form of working as a transporter at the face had for underground workers.\textsuperscript{17}

Ueno Eishin, one of great postwar documentary writers of the Japanese mines, wrote down these words. As much an activist as a writer, Ueno worked among the miners in Chikuhō after World War II, and one of his closest comrades was Tanigawa Gan, Yoshimoto's co-editor for the journal Shikō.

Tanigawa and Ueno's focus on the coalmining proletariat stemmed from the miners' central role in Japanese capitalist industrialization and their dynamically multi-racial composition. Japanese coal miners had been among the worst paid workers faced with the most dismal working conditions since the inception of Japanese industrial capitalism, a trend that markedly worsened with World War II under the militarist state, which imposed a veritable regime of slave labor on mostly Korean, some Chinese, few Caucasian, foreign workers to undertake "the most difficult and dangerous jobs under the supervision of Japanese overseers in an atmosphere suffed with racial contempt."\textsuperscript{18} Capitalist slave labor of "starvation rations and overseer brutality" resulted in many deaths. In the aftermath of the war, these workers were some of the first to organize and

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 41-42.
strike, forming a militant backbone of the Japanese postwar working-class struggle. This struggle came to a head in the late 1950s, when the capitalist strategy of "rationalization" was in full swing to defuse working-class militancy in the coalmines through a shift to oil as a primary source of industrial energy.

In response, Tanigawa and Ueno formed the "Circle Village." Respecting "structural diversity and the autonomy of each group through the principles of free association and individual participation" by way of "ongoing debates and internal critiques through columns and...exchange visits between groups," the Circle Village was "a horizontal net of independent circles" among heterogeneous villages from Satsunan to Chosuhū, set up to facilitate communication among agrarian activists seeking to work independently of the Japanese Communist Party's heavy-handed democratic centralist policy. The Circle Village followed the lead in the ferocious anti-rationalization struggle unleashed by Miike coalminers and became a major vehicle for miners' anti-rationalization struggle in Chikuhō, prompting Tanigawa and other miners from the Taishō mines in Nakama to organize the Taishō Kōdōtai (Taishō Action Brigade).

For Tanigawa, Marx's ideas came from the German forest commons ("Marx, a German who inhabited the forest wherein the various patriarchs lived together distantly from each other") and his own revolutionary ideas, "an Asian agrarianism that connected to Mao Ze-dong's theory of the base," drew directly from the indigenous revolutionary tradition of the Japanese commons.

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19 Wesley Sasaki-Uemura, "Tanigawa Gan's Politics of the Margins in Kyushu and Nagano" in positions 7:11 (Spring 1999), 141-142.
20 Matsumoto Ken'ichi 松本健一, Nihon seishin-shi no tabi 日本精神史の旅 (Tokyo: Kawadeshobō, 1997), 178; Tanigawa Gan, "Nōson to shi" 農村と詩 in Tanigawa Gan shishū, 59.
The kindness of the anonymous people, pre-proletarian emotions... if one expresses these as an ideology, one may call it Asian anarcho-syndicalism. This is the bitterly passionate ideology that is implanted at the bottom of many riots in feudal society and lying at the heart of all popular rulers. Whether it was Nakae Chōmin, Kōtoku Shūsui, Katayama Sen, Kawakami Hajime, Okakura Tenshin, or Uchimura Kanzō, those independent thinkers who did not think twice about shedding their own blood also never lost their orientation toward this fountain. No radicalism can ever advance without confirming the turning point of its uniquely, formative progress. For example, Japanese communism cannot advance even a single step without clarifying the content of the pre-communism that emerged on the very soil of Japan. That is a most elementary principle of the dialectic. But nobody fears unveiling their predecessor more than the Japanese progressives.  

The "Japanese progressives"--postwar democrats and the Japanese Communist Party who pursued the logic of modernization no less steadfastly than their reactionary and conservative opponents--rejected such communism and anarcho-syndicalism of the traditional commons. Indeed Tanigawa's "Asian anarcho-syndicalism," in spite of the latter term's singularly urban connotation, was "Asian" precisely because it was thoroughly agrarian. The Taishō Kōdōtai that Tanigawa organized was an attempt precisely to put this "Asian anarcho-syndicalism" into action, a "search for a 'beautiful revolution' that transcended politics..., dreaming the Chinese "base" on the one hand and, on another, attempting to layer it over with the 2.26 Incident, which emerged as the revolution of emperor fascism."  

Tanigawa's famous poem "Don't Go to Tokyo"--which called for peasants to stay in their region and not seek employment in the city--was a direct expression of his proclaimed "Asian anarcho-syndicalist" political principles that

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21 Tanigawa, ibid., 58.
(a) The majority of the Japanese people come from the peasantry. Therefore, what saturate Japanese civilization are the feelings of peasants. The peasants can declare their maternal position in relation to all the working and laboring classes.

(b) The feelings of peasants are based on production connected to the land. The land is the source of human emotions, and human beings must become its mirror.

(c) Progress requires a base that will become its foundation. Workers and pre-proletarians, city and country, world and hometown, must firmly fuse together.

(d) However, Japanese civilization, including the working class, harbors a strong desire to alienate themselves from the pre-proletariat, the provinces, and the hometown.

(e) This is generating an 180-degree misperception in relation to the objective tendency of proletarianization, which views it as a result of an obstruction being placed upon the Japanese peasants' path of upward development toward the establishment of individuality and their consequent aim to subjectively establish such individuality.

(f) Japanese modernism seeks not to rescue the already existing crisis of the modern but to grasp within its hands the modern that is yet to exist in a perfect form.

(g) This is an irrational act of peasants who are expelled from the land and trying to hold onto a new mental landscape, it is perverted agrarianism.

(h) It is customary for agrarianism to appear as naturalism, which contains the former's irrationality. In short, naturalism and modernism in art are nothing more than two sides of the same coin.

(i) There is no other way to overcome pre-proletarian irrationality than through the organized nature of the proletariat. However, in such cases, the latter must inherit the developmental turning point of the former. That turning point is the realm of sensibility that is directly proportional to the depth of connection to the land.

(j) The Japanese working class are making the error of emphasizing the fusion of workers and peasants merely from an ideological dimension. That is because of modernism existing inside the working class.

(k) We must break through the deformed peasant irrationality that is saturating us today by rebuilding the sense of the national people on the basis of peasants' normal sensibility through the organizational power of the workers.²³

If the modern "Japanese progressives" rejected from the outset such a peasant-based revolutionary vision seeking to restore the "normal sensibility" of the Japanese people's connection to their peasant origin and land, Tanigawa in contrast considered Kōtoku and other Meiji radicals as honorable predecessors

²³ Ibid., 51-52.
who remained loyal to this revolutionary tradition. Undoubtedly, Kōtoku and Sakai’s "monster" of communism had more intimate kinship with Tanigawa's awkwardly phrased "pre-proletarian pre-communism" of the Japanese peasantry than the Japanese progressives’ specter of modern Communism and Democracy.

At the same time, for Kōtoku, Sakai, and their comrades, their primary concern was not the anti-commonist betrayal of the "progressives"—who had not yet formed a sufficient independent voice in their time to have any discernible influence on policy formulation—but the despotism of the modern Japanese state, which was presiding over the initial stage of this economically modernizing project of primary accumulation, i.e., expropriating peasant lands and forcing the poor in the country to become proletarians, that Tanigawa attacked. This despotism often took the form of repressing any voice of dissent offering commonist alternatives against primary accumulation. For example, earlier in November 1904, prior to the publication of the Manifesto, at a socialist rally held at the Y.M.C.A. Hall in Kanda where Sakai was one of its main speakers, more than one thousand audience broke out into a riot when the police stopped the socialists from speaking and ordered the meeting to be dissolved, dragging Sakai from the platform. Heimin shinbun reported, "The audience became enraged at this violent action, and struck the policemen down on the floor and trampled on him. Two more policemen met the same fate. Some cried: 'Despotism like the Russian government.' Another said: 'Down with despotism!'" Less than a

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couple of weeks later, the Japanese authorities banned *Heimin shinbun* the day after its publication of the *Communist Manifesto* and jailed Kôtoku.

Kôtoku’s Dec. 30, 1904 letter from prison to the Russian émigré anarchist Albert Johnson again compared Japanese state despotism to its Russian Tsarist counterpart (this letter, along with others, was later reprinted in August 1911 issue of *Mother Earth*, seven months after the Japanese state’s execution of Kôtoku on the tramped-up charge of conspiring to assassinate the emperor):

> As already informed, I was prosecuted by barbarous government on the charge of inciting to the alteration of the Dynastic Institution and sentenced to five months’ imprisonment, but I soon appealed and second trial was postponed until January 6th.

> Beside this I was sentenced on the 20th inst. To a fine of 80 yen on the charge of translating and publishing Marx’s “Communist Manifesto.” What a beautiful Japanese Government is! Is it not quite same to Russian despotism?25

In search of a class force to help overturn this despotism, Kôtoku traveled to Seattle, Oakland, and San Francisco in November 1905 to meet with Japanese socialists and American anarchist and Wobbly comrades, including Johnson, in the Bay Area.

Kôtoku gave his first post-imprisonment public speech on socialism and contemporary Japan in Seattle to an audience of some five hundred people at a meeting organized by the Japanese Association on December first and, two weeks later in San Francisco, spoke at an organizational meeting of the Industrial Workers of the World at the invitation of the three of its members. He first-handedly observed the spontaneous popular self-organization of mutual aid

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25 *Kôtoku Shûsui zenshû*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Meiji bunken shiryô kankôkai, 1982), 238.
among the survivors of the San Francisco Earthquake and considered it the embodiment of anarcho-communism:

The terrible disaster in San Francisco afforded me a most valuable experience, which is none other than this: since the eighteenth of April the entire city of San Francisco has existed under a state of Anarchist Communism \[\textit{museifuteki kyōsansei}\].

Commerce is at a complete standstill; the mails, trains and ferries [of the vicinity] are completely free of charge. Food is distributed daily by a relief committee. All able-bodied men work as a matter of duty, transporting foodstuff, caring for the sick and wounded, clearing up the fire's debris, and building shelters. Since there is nothing to buy, even if one wanted to, money has become totally useless. Property and private ownership has been completely eradicated. Interesting, isn't it? But this ideal paradise will continue only for a few more weeks before things will revert once more to the original capitalist system of private property. How regrettable.\(^{26}\)

Kōtoku also put tremendous energy into trying to "establish...a base for the work of the Heminsha" in the United States, imagining a possibility for creating "through concerted effort, a sanctuary for our persecuted comrades at home, as well as a base of supply and operation for the Japanese socialist movement, much as the Russian revolutionaries made Switzerland a base for their movement."\(^{27}\) Before his return to Japan, Kōtoku and his two comrades Iwasa Sakutarō and Takeuchi Tetsugorō inaugurated the Social Revolutionary Party of Oakland (Ökurando no Shakai-kakumei-tō) that enlisted approximately fifty members. In the party newspaper \textit{Kakumei}, they declared, "Our strategy seeks to overthrow as soon as possible the Mikado, King, and President as representatives of the capitalist class, and, for this aim, we shall take whatever means necessary."\(^{28}\) Kōtoku's journey to the West Coast was one essential

\(^{26}\) Cited in F.G. Notehelfer, op. cit., 131.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., 123.
moment in the twentieth-century trans-Pacific struggle for the Asian commons, communism, anarchism, and other politically pregnant terms that would soon suffer violent divarication under the Japanese imperialist state.

A hundred years after the founding of the IWW, Kōtoku's antiwar prison experience and trans-Pacific journey, over one hundred and fifty years after Macfarlane, Harney, Cuffay, and others' trans-Atlantic revolutionary activities, we are still faced with the "old Powers" of Moloch, Belial, and Mammon entering into a "holy alliance to exorcise" the specter of what the rulers call "terrorism," which, as coined by Edmund Burke, originally referred to the despotism of the state. Can we ourselves do the work of translating this "specter" for our times? Shall it manifest itself in an incarnation that we do not yet know how to name? And who shall write its new manifesto? Yoshimoto once commented that his role was merely one of playing prologue to the coming of a new messianic Marx, by which I interpret to mean the making of the new international, a new class, whose necessity Derrida alluded to but did not articulate. The following is an incomplete footnote to this prologue of an unknowable specter to come.

The Communists invariably support every revolutionary movement against the existing order of things, social and political. But in all these movements, they endeavour to point out the property question, whatever degree of development, in every particular case, it may be obtained--as the leading question. The Communists labour for the union and association of the revolutionary parties of all countries. The Communists disdain to conceal their opinions and ends. They openly declare, that these ends can be attained only by the overthrow of all hitherto existing social arrangements. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist Revolution. The Proletarians have nothing to lose in it save their chains. They will gain a World. Let the Proletarians of all countries unite!29

要するに、共産党は至る處に於て、社会的及政治的現状に反抗する各種の革命運動を応援す。

29 Black, op. cit., 169-170.
In short, the communist parties are on the side of all types of revolutionary movements everywhere that rebel against the current social and political conditions. In all these movements, they always profess the property question as their central problem, and the questions concerning the level of development in a particular historical period need not be asked.

"Finally, they expend their power for the unity and integration of democratic parties throughout the world.

"The communist parties consider it disdainful to conceal their doctrines and political views, therefore, we publicly declare that one of our aims is to subvert all existing social systems and, in order to accomplish this, let the class of power shudder in front of the communist revolution, for the workers have only to lose their iron chains and have the whole world to gain. Workers of all countries, unite!"

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30 Kōtoku Shūsui zenshū, vol. 5, 446. The passage can be translated:
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I strongly hope that Mr. Yoshimoto’s books will be introduced into French or English and, if this were not the case, I would be glad if in Tokyo or Paris or in the form of correspondence I can exchange various opinions with Mr. Yoshimoto who deals with such similar themes as I do. Because, for us Westerners, to be able to hear what you have to say is an extremely valuable experience and also absolutely necessary. Particularly talking together about such problems as those of contemporary political experiences not only makes it possible to prolong my life but I think would be extremely suggestive in my thinking about many things from now on.

Michel Foucault to Yoshimoto in a dialogue in Japan on April 25, 1978

Yoshimoto Taka’aki 吉本隆明 is arguably the most significant thinker of postwar Japan. Such a designation, of course, poses the usual problems associated with intellectual canonization, for it presupposes a paradigm of hierarchically constituted thinkers that function as a metabolic process, to borrow Karl Marx’s biological metaphor for the sphere of circulation, of internationally circulating academic industry. Considerable components of Japanese intellectual culture are unquestionably tied to the nexus of this industry, where instant classics of postmodern, post-structuralist, and other currents of contemporary thought are translated speedily, perhaps more so than the Anglophone world, with massive publications of books and articles that offer disquisitions of varying quality on them, targeting everyone from the lay reader to

31 Yoshimoto Taka'aki, Sekai ninshiki no hōhō 世界認識の方法 (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1984), 48. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from my Japanese sources are mine.
32 Karl Marx, Capital: Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976): ”In so far as the process of exchange transfers commodities from hands in which they are non-use-values, it is a process of social metabolism.”
the specialist.

This sort of intellectual sophistication has found its most eminent voices in what was generally termed the New Aka "New Academics"—i.e., "New Academics"—of the 1980s and 1990s who had become, during the most phenomenal phase of their success, veritable media personalities gracing TV talk shows and commercials. Among the leading New Aka luminaries, such as the left post-structuralist Asada Akira 浅田彰, Marxist literary philosopher Karatani Kōjin 柄谷行人, film studies specialist Hasumi Shigehiko 速黒重彦, economic anthropologist Kurimoto Shin’ichirō 栗本慎一郎, and religious philosopher Nakazawa Shin’ichi 中沢新一, Yoshimoto’s status is an ambivalent one, if accorded due respect and criticism proper for a canonical thinker of the previous generation. For example, while breezily surveying the state of contemporary Japanese culture and politics in an interview for the British journal New Left Review, Asada’s commented that, compared to Kobayashi Hideo 小林秀雄, the foundational literary critic of pre- and postwar Japan, Yoshimoto was “more populist,” describing him as “the key figure” who influenced 1960s student radicals and who was critical of the Japanese Communist Party from the “opposite direction” of the Marxist economist Iwata Hiroshi 岩田弘:

a poet and literary critic who brought a purified notion of ‘the masses’ to the fore—not so much in the sense of Luxemburg’s critique of Lenin, but rather in a rejection of doctrines imported from Moscow. Instead of such foreign conceptions [Yoshimoto argued], the Left should listen to the mass of the Japanese people themselves, starting from their needs and concerns. This line appeared strongly to the romantic strain in the cultural underground at the time, where many young people were reading Feuerbach more than Marx.33

Asada went on to imply that such a romantically strained influence contributed to the student movement becoming “more and more subjectivist and romantic,
either pursuing an illusory unity with the masses or seeking a quasi-erotic communality of its own, in a Feuerbachian or Marcusean spirit.” Such high-handed and rather inaccurate characterization of Yoshimoto’s ideas—which did not call for any “illusory unity with the masses” and was not particularly Feuerbachian, to say nothing of Marcusean, but, in fact, drew considerably from Marx (especially of 1844 and Capital)—cannot help but remind us of similar attacks vented, on a much more extensive and polemical length on the pages of the New Left Review, against the historian Edward Thompson for the latter’s presumably populist and nationalist predilections.34

Indeed, the comparison between the two men is not arbitrary: born in the same year (1924), having exerted a seminal impact on the first British New Left, as Yoshimoto did on the first Japanese one, and sharing a number of common intellectual and political concerns, Thompson is most likely the best candidate for comparison with Yoshimoto in the Anglophone world. In Thompson’s intellectual vocabulary, the term “experience” looms large. It is a term that has deep roots in the English empiricist tradition and can be seen at work, as a powerful methodological imperative, in Thompson’s own work as a historian. I think it is also a term, shod of its peculiarly English connotations and primordially understood in a more general sense, that applies to Yoshimoto’s stance as an

33 “A Left within the Place of Nothingness” in New Left Review (2/5), September-October 2000, 18-19.
34 See, for example, Perry Anderson, “Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism” in New Left Review (1/33), January-February 1966, 2-42. Contrary to Asada’s flattering designation of Karatani as someone who “started out as a rebellious son of Yoshimoto and Etoh”—which would make Asada, a long-time junior intellectual collaborator to Karatani, presumably the recalcitrant, precocious younger brother (he was only twenty-six when his Közō to chikara (Structure and Power) became a Japanese bestseller) —Yoshimoto has dubbed Karatani, Asada, and Hasumi
intellectual as a whole, especially when qualified with such class adjectives as “popular” and “plebian” that, in the Japanese idiom, would most perfectly be expressed in the word *taishū*.

The etymological root of “*taishū*” is a Buddhist term that uses the same ideograph 大衆 and is pronounced “daishū,” referring to a group of male monks who have taken the 250 Buddhist vows or a multitude of monks or lay believers. It is virtually untranslatable into English because its closest approximation, “masses,” has a sociologically reductive and homogenous implications associated with modern ideologies of mass mobilization or indoctrination, the very antithesis of Yoshimoto’s ideas. As one of the defining key terms in his ideas, Yoshimoto also infuses the term with a specific meaning of his own, but, for our purpose, *taishū* can be broadly translated as the “people” while explicitly denoting the general working class.35

An unwavering fidelity in his intellectual work to this experiential base of the *taishū* made Yoshimoto both unique and representative in the postwar period, winning for him a kind of universality that is as inimitable as it is historically specific. Kitagawa Tōru 北川透, a poet and critic, for example, remarked, “Among postwar poets and literary figures, there is probably no other case of anyone being discussed so extensively as that of Yoshimoto Taka’aki... One can think of many reasons as to why this is, but I think it is sufficient to

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35 In a conversation with the U.S. sociologist Lawrence Olson, Yoshimoto explicitly rejects the use of the term in any sociological sense. Although I have left the keyword *taishū* as is, as a rule I have translated *shomin* 隨民 as “people” in the plebeian--in opposition to the patrician--sense of “ordinary or common people”; *shimin* 市民 as “citizens” in the classical bourgeois sense; and...
simply say that it derives from the enormity of his existence in which to be a poet means to be a critic as well as a thinker.”\(^\text{36}\) His eminence as one of the greatest postwar literary critics and theorists, a versatile thinker in possession of an original and systematic theoretical framework capable of discussing and arguing virtually any subject under the sun, is unassailable, if perpetually mired in polemics, denunciations, and passionate partisanship.

Washida Koyata 職田小彌田, a specialist in modern European philosophy, has called Yoshimoto “a rare being who had run through the totality of postwar history while believing in the possibility of ideas,” adding, “with virtually no one to follow him.”\(^\text{37}\) Yoshimoto himself expressed this “possibility of ideas” in one of the most oft-cited lines of his poem “Haijin no uta” 廃人の歌 (“Song of a Lunatic”), written in 1952 when he was twenty-eight years old and had started to work at the Seito factory of the Tōyō Inki (East Asia Ink) Manufacturing Company: “When the truth passes through my lips/I am a lunatic on account of the delusion (mōsō 妄想) that this will probably freeze almost the entire world/Yes.”\(^\text{38}\) According to Takahashi Jun’ichi 高橋順一, another scholar of European philosophy, this “delusion” can be “called an obsession that is rooted in the so-called depth of his existence,” and it has enabled Yoshimoto to single-handedly construct a range of over-arching, critical theories that inform his diverse and continuous interventions


into debates on everything from literature and politics to language and popular culture. This “delusion” is also one borne on the actuality of personal experience and sensibility, marked by indelible signatures of historical defeats and efforts in postwar Japanese history and a ceaseless attempt to transform such signatures into a new language of revolutionary possibility.

The non-sectarian radical segments of the first Japanese New Left who emerged out of the 1960 anti-Ampo (U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty) struggle briefly took up this language and made it their own. Or, to put it more accurately, their embryonic struggles in the late 1950s energized and made possible Yoshimoto’s voice to emerge and be heard above the din of postwar democratic and Communist orthodoxy, as the class struggle against capitalist rationalization at the Miike coalmine around the same time hurled the militant coalminer-poet Tanigawa Gan (an erstwhile comrade of Yoshimoto’s whom the latter has called “the greatest organizer of postwar Japan”) into the limelight as a working-class activist par excellence of the New Left. Even if Yoshimoto himself maintained a certain distance from the later Zenkyōtō students (among whom many of the New Aka thinkers can be counted), who constituted the heart of the second New Left’s efflorescence in the late 1960s, for many of them reading Yoshimoto was an essential intellectual baptism which connected them to a tradition of independent radical politics that developed antagonistically to Japanese postwar democracy, whether in the liberal or Communist form. Yoshimoto’s struggle, from 1945 to the 1960s, waged

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to make sense of his very personal "experience of defeat" and turn it into the basis of ideas that would endure on a world scale, culminated in the 1968 publication of *Kyōdō gensō ron* 共同幻想論 (*Communal Illusion*), a powerfully influential, indeed mythically potent book for the Zenkyōtō generation, which explicitly dealt with the origin of the Japanese state and emperor system in relation to what we may provisionally term the "superstructural" aspects of the Japanese commons.

However, as it shall become clear, the use of "superstructure" as a metaphor to describe Yoshimoto's book is misleading at best, for cultural, religious, legal, and political "superstructure" implies an economic "base," and *Communal Illusion* challenges the very premise of such a Marxist base-superstructure model of history. One of the important thrusts of Yoshimoto's argument in *Communal Illusion* was that, at the level of popular customs, rituals, and consciousness, one cannot escape from the enduring power of the commons, no matter how hegemonically distorted and materially embattled this power may become through millennia of ruling-class rule and, by implication, even under contemporary capitalism. Yoshimoto’s theories of literary language and phenomenology of the mind—and, later, of hyper-capitalism and its mass cultural images as well as that of the “African stage of history”—must be viewed as organic components of this project which seeks to trace the historical and contemporary genealogy of communal illusion.

All of these theories, suffused with themes of great transitions and
polymorphous shifts in stylistic registers, also historically correspond to the peculiarities of postwar Japanese capitalist developments. A writer commented, “Needless to say, it was Yoshimoto Taka’aki, already an incisive thinker before the period of economic high growth, who attempted to contemplate the significance of the great transformation Japanese society had undergone during this period.” Another noted, “I believe Yoshimoto Taka’aki is a thinker in whom postwar Japan is most characteristically reflected. Mercilessly and masochistically exposing his own weaknesses which, when struck, cannot but bounce back with resonating sensation and, as he applies a method that correspondingly exposes also the weaknesses of postwar Japan, his is a crystallization of the most durable ideas that most accurately reflect the postwar actuality under the condition of our ‘drowning prosperity.’” The originality of Yoshimoto’s ideas, from this view, derives from their capacity to clearly reflect a succession of new historical turns in postwar Japanese capitalism and their continuous attempt in capturing the new dynamics and contradictions of these turns on their own terms.

What comes to the fore from such general comments is the extent to which Yoshimoto’s work is part and parcel of postwar Japanese history, that its theoretical magnitude stem from its seismically sensitive ability to absorb and digest the unique experiences that economically and culturally defined postwar Japanese society, and the extent to which both the poetic and theoretical frameworks of this work are grounded in Yoshimoto’s own personal,
autobiographical experiences. There is, to be sure, a specific generational conjuncture out of which Yoshimoto’s thought reflects postwar Japan, and it is the one in which the "embrace of defeat"--to borrow the title of John Dower’s magisterial account of Japan in the immediate aftermath of World War II--defines its architectonics.

Conventionally, architectonics (from the Greek term arhitektôn meaning "architect") refers to qualities related to architectural design; in philosophy, it signifies any effort toward the scientific systematization of knowledge. Commenting on one of Yoshimoto’s central notions in the 1950s, kankei no zettsaiei 関係の絶対性 (“absolute nature of relations”)--formulated in Yoshimoto’s 1954 critical essay on the Gospel of Matthew, a document that was virtually an intellectual manifesto declared against progressive liberal and orthodox left intellectuals--Karatani Kôjin, the aforementioned New Aka Marxist theorist of architecture and philosophy, has described the original impulse of Yoshimoto’s work:

For example, Yoshimoto has an episode in which, on the day of defeat of the war, an older woman in charge of his room and board comforted him. Or he has written about the taishû who, instead of fighting back systematically on the day of the defeat, returned without qualms to everyday life. What is important is the surprise he expresses here. For Yoshimoto’s shock was to encounter the taishû as the Other. The perceived “taishû” here are different from either the taishû whom the Romantics see as the foundation to which they can return as the inverse side of their self-consciousness or the taishû as the persons of common sense that Kobayashi Hideo talks about. They are the taishû who cannot be internalized. One can say that this is what has made Yoshimoto’s postwar criticism original. In short, there is no “internal relationship” in which privilege is placed on either intellectual/taishû and neither term is made as one’s foundation.

In the 1960s Yoshimoto ends up internalizing such “relationship of externality.” To put it another way, he ends up making the taishû into

zô-ô 神聖 憤懣 in Gendaishi bunko 8: Yoshimoto Taka’aki (Tokyo: Shichôsha, 1968), 143.
an epistemological object. Hence, he says that the task of the intellect is to channel in the “original image of the taishū.” However, it was precisely because they cannot be channeled inside that the taishū are an “Other.” To put it inversely, there can never be a position to transcend the taishū. In the 1950s Yoshimoto spoke of himself, in fact, as “plebian.” Of course, this did not mean to speak in the guise of the taishū. It was to critique the institution of “taishū/intellectuals” itself, whether one privileges one or the other, as nothing more than an “internal relationship.”

What he has critiqued from that point on were not only the Communist Party and the progressive intelligentsia. It was also directed toward Tsurumi Shunsuke 鶴見俊輔 who had tried to draw up the life philosophy of the taishū by descending to their level as well as toward Tanigawa Gan who was “an organizer who committed himself to the path of hypocrisy in decisively being an intellectual vis-à-vis the taishū and being the sharp taishū vis-à-vis the intellectuals”...

Yoshimoto is not denying that the intellectuals and the taishū exist. But he is saying not to resolve this into “the way one sets up the problem of intellectuals and taishū.” The dynamism of Yoshimoto’s criticism stemming from this is particularly striking. In the 1960s this goes through a subtle transformation. This is because Yoshimoto has actively started to define himself as an intellectual.  

Although Karatani’s reading is accurate insofar as it grasps Yoshimoto’s rejection of the traditional, largely elitist paradigm of "taishū-intellectuals" assumed by the postwar democrats, in the end he makes an overtly axiomatic interpretation of Yoshimoto’s relationship to the “taishū-intellectuals” dichotomy, fitting it into his brand of deconstructive analysis in which foundationalism and privileging are rejected out of hand to preserve the taishū as an indefinable, undecidable Other. It is true that Yoshimoto privileges neither the intellectuals nor the taishū, as, for example, his critique of Sartre’s conception of the intellectual makes clear. However, this was also another way of stating the necessity of dissolving intellectuality into the sea of proletarian experience, that is, not for the petty-bourgeois intellectual to cease from his or her privileged intellectual activity to join the factory worker, as the late Sartre admonished, but to bring the working class into the domain of one’s thought process and

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41 “Leipnitz shokōgun: Yoshimoto Taka’aki to Nishida Kitarō” ライプニッツ症候群： 吉本隆明と西田幾多郎, Hūmoa to shite no yuibutsuron ヒューモアとしての唯物論 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1999), 161-163.
abstraction.

Apart from his passing allusion to Yoshimoto’s “surprise” and “shock” in encountering the taishū on the day of Japanese defeat in World War II, Karatani does not provide any reference to Yoshimoto’s concrete experience to substantiate his claim that Yoshimoto rejected making the latter the basis for his intellectual projects in the 1960s. This is perhaps to over-read, on Karatani’s part, a decisive moment of defeat into an abstractly fixated position of “taishū as the Other”--a notion incidentally that does not appear anywhere in Yoshimoto’s work of the 1950s. For the very “shock” and “surprise” Yoshimoto experienced were a common response of his own generation. They were the immediate symptom of Yoshimoto’s wartime values and beliefs in Japanese militarism collapsing and disintegrating into temporary nihilism in the face of defeat. They also prompted in Yoshimoto a grueling, self-conscious search for new values that did not deny the actuality of his wartime experience but critically preserved it in new intellectual and political forms organically rooted in popular consciousness.

When Yoshimoto elaborates his ideas, a constant tension exists in his writing between intuitively building them on his own experiences and, if not scientifically systematizing knowledge in a manner of constructing architectonics, designing from various branches of knowledge (psychology, ethnology, linguistics, literature, etc.) possibilities of a new “science.” This tension is explicitly expressed in “Ramūbō moshiku wa Kāru Marukusu no hōhō ni tsuite no shochū” (“Several Footnotes on the Methods of Rimbaud and Karl Marx”), 1949, one of Yoshimoto’s first postwar publications:

(For example, although within me now the poet Arthur Rimbaud and the thinker Karl Marx co-exist without the slightest sense of strangeness, the
poet Rimbaud does not cease to heap insults on Marx with that singularly bound, lonely and intense invective for the simple reason that Marx was a human being. And Marx does not cease to take Rimbaud to task with such ideas as production and traffic about which Rimbaud never would have given any thought because he was an ignorant daydreamer called a poet. To ask which thought is true is nonsense.

But aren’t you politicos and poets in Japan today attempting such nonsense? As long as you forcibly undertake such nonsense, you will not be exempted from being mocked by an idea that is authentically true).\(^\text{42}\)

Already we see here one of the seminal motifs that runs through Yoshimoto’s major works from the 1950s through the 1970s, to rethink Marx against the Japanese Marxists who refused the task of developing Marx’s unfinished legacy on their own intimately visceral terms and opted instead to being satisfied with merely reproducing ideological derivatives of Russian Marxism. It was, after all, Marx who said in chapter 5 on the labor-process in *Capital*, “what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax,” stressing that even in the realm of capitalist labor-discipline in which a worker’s mental and physical powers are estranged from him or herself the human imagination maintains its irreducible power, an luminously flaring glimpse into our species-being.

For Yoshimoto, the task of truly thinking through Marx meant bringing together the two spheres of his own life--science and poetry--into interconnected traffic. This un-strange “co-existence” of Rimbaud and Marx in his thought derives from his recognition that “what mediates thought and practice is nothing other than will and passion,” the existential medium of one’s personal experiences that rejects any attempt on the part of Japanese Marxists to deny Marx’s “consciousness of agony” out of which Marx forged his method:

For Marx, no impurities are contained between existence and consciousness. The method which existence, that is, human beings use

\[^{42}\text{Yoshimoto Taka’aki zen-chosakushū 吉本隆明全著作集, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Keisō-shobō, 1970), 17-18.}\]
to express their lives is consciousness itself and nothing else. The intellectual method of dialectical materialism must be located here. There is a world of difference between this and the Japanese variants [of Marxism] that shamelessly say something as meaningless as: because human beings are expressing the subject of historical reality, they must possess an active will toward historical reality. Why have you today, Japanese Marxists, abandoned the agony of investigating social consciousness, that is, the existing mechanisms of society within your own consciousness? I cannot understand why you have become such simple optimists. From the agony of his consciousness, Marx elaborated the practical principle of social transformation as an intellectual thought. And throughout his life he never abandoned the difficulty of investigating the existential conditions of human history within his own consciousness. What a lamentable fact that his variants have become intellectual idiots. It is fortunate, if within your brains, Marx’s method and practical thought do not exist as ideas that Marx despised the most. Authentically true thought is always too subtle to be standardized by a measurement. It is self-evident that when you gauge Marx’s intellectual system with such measurement only the dead forms will fall into your brains. The passion and method in Marx, to put it another way, the subtle blending of colors between human beings and their thought will spill out of measurement. It is absolutely impermissible to liquidate such blending of colors in the name of science.\footnote{Ibid., 19-20.}

Yoshimoto’s apprenticeship in chemical science dealt with coloration, and at the time of writing the Marx-Rimbaud essay, Yoshimoto was making use of it in his factory work. The working conditions at these factories were so atrocious that he had found himself forced to organize a union, an act of “passion and method” that spilled out of measurement of the capitalist labor-process.

One of such factories made “sleeves,” the integument for electric cords, where the labor process consisted of repetitively dipping and drying hollowed strings into a liquid mixed with drying oil and synthetic resin; every two days each worker had to do an all-nighter shift and, even during the few hours when the strings were drying, they were not allowed to sleep due to supposed fire hazard from the oil:

It was a complete all-nighter. There is no way you can do it, but at least on the surface it was a complete all-nighter. If you go to sleep, someone from the factory comes to wake you up, saying, you shouldn’t fall asleep. And so on such an occasion you have no choice but to get up and
pretend you’re looking around but, as soon as the person goes away, you
go back to sleep, repeating this over and over. A game of seesaw.44

Additionally, the factory owner there used the workers for private purposes
outside the prescribed boundary of their work, such as having workers clean up
his house. Working successively also at a plating factory as well as black-market
factories manufacturing soaps and makeup, Yoshimoto experienced first-
handedly the severity of the working conditions in these places, which prompted
him to further union-organizing efforts. Such efforts, where the colors of “human
beings and their thoughts” in the labor process are collectively blended, however,
invariably resulted in Yoshimoto getting fired from his jobs, earning him an
unofficial blacklisting that disabled him to readily obtain employment elsewhere.

Yoshimoto’s metaphor of “blending of colors between human beings and
their thoughts” also calls to mind the one Marx himself employed in *Grundrisse*,
describing the centrality of communal landed property—i.e., the commons—
among pastoral peoples:

In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which
predominates the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to
the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours
and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines
the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it. For
example, with pastoral peoples...Certain forms of tillage occur among
them, sporadic ones. Landed property is determined by this. It is held
in common, and retains this form to a greater or lesser degree according
to the greater or lesser degree of attachment displayed by these
peoples to their tradition, e.g. the communal property of the Slavs.45

Later, Marx posits a no less revealing metaphor in which the base, which is
inseparable from commoning in communal land property or union-organizing on

44 *Boku nara iuzo!: seikimatsu Nippon no tadashii nagamekata, tsukiaikata* 僕なら言うぞ！
the factory floor, is organically conceived as a flower, as opposed to the mechanical automatism intimated in “base-superstructure”:

Considered *ideally*, the dissolution of a given form of consciousness sufficed to kill a whole epoch. In reality the barrier to consciousness corresponds to a *definite degree of development of the forces of material production* and hence of wealth. True, there was a not only a development on the old basis, but also a *development of this basis itself*. The highest development of this *basis* itself (the flower into which it transforms itself; hence wilting *after* the flowering and as consequence of the flowering) is the point at which it is itself worked out, developed, into the form in which it is compatible with the *highest development of the forces of production*, hence also the richest development of the individuals. As soon as this point is reached, the further development appears as decay, and the new development begins from a new basis.\(^{46}\)

If the forces of production are the flower, then by implication its leaves, roots, and soil, to say nothing of degree and quality of light and water it receives, are as absolutely critical in producing the flowering as the flower itself, and any attempt to establish a rigid hierarchy of causal importance to any of these factors and relationships would be akin to an exercise in scholastic theology, as great deal of Marxism unfortunately has been. These are central themes with which both Yoshimoto and Edward Thompson wrestled in their respective work.

In 1978 Thompson used Marx’s color metaphor in *Grundrisse* to buttress his view of gentry-pleb relations in eighteenth-century England as a “societal ‘field-of-force’” that “resisted the attribution of identity to a class,” preferring Marx’s metaphors of “rank and influence,” “tonalities,” and “illuminations” to either the structuralist language or the base-superstructure metaphor, for the sensitivity this language of coloration showed toward the fluency of social process.\(^{47}\) Later in *Communal Illusions*, Yoshimoto would pursue a theoretical study of the fluent tonalities and illuminations of customs, rituals, and

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 540-541.

consciousness grounded in the Asiatic communal property of Japan, rejecting
the modernizing framework of both bourgeois and orthodox Marxist social
sciences, as Thompson himself did with the empirically supple, historical study

Thompson’s metaphor of “societal ‘field-of-force” comes from his
recolleciton of a school experiment “in which an electric current magnetized a
plated covered with iron fillings” that were evenly distributed and that “arranged
themselves at one pole or the other, while in between those fillings which
remained in place aligned themselves sketchily as if directed towards opposing
attractive poles.” Hence, in eighteenth-century English society, at one pole was
the crowd and, at the other, the aristocracy and gentry, with the “professional
and merchant groups bound down by lines of magnetic dependency to the
rulers, or on occasion hiding their faces in common action with the crowd”--a
metaphor that described the possibilities and limits of class antagonism under
patrician hegemony. Thompson’s metaphor here is certainly useful in specifying
the unique characteristics of eighteenth-century English class structure, but
perhaps some qualifications can be made as regards the stability of this patrician
hegemony, which appears to have been under more stress and strain than the
metaphor of evenly distributed electric charges of magnetic class dependency
implies.\(^{48}\)

\(^{48}\) In 1767 Joseph Priestley, the dissenting minister and chemist who defended the French
Revolution, published the first English history of electricity, *The History and Present State of
Electricity, with original Experiments*, in which he implied the law of inverse squares between two
electric charges and noted his discovery of how blacklead, charcoal, and red-hot glass conducted
electricity and how flame discharged an electrified body, arguing the need for measuring electrical
resistance; seven years earlier, John Wesley, the founding figure of Methodism, had written *The
Desideratum, or Electricity made Plain and Useful by a Lover of Mankind and of Common Sense*,
based on his own treatment of mental illness among the poor in Bristol and London with the use
of what we would call today electro-shock therapy. We find in Priestley’s work of “high science,”
theoretically abstracted from diligent experimental work, a marked interest within the English
scientific discipline in finding the means to quantify and control electricity as an energy, and it
appears to be no accident that at the time the most primordial human energy required in the
establishment of the free market resisted any attempt at such quantification and control that
Nonetheless Thompson’s objective in using the metaphor of magnetized electric currents to distinguish eighteenth-century customary popular culture from nineteenth-century working-class culture is generally a sound one, for the plebian struggles for the former culture were still in motion, and the metaphor gives historical specificity to the two dialectical antitheses of this culture which, in Thompson’s words, are: “(1) the dialectic between what is and is not culture—the formative experiences in social being, and how these were handled in cultural ways, and (2) the dialectical polarities—antagonisms and reconciliations—between the polite and the plebian cultures of the time.” This dialectic is really the class struggle over which the whole existence of imminent industrial capitalism depended, for the divide between culture and non-cultural spheres of life were in part a reflection of the increasing division of labor while the struggles within culture between the plebian and polite classes circulated into the intensified pitch that threatened to explode once and for all the dialectic of accumulation and development in the trans-Atlantic revolutionary struggles of the 1790s. Putting aside the question of whether or not such a theoretical distinction between plebian and working-class is useful in the long history of global capitalism, we can still see the virtue of Thompson’s use of the metaphor

would turn it into a commodified labor-power: from the Ulster Whiteboy movement under the name of the Oakboys in 1763 parading in military formation with fife and drums to the house of gentry and clergy demanding the reduction of cess and tithes to the Wilkes and Liberty crowd who rioted and demanded wage increase and reduction in grain prices in 1768, to say nothing of the general climate of popular food riots (commoning as street action) and demand for restitution of customary rights (often revolutionary inventions under the guise of ancient tradition) that Thompson did so much to painstakingly and masterfully elucidate. Wesley’s book of “applied science,” on the other hand, shows us the making of a capitalist scientific management that utilizes torture of the body as a means of acculturating the “crowd” into the sober, orderly, and churchgoing working class—a process which Thompson eloquently describes in chapter eleven (“The Transforming Power of the Cross”) of Making of the English Working Class—an indication of how much patrician hegemony was already being eroded by the incipient culture of industrial capitalism.

49 Thompson, op. cit.
to lie in establishing retrospectively the historical specificity of a class in the making.

On the other hand, Yoshimoto’s “blending of colors”—dealing not with relations of class conflict but with relations between human beings and their consciousness—is a metaphor taken from his study of chemistry and its application in the labor process of the factory and directs our attention to how we may most usefully think, to form revolutionary ideas existentially through the “agony of consciousness” that history forces upon us. It indicates a method of thinking, reasoning, analysis that is rooted in our own personal experience in a world of work where we find ourselves in the making of a class. For Yoshimoto this experience was indissolubly bound up with his labor in chemical science. Okuno Takeo 奥野健男 has pointed out that “in the first half of Yoshimoto Taka’aki’s life, science of chemistry had no less significance in his working life than poetry, literature, and philosophy”:

If one looks at Yoshimoto Taka’aki’s résumé, his middle school was the municipal chemical engineering school..., specialized school was Yonezawa 米沢 Upper Engineering School in the Department of Applied Chemistry (later Yonezawa Specialized Engineering, today’s Yamagata University, Engineering Dept.), graduated from Tokyo Engineering University majoring in electric engineering (old form), became special researcher in inorganic chemistry class in the Chemistry Department at Tokyo Engineering University, worked in the chemical technology section of Tōyō Inki KK’s Seito factory, visiting researcher in the dye chemistry research lab at Tokyo Engineering University, planning section of the Nagai/Ezaki Patent Office, etc.; he has majored in chemistry since boyhood. It means that he has grown up and lived with chemistry for over thirty years. Equivalent to the path of an artisan who apprenticed under a master as a child and worked for thirty-some years as journeyman carpenter and construction engineer or who, from tailoring artisan’s apprenticeship, became an independent tailor or clothing designer, chemistry has been driven in and become one with Yoshimoto Taka’aki’s body and thought process; at least as a chemical technician he is a veteran with a career of thirty-some years.51

The exhaustion Yoshimoto had experienced in the chemically related labor process of the factory made him “lose his poetry,” though he continued to write a “sort of pre-poetic sketches”: “The motif of poems maintained in this period was less carving and concentrating the words than preserving not to forget the way the unconscious contributed to the expression of words. Even as I did this, I felt myself worry that poetry was gradually moving away from me.”

Takahashi Gen’ichirō 高橋源一郎, a postmodern novelist who had sharpened his craft while earning wage through physical labor, noted in a collective interview with Yoshimoto the distinctly “non-intellectual” way in which Yoshimoro wrote these “non-poetic sketches,” which were partially collected in *Hidokei-hen* 日時計編 (*Sundial Verses*):

…when we look at the way Yoshimoto-san deals with poetry, many of the group poems in the *Sundial Verses* are written in a single day. Shutting yourself in a room on your own, you wrote poems for many years as if training your muscles. On rare occasions, there may be poets who write poems this way, but ordinarily poets refine their words as ideas while receiving influences from the outside. Although there might be some influences from Miyazawa Kenji 宮沢賢治 and poems of the *Kōchi* 荒地 group, Yoshimoto-san ceaselessly works into the words a materialist processing. It hardly seems the work of a poet.

Written in the years 1950 and 1951, the two volumes of the *Sundial Verses* contain over four hundred poems. In these poems, in which winter, darkness, apocalyptic foreboding, and fires of war appear as recurrent motifs, there is one entitled “Watashitachi no uchi de horobiyuku mono” わたしたちのうちで亡びゆくもの (“Those that fall into ruin within us”) in which the dead labor of the previous generation had radically transformed and frozen the scenery of the world inside and outside of “us”:

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52 Yoshimoto Taka’aki shoki shishū, 253.
Winter freezes the scenery within us

[...]  
Even inside gigantic buildings, even inside the heavy industry area where Y-shaped steel frames stretch in a row our endurance is still darkly primitive.  
An ignorant father teaches his son, “The workings of this world where you cannot live without working...  
Son, contain far more terrifying and deeper details than you think.”  
Oh, for this reason the endurance of the ignorant father changed the scenery into tundra  
And we cross it in silence, our shadows also going across it.  
Clearly not through scenery that we have carved inside our minds but  
Crossing across the pavement of the city that teaches music, musical dramas, and films through illusions  
We pass through the gate in order to learn science  
From mindless scholars who seem to know nothing of what it is to work to live.  
An ignorant father whispers to the son, “Son, your pain will be lessened a little by this.”  
But we have no way of answering.  
We cross the tundra in silence, our shadows also going across it

Everywhere winter comes  
And freezes the scenery within us.  
Something monumental goes into ruin within us.  
What is monumentally nominal goes into ruin.  

Yoshimoto’s experience of being transformed literally overnight from a college graduate to a factory worker was “unforgettable,” making those recent memories of lying on the grass and floating through school recede rapidly like a dream, which were daily frozen into ruin by the kind of work wherein his scientific education was all but useless in diminishing his pain. Indeed what Yoshimoto had realized in this period was that factory labor had an infernal quality from the perspective of the “place of rest” that was the university and that the science he had learned in the university was useless in the repetitively simple operations of the capitalist labor-process. Experience of having to “work to eat” materially made Yoshimoto’s memory of an immediate past appear remote, “freezing” the idyllic landscape of his mind into the “tundra” of numbing exhaustion:

How shall I summarize the background of poems written in this period? One is that the school was a “park,” that is a place of rest.

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54 Yoshimoto Taka’aki zenshishū 吉本隆明全詩集 (Bunshōdō: Tokyo, 2003), 1111-1112.
Another is that this was a period when, looking at it from this rest at the park, I truly realized that hell does indeed exist in this world. Working at middle-to-small-sized chemical factories, my knowledge of chemistry from the university turned out to be unnecessary and what I learned at the five-year old-form chemical industrial school and experimental technique were all that was needed. With that, the experience of those days I had spent sunbathing in the “park” that was the university receded immediately into the size of a tiny pea in the far distance. My purposelessly enlarged useless knowledge and utterly out-of-shape body were completed exhausted from the labor without rest that was repeated every other day. On top of it, my mind felt like it was ensnared in a morass and I was at a loss not knowing where to start repairing myself. My mind was so weakened that it sought rest and comfort, and I took an exam for a special researcher at the university and took a break for two years.\footnote{Yoshimoto Taka’aki shoki shishū, 250.}

After this two-year hiatus, Yoshimoto went back to the factory in 1952, starting to work at Tōyō Inki, the second largest printing company in Japan. A year later in April Yoshimoto was elected as a head of its union, initiating a struggle to double the wage rate, adjust the labor time, and demand work benefits. In his May 30 notice to union members, he noted that the gulf between these demands and company’s rejection of them “lay not only in the difference of monetary amount but also the irreconcilable gap between the [company’s] darkly emotional conception of employment and the bright, rational conception of labor.” Yoshimoto amplified on this difference in an article published in August:

> It is important that we directly take in the particularly feudal characteristics in our working condition with our bodies and grasp out of it a wide perspective and an opportunity to advance forward into a bright conception of labor. There was a time when even union members commonly referred to the “special conditions of Tōyō Inki,” but, needless to say, there is no such thing. It is merely a way of saying “the backwardness of Tōyō Inki” in a rationalized manner. By saying “special characteristics” instead of “backwardness,” we should not avoid the effort of breaking through the feudal working condition surrounding us. But we are still in a difficult living condition and are constantly filled with mental stagnation from repeating labor that requires powerful endurance. This problem, as a principle, cannot be resolved except socially, but I want to plead that we must hold onto a prospect of a bright future that is founded on such pain and despair. When we experience with our own bodies the pain and despair that come from our living and working environments, at least it can be said that we are given the opportunity to grasp a wide perspective and prospect for the future. We should not lose this
opportunity in a series of resignations and emotional escapes and cowardly nod off inside the “backwardness of Tōyō Inki.”

The healthy conception that we the workers possess is constantly invaded by the vulgarity of personalism and the vulgarity of sentimentalism, and there is always a possibility of avoiding the primary task of a labor union by substituting the union machinery into a mere machinery for socializing.

We must clearly grasp the fact that we can start conceiving the possibility of us improving our living and working conditions only by standing above the possibility of overcoming problems such as the ones noted above. We are convinced that the young and fresh union members are secretly in possession of a vitality that enables them to stand up from nihilism or despair of whatever kind.56

Even at the level of language, we can see here Yoshimoto’s own personal nihilism and despair in the immediate aftermath of Japanese defeat in World War II being resolved in the discovery of his own class, not as an ideological group-formation but an experiential collectivity bound together by shared repetitive labor “that requires endurance.”

This resolve is quite apparent in “Kichi ni tatsu kaikyū e 危地に立つ階級へ (“To the Class Standing in Crisis”) from his poems in Tegata-shihen 手形詩篇 (Hand Print Poems), which were written in this period (1953-54):

To our class who have been sunk by innumerable broken promises,
I do not believe
any word that can elevate them.
Surrounded by the frost that falls every morning
and the wind that starts to freeze at sunset,
a class of shame that weathers the winter,
through poverty that working cannot sustain,
through affliction that penetrates the heart like maggots,
and through the counterattacks of the rulers,
our class who weathers the winter of endurance.
But
in our endurance lies its beginning
because in what represses us lies its source.
In our shame lies its end
because in what threatens us lies its annihilation.

In a rapid-fire succession a series of questions and entreaties to his comrades in
“Boku no tomotachi ni yoseru boku no uta” ぼくの友たちによせるぼくのうた

(“My Song, Dedicated to My Friends”), we find a more charged velocity, a more
defiant attitude toward the frozen scenery of the tundra built on the accumulation
of dead labor, accompanying this class consciousness:

Do you believe in
Politics forced through the energy of luxurious diet
And the absolutely idiotic excuse that that approves it in the name of success
Do you believe in
God that has become the slave of power
[...]
Do you believe in
This system that smoothly circulates
Righteousness, capital, culture, and the tools of slaughter
Do you still have the ability to believe inside the reason to live

A pair of your exhausted eyes,
Never form any tears
Throw away the dampness and repeated words genetically inherited from your
forefathers
Reject all symbols and substances of repression
Suppress that vulgar sentiment that mistakes geniality for love
You are alone
Realize that your environment is the tundra
You are alone
Treat with care the meaning of being alone

That pair of eyes that approach me
I teach you that this comfort is degrading
I teach you that my understanding is silence
That the system is near despair
Teach it with a particular authority
And teach you that the work we must build inside it is enormous.

Poetry and science were, therefore, not antithetically positioned in Yoshimoto’s
life; they were mediated by the collective experience of factory work and the self-
organized struggle to build something enormous “inside it” that would accelerate
the system’s despair, linking rank-and-file unionizing on the shop floor with the
“prospect” of socially resolving the problem of alienated labor through revolution.

56 Yoshimoto Taka’aki zen-chosakushū, vol. 13, 411-413.
Chemistry and the labor-process greatly interested Marx the revolutionary as well, leading him to use the chemical analogy of equivalent chemical composition between butyric acid and propyl formate, as opposed to the difference in their physical formation, to explicate the value-relation of linen and coat in his famous exposition of the labor theory of value. Marx also turned to molecular theory of modern chemistry to illustrate the transformation of the medieval European guild system into capitalist production, saying it was analogous to the law in Hegel’s Logic that “at a certain point merely quantitative differences pass over by a dialectical inversion into qualitative distinctions.”57 Hence the key to exploding the stadialism of capitalist mode of production that views all others modes of production as embryonic, incomplete, or uncivilized versions of itself lies in thinking and acting through the changing composition of the working class. The economist Harry Cleaver has clarified Marx’s adaptation of Hegel’s latter law of dialectical inversion—i.e. revolution—in his labor theory of value as a method of such strategic analysis of class composition, arguing that the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative aspects of value “embody the complex dialectic of two class perspectives” between the working class (whose primary concern is qualitative) and capital (whose concern is primarily quantitative).58

Friedrich Engels, however, took this historically and socially specific notion of dialectic into the realm of natural science and cosmology, setting an important precedent in the development of orthodox Marxism. In a talk on the

57 Capital, 141: 423-424.
58 Reading Capital Politically (Austin: University of Texas Press, 101-102, italics in the original.)
Marxist philosopher Hiromatsu Wataru, Yoshimoto critiqued, on the basis of his knowledge of chemistry, Engels’s dialectical logic that Hiromatsu utilized in his work:

When you analyze what metal a particular chemical compound is made up of, you always make it into a solution that is neutral or more acidic than neutral. Nagaumi Saichiro, whom I personally know and is an authority on analytical chemistry, had kept thinking about how to analyze and detect the base compound of a negative radical, such as sulfuric radical, and discovered for the first time that you can analyze it by dissolving it in alkaline solution. This is a reason for considering even Engels’s example of chemical bonding as being not that simple. For instance, it may be fine if, when analyzing the elements that compose chemical compounds, you can analyze any ingredient with a micro-acidic or neutral solution. If that were the case, you can make an explanation at the level of Engels’s example, that when this and this combine, the positive and negative ions bond and form a neutral base compound, in short, the synthesis dialectically developing from a thesis and an antithesis. But the concrete nature of matter is not that simple. The professor who taught us discovered that in analyzing the negative radical of acid base you have to make it into an alkaline solution. In short, ordinary scientists don’t think that way. Ordinary scientists only think about the latest developments in their field. That’s not what I mean here but there is something more fundamental. When we heard about finding out the process of being able to use alkaline solution, we were surprised to the point of thinking “wow” and were greatly moved. Acid base and/or positive solution and negative solution bond to form a neutral matter. On the basis of that example, Engels says nature is dialectically composed, but I can’t help but think that this is speaking inversely from the result. That Engels speaks this way, I think, is his weakness.59

Elsewhere Yoshimoto has noted that, whereas Marx’s materialist investigation of natural history has the great virtue of establishing careful qualifications for possible inevitabilities of natural history while refusing to say anything beyond those qualifications, Engels’s brilliance and thoroughness has made him err greatly:

In contrast [to Marx’s approach], everything is wrong with Engels. Engels’s Dialectic of Nature is also a bad book. Its materialist view only applies to classical science. The reason why it became that way

was, you can say, due to Engels’s thoroughness, he has a side to him that doesn’t get satisfied until he is complete and thorough, thorough even with illustrative examples. Nobody can ever know whether nature operates dialectically and, if you interpret it post facto, it’s possible [to think this way], but that’s not the case, I think, and the dialectic of nature isn’t valid. He should’ve stopped right before becoming thorough but, because he did it thoroughly, he got it wrong. There is no way nature changes just on the surface like that. I think it is valid only as an interpretive method but has no validity otherwise. Those people who are called Marxists, that’s the case with Lukács, I think also with Mr. Hiromatsu Wataru, isn’t the influence of Engels on them very considerable? I can’t help but think that way.  

For Yoshimoto, as it is for Thompson, dialectic is not a law--whether of nature or history--but a heuristic framework specific to social and historical relations that requires qualifications, adjustments, and revisions in relation to the particular social phenomenon one is studying. Obviously, neither Thompson’s electric “field of force” nor Yoshimoto’s “blending of colors” is an attempt to find in an electro-magnetic or dye-chemical process a scientific verification for their insights into, respectively, eighteenth-century English gentry-plebs relations and twentieth-century reading of Marx in relation to postwar Japanese Marxism. As with Marx’s example of butyric acid and propyl formate, these allusions to scientific phenomena are merely analogical illustrations to clarify their meaning in entirely different spheres of analysis, to investigate class experience either as a historical or existential phenomenon.

Another point of convergence between Thompson and Yoshimoto is their valuation of culture as a realm to be neither economically predetermined nor marginalized by science. Thompson’s concern with hegemony as a sphere of symbolic and material class struggle, on one hand, and Yoshimoto with Rimbaud’s poetry (which was at the time inseparable from questions of religion, Yoshimoto later recalls) and Marx’s “method and passion,” on the other,

61 Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga kataru sengo 55-nen: Kaisen-senchū-haisen chokugo "machiu-sho
exemplify this. To be sure, Thompson is writing at the full maturity of his historical power and imagination, empirically approaching his subject with critically versatile command of vast theoretical concepts and idioms, while Yoshimoto, still on the cusp of finding his own analytical voice, is intuitively tracing, with a somewhat awkward gait, an outline of his still freshly smoldering study of Marx and a defiant challenge against the Japanese orthodox Marxists; moreover, autobiographically urgent issues are at stake in Yoshimoto’s “Several Footnotes on the Methods of Rimbaud and Karl Marx.”

Rimbaud’s itinerary as a precocious, decadent Symbolist poet was shaped by the defeat of the Paris Commune no less so than Marx’s new horizon of thinking on “possible communism” in his writing on the Commune in “Civil War in France.” Hence the “illumination” of poetry (Rimbaud) and “possible communism” of science (Marx) are connected in Yoshimoto by his passionate and willful (i.e., poetic) insistence on basing his intellectual method (i.e., science), after Marx, on his own consciousness of agony in the experience of catastrophic defeat, for unlike the Commune, Yoshimoto’s youthful commitment was forged upon ideological delusions of the emperor-centered, militarist industrial state but, like the Commune, those very delusions were organically connected to the subaltern commons. The hidden, prefigurative transcript Yoshimoto underwrites here is a search for a method for social revolution, attempting what Marx has done after his own fashion, for such an attempt, as both Marx and Yoshimoto understood well, is demanded of every generation faced with new circumstances that “weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living.” Even as Yoshimoto persistently reads Marx of *Capital* as a finest

*shiron* "o chūshin ni* 開戦・戦中・敗戦直後 『マチヴ書試論』を中心に, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Sankō-sha, 2001), 25: “I think it was a time when, in truth, I could’ve said the problem of religion and science, instead of the problem of poetry and science, and still it would haven’t changed much of my concerns.”
systematizer of political economy (hence speculating on the suspension of the labor theory of value in the new consumerist production phase of Japanese capitalism since the 1970s), it is necessary to reread Yoshimoto’s ideas and categories of analysis *politically*, as Harry Cleaver suggested for Marx’s labor theory of value, because Yoshimoto’s notion of Marx’s “intellectual system” hinges on its effectiveness in accurately defining and redefining the practical principle of social transformation. And this, I would argue, is no less true for Yoshimoto himself, who modeled his major works on what he considered one of the three potential paths Marx could have developed from his writings in 1844, namely the study of religion and state for the purpose of thinking revolution through the science and theory of literary language and communal illusion.

Yoshimoto’s violent disillusionment in the wake of Japanese militarist defeat was first and foremost with the state that implanted in him religious delusions regarding his relationship to society and this disillusionment set the primary context for Yoshimoto’s formative thought. In an interview serialized in the Japanese edition of *Penthouse* magazine in the late 1990s, Yoshimoto described the significance of Marx in sorting out this question of the Japanese wartime state:

Interviewer: While going from one job to another, was Marx for you a great spiritual support and compass?
Yoshimoto: Yes. When Japan lost the Pacific War, what I reconsidered the most was the fact that I didn’t know a method to analyze the world. I was a literary youth so I thought I knew to some extent the internal states of human beings but didn’t know a method to analyze the outside world.

Even though I myself hadn’t felt as if I had changed, because of the defeat in the war, the world outside had changed completely. Why? Marx taught me a method to understand this.

During the war, we had been led to believe that it was the state that embraces everything from the occupied lands to our own bodies. But it was a state in the Western sense of the word and it wasn’t an entity that embraced everything. A state that has received damage from the war demands compensation from the state that inflicted that damage—the state in the Western sense was such a state, an entity that
could be objectified. I learned from Marx how to objectify and study the state, that, as a concept, society is larger than the state. I also learned from Marx economics—for example, method of analyzing commodities. Such matters as what is a commodity and how does value gets produced. All these things were an experience tantamount to the scales falling from my eyes.62

Even though Marx’s work was central in helping Yoshimoto fundamentally rethink his values and ideas in the immediate aftermath of the war, Yoshimoto has always refused to identify himself as a Marxist (Marukusu-shugi-sha マルクス主義者).

In the 1949 piece cited above, which is also his first published discussion of Marx, he is already on the critical offensive against contemporary Japanese Marxism, a consistent position that would catapult him into playing a pivotal role in the making of the New Left and engaging in severe polemics against dogmatic Marxism of any stripe, including that of the New Left. In his citation of intellectual debt in this period, Yoshimoto does mention the Marxist linguist Miura Tsutomu 三浦つとむ, who worked outside the Community Party for his principled anti-Stalinist and anti-vanguardist views and who influenced Yoshimoto’s grasp of Marx’s conception of the working class and theoretical disquisitions on literary language. At the same time, Yoshimoto’s rejection of the label “Marxist” expressed his complete outsider status from the experience of the Old Left, for Yoshimoto belonged to that generation who never knew the existence of the prewar Left, particularly the underground Communist activists, because, by the time he came of age, they all either had been jailed or had become apostates in support of the war.

Haniya Yutaka 墳谷雄高, a leading postwar Japanese writer who authored the unfinished, monumental novel Shiryō 死霊 (Dead Spirits), spent

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62 Yoshimoto Taka’aki and Tajika Nobukazu 田近伸和, Cho-“20-sēki”-ron gekan 超「20世紀」論 下巻 (Shibuya-ku: Asukii, 2000), 156-158.
time in jail for his underground activism during the war, and along with Yoshimoto, actively supported the emergence of the New Left, indicates the particularity of Yoshimoto’s generational experiences that made him unique in the historical genealogy of the Japanese Left:

What I had realized foolishly enough for the first time reading Yoshimoto Taka’aki’s book concerned the actuality of the complete defeat of our generation, including Hanada Kiyoteru 花田清輝. It concerned the period of intellectual transition in which it was finally impossible to overcome Yoshimoto’s generation who returned from the land of death, no matter how much we supplied a forward-moving meaning by cleverly combining fugue-like the two dominant tones of resistance and collaboration. Yoshimoto Taka’aki, who throws a funeral note of total denial at our generation that have passed through the war and Marxism, finds a slight means of escape in Nakano Shigeharu’s 中野重治 apostate position, but Yoshimoto Taka’aki’s colleague Takei Akio’s 武井昭夫 impression, that “the General achieves great merit and then dries up million bones,” shows great doubt about the content of subsequent activities Nakano Shigeharu undertook after taking that position.63

This “complete denial” of Haniya’s and earlier generation of the Left meant that, from the very inception of the postwar, Yoshimoto never felt the slightest obligation to adhere himself to any party directive or sectarian doctrine, leading him to fierce polemical confrontations with Communist and other Old Left ideologues as well as the “postwar democrats” who included fellow travelers, Socialists, constitutional liberals, and other segments of the progressive intelligentsia.

In the 1960s, however, Yoshimoto did call himself as a Marukusu-sha マルクス者 (literally, a “Marx-person”), one who seeks to do for his own times what Marx had tried to do for his:

In the past I have never partaken in so-called progressive common sense nor have I ever thought of becoming a Marxist. That is to say, although I’ve thought of becoming a Marx and, even today, though I fall short of it, I try to still think this way, that is, have not lost the task to be the new Marx, I haven’t really thought of becoming a Marxist.

63 “Ketteiteki na tenkanki” 決定的な転換期, Yoshimoto Taka’aki o ‘yomu,’ 28.
You might think that Marx and Marxists, Marx’s ideas and Marxism are the same thing, but that’s completely wrong. They’re something utterly different. Therefore, the problems we pose as intellectual tasks always have to find a political expression, expression as a real movement, and I think that no one would be able to stop this.\(^\text{64}\)

It is only in the context of a real movement that assuming the task Marx left unfinished takes on any meaning. This is a position not far removed from Thompson’s, as when he famously wrote, “The point is that Marx is on our side; we are not on the side of Marx.”\(^\text{65}\)

Notwithstanding Yoshimoto’s project of becoming the “new Marx” in relation to his times, most prominent criticisms directed at Yoshimoto frequently stem from how his deeply entrenched fidelity to this experience of defeat has made the terms and assumptions of his ideas increasingly out of sync, if not anachronistic, with post-1970s history. A cultural critic comments:

...previously, there was an occasion when we invited Yoshimoto-san to a study group that Fukuda Kazunari 福田和也 and I were conducting. To be truthful, that was the only time when I met Yoshimoto-san in person and, after Yoshimoto-san had gone home, I think it was Fukuda-san who sighed, “Yoshimoto-san’s ideas are those of Japan when it was poor” with a slightly troubled expression on his face and I remember all of us participants nodding in unison.\(^\text{66}\)

This consciousness of impoverished Japan dates back to the watershed year of defeat in 1945. The term "defeat" has a far-reaching consequence in Yoshimoto’s constellation of ideas, for it is one of the keywords in Yoshimoto’s overall intellectual peregrination through the 1950s and 60s, positing for him the triumvirate of personally shattering events that set the essential points of departure for his intellectual formation in that period: war, union organizing, and anti-Ampo movement.\(^\text{67}\) Defenders and detractors of Yoshimoto demarcate the

\(^{64}\) "Jōkyō ga shiiru setsujitsu na kadai towa nanika” 情報が希い事実な課題とはなにか, Yoshimoto Taka’aki zenchosakushū, vol. 14 (Tokyo: Keisō-shobō, 1972), 43.


\(^{67}\) Yoshimoto Taka’aki, “Haiboku no kōzō” 「敗北の構造」 in Katari no umi Yoshimoto Taka’aki 1:
dividing line of their views according to their perception of the degree to which Yoshimoto’s ideas, based as they are on these nodal points of immediate postwar Japanese history, constitute its critical or complacent "reflection." General assessments of Yoshimoto’s ideas are thus wildly divided--if his defining role in postwar intellectual life is not--and Yoshimoto has not made the matter any easier by his consistent, though ideologically indefinable commitment to his intellectual projects that, as he himself notes, are inextricable from experiences and sensibilities he had acquired as a typical member of the Japanese taishū of his generation and by his combatively polemical style and doggedly pursued principle of debating his opponents in print.

On making his own sensibilities--as opposed to ready-made ideology, partisan politics, and currents of cultural fashion--as the basis of his thinking, Yoshimoto has declared:

The trajectory of all intellectual experience, no matter how trivial, is not something to be thrown away or concealed. It exists as something to be absorbed and synthesized. If I have an intellectual method, in contrast to the ideologues of the world who believed that they have acquired their realistic “position” by throwing away and concealing their experiential thought, it lies in the fact that I have not thrown mine away but absorbed it. This inevitably keeps the intellectual speculations of the world’s ideologues and my intellectual contribution at times away from each other to the point of infinity and at other times close to each other within a point-blank range. They sway according to “position” and I sway only according to reality. When I sense within myself a foundation for timely thought without peers, they turn into a name of annihilated “position.” When they emphasize this “position,” I appear a solitary figure. But, of course, I’m the one who is more of the shapeless organizer, the shapeless majority, and resolutely “reality” itself.68

This is a passage from “Kako ni tsuite no jichū” 過去についての自注 ("Self-Annotation on the Past"), an autobiographical précis that was appended to a collection of Yoshimoto’s early, formative writings, Early Notes, published in

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68 Haikei no kioku 背景の記憶 (Tokyo: Heibon-sha, 1999), 14-5.
1964, just as he was in the thick of polemical battle with the “ideologues of the world” as represented by the whole of the Old Left and sectarian, vanguard elements of the New.

He explicates the principle with which he infused these skirmishes in his 1967 discussion with Tsurumi Shunshuke, a radical liberal professor of American Pragmatist philosophy and a leading progressive activist and thinker who co-founded the journal *Shisō no kagaku* 思想の科学 (Science of Thought) and participated in other activities that sought to popularize philosophy and treat popular culture as a source of critical philosophy:

Maybe I’m considered as liking arguments or thought of as no good because I’m very aggressive, but I’ve never gotten into it first. It’s the same with the principles of my thinking as well as personality so you can check through all the debates. Probably not once did I pick a fight or start a debate on my own.

I affirm that an individual’s thought can deny and try to kill off another person’s thought. That is, when someone picks a fight in the form of I think this way or that. In such cases, whether or not I follow through with the principle of eye for an eye, I consider the matter freely and flexibly. Sometimes I consider doing it and at other times not.

However, when someone who carries a communal or organizational character criticizes or picks a fight with me, I always follow the principle of eye for an eye. In short, I have a principle that says communality can’t kill individuality, the thought of an individual. And also a commandment that says this shouldn’t be allowed to happen. I have a governing principle that, in relation to an opposition made under the guise of communality, you follow the ironclad rule of eye for an eye.69

This willingness, even principled insistence, in accepting any polemical battle, particularly when the opponent challenges him with organizational or sectarian authority, did exact its own price. In several important instances, Yoshimoto’s refusal to mute the political and intellectual differences developing between his comrades and himself, a refusal that often took the form of open letters, sharp exchanges, and critical essays, often translated into unappeasable rifts. More

recently, Yoshimoto has self-critically reflected on this part of his writing life:

I don’t say words are the same as sarin, but I think they have killing capacity. I always have the consciousness, consciousness of sin that I am killing someone. When I speak, I choose words deliberately to minimize the killing ability of words. Unless both are really excited, you don’t spit out killing words but, if you started to write because you could say more in writing than in speaking, the killing unconsciously goes into the writing. That’s why I have a thought somewhere that “I’m going to meet a terrible occasion.” Even if you don’t go that far, I sometimes think, “Maybe I should call on a Buddhist priest to have this sin cleansed.” I think this real feeling that writing has an ability to kill would not have emerged if I had not written and did emerge because I wrote.

Nonetheless, it was also these “killing words” that made Yoshimoto’s prose so excitingly riveting and attractive to New Left students; Yoshimoto never minced words in attacking the orthodoxy of the Old Left or the emergent one of the New, marshaling his critical ammunition against them as a singularly solitary figure without appeal to any organizational or institutional backing. Indeed, these creatively destructive words made it possible, according to a leading scholar from the 1968 Zenkyōtō generation, for Yoshimoto to single-handedly destroy for good the intellectual and political prestige and authority of the Tokyo University intelligentsia and their intellectual history and political philosophy centered around Maruyama Masao 丸山眞男, Tokyo University professor and leading postwar democrat intellectual: “I think Yoshimoto-san said that no good can come from any thought that got tangled up in ideology, that the ethos of taishū should be the basis, or it’s all right as long as you continue to have the ‘original image of taishū’ within you. From the place that treated the intellectual’s thought

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or intellectuals as a philosophy not deserving to believe in, Yoshimoto-san completely destroyed Japanese intellectual history or history of political philosophy as an academic discipline.”

Another New Left student activist who is highly critical of Yoshimoto’s developments after the late 1960s confesses the intense clarity he felt when he read Yoshimoto’s scathing rebuttal against Maruyama, who, in a seminal dialogue with Satō Noboru 佐藤昇 and Umemoto Katsumi 梅本克己 in Gendai Nihon no kakushin shisō 現代日本の革新思想 (Radical Thought in Contemporary Japan), originally published in 1966, derogatively insinuated in an *ad hominem* manner to Yoshimoto’s lack of university position and meager status as a critic to be the stimulus of his *ressentiment* which prompted him to join and support the New Left students during the 1960 anti-Ampo demonstration, a crass example of the postwar democrats’ elitist mentality (and of Maruyama’s decidedly weaker moments):

There Maruyama criticizes the struggles of the “Zengakuren” (mainstream) and its supporters like Yoshimoto, “using terribly ’abstract’ terms and symbols, such as ‘concretely’ the tendency of physically clashing on the streets and meetings” and “purism” of “absolute revolutionism.” Yoshimoto has written a counter-critique to this dialogue three years earlier, and he starts from renewing his critique of this remark:

The progenies of the students of “purism,” as Maruyama Masao defined about three years ago like a stand-up comedian exchanging pleasantries, stormed into the building of the Tokyo University Law Department to which Maruyama belongs, chasing him out of the research room. According to the newspaper report, as he was “physically clashing” (?) for three times with the crowd of occupying students, he uttered to them, “Neither the Nazis nor Japanese militarism ever committed such violence as you’re now committing. I do not hate you, merely despise you.” The students replied, “we came to kick out professors like you.”//And now it is my turn to

71 Ibid., 99.
open my mouth in astonishment, as someone whom Maruyama second-guessed in laughable words to have run to “purism” out of the psychology of “confidence” and “self-spite” on the basis of thinking “I should’ve originally become a university professor by going to a first-class university” (?) or, even though having the ability to achieve the status with more “prestige,” I was merely a “lackluster” “critic.”/Maruyama Masao has now proven by his own action and body that the “immediate tendency of physically clashing” is not the characteristic of “purism” or “lackluster” “critics” but is, in fact, one mode of action imposed by the particularity of human social being at certain conjunctures. But, unlike the lackluster critic, even at the moment of “clashing physically,” Maruyama was not free from the unconscious delusion that “university professors” socially possess the status of “prestige.” Otherwise, he could not have possibly uttered that such violence was neither committed by the Nazis or militarism simply on account of the students of his own university forcefully stepping into his research room. The “lackluster” “critic” continues his research as he looks things up while joining the as-always long line of library users, spending such time as he can between the work he has to do for subsistence. Undoubtedly, the poverty of such a cultural environment and the discrimination of unjustifiable “prestige” is “violence” unique to postwar democratic society.

What an intellectual bluster that clears the breast. Here Yoshimoto does not exhibit much the empirically unproven, arbitrary attacks supported by a self-righteous paradigm that is strengthened after this period. The same Yoshimoto indicates here an almost unbelievably sharp intellectual and logical power.72

Along with Yoshimoto’s own sense of his intellectual contribution and fighting words of reason unleashed against his opponents, the physical and personal presence of the man was, in many ways, a great contrast to the domineering, whether agitational or academically aloof, style of the Left, Old and New. Haniya Yutaka recounts a particularly memorable street meeting during the anti-Ampo protest:

...judging from the height of the students’ voices mourning for the dead

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(Kanba Michiko 樺美智子)\(^{73}\) and protesting through the microphone, they seemed to be standing on top of one of the previously mentioned armored vehicles that has been moved into the darkness in front of us, and later I unexpectedly realized Yoshimoto Taka’aki standing there as well...Introduced as a poet who supports the *Bunto* ブント\(^{74}\), Yoshimoto Taka’aki’s voice that I could hear from the other side of the darkness, although speaking words of encouragement, was different from the students’ agitated tone, delivering a greeting that possessed a low tonality mixed with self-consciousness and self-restraint.\(^{75}\)

In other accounts, similar impressions are noted. An erstwhile friend from his student days records an admiring female college student’s encounter with Yoshimoto and his wife at their apartment; Hagé Keiko 禿慶子, the young woman, reminisces: “I also wanted to talk to Yoshimoto-san but, because I couldn’t find an opening, I hopelessly said ‘it’s nice weather, isn’t it’ and all Yoshimoto-san did was to agreeably respond like ‘it is, isn’t it.’ And the conversation ended there. After two hours of being there, we didn’t get to make any meaningful conversation. I thought, wow, Yoshimoto-san is very shy...”\(^{76}\) A combination of a willingness to thoroughly fight those detractors who write in the name of an institution, openly critiquing the inadequacies and shortcomings of ideologues from both the Old and New Left, on the printed page, an earnestly reserved demeanor in person that rejects any function of power, and down-to-earth plebian sensibility associated with the working-class culture of downtown Tokyo have resulted in winning passionate adherents to Yoshimoto among student radicals in the 1960s.

\(^{73}\) Kanba Michiko was a former Tokyo University student who joined the *Bunto*--one of the leading student organizations that mobilized the anti-Ampo demonstration--from the Communist Party, was one of the first major casualties of the demonstration; the riot police killed her on June 15, 1960, as demonstrators broke into the Diet (174 people arrested, over a thousand people injured).

\(^{74}\) From the German *Bund*, *Bunto* was the League of Communists, an ecumenically dissident group initially organized around ex-Communist students who were expelled from the Japanese Communist Party for refusing to allow Party-centered leadership and intervention in the student movement.

\(^{75}\) *Yoshimoto Taka’aki o ’yomu,* 58

During the 1959-60 anti-Ampo struggle organized by the New Left students, Yoshimoto made himself a promise to follow two principles in relation to them: “...what I have at least imposed on myself were two points, one to never go in front of the students to take the lead and the other to not get away, to work with them. Although I think I have followed through with these two points, I’ve also had a feeling that our thinking was different.” After the defeat of this popular movement, Yoshimoto stuck to his two points:

After the 1960 Ampo, the movement broke up into pieces and, during the beginning of so-called “season of breakdowns” several students committed suicide. Among them there were a few who wrote me letters and with whom I exchanged correspondence. When the friend of such students informed me, I would go to their funerals.

I keep myself quietly reserved, but, on such occasions, although not in outright words, their parents would tell me, “if he hasn’t read your books and instead studied well, such a thing wouldn’t have happened.” Because I’d feel strange to make excuses, I kept feeling sorry, just bowed my head, and kept listening. It made me seriously think about the responsibility or the weight of writing and how it is received. I still maintain relations with some of the students who have since become mentally abnormal...

Later, if I were asked to attend any small study group or organization by those students who still preserve the problem consciousness of those days, I’d go no matter what and share their frustrations with them. I’d go thinking how difficult it is for both myself and for them.\(^77\)

Part of this difficulty can be glimpsed in Yoshimoto’s dealing with Kishigami Daisaku, one of the students who committed suicide after the defeat of the anti-Ampo movement.

Yoshimoto and Kishigami became acquainted when Kishigami, an accomplished poet in his own right, wrote to Yoshimoto as a member of the tanka study group at Kokugakuin University, inviting him to give a lecture. Determined to accept any such invitation from students after the movement’s defeat, Yoshimoto consented. However, due to opposition from the faculty,

\(^{77}\) Waga “tenkō”, 12; 13-14.
Kishigami had to withdraw the invitation, although noting in heartfelt apology in his letters that he was going to fight this decision and, when his study group was not willing to join him, to resign from the organization. Yoshimoto told Kishigami not to worry about it because he was used to such politically motivated last-minute cancellations, that he was partly relieved because he was not well versed in public speaking, and asked the young poet to feel free to look him up whenever he had the chance.

After two or three brief, inconsequential encounters, Yoshimoto was shocked to learn the news of Kishigami’s suicide and was doubly shocked when he read Kishigami’s publicized will, *Boku no tame no nótto* 僕のためのノート (*Notes for Myself*), which contained explicit references to him:

I momentarily connected Kishigami’s suicide to my “sense” of discrepancy between him being “excessively” apologetic about the lecture cancellation and my “underestimated” thinking that was even glad for the cancellation. “Perhaps I failed to read the desperate feelings of that student poet. If thinking that this to be the whole reason [for the suicide] is arrogant, was it at least not a part of the reason? Even if I think they’re just one of the students in general, each individual may have his or her own unique feelings and situations.”

This thought was the “feeling” of a self-examining light encroaching and suddenly penetrating into the decay of “familiarity” and “gaps in events” that covered up my Ampo experience. I couldn’t help but think, “unconsciously, I’m becoming a little messed up”...

Reading “the will,” what passed through me first of all was a feeling that I could not articulate into words, that was similar to swallowing something like a kind of “lump.” The content of this “lump” can be easily analyzed. It can be summed up as: “A completely unacquainted student poet visited me two or three times regarding a lecture proposal. He was quiet, gentle, and, when questioned, always made conversation with few words concerning inconsequential topics and then went home. If this impression of mine is not mistaken, on the basis of such a personal relation, I’m being pried into far too much. Is such a thing possible?” Here, too, something is discrepant. Most likely, this experience is more or less a universal one for a “writer.” Kishigami Daisuke’s will nearly forced me to think through the meaning of this “discrepancy.” Or I can reword it as having thrust upon me the terror and weight of “writing” and told, here it is. Are “words” a “lethal weapon”? What does it mean to publicize “what is written”?

A general conclusion I have obtained was the following. As long as you publicize “what is written,” even if the reader
excessively “pries into” you, you must endure it. You must tolerate overestimation, underestimation, or emotional estimation. You must not make the slightest excuse or correct any misunderstanding. The reason is, the act of “writing,” whether it is an act purely for oneself or an act in response to someone else’s request, remains a self-sufficient act for the writer. There the world of the writer closes, for better or worse, a completed world. But publicizing “what is written” is another matter altogether and does not change the fact that it is an unwanted “exposure” for the writer. Does not this unwanted “exposure” perhaps lie at the root of what forces the reader into excessive “prying” or arbitrary estimation? If that is so, no matter what outcome falls on yourself, should you not accept it?

Kishigami Daisuke’s suicide can be said to have forced on me the first self-examination concerning a writer’s completed phase between the act of “writing” and the act of publicizing it. But, whatever my obtained conclusions were, such incidents subsequently happened a few more times. And, on every such occasion, I had to listen intently with unparalleled thoughts.78

Many students found exemplary and attractive Yoshimoto’s such intent listening, his unwavering commitment to the surviving students who had opened up the horizon of the New Left through their participation in the anti-Ampo demo. They had to endure their own “experience of defeat” over Ampo that one student activist called the “monumental zero” (sōdainaru zero 壮大なるゼロ).

Yoshimoto’s own ideas, of course, constituted the substance of the students’ attraction. As is apparent from the way in which Yoshimoto distinguishes himself from the “ideologues of the world,” one of the most distinctive aspects of Yoshimoto’s style of doing intellectual work is his persistent awareness of the necessity to root this work in the ever-changing image of the taishū. And indeed this was how he was generally read among the student radicals of the 1960s, as a lone voice attacking the elitism of vanguard intellectuals and postwar democrats while making the common sensibility of the general population that he found within himself the basis for fundamentally thinking through categories of political and social relations. And, when Yoshimoto writes that he “is more of the shapeless organizer, the shapeless

78 Tsuitō shiki 遠藤私記 (Tokyo: Chikuma-shobō, 2000), 245-249.
majority, and resolutely ‘reality’ itself,” this statement refers to none other than his lifelong, self-conscious project of thinking and theorizing in relation to the “original image of the taishū.”

Not only his *Saigo no Shinran* 最後の親鸞 (*The Last Shinran*), a major work on the thirteenth-century Buddhist monk who revolutionized Japanese Buddhism both theoretically and practically as a popular faith of the Japanese commoners, but also his trilogy of theoretical magnum opus--*Gengo ni totte bi to wa nanika* 言語にとって美とは何か (*What Is Beauty for Language*), *Shinteki genshō-ron josetsu* 心的現象論序説 (*Introduction to the Phenomenology of the Psyche*), and *Kyōdō gensō-ron*--that ostensibly deal with abstract themes of language, epistemology, and ideology are also integral parts of this theoretical project. In a crucial sense, such an intellectual endeavor may be termed “thinking from below,” with the proviso that in no way does it constitute the definitive, let alone the only possible, thinking of such nature, but it is the only one attempted at such a systematic and wide-ranging scale, at a peerless pitch of existential intensity, among his contemporaries, intellectually fueling and reflecting what was most uniquely independent about the Japanese New Left.

Yoshimoto often downplays the instrumental role his ideas had played in the making of the New Left student movement, commenting that although he was called the “No. 2 fellow intellectual traveler to the mainstream current of the *Zengakuren* 全学連 (*Comprehensive Association of All-Japan Student Self-Governing Groups*),” he could not make as significant a contribution as the social scientist Shimizu Ikutarō 清水幾太郎--the reputed No. 1 fellow intellectual traveler--did, given his relative youth and marginal status outside of the established intelligentsia.79 In spite of such self-effacement, if one surveys the

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79 *Waga “tenkō”,* 9-11.
course of the 1960s Japanese student movement in search of decisive intellectual leitmotifs and vocabularies of analysis that politically differentiated their efforts and practices from the older generation of liberal and left groupings associated with or sympathetic to the JCP, it is Yoshimoto’s ideas that stand out as some of the most original intellectual contributions, free of sectarian concerns or dogmatic Marxist theoretical constructs, that crystallized in many essential ways what was so radically new and distinct about the Japanese New Left. This is not to say that there were no other intellectuals or thinkers who left a similarly profound imprint on the movement; there were indeed many. However, it was only Yoshimoto who took such continuously unpredictable steps in the development of his ideas while remaining consistently faithful to the original conception of intellectual and critical impulses that he had nurtured long before his critical engagement with the New Left.

As of 2005, at the age of 81, Yoshimoto has remained a gadfly in the Japanese intellectual scene. Although his immediate influence on the contemporary generation of students has waned considerably since the 1960s and 70s, his stature as an original thinker and theorist of tremendous range is undisputed. Essentially, two schools of reading Yoshimoto exist today, split over the assessment of his post-1970s works: one considers the latter as a logical development of his works in the 1950s and 60s which led up to and went through the rise and fall of the New Left; the other rejects them as a confused or, at worst, reactionary devolution on the order of a political “apostasy.” However we judge Yoshimoto’s considerable output over the span of the last thirty-five years, it is indisputable that his imprint on the Japanese New Left in the 1960s was a critically indelible, decisive one.

Notwithstanding his self-deprecating commentary to the contrary, if the intellectual impact he had left on the Japanese New Left through his critique of
postwar democracy and tenacious search for an authentic, critical position of autonomy is the most immediately formidable one felt in relation to his times, his most enduring intellectual works are, undoubtedly, his literary theories and criticisms, along with his theoretical trilogy, works on Shinran, and, more recently, “African stage” of history. Ironically--or appropriately enough, given his critically open conception of “hyper-capitalism”--Yoshimoto’s fame is currently superseded by that of his daughter, Banana, who has become an internationally best-selling novelist who chronicles the postmodern sensibilities of the young women of her generation. If Yoshimoto’s ideas in the 1960s were some of the most useful ones for the intellectually independent members of the Japanese New Left of that decade, it remains to be seen whether his enduring intellectual contribution will have similar ramification for the New Left of the future.

Part of this contribution stems from the particularly emphatic connection Yoshimoto makes between the trajectory of his personal everyday life and the development of his ideas. Hence what Yoshimoto Taka’aki contributed to the making of the Japanese New Left is only explicable within the contours of his lifelong thought, germinated at the historical moment of Japanese defeat in World War II and developed critically and independently outside of both academic and traditional left circuits of intellectual discourse. It is also true that the category of the “New Left” is finally too limiting to bracket the whole of Yoshimoto’s ideas, which from the outset refused any assimilation into conventional ideological configurations and sought new departures for world philosophy:

For example, with its transparent lyricism, logical abstraction, and constructive conceptual power, Koyū-ji tono taiwa 固有時との対話 (Dialogue with Individuated Time), which is essentially his first book of poems, and Ten'i no tame no juppen 転位のための十編 (Ten Verses for Transposition), with its intellectual imaginative power through the expression of rebellious morality, are departures from our country’s contemporary poetry of sentimental lyricism that overemphasizes images. What is Beauty for Language is a departure from such
sectarian views of literature as socialist realism and absolute aestheticism as well as from linguistics that only treats language as an object but not as expression. *Communal Illusion* is a departure from Marxist theory of the superstructure and the state and *Phenomenology of the Psyche* a departure from so-called psychology and psychiatry. Or the religious theories in “*Machiu-sho shiron*” ("Hypothetical Essay on the Book of Matthews") and *The Last Shinran* are departures from the position of faith or religious apologia as well as from its opposing, ideological denial of religion. And Yoshimoto Taka’aki probably receives his greatest attacks and misunderstandings from people in these respective fields of specialization. In short, we can view what the conservative castle of specialization rejects as his heterogeneous way of thinking that departs from everything. Most likely it is on the basis of this comprehensive departure that his ideas approach the level of world philosophy.80

One of the major marks of distinction that the rich, variegated corpus of Yoshimoto’s ideas thus bears in postwar Japanese history is that they contain the power of creating a new world philosophy from below, consistently refusing to yield to either uncritical consumption of Western thought or recidivist affirmation of nativist sensibility--two pitfalls that have persistently tempted the Japanese intelligentsia since its modern capitalist state development initiated in the 1868 Meiji restoration. Such an independent intellectual standpoint drew its crucial point of departure from Yoshimoto’s own experience of the war that Japan had waged against the Allied Powers.

80 “Yoshimoto Taka’aki kenkyū an’nai” in *Kanshō Nihon gendai bungaku*, vol. 30, 496.
CHAPTER TWO
WAR, LANGUAGE AND THE PAN-ASIAN STRUGGLE

We might say “no” to all judgments
and when the night of the prison
changes into a morning of annihilation of whatever kind
we might say that we had nothing to do with it
we may say that we have not taken one cent from the rulers
and have lived eating mostly desolation and the fires of war

Yoshimoto Taka’aki, “Judgment”\textsuperscript{81}

In 1945 Yoshimoto was twenty-one years old, and, like most typical young
men of his generation, until that fateful year, he whole-heartedly believed in the
Japanese war effort as a war of liberation against Western imperialist powers.
He recollected, for example, the beginning of the war as being “liberating as if
both heaven and earth had split open suddenly,” remarking how, as an upper-
level elementary school student, he and other Japanese children perceived the
Italian invasion of Ethiopia as a war of liberation for Italian fascism and rooted for
Franco’s victory in Spain. A friend recalls Yoshimoto making an impressive pro-
war speech at the first meeting of the debating club that Yoshimoto had proposed
organizing in fifth grade:

Around the time Yoshimoto became a fifth grader, he was the
tallest in the class. His jawbone taut, the sharp glitter in his eyes glaring
at his surrounding, his appearance resembled that of a Deva King. But
his voice was never loud. Quietly, as if chewing each of his words, he
started to talk on the theme of “the position of Japan under contemporary
state of affairs.” Its content was something along the line of: “It’s
inevitable that Japan and the United States will go to war with each other.

\textsuperscript{81} Yoshimoto Taka’aki shishû, 53-4.
Moreover, the inevitability of this war is the struggle between Asian morality and Western morality. The problem is which morality will carry a more important significance for world history in the future. Fundamentally, the Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere demands a new morality, which is assembled and cultivated in Japan, and this will eventually form a new world order."

When Yoshimoto was speaking, the classroom was the model of absolute quietude. Was that quietude the expression of the extent to which each and every student was moved? I myself was an idler and usually never pricked up my ears to what the teachers said, but, with Yoshimoto, I tried not to miss not even a phrase or a word of his talk...

After Yoshimoto’s talk, after several seconds, a commotion was heard from everywhere. And that commotion turned into a violent applause. In that room Yoshimoto smiled satisfactorily. Truly, he was at the height of his triumph, and it was the birth of Yoshimoto Taka’aki, the boy founder of religion. Yoshimoto was no longer “Té-chan” but becoming an awe-inspiring person, a teacher who had exceeded the role of a classmate, an existence close to God.82

With the U.S.-led European powers expanding their respective spheres of imperialist influence in Asia and imposing oil embargo and economic sanctions on Japan’s economic resources to restrict its competing military ambition in Asia, Yoshimoto and his classmates immediately felt an oppressive climate of progressively worsening shortages and tightening of belts, which quickly broke loose into tremendous release with the onset of the Pacific War.83

Such a release, as we can see here, was also bound up with the question of morality, relationship with Western modernity and its twin expressions in the form of capitalism and imperialism, and Japanese nationalism as a subset of pan-Asian liberation: "I had believed in my own way in the slogan of the emperor-system fascism, that, if we were to lose in the war, the Asian colonies would not be liberated...Hence, in the postwar when I started to actually realize that human life was far more precious than what I had thought then [during the war] and, when the 'indiscriminate killing and drug offensive' committed by the Japanese military and wartime power were exposed at the Tokyo Trial, I was shocked to

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82 Ochiyo! saraba: Yoshimoto Taka’aki to watashi, 29-30.
find that there was not the slightest value to the morality of the war that supported almost all of my early youth."³⁸⁴ Although politically on the other side of the ideological spectrum, Yoshimoto’s concern with morality (even in a rather conventional dichotomy of Asia vs. West) as the paradigmatic rationale for the war echoes Edward Thompson’s own moral commitment to the Allied war on the European front as a popular struggle against fascism. For both Yoshimoto and Thompson this “question of morality” would have a profound significance in their subsequent confrontation with their respective political commitments.

It was in this period of war fever and continuing sense of national crisis that Yoshimoto forged the raw materials of his later intellectual developments. On the one hand were all the intimate objects, incidents, relationships, and textures of everyday life--about many of which Yoshimoto had written a number of keenly observed, penetrating autobiographical essays, often registered in his sensitively attuned, poet’s eyes--and, on the other, in fact, in many ways indivisible from these, the intellectual influences that shaped and refined his views of the world. Experience and intellect are, of course, interfused, and his family’s work as shipbuilding carpenters was one of the primordial forces in reinforcing this interfusion in Yoshimoto’s life.

Yoshimoto grew up in Shin-tsukuda-jima 新佃島 (new Tsukuda Island), a working-class settlement in a landfill made between 1888 and 1897 (later more landfill was made in the neighboring area and called Tsuki-jima 月島, the ground for housing completed in 1938), an extension of Moto 本 (original) tsukuda-jima. In 1612 the feudal overlord Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 made thirty-three fishermen from the country of Settsu 抹津 (now part of Osaka and Hyōgo Prefectures), Seisei county, villages of Tsukuda and Yamatoda migrate to Edo

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³⁸⁴ Takamura Kōtarō in Yoshimoto Taka’aki zen-chosakushū vol. 8 (Tokyo: Keisō-shobō 1973),139.
Nihon bashi 江戸日本橋. The fishermen moved to a chikujima (cultivated island) they themselves made and called it “Tsukijima” after their home village. Combined with Ishikawa-jima 石川島 that was founded in 1626, the area came to be called Moto-tsukuda-jima. The fishermen moved to a chikujima (cultivated island) they themselves made and called it “Tsukijima” after their home village. Combined with Ishikawa-jima 石川島 that was founded in 1626, the area came to be called Moto-tsukuda-jima. 

Tsukuda is an old Japanese word for the land on which the peasants work and, in the medieval period, came to refer especially to the land directly managed by shōen 庄園 (manorial) landlord, who expropriated the peasants’ entire harvest on tsukuda in exchange for loaning farming instruments and other materials of subsistence. This area of Tsukijima and Tsukudajima was considered something of a “colony” in Tokyo:

Ever since Kinoshita Mokutarô 木下奎太郎, poets and artists made this neighborhood, along with their taste for Ōkawabata 大川端 [area on the rightward shore downstream from Ōkawa Bridge over Sumida River], their subject in the colonial atmosphere in Tokyo.

Before the war, it became the object of settlement movement for the social movements. On the opposite side, there was also a banker’s villa named Nakazawa Villa. For children, the fields in the landfill and the alleyways in the city were rare playgrounds in Tokyo.

[...]

It was an artificially isolated island that required a Tsukuda boatman from chikuchi Akashi City and Aisei Bridge from Fukagawa and Ecchû-jima, and the inhabitants were well-informed about how whosoever in which house did what. Children thoroughly knew the private houses and city factories along the canal as well as all the nooks and crannies of the alleyways. It was a distinctly small world and created a distinctive atmosphere.

The neighborhood had some rough sides--if you were to gang up among children, you’d get immediate retribution--but it was also an extremely downtown-like, good place. Even adults would borrow rice from a neighboring house partitioned into three units and nonchalantly loan and borrow from each other things you used daily.

In that sense it was a good place, but there was no tradition from the Edo period. The downtown tradition barely flowed from the chikuchi Akashi City and Southeast Fukagawa and in its womb were enclosed the gathering place of petty criminals and the stubborn Edo period of the Settsu Tsukuda village’s fishermen.

It was, in short, historically relative new neighborhood bound by typical working-

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class forms of retributive rough justice and mutual aid. Befitting such an environment, Yoshimoto’s family was also migrant commoners specializing in shipbuilding, originally from the Amakusa Island in Kumamoto Prefecture, an island famous as the site of 1637-38 Shimabara Rebellion in which over twenty thousand peasants, many of them Christians, under Masuda Tokisada (commonly known as Amakusa Shirō), rose up against the ruling Bakufu government. In 1924 Yoshimoto’s father, Juntarō, closed up his small shipbuilding business in Amakusa due to post-World-War-I depression and moved to Tokyo, working as a hired carpenter in the downtown area with his father Gonji. By 1931, when Yoshimoto was entering into Tsukuda-jima Grammar School, Juntarō was able to rebuild the shipbuilding business, opening as many as four boat shops around the city.

What fascinated Yoshimoto as a child in his father’s workshop were the details of the labor-process involved in building a boat. After making a long quadrilateral tube from a wooden board, inserting in it a wooden tube from one side with the steam from a huge water-filled pot placed on firewood, and putting in it a few thin, long boards, Yoshimoto’s father and his artisan assistants would steam the wood for several hours. Then, they temporarily hit the boards into the bows, bending them together and giving them a curve, and hit them again into the stern. As they hit the boards one after the other into the middle of the keel, they finally nailed them in for good and gave them a curve. “For a child’s mind’s that was inexhaustibly interesting. There must’ve been a genealogy to such a method [of working].” Yoshimoto noticed this distinctive genealogy of the labor-process by the shape of the boats he encountered in the river; the ones made in his father’s workshop had a particular curve on both bows and sterns.

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87 Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga kataru sengo 55-nen, vol. 10, 11.
Although Yoshimoto observed that his father’s skill was not particularly good, he could tell from his own eyes that his assistants had techniques that were incomparably meticulous. These assistants were traveling artisans and many of them were originally from Amami, Kyūshū, and Okinawa:

Although my father died before I could ask him about it, there was supposed to be a genealogy of techniques among boat carpenters, and, whether they knew about it from somewhere else or whether my father called on them for help, the boat carpenters in the genealogy of my father’s home country (Amakusa Island in Kumamoto Prefecture) would come out of the blue, carrying merely a rectangular wooden box of tools, stay in the workshop for a while, and, just about the time a boat was near completion, disappear again to who knew where.

These boat carpenters were mostly from Okinawa, Amami, and Kyūshū and they established a very distinctive atmosphere in the shipbuilding area.

Before I went to grammar school, I have the memory of daily playing all day in the workshop, working something into shape while buried among the wood shavings.

Although the carpenters appeared somewhat unreliable, they possessed an incomparable kindness. And, however they wandered from place to place, after some time has passed they would come back again to make boats.88

Yoshimoto would trace the genealogy of these techniques of the labor-process, especially those of the Okinawan workers, from a different angle than that of boat-making carpentry. He would trace them to the site of the origin of Japanese commons, which he viewed Okinawa to most closely approximate. As he says in the same essay: “…I sought [in Okinawa] the appearance of old customs and language and religious rituals that went further back than those in the mainland and wanted to discover therein a real perspective that sees the historical periods of the mainland.”89 For Yoshimoto, the seed of this perspective—to view the whole of Japanese

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89 Ibid., 107.
history from the ancient roots of the commons—was quite literally sown in the traditional and customary genealogy of the labor-process that the workers in his father’s workshop had preserved.

After such an intimate schooling, so to speak, in the traditional craft of working-class labor, Yoshimoto found schooling of a different kind in a juku—a form of private tutoring school that many Japanese school children attend outside of public school—from 1934 to 1941, a period spanning his formative years of fourth grade through the end of high school; it was a free and open laboratory of learning in which his everyday sensibilities converged inseparably with intellectual as well as physical education. Unlike the latter-day juku of postwar Japan, the one Yoshimoto attended was not run institutionally, with certified tutors and standardized curriculum impersonally tailored to fit the operation of public education; instead, its tutor, Imauji Otoji, retained a loose and intimate relation with his students that was suffused with an air of unmistakable freedom: “The private school that I started going to around fifth grade was really free, and you went there whenever you wanted to go and sit in any empty seat that you liked, deciding on your own whether you were going to study math or literature or whatever and, if you got tired of studying, you could talk to the child next to you or do whatever you wanted and you wouldn’t be scolded but allowed to be free.”

The monthly tuition was entirely based on how much a particular family could afford, and Yoshimoto “didn’t say or hear and didn’t know
anything about what the other children were paying...and, of course, there wasn’t such a thing as being tutored less fastidiously because you paid a lesser monthly tuition.” It was in this same place--where commodity relations and wartime pressures were suspended--that, in the presence of female students and an atmosphere of open, intellectual stimulation, Yoshimoto also first felt the impulse and acquired the craft of writing poetry. This experience later yielded a fictionalized poetic account of Yoshimoto’s tutor and a love he felt for a particular female high school student at the juku in “Erian no shuki to shi” エリアンの手記と詩 (“The Notebook and Poems of Erian”) thus creatively emblematizing a period he felt to be his “last golden age and its culmination.”

While studying for his entrance exam for a technically oriented high school, Yoshimoto met older poets gathered at the Imauji juku--such as Tamura Ryūichi 田村隆一 and Kitamura Tarō 北村太郎, who later became active in the influential postwar group of kōchi (wasteland) poets--to have his poems looked over. These writings found their way into private publications of a student literary magazine that he and his classmates edited and printed: “...what I was writing at the time were a series of poems in the style of nursery songs, not contemporary poetry but infant poetry.” It was around this same time that he became more seriously interested in literature, and Imauji-sensei opened up his library to Yoshimoto, telling him “you can take whatever you want; return them

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90 Ibid., 82-5.
whenever you’re finished reading”—an opportunity of which Yoshimoto availed himself freely and extensively. He systematically read the Kaizō-sha-published series of *Gendai nihon bungaku zenshū* （Complete Collections of Contemporary Japanese Literature）and waded his way through Japanese translations of foreign literature, one of which—Jean Henri Fabre’s *Konchūki* 昆虫記 （*Souvenirs Entomologiques*）—left an especially lasting impact on his thinking. According to Yoshimoto, the chronology of this “golden age” of adolescent writings and readings, inspired by the “free environment [of the Imauji juku] in direct antithesis to the military education at school,” runs “from around the time of the 2.26 Incident [1936] to the immediate onset of the Pacific War.”

Of the discovery of adolescent reading, Yoshimoto writes:

Awakening to the world of reading, which, once it takes possession of you, absorbs your intellect, emotions, and senses, was similar to and simultaneous with awakening to sex and its associated world of eros. To train yourself in writing and reading the language of knowledge and technique accompanies tasteless previews and reviews as if you are rigorously placing restrictive number of bricks on top of one another.

My interest and desire for women that came at the same time as did my eye-opening experience with reading felt bottomless and I had no idea of how to deal with them and balance myself. For that reason, while displaying the face of an entrance-exam-taking student full of studious ambition toward my intimates and family members, I had embraced within myself another self that, in fact, waved its hand in front of infinity and, with folded arms, fell to brooding in the face of infinity.

If it were possible, I wanted to pass the season without anybody knowing about this. That agony was unendurable. Moreover, the war was gradually spreading and, with the plunge into the Pacific War, I thought that death would most likely rupture my life’s hopes.

Reading is similar to a pleasure that you savor alongside of pain while hiding from others. That such a manner of feeling was implanted in me was, I think, due to my environment. Additionally, I started to

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91 Ibid., 95.
92 *Haikei no kioku*, 120-1.
think that when you read books that imposed limits within themselves, you couldn’t call it reading no matter how much you read.\textsuperscript{93}

We observe in this recollection a way of reading fused autobiographically in a personal world of eros and thanatos that, in turn, informed the basis of Yoshimoto’s distinctive approach to writing. In a 1972 essay summing up his views on reading (“Nani ni mukatte yomu no ka” なにに向かって読むか [“What Do You Read Toward”]), Yoshimoto locates the motive of his youthful reading in his “excess of ideas” that convinced him that speaking was inadequate to the task of articulating what he had felt and thought within himself, that there was no one around him with whom he could truly communicate, leading him to believe that in books he found those possessing the same peculiar sensibility as he did.

After this belief made reading compulsively addictive for him, “saturating his entire self with the poison of reading,” he wondered why it was that he could find those of the “same kind” as himself in books but not among the people who surrounded him. One answer he posited was that “those human beings who became writers of books were, like myself, unable to find around them those of the same kind as themselves, agonizing over the impossibility of communicating with others through speaking.” Another answer--one that had for Yoshimoto the effect of “the scales falling off his eyes” as the reading of Marx did--was that “perhaps those around me are also agonized over the thought of not being able to communicate with others through speaking.” Although conceding that the former answer contained a grain of truth, what made the latter a revelatory experience for Yoshimoto was that he “realized for the first time during this period how I myself might have looked from outside myself.”

It is this self-relativizing perspective that gives Yoshimoto’s mature writing its distinctive quality: “If there is something a little worthwhile in me as a writer, it

\textsuperscript{93} Yoshimoto Taka’aki, \textit{Dokusho no hōhō 論書の方法} (Tokyo: Kōbun-sha, 2001), 92-93.
is only based on the fact that the people I truly fear are not other writers but those who reflect my commonness when I discovered through the latter answer the self I perceived outside of myself."\(^94\) This perspective is consistently observable to this day, as, for example, in the aftermath of September 11 and U.S. bombing of Afghanistan, Yoshimoto commented on the difference between his antiwar views and those of the mainstream progressives and Left in Japan:

> It’s the same with a progressive like Tanaka Yasuo and also with leftists like Karatani Kōjin and Asada Akira, what these people have in common is their inability to ‘self-relativize’ themselves. There is no perspective in which they think “I’m not necessarily right” and relativize themselves. It’s the same with the Communist Party.

> Of course, that happens with anybody. I’m no exception...

> But when it comes to genuinely saying something serious, I end up being conscious of self-relativization in relation to both myself and others. That’s why I say, “I’m not going to agree with any remark that fails to relativize itself.”\(^95\)

The critically defining event that made Yoshimoto start relativizing his views was no doubt the Japanese defeat in World War II.

> As soon as the Japan’s devastating defeat shattered the youthful idealism Yoshimoto shared with his friends about Japan’s objectives in the war, the totality of values he had held closely until then suddenly dissolved in a vertigo of loss:

> On the day of the defeat of the war, having been mobilized, I was at the Japan Kābaito Factory in Uozu 岩手 City in Toyama 富山 Prefecture...After listening to the emperor’s announcement at the public square in the factory, I immediately went back to the dorm dazed. When I was crying alone for some unknown reason, the old woman at the dorm asked me, “What’s the matter, did you get into a fight?” Although it was mid-noon, the old woman said “lie down and take it easy” and started to lay out the futon. I went out to the pier at the fishing port and, as if I didn’t know anything anymore, became naked as usual, jumped into the sea and started swimming to the shore. When I laid face-up on the water, it seemed strange that the sky was blue as always. And, when I sometimes came back to reality, along with soundless voices like “ah” and “uh,” I couldn’t help but feel

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 13-14.

\(^{95}\) Cho-“sensō-ron” gekan 超「戦争論」下巻 (Shibuya-ku: Asukī, 2002), 101-102.
something of a shameful embarrassment running through me.\textsuperscript{96}

Expecting the U.S. to destroy the schools and kill all the remaining youths, Yoshimoto’s initial first-hand observation of occupying American G.I.s took him by great surprise because the sight of them playing around with their rifles and dallying with women hardly fit the state propaganda conception of them as *kichiku-beiei* 鬼畜米英 (“American and English demonic beasts”), leading him to think that he “had gotten it all wrong”: “My conception was wrong,’ what was wrong was that I didn’t understand the world and didn’t even know how to understand it.” This experience of the relatively well-managed U.S. occupation and absence of Japanese resistance to it left a strong impression on Yoshimoto, making him realize that, no matter how ideologically justified the policies of the occupying force may sound--such as that of Japan in Asia, claiming anti-Western-imperialist and pan-Asian autonomy--it was completely wrong, if the rank-and-file soldiers act in a brutalizing fashion toward occupied civilians.\textsuperscript{97}

The experience of defeat unquestionably affected Yoshimoto deeply and irrevocably, forcing him to rethink everything from the ground up. “In short, although from the age of about sixteen to twenty I might have been just an embryo of an ordinary person who wasn’t anything at all, this existence that wasn’t anything had no other way of loosening and liberating his living death, except by digging into, expanding, reforming, and overcoming the revelations he had received from clashing with the defeat of the war.”\textsuperscript{98} It took a while for Yoshimoto to recover from the shock of this “living death” and the accompanying demolition of his heartfelt values that Japan’s defeat in the war signified.

His two earliest postwar texts on Miyazawa and Takamura indicate the struggle he was starting to wage and the direction it was taking. In the same

\textsuperscript{96} Haikei no kioku, 156.
\textsuperscript{97} Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga kataru sengo 55-nen, vol. 5, 56-60.
\textsuperscript{98} Haikei no kioku, 157.
period he was writing “Notes on Takamura Kōtarō 高村光太郎,” Yoshimoto presages the themes of experience, intellectuals/taishū, and communal illusion with which he would be struggling in the following decades:

When can we stop being the people and become free? According to our thinking, it is through the process that experiences the world within ourselves striking against reality and that makes logical sense out of this. This process, at first glance, is a process of separating and isolating from the popular consciousness of life. However, in this process, there is a process of inversion. When, inversely, one appears into the external world from the world that has not been made logical, a desire to make logic out of the external world must come into being. To put it another way, this is the process of inversely throwing back against the social order the sense of removal from one’s own popular consciousness of life as a desire to revolutionize social reality. The theme of radical transformation and revolution in the essential sense is not born from this side of such a process.99

Again, experience and its relationship to popular consciousness figure here as leitmotifs. It was quite appropriate that Yoshimoto started his own postwar reconstruction of ideas through Takamura and Miyazawa, for these were two writers who also sought to articulate the experience of popular consciousness in their works against the backdrop of Japanese modernism had the greatest influence on Yoshimoto as he came of age during the war.

Yoshimoto summarizes the most influential readings he had done, after quitting the juku and moving to the Yonezawa Technical High School as follows: “attitudes towards emotions and life from Miyazawa Kenji, Takamura Kōtarō, and the Shiki-ha 四季派 [Four Seasons School] poets; intellectual attitudes from Kobayashi Hideo and Yasuda Yojūrō 保田与重郎; and the world of fiction from Yokomitsu Ri’ichi 横光利一 and Dazai Osamu 大宰治.”100 What all of these major writers had in common, across the diverse spectrum of ideological commitments,

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99 Cited in Washida, op. cit., 63.
100 Haikei no kioku, 121; characteristically, Yoshimoto adds: “Even citing all of these [influences], they didn’t come close to what I obtained from the labor entailed during war mobilization, friendships and conflicts of dorm life, and the sense of survival cornered and carved by the fate of the war.”
was their central role in developing uniquely Japanese forms of literary and cultural modernism, and, although it would not become clear until after the end of the war, Yoshimoto’s rite of intellectual passage through them would serve him in good standing when he came to do battle with some of the most representative exponents of “modernism,” whether in literature or politics. What was the precise nature of this rite of passage through modernism of prewar Japan?

Yoshimoto’s earliest writings after the war were, as mentioned, on the two aforementioned poets, Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933) and Takamura Kōtarō (1883-1956). Miyazawa, a vegetarian poet and writer of children’s stories, combined the cosmological images and ideas of his Kegon Buddhist faith with the scientific principles he had learned as an agriculturist and applied as a tiller of the land seeking to revivify the Japanese peasant village. A widely read popular poet of the commoners, Miyazawa’s status in Japanese literature is not dissimilar to that of William Morris, whom, in fact, exerted an important influence on Miyazawa. Yoshimoto’s wartime interest in Miyazawa’s writings revolved around less on the latter’s literary accomplishments than on pragmatic ones related to the revival of the commons: “That man was doing agricultural chemistry and so I had a sense of intimacy as a person doing something related to chemistry and included in this was the thought that I could do something along the line of an agrarian movement like he was doing.” Science and the commons were coeval in both Miyazwa and Yoshimoto’s thought.

Miyazawa intensely sought to distinguish his agrarian activism from, on the one hand, those of Uchihara 内原 Training Camp or the Manchurian Pioneering Group and other imperialist agrarian movements within Japanese colonies that practiced collective agricultural cultivation; and, on the other hand, from those of Aikyō-juku 愛郷塾 (Private School of Loving One’s Hometown) and similar domestic agrarian experiments that aimed to train pro-agrarian youths by
operating a private school and agriculture “in which activism and ideology converged.” Purging the ideological dimension of such endeavors, Miyazawa rethought agriculture as simultaneously materialist and aesthetic practice, making not so much agriculture per se but the practical, everyday concerns of the peasants, i.e. the means of cultivating their land easier, the core of his cosmology, considering “the so-called utopian aesthetic socialists such as Ruskin and William Morris as the strongest influence” in his thoughts on agriculture and its associated labor process. In Yoshimoto’s mind, then, Miyazawa’s originality lay in his conception of “farming” and “cultivation” as an aesthetic act, a signal example of species-being in action, which expanded the notion of agriculture as a form of liberation through the integration with the rhythm of the universe—or, in Miyazawa’s keyword, “galaxies”—and defining this rhythm of cultivation in the specific, masterful way a peasant plants or uses the hoe as musicians and dancers perform in relation to the rhythm of music and dance.\textsuperscript{101}

The dual aspects of Miyazawa’s thought here—defining the agrarian labor process as an aesthetic sphere of autonomous creation and his pragmatic efforts of adapting modern agricultural science to enhance this process from the perspective of those who participate in this creation—constitute a kind of indigenous modernism, but it is modernism that is turned on its traditional head: the aesthetic autonomy from politics and ideology being defended is not that of individualized creators of music, fine art, and literature but that of peasants and farmers, the working class of the soil; the use of scientific methods and principles is not geared for either capitalist expropriation of land, industrial transformation of agriculture, or urbanization from above but for preserving and expanding the creative process of cultivating the land under the farmers and peasants’ direct

\textsuperscript{101} Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga kataru senso 55-nen, vol. 5, 30-31.
control. And it was precisely this kind of modernism from below, a commonist modernism--albeit now shifting from the popular cultivation of the land to the popular consciousness of the war--that attracted Yoshimoto to the poetry of Takamura Kōtarō.

Takamura, a sculptor and poet who studied in the United States and France (where he met and learned from Auguste Rodin), went through roughly three phases in his poetic career until the end of the war. The first, in the mode of aestheticist modernism was followed by a humanist one, yielding his masterpiece collection Dōtei 道程 (Passage) that showed, at the cellular level of language and sensibility, an indigenously Japanese digestion of influences from Romain Rolland and other European modern humanist writers. It was in this second phase that Takamura did his most original work (including a collection of lyrical love poems dedicated to his mentally disturbed wife, Chieko-shō 智恵子抄, which Yoshimoto copied word for word in his notebook). Dōtei was the first poetry collection Yoshimoto had bought, and, as he says, “those poems shaved away what was necessarily literary, possessing an extraordinary power of shaping words befitting a sculptor, a simplicity that cleanly sliced off any atmosphere of sentiment, and a plasticity of cognition and ethics”; “although I liked the title poem ‘Dōtei’ so much that I memorized it, doing this was little different from love of recitation, and it was more in the sense of carving, with words, into the ethics of life.”

During the Pacific War, Takamura moved into his third phase, writing documentary poems about the war. According to Washida Koyata, with the increasing crisis of energy shortage and food scarcity in Japan imposed through European imperialist encirclement, this transition on Takamura’s part can be

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102 Dokusho no hōhō, 27.
summarized as an actively chosen response to the movement of popular consciousness toward “the position that, in order to attain one’s daily bread, profession, and work, in short, in order to fulfill the needs of one’s life, expanding markets and securing natural resources under the guise of continental penetration were needed, inevitable, and presupposed; in short, the road toward Nazism (National Socialism), a view that based self-interest on national interest and held that pure egoism is only possible by being absorbed into imperialist nationalism.”

This was, in other words, an attempt on the part of a culturally modernist ego of an aesthete and a humanist on the periphery of capitalist development in the Pacific to transcend its isolation and come to terms with its plebeian origins by identifying with the popular consciousness absorbed within imperialist nationalism.

Reading the poems in the third phase, Yoshimoto considered “about half of them as ‘being consciously written’ but, in the latter half, his real intent, what he was concealing wasn’t clear.” This disjunction—which, especially in comparison to the more hackneyed, brazenly pro-war poems of virtually all of Takamura’s contemporaries—for Yoshimoto raised questions as to why and how there were irreducible elements which appeared in wartime Japanese poetry that were not fully modernized and opened up an entryway to probe into the very nature of Japanese modernity in relation to the West:

Takamura Kōtarō was writing consciously, but there were those who didn’t write consciously but who really wrote war poems. I think you can say that was the case with almost all Japanese poets. Even if it’s a war poem, if it’s good, that’s all right, but mostly were poems superficially praising or singing lyrics to war, and many of them were seriously written poems toeing the party line. Comparing them to Takamura Kōtarō, there were elements that made me think “this is a huge problem”.

Almost everybody, almost all wrote poems superficially praising the war, and we have to think about that. And, essentially,

103 Washida, op. cit., 71.
isn’t that attributable to Japan imitating the West and being unable to achieve the same kind of modernization? Studying Takamura Kōtarō’s poem and rereading the war poems of all the poets during the war, that’s what I started to think. I couldn’t help but think that this symbolized the way in which Japanese modernity ran aground. It’s not that one person ran aground and the other person didn’t, everybody ran aground. There is not even one exception. This was not just a problem of poetry but I thought the whole problem of Japanese modernity not really going as well as the West coming out.  

And this “problem of Japanese modernity” in relation to Takamura took on particular significance for Yoshimoto immediately after the war because the disjuncture between what was consciously written and what was concealed in Takamura’s war poems not only distinguished him from his contemporary poets but resulted from his genuine aspiration to “descend” from the intellectual’s position to that of popular consciousness. Yoshimoto equated the postwar critics' failure in critically abstracting Takamura’s power of reflecting popular consciousness in his war poems and their simple-minded, unilateral condemnation of these poems as “pro-war” propaganda, alongside of his contemporaries’, to an intellectual and political defeat that did not face up to the full implications of the failure of Japanese modernity and its defeat in the war. Yoshimoto would make this critical interrogation of “failure” and “defeat” his first postwar project.

Both Kobayashi Hideo (1902-1983) and Yasuda Yojūrō (1910-1981) represented a theoretical and methodological standard against which Yoshimoto pursued these initial intellectual projects after the war; they were, in their different ways, high theorists of modernism par excellence. Having started his career translating and analyzing Rimbaud and Baudelaire, Kobayashi was a leading critic whose erudition, impact, and felicity of style cast a long shadow over the whole of twentieth-century Japanese literary and cultural criticism. Heavily

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104 Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga kataru sengo 55-nen, vol. 6, 24-5.
influenced by German Romanticism, Yasuda was also a major critic but, due to his traditionalism, critical attitude toward modernity, and pan-Asian views, was purged by the U.S. Occupation from his civil servant position, expelled from the literary establishment, and branded as a right-wing “war supporter.” For Yoshimoto and his generation, the importance of both of these figures derives, in part, from the way they stylistically and analytically digested and summed up modernism in their writings, made modernism thoroughly congruent with native Japanese sensibility.

As the war intensified, both turned to classicism: Kobayashi reflected on the thirteenth-century shogun and poet Minamoto no Sanetomo 源実朝 and a twelfth-century Buddhist monk-poet Saigyō 西行 in “Mujō to iu koto” 無常といふ事 (“On Impermanence”) and Yasuda on the mythical and classical literary treatment of the Japanese bridge in Nihon no hashi 日本の橋 (The Japanese Bridge). But, even in these texts, as Yoshimoto says, “we distinctly smelled a kind of modernism” that opposed the pragmatic and functional conception of art in the CP-dominated movement of proletarian literature. Like Kant in The Critique of Pure Judgment—an inaugural text on modern European aesthetics—the late Yasuda “moved more and more systematically to the position in which the more useless it [literature] was, the better it was.” And it was from this “anti-functionality” that Yoshimoto drew the baseline from which he later engages in polemics with the CP-affiliated critics and, combined with Marx’s labor theory of value and the French mathematician Andre Weil’s ideas, undergirds his conception of literature as an “art of language” in his theoretical work.

Kobayashi submitted his essay “Samazama naru ishō” 様々なる意匠 (“Multiple Designs”) in 1929 to a criticism essay contest to the magazine Kaizō 改造, placing second to Miyamoto Kenji’s 宮本顕治 “Haiboku no bungaku”
敗北の文学 ("Literature of Defeat"). Miyamoto, later imprisoned for his underground Communist activism to become the General Secretary of the Party in the 1950s, was by no means the ablest theorist of proletarian literature movement that had become prevalent in the late 1920s and early 1930s, along with a number of study and research groups--usually under the heading of "social science"--which actively incorporated Marxist analysis and vocabulary into their writings. It was an intellectual battlefield that Yoshimoto and others within the postwar left would revisit in the context of controversies over the relationship between politics and literature, apostasy and war responsibility, but, as if to presage the old struggles fought under new costume, Kobayashi had already indicated in his essay the contradictions of creating literature under the dictum of particular political or aesthetic programs.

Surveying the whole range of literary currents influential in the period, from art-for-art's sake, realism, symbolism to the Shin-kankaku-ha 新感覚派 (New Sensibility School) and popular literature, but especially targeting the Marxist literary movement, Kobayashi categorically viewed all of them as "designs" from the perspective of criticism as self-consciousness:

There was a time when the harmful effects of subjective criticism or impressionistic criticism were variously debated. But, in the end, they did nothing more than wander around the periphery of a singular law of common ethics or rules of etiquette that said "don't argue about others on the basis of likes or dislikes." Or perhaps what was attacked was neither subjective criticism nor impressionistic criticism. Perhaps it was "criticism that was not yet criticism." How can a person distinguish between what is criticism and what is self-consciousness? That the object of criticism is at once oneself and is the other is not two things but one. Is not criticism finally to speak doubtfully about one's own dreams?\(^{105}\)

Hence to impose an aesthetic and political standard against which to conduct criticism was tantamount to abnegate the critical exploration of one's self-

consciousness, failing to unveil the character of art, which "is not to show us a
country of beauty, the true world, far from this life" but "human passions always
existing in the clearest signs." What Marxist proletarian literature did was to
mistake historical consciousness as existing apart from this self-consciousness:

A powerful ideology is an event, a powerful art is also an event. On
such an occasion, to try to take advantage of an art as an event by
saying "do art for the sake of the proletarian movement" is clever. They
order artists to "possess a purposeful consciousness to make a
proletarian society into reality." But, even as one advances toward a
purpose, because purpose means to make a living, purpose returns to
making a living. For the artist, there is no purposeful consciousness
outside of his theory of creation. The theory of creation is nothing other
than his theory of fate. And it is of the utmost difficulty for the artists to
be loyal to their own theory of fate…

Although Marxist literature says, "take hold of the consciousness
of the times," it is clear that the consciousness of the times has the
same structure as that of self-consciousness. Every age has its
distinctive color and tone. But that is always just color and tone and it is
not a scene we can clearly observe. What is clear before our eyes is
only the architecture of multiple representations that that period's color
and tone have given birth to… It is clear that consciousness of the times
is neither larger nor smaller than self-consciousness.\(^{106}\)

In many ways, this simple insight of Kobayashi's--developed persistently like a
recurring musical leitmotif throughout his life in many contrapuntal variations--
was able to single-handedly defeat the entire weight of Marxist literary criticism of
his day because it took literature and art on their own terms, something that
Engels, too, conceded was necessary in his famous 1890 letter to Joseph Bloch,
noting that there were “interactions” of “various elements of the superstructure”
that had the effect of determining particularly the form of historical struggles, with
economic relations as the determinant in the last instant, without, however,
explicitly clarifying what he meant. Kobayashi, as Yoshimoto later did more
rigorously beyond the purview of a sole focus on the critic’s self-consciousness,
went a step further than Engels in doing away with the base-superstructure

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 142-143.
model altogether and starting from language, the most fundamental means of production for the writer, as his point of departure.

The orthodox Marxist literary theorists evaluated literary language on the merits of its political expression and functionality for raising revolutionary class consciousness, and Kobayashi viewed them wanting in their incapacity to do for language—specifically, literary language or aesthetics—what Marx did for value. He argued that the sterility and impossibility of Marxist literature stem from Marx “expelling the poet from his Capital”: “In order to capture this world’s economic structure with vivid eyes, he directly threw away the vividness of literature. For him the letters were sufficient as a clean semiotic of logic” but “words, at the same time as they follow a rational theory, only exist in being pregnant with infinitely irrational shadings.” In order to create genuine literature, Kobayashi suggested that the reverse course ought to be taken, namely to discard “letters” or language as “semiotics of logic,” hypothesizing: “If Marx had written Aesthetics instead of Capital, he would not have started with the analysis of Tolstoy’s ‘What is Art’ like Plekhanov did. He would have started directly with the analysis of Anna Karenina, or, rather, language itself.” As Capital begins with the analysis of the category of the commodity, Yoshimoto’s later theoretical ruminations on language attempted to do the same for the category of literary language, directly taking up the challenge Kobayashi threw in the face of Marxist literary theorists and practitioners of his day.\(^\text{107}\)

Kobayashi was Yoshimoto’s predecessor in a more conventional sense as well, as were all critics who came after him. Although Kobayashi desisted from fashioning a theory of literary language of his own—he was at his most ease in

\(^{107}\) Kobayashi Hideo zensakuhin 3 (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 2002), 20. It is worth mentioning that some of the Japanese New Left read Yoshimoto’s particular work in question—What is Beauty for Language—as the Capital for their own times.
the essay, a literary form that most readily accommodated his boundlessly insatiable knowledge and creatively digressive discursions of thought--by making the critic’s self-consciousness, the doubtful speaking of one’s dreams, so central to the task of criticism, he brought, in Yoshimoto’s words “the melancholy and indolence of working into the artisan’s handicraft world,” a feat that was as exemplary as it was agonizing to follow because nobody could do it as thoroughly and flexibly as Kobayashi did. The secret of Kobayashi’s craft derived from not making literary analysis into a reproducible technique, a model, a commodity:

What dominates the contemporary period is not “matter” according to Marx’s historical materialism, it is what he clearly indicated as commodity. When Balzac views the world as is, the “as is” for him a basic form of understanding human existence... If we advance another step forward, when Balzac is writing *la comédie humaine*, if he were to view it from his own epistemology, the fact of his writing *la comédie humaine* is merely a form of the world as is. But, if he were to view it from the perspective of writing *la comédie humaine*, one’s fundamental definition of understanding human beings is then nothing more than a concept that has discolored and lost its luminosity. The logical relationship of theory and practice for Balzac the individual must be the same for Marx the individual. If were to advance yet another step, both Balzac and Marx are no different from each other in having sought nothing but the vibrant reality before their eyes by making as the premise of their work the attempt to reflect the fundamental character of the times in which each of them lived. They merely possessed a fate distinctively their own.

The Marxist literary critics of the world may laugh at such fact, such logic as all too simple. But, among your brains, Marxist ideology has not become practice driven through theory or theory driven through practice. It has come to activate the magic of the commodity by becoming itself a commodity form. Marx says that the commodity dominates the world. But, when Marxism crosses the human brain as a single design, it is a splendid commodity. And this transformation makes one forget the commonplace fact that the commodity dominates the world.108

Compare this to what Yoshimoto wrote in his early essay on Rimbaud and Marx:

“From the agony of his consciousness, Marx elaborated the practical principle of

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108 *Kobayashi Hideo zensakuhin* 1, 152-153.
social transformation as an intellectual thought... It is fortunate, if within your brains, Marx’s method and practical thought do not exist as ideas that Marx despised the most.” We can see how much he owed his approach--to the point of almost rephrasing word for word his reclamations--to Kobayashi’s rhetorical flourish against contemporary Marxists and appeal to the humans passions that had made Marx’s thought, as opposed to the dogmatic wrangling over the commodity or the dead forms of Marx’s intellectual labor which Marxism had become.

This emphasis on the centrality of language as a material process was hardly alien to Marx. As early as 1845, he too saw language as the most readily accessible inlet for grasping human consciousness:

The "mind" is from the outset afflicted with the curse of being "burdened" with matter, which here makes it appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the needs, the necessity of intercourse with other men.¹⁰⁹

To say that language "is as old as consciousness" and that it "arises from the needs, the necessity of intercourse with other men" was at once to realize that, by studying language closely, one may glimpse the outline of ancient history that is inscribed in it, particularly the communal relations ("intercourse") at the core of that history. However, in diametric opposition, the orthodox Marxist treatment of language approached language as a universal "instrument" of communication. Stalin summarized this approach as one that viewed language as an instrument:

Language is a medium, an instrument with the help of which people communicate with one another, exchange thoughts, and seek mutual understanding. Being directly connected with thought, language registers and records in words and in words combined into sentences the results of thought and man’s successes in his quest for knowledge, and thus makes

Language, therefore, was an instrumentalist mechanism that “directly” mirrored human consciousness and was as essential as machinery in bringing about the progressive development of both capitalism and socialism: “...while it differs in principle from the superstructure, language does not differ from the implements of production, from machines, let us say, which may equally serve a capitalist system and a socialist system.”

The Stalinist *reductio ad absurdum* here was at least twofold. First, in metaphorically reducing human language to a machine, he enclosed it from the realm of historical imagination rooted in communal relations that are "as old as consciousness." Second, Stalin's conception of the machine is indistinguishable from the technological determinist fetishism of the machine in modernist or bourgeois ideology. When Marx wrote in the *Manifesto* that “steam and machinery revolutionized industrial production,” he was, after all, merely making a shorthand intended for illustrative purpose, certainly not a formula for analysis or economic application, as Lenin, for example, interpreted in his slogan of Russian Communism as "Soviet power plus electrification." Indeed Marx explicitly noted that "(t)he field of application of machinery would...be entirely different in a communist society from what is in bourgeois society"--although he did not elaborate what precisely constituted this difference between the bourgeois and communist applications of machinery. Be that as it may, for Marx machine was not simply any tool that human beings had appropriated and used for millennia. He was critical of the English economists, as well as mathematicians and machine experts, for accepting such a simplistic definition,

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111 Ibid., 410.
112 *Capital*, Volume One, 515.
judging their explanation as "worth nothing, because the historical element is missing from it." He also considered it inadequate to distinguish tool and machine on the basis of the presence of human motive power for the former and its absence in the latter:

The machine, therefore, is a mechanism that, after being set in motion, performs with its tools the same operations as the worker formerly did with similar tools. Whether the motive power is derived from man, or in turn from a machine, makes no difference here. From the moment that the tool proper is taken from man and fitted into a mechanism, a machine takes the place of a mere instrument.\textsuperscript{113}

Hence, from tool to machine, there is a qualitative leap, a dynamism that radically modifies human relationships within production, which is only explicable with the historical element of class antagonism intact.

However, to treat machine or language as functionally identical throughout history as a tool for production or communication is itself a historically novel phenomenon, for production and communication in the abstract presupposes an abstract, historically transcendent individuality. It is, in short, equivalent to ideologically conceiving communication or production as an individual activity unconnected to society, precisely what Marx critiqued as “the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades”: “Production by an isolated individual outside society--a rare exception which may well occur when a civilized person in which the social forces are already dynamically present is cast by accident into the wilderness--is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other.”\textsuperscript{114} And this was what Stalinism assumed in its economic policies and linguistic theory under the cloak of Marxist rhetoric.

Stalin’s instrumentalist and reflectionist conception of language had

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 495.
\textsuperscript{114} Grundrisse, p. 84.
considerable cachet among Japanese Marxists as well as college students in the 1950s because his work was frequently cited in debates and read as a part of study groups, as the novelist Itsuki Hiroyuki 五木寛之 attests: “Our student days were the first half of the 1950s, a time when even in the literary world books were coming out labeled as winners of the Stalin Prize, and we whole-heartedly read together in study groups books concerning everything from Stalinist linguistics to architecture.”

This was time when the Japanese Communist Party was still able to preserve a modicum of its revolutionary aura as the vanguard party of the proletariat and proffer the mastery of Stalinism as a necessary part of students and workers’ education, even though its policies were showing great inconsistency and ideological dogmatism in the face of new forms of struggles among students, coalminers, and factory workers.

Miura Tsutomu (1911-1989), autodidactic grammarian and acute dialectician, whose influence on Yoshimoto, as noted, was considerable, was one of the most original and vocal figures of independent Marxism who strongly dissented from this Stalinist orthodoxy in the sphere of language and politics. He laid out his objections and an alternative theory of language from the perspective of the speaker and writer’s consciousness in *Nihongo wa dō iu gengo ka* 日本語はどういう言語か (*What Kind of Language is Japanese*). Developing his ideas from linguist Tokieda Motoki’s 時枝誠記 “process theory of language,” Miura traced the fault of Stalinist linguistics to the Soviet film theory of montage, which conceived cinema as analogous to language in that both were structured from frames and words which contained no significance by and of themselves but, when combined consciously, acquired artistic life and reality. One glaring problem in this outlook was the confusion derived from flattening and conflating

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epistemological categories that were qualitatively different from each other in historical reality, which, in turn, stemmed from eliding the fact that even a single word is already imprinted by the speaker’s consciousness:

Whether in painting, photography, or cinematic fragment, there is always an author. The sketch that A had drawn, Picasso’s wall painting, the newspaper cameraman Mr. K’s snapshot, the cameraman Mr. S’s news movie, and such cannot exist as expression without an author. Same thing about language can be said. Even if A writes “I” and B writes “I”, those are distinctive languages that the different writers created with their respective pen in hand and the person captured by the writer is also different. These two should be treated as different languages. In spite of this, there are not a few who claim that “the two are using the same language.” And, going further, they make such an assertion as the following:

Language exists, and it has been created precisely in order to serve society as a whole, as a means of intercourse between people, in order to be common to the members of society and single language of society, serving members of society equally, irrespective of their class status. (Stalin, “Marxism and Linguistics”)

That A’s “I” and B’s “I” possess a common aspect is certain. Whoever is looking at it, the shape of the letters appears the same. But what appears the same and the commonalities found therein are different from them being the same or having commonalities as language. To put it precisely, what is the same here is the type of vocal sounds or type of letters and not language itself. Belonging to the same vocabulary is different from being the same language. This is the same, for example, as the fact that belonging to the same movement, such as surrealism, is different from being a painting. This is the same as saying that, even though the Liberal Democratic Party President Miki [Takeo, who became the seventh president of the Liberal Democratic Party in 1974 and undertook anti-inflationary policy before his resignation in 1976] and Sōka-gakkai [a reactionary Buddhist political organization based on the teachings of thirteenth-century priest Nichiren] chairperson Ikeda are, as the type of human beings and as males, are the same or share commonalities, we cannot say that they are the same human being. Stalin’s linguistics has been correctly criticized from such a perspective:

When he says that language is "single", he largely makes as his foundation the fact that a language’s basic vocabulary and grammatical structure are the same. If this logic is permitted, all Japanese paintings can be considered the same because they use lines and colors similarly. Can we be content in thinking this way, that only a single language exists for a people? That is tantamount to thinking that all dogs are equally dogs and no distinction can exist among them. But from another perspective, it must be permitted to say that all dogs can be seen as
distinctive from each other. (Tokieda Motoki, “On Stalin’s ‘Marxism and Linguistics’)

Anyone can freely choose and freely use a type of vocal sounds and a type of letters on the basis of social agreement. But this is different from anybody being able to use language without obstacle. No one can deny that there are those who want to speak or write but do not have the freedom to speak or write, those who have to use the “language of slaves” because they are unable to express what they think as is, those who have to use a pseudonym even as they have their own name as a vocabulary because they are unable to make linguistic expression on its basis. No one can deny that one’s class status as members of society puts such constraints upon language. That vocabulary is inherited and freely chosen beyond a social system and beyond class does not mean that language is freely expressed beyond a social system and beyond class. Even as vocabulary is created and used by the entire society, by all classes of society, through the efforts of many hundreds of generations, language only exists as each and every individual’s spoken and written expression and only possesses the lifespan of the moment in which vocal sounds exist and of the period in which written letters are preserved.\footnote{Nihongo wa dō iu gengo ka (Tokyo: Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko, 2002), 36-38.}

To pursue the study of language as the study of individual expression was one of the two primary lessons Yoshimoto extracted from reading What Kind of Language Is Japanese. Another lesson concerned Japanese prepositional particles, specifically the problem of how to understand te-ni-o-ha in language; Miura called such words “subjective expression” and defined them as “words that directly express the speaker’s subjective emotions and intentions without treating them as an object.” Years later Yoshimoto still recalled “clearly how this type of definition was startlingly enlightening” because, on one hand, “the works of linguists, while arbitrarily indulging in nonsense about the metaphysics of language, generally do not speak about the conditions of concrete language (national language)” while, on the other hand, “Japanese philologists, though speaking intricately about the usage and character of language, lacked in their studies a general epistemology of language.”\footnote{Ibid., 274.} Yoshimoto’s What Is Beauty for Language sought to repair this insufficiency of
linguists and philologists by presenting a concretely detailed, full-fledged theory of literary expression.

Upon perusing the two volumes of *What Is Beauty for Language* (1965), the reader might initially wonder what the source of Yoshimoto’s inexhaustible interest in language is. This was not an atypical response on the part of the students who picked up the book around the time of its publication:

> When this *What Is Beauty for Language* first came out, I think many readers had the impression of it as being unexpected. Yoshimoto Taka’aki, who up until then had been criticizing the old progressive intellectuals, suddenly started speaking about "language." What was this? I had read a few of Miura Tsutomu’s books earlier so I understood that Yoshimoto was starting to talk about the problem of language with Miura as a stepping stone…But I couldn’t understand the necessity of Mr. Yoshimoto doing language. Why did Yoshimoto Taka’aki, who was within the discursive space of the Left--and this includes Miura Tsutomu--had to show interest in language? What is the relationship between the problem of *taishū*, the problem of politics, and language? I couldn’t understand that.118

Apart from the necessity of struggling against Stalinist and orthodox Marxist hegemony of the Old Left, there was the necessity of bringing this struggle into one’s workplace, to fundamentally reassess the means of production immediately at hand to the point of fully understanding its operations in its precise details and thereby find ways of seizing hold of it more effectively. For Yoshimoto, poet and critic, this meant a theoretically rigorous as well as practical investigation of literary language from the writer’s perspective.

One can measure the intensity of Yoshimoto’s concentration and intentions when he described, in the afterword of the one-volume edition of *What Is Beauty for Language*, his state of mind as he was serializing it on the pages of *Shikō* from its first through the fourteenth issue:

> Because this journal bases itself on a direct subscription system that makes it a semi-non-purchasable commodity, only a small number of

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118 *Kawade yume mook bungei bessatsu Yoshimoto Taka’aki*, 197.
people read it during its serialization. I continued to write this manuscript with the small readers in mind. During that time, I think my mind kept whispering in silent words, "It's a victory, it's a victory."

I cannot say in clear words what was the "victory" and against what and why was it a "victory." Those may have been words against myself or may have been words against all the conditions under which the manuscript was written. It was just that I could not cover up the impression that I had been overcoming someone.119

After the defeat of the anti-Ampo movement, in which Yoshimoto first came to prominence among the student radicals, the publication of Shikō 試行, with Tanigawa Gan and Murakami Ichirō 村上一郎, and the writing of What Is Beauty for Language constituted a way to overcome that defeat. In Yoshimoto’s own chronology of major defeats in his life, we have already seen that the first was the Japanese defeat in World War II, second was the defeat of his union-organizing efforts in the factory in the 1950s, and the third was the defeat of the Ampo struggle in 1960. Each of these prompted him to struggle with himself in a new way. The first forced Yoshimoto to wrestle with the contradictions of the wartime military state and emperor system, or the structure of society and politics; second forced him to search for ways to activate the image of the taishū or proletariat within himself in relation to practical day-to-day struggles, or the relationship of intellectuals to the class struggle; and the third forced him to refine the grounds of his work in the context of existing popular movements, or language as literary expression.

It is true that What Is Beauty for Language is no more a document of revolutionary incitement than Marx’s Capital is, for each of them furnishes, no more and no less, a structural analysis of literary language and capitalism, respectively. And, just as it is possible to situate Capital as a crowning achievement rivaling the finest works of nineteenth-century English political economy, it is possible to do the same for What Is Beauty for Language in

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comparison to French literary criticism and theory of the same period, as the sociologist Hashizume Daisaburō 橋爪大三郎 does:

As Mr. Yoshimoto is an honest person, he does not display his eccentricity and does not fire in rapid succession strange terminologies. There are a number of Yoshimoto terminologies but I think they are used minimally and he tries as much as possible to develop his views in relation to concepts many readers are familiar with, such as Marxism. But, viewing it from where it needs to be viewed, I think his intellectual accomplishments can be estimated highly as paralleling contemporary French philosophy and at the same time remaining independent from it and in some ways going beyond it.\textsuperscript{120}

However justifiable as such interpretations are, they tend to overlook the political ramifications of Yoshimoto’s work. As indicated in the introduction, to read Yoshimoto politically means to take apart the theoretical categories he uses and reconstructs them as a method of reading class struggle from below or the vantage point of the \textit{taishū}. Needless to say, such a reading is a world apart from what Yoshimoto himself was combating in his book, namely the orthodox Marxist ideology of making literature or theory subservient to politics. Just as actually existing class struggles are far more than--at times outright opposing--their organizational structures and the ideological pronouncements made in their name, linguistic expressions cannot be accurately understood within the confines of specific political or aesthetic programs and a political reading asserts the \textit{jiritsu-sei} 自立性 (autonomy) of linguistic expression as it basis.

At the heart of \textit{What Is Beauty for Language} lie two sets of categories Yoshimoto fashioned for analyzing literary expression. One is the distinction between what Yoshimoto calls \textit{jiko-hyōshutsu} 自己表出 (self-expression) and \textit{shiji-hyōshutsu} 指示表出 (indicative expression): \textit{jiko-hyōshutsu} refers to language that is articulated for oneself without the purpose of communicating with others, such as groans of "ah!" and "fuck!" that are uttered in a reflexive

\textsuperscript{120} Hashizume Daisaburō, \textit{Eien no Yoshimoto Taka’aki} 永遠の吉本隆明 (Tokyo: Yōsensha, 2003), 78.
throes of pain, and shiji-hyōshutsu to language that indicate or point to something, such as the remark “how beautiful it is!” when one views a particular scenery. Another is a set of categories intended to determine the value of literary expression: inritsu 韻律 (rhythm), sentaku 選択 (choice), tenkan 転換 (transposition), and yu 喻 (comparison). Inritsu refers to the meter or rhythm, sentaku to the way in which a scene is chosen, tenkan to changes in the object of expression and time, and yu to comparisons we find in metaphors and similes. How these four basic elements are skillfully combined, Yoshimoto argued, determines the merits of a particular work. To illustrate his point, Yoshimoto cites a tanka—a poem composed on the basis of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, which are equivalent to letters in Japanese—by Ōtsuka Kinnozuke 大塚金之助 (1892-1977), mathematician and waka poet:

国境はれしカール・マルクスは妻におくれて死ににげる
かな [Kokkyō owareshi Karl Marx wa tsuma ni okurete
shini-nikerukana: “Chased in close pursuit/to cross the border Karl/Marx remains behind/after his wife is gone
and/is himself going to die”]

Karl Marx was chased to cross the border, his wife died while he was alive, and after that he died...with merely such description, the writer’s thoughts concerning what happened and why are not articulated. Even though it has only stated the facts...why does such work give us a sense of autonomy and completion as a poem? In this question hides the secret original form of tanka as a poetic form.

With words such as sense of stability in a traditional poetic form, what is vaguely considered is the meaning of literary expression that has been layered from the process of inevitable transitions in which inritsu has been stabilized and shut into the thirty-one letters of 7-5 as meters. And riding on the necessity of inritsu a rather complex tenkan is accomplished. If the work is concretely analyzed from the perspective of jiko-hyōshutsu, this can be understood well.

“国境はれしカール・マルクスは” [Kokkyō
owareshi Karl Marx wa: Chased in close pursuit/to cross the border Karl/Marx]

Until “国境はれし” [“Chased in close pursuit to cross the border”], the author’s expressive consciousness passes itself off as Marx and is chased to cross the border. And in “カール・マルクスは” [“Karl Marx”], the author and the object of expression that is poeticized as a historical event are separated.
“妻におくれて [tsuma ni okurete: remains behind after his wife]”
Here we can understand it to mean that the author, who has staked his expression onto Marx at the level of ideas, has returned to himself and is thinking that, after his wife’s death, Marx survived and closed his life as an exile.

“死にけるかな [shini-ikerukana: is himself going to die]”
With this, the author comes back to the original position of his expression and infuses meaning into Marx’s death.

If one thinks about it a little, as we dismantle it like high-speed photography and view it as a single expression, we realize that a verse that has only stated a historical fact in an objective-like fashion undertakes a rather complex tenkan of subject and object through the author impersonating Marx to cross borders, absorbing himself in impersonating Marx, and, as he returns to the authorial position, infusing emotions into the meaning of his death. Of course, whether this tenkan is conscious or unconscious does not matter. This is because, if it is unconscious, he is doing it on the basis of the tradition of expression or the tradition of meter that is the foundation of shiji-sei and tradition has compensated for the lack of his self-awareness.

Tradition also compensates more often than not for self-awareness of participants in a class struggle. Class struggle has its roots in proletarian self-indicative expressions that take the form of spontaneous, reflexive actions in the workplace, and, if we put aside for the moment their implications for literary analysis, Yoshimoto’s four categories for evaluating value in literary expression can also be applied to assess the value of class struggle. Inritsu is the rhythm and pattern of disruption, sabotage, and self-organization that the various collectivities of workers create under different circumstances; it asks the question “how?” or the source of class struggle. Sentaku refers to grasping why workers choose one strategy over another in refusing work or increasing their power or accommodating themselves to working conditions that capital imposes on them; it poses the question “why?” or the content of the class struggle. Tenkan is the
extent to which workers can successfully develop their struggle by flexibly changing its direction, increasing its velocity, and making organic connections beyond the workplace; it asks “whence?” or the direction of the class struggle. And, finally, *yu* is how workers link up and draw up equivalence between their struggles and those of others, actively expanding the circulation of class struggles by treating those in other sectors, regions, industries, etc., as their own; it asks the question of “with whom?” or solidarity.

Whether or not such a *political* reading of Yoshimoto’s four categories is entirely justifiable, it is undeniable that the literary notion of “beauty” that these four categories seek to elaborate with precision is a “social” one that is closely connected to the act of making our relationship, including that of our species-being found in the labor-process and the making of our own class, known to ourselves:

We can see that for Yoshimoto the meaning of creating beauty lies in its being an act of human beings illusorily relating to “society” and seeking their own essence therein. What we notice immediately is that, while for Yoshimoto the meaning of beauty is fused with the term “society,” in contrast we cannot find such a word as “society” in Kobayashi. In my view, what is “society” for Yoshimoto most likely corresponds to the notion of “tradition” in Kobayashi.122

What distinguishes Yoshimoto’s approach to literary aesthetics from that of traditional Marxist aesthetics lies in his insistent refusal to reduce the “illusory relations” human beings conceive toward society, to say nothing of their act of creating beauty, simply to the realm of ideology or even to that of production in the narrow economic sense.

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121 *Gengo ni totte bi to wa nanika* (Tokyo: Kadokawa sofia bunko1990), 133-135.
This is why, for example, in an extensive discussion on the formation of literary forms in *What Is Beauty*, he critiques the method George Thomson’s employs in *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* which seeks the origin of art in physical movement of the body that participates in collective labor as a “variation or a type of Plekhanov’s labor origin theory of art” that “misunderstands the concept of ‘labor’ and unreasonably gives it a strangely fetishistic weight” (although Yoshimoto is careful to add, “Putting aside its method and theory, Thomson’s *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* is a very brilliant book. Even those lacking interest in Hellenic culture can decipher this”).\(^{123}\) Indeed the very notion of “labor” as a central category in Marxist aesthetics suffers from the error of similarly “strangely fetishistic weight” which Marxist economics places upon “value” when neither “labor” nor “value”—be it aesthetic or economic—can in such a modern sense be conceivable without the development of the commodity-form as a dominant mechanism of organizing society, i.e. without assuming that highly developed capitalist social relationships are somehow embryonically present throughout history.

Moreover, such assumptions in no way help us to explain why a particular narrative form emerges or fades from the historical stage. In reviewing the literature on the origin of the *monogatari* (story) form in medieval Japan, Yoshimoto notes the prevalence of economic interpretations that explain the formation of *monogatari* literature in terms of the historical transition from the

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\(^{123}\) *Gengo ni totte bi to wa nanika* II (Tokyo: Kadokawa sofia bunko, 1990), 30; 32.
ritsuryō 悟令 system to the sekkan 摯間 system in the ninth century, which was premised on the dissolution of common land ownership and the legalization of privatized land. According to such lines of argument, the dissolution of the ritsuryō system produced “intricate class distinctions and a critical, outlaw lower-aristocratic intellectual layer that prompted the formation of monogatari literature” and, because the sekkan system “possessed characteristics that considerably fulfilled private tribal relations, as compared to the ritsuryō system whose coherent bureaucratic nature imitated the Chinese system, it matured a society of wives into a palace of courtly women,” the latter explaining the role women played as primary bearers of monogatari literature. Yoshimoto considers such “common sense” within Japanese literary studies as “trivial” and explaining nothing:

If one thinks about it carefully for a little bit, this specie of “common sense” does not appear to clearly explicate why in the transitional period from the ritsuryō system to the sekkan society, monogatari literature emerges with all the qualities of prosaic composition intact. It is tantamount to attributing the formation concrete-block architecture to concrete-block materials, which is merely saying, without concrete-block materials, there can be no concrete-block architecture. It does not elucidate at all how the concrete-block materials came to take on the composition of concrete-block architecture.124

Hence to understand how particular materials are transformed into an architectural style, literary form, or, for that matter, class composition, we must enter into the particularities of this transformation that are neither reproducible at will nor economically predetermined but exist as active, living relationships which always contain a momentum that Yoshimoto elsewhere calls hiyaku 飛躍 (“leap”),

124 Ibid., 85-86.
which we can as easily translate as “rupture.” This was nothing less than a direct challenge to the rigid stadialism of Marxism and its bourgeois counterparts.

Understanding the process of such composition and rupture in literature, albeit from the vantage point of an individual self-consciousness, was also the aim of Kobayashi’s “Multiple Designs,” which in crucial ways prompted Yoshimoto’s efforts in What Is Beauty for Language and was itself a challenge to Marxist orthodoxy in literary criticism. It is not without significance that Kobayashi wrote “Multiple Design” in a period when the Japanese working class was seeking their distinctive methods of composition and rupture at the social level. 1929, the year of publication of Kobayashi’s essay, was the year of the Great Depression that plunged world capitalism into severe crisis, and the Japanese rulers tried to stem its spread into the country by lifting the ban on export of gold--instituted since 1917--and the policy of sangyō-gōrika (industrial rationalization), which resulted in the bankruptcy of small-to-medium manufacture, increasing unemployment, and impoverishment of the agricultural villages. It was a year after the mass arrest of thousands of Communist Party members and their supporters, along with the forcible disbanding of three leftwing organizations (Rōdō-nōmin-to 労働農民党 [Labor Peasant Party], Nihon rōdō kumiai hyōgi 日本労働組合評議 [Japanese Labor Union Council], and Zen-Nihon musan seinen dōmei 全日本無産青年同盟 [All-Japan Proletarian Youth League]), and the London Conference in which the tonnage of Japanese auxiliary naval ship was restricted to the sixth of what the U.S. and British were allowed to maintain (a treaty was established at the 1921-22 Washington
Conference to set main naval ship tonnage to 500,000 for Britain and U.S., 300,000 for Japan, and 175,000 for France and Italy). The first signified the state repression of proletarian political organizations; the second an attempt on the part of the Western imperial powers to place Japan within the hierarchy of world capitalism. That the Hamaguchi cabinet forced the acceptance of the London treaty against the dire opposition of the naval military officers, many of whom came from the countryside and felt the effect of state policies tailored to the interest of monopoly capital, prompted many within the military to conspire insurrectionary coup-d’etat against the government and assassinations of key figures in the ruling class. In fact, in November 1930, a youthful rightwing militant shot Prime Minister Hamaguchi, who later died from the injury.\textsuperscript{125}

Both liberal and progressive scholarships have tended to characterize these rebellions from the military ranks and rightwing assassination attempts as ultra-nationalist, even proto-fascist, fanaticism that ended the embryonic parliamentary system of Taisho democracy and laid the ground for the militarization of the Japanese state that plunged it into the imperialist invasion of China and the Pacific War. For example, a leading postwar historian Inoue Kiyoshi has called the Hamaguchi assassination “a prelude to the new invasion of China.”\textsuperscript{126} However, what this general view entirely obliterates are the various tendencies and sectarian struggles within the Japanese military, some of which aimed to overthrow the state and smash industrial capitalism to establish an emperor-centered peasant commonwealth. Matsumoto Ken’ichi, intellectual

historian of the Japanese radical rightwing and nationalism, has characterized this latter tendency as *kakumeiteki romanshugi* 革命的ロマン主義 ("revolutionary romanticism").

But the rightwing did have an anti-capitalist philosophy. It was *nō-hon-shugi* 農本主義 [agrarianism]... The agrarianism of Kento Nari'aki 極藤成卿 and Tachibana Kōzaburō 橘孝三郎 had revolutionary content. Perhaps, after them, those of Nakazato Kaizan 中里介山, Shimonaka Yozaburō 下中弥三郎, and Nishida Tenkō 西田天香 could be cited.

Why did anti-capitalist philosophy take on an agrarian form? That was because Japanese modernization, aiming toward industrialization, took the form of sucking up industrial labor-power from the peasants in the agricultural villages. The degradation of agricultural villages was perennially normalized, and Tokyo, as the capitalist metropolis, unhealthily expanded from the exploitation of these villages. Tachibana Kōzaburō says in *Nihon aikoku kakushin hongi* 日本愛国革新本義 [True Meaning of Japanese Patriotic Radicalism]:

As you know, the world today is, if you put it vulgarly, the world of Tokyo. This Tokyo appears in my eyes unfortunately only as a franchise of global London.

Anyway, as that abnormal expansion of Tokyo increases, to that extent the agrarian villages are going to be beat up and destroyed, this fact is an undeniable fact no matter what. And there has never been such time as now when the peasants have been ignored and the value of the agrarian villages has been forgotten.

From these words of Tachibana’s, one may associate many oppositional concepts, such as anti-Westernism, anti-modernism, anti-capitalism, anti-urbanism, and anti-centrism. And, with all these opposing concepts in the background, the philosophy that he put forward was that of agrarianism. With this philosophy, he thought of *kokka kaizō* 国家改造 [state reconstruction], and moved toward to the 5.15 Incident. The lecture that became the basis of the above *True Meaning of Japanese Patriotic Radicalism* was made right before the 1932 5.15 Incident, and it was printed as a book on May 20.

Also, in the declaration attached in the same book, there is a line "no national people exist when removed from the national land, etc.," words that are derived from his faith that "if you destroy the land, you destroy everything." However, Japanese modernization was precisely removing the national people (peasants) from the land and dismantling the village commune. If so, agrarianism theorized the cries of the peasants who were removed from the land, made into an industrial worker or a soldier, and forced to sell their daughters to the brothel or textile mill to pay the land rent.

Hashikawa Bunzō 橫川文三 has indicated that this agrarian

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126 Ibid., 174.
philosophy and Japanese Romanticism “have parallel intellectual significance” (Nihon roman-ha hihan josetsu 日本浪漫派批判序説 [Introduction to the Critique of Japanese Romanticism]). Japanese Romanticism attacked the “bunmei kaika no ronri” 文明開化の論理 ["logic of civilization and enlightenment"] using irony as a weapon while positing beauty = Japan as what this civilization and enlightenment solely exclude. In contrast, no matter how much the modern capitalist state ground its foot on the agricultural village, agrarianism considered “Japan as still an agrarian nation” and defined the agricultural village = Japan as an absolute value. In short, both share the character of Romanticism.¹²⁷

*Bunmei kaika* was one of the primary slogans of the Japanese modernization popularized during the reign of the Meiji emperor. During those first decades of Japanese industrial capitalism the revolutionary Romantics who cast their shadow on the agrarian philosophy of the radical right had participated or had direct linkage to the 1877 *Seinan Sensō* 西南戰爭 (War of the Southwest), the last great rebellion of discontented feudal clans against the Meiji government led by Saigō Takamori, who came to “symbolize rightwing revolution” for the later generation.

After the suppression of the *Seinan* rebels and Saigō’s ritual suicide, the revolutionary activists circulated into the *Jiyū minken undō* 自由民権運動 (Freedom and People’s Rights Movement) that, among its most militant sections, sought to establish a popular constitution, cancel debt, put an end to forcible imposition of labor for public works, and other demands of the impoverished peasantry. In 1884, after the *Jiyūtō* 自由党 (Freedom Party), one of the organizational hubs of the movement, dissolved; its radical elements, fueled by the poor peasants suffering under high-interest debt in Chichibu 秩父, mobilized tens of thousands of people under the name of the *Shakkin-tō* 借金党 (Debt Party), and, aiming to create a free government through revolution, attacked the houses of moneylenders. The military and police repressed the popular

insurrection, thus killing off the last incandescent struggle of this popular movement.

One of the leading thinkers of the Freedom and People’s Rights movement was Nakae Chōmin 中江兆民, who translated Rousseau’s *Social Contract* and in 1871, the year of the Paris Commune, had gone to France as a law student and stayed there for three years, developing friendship with French workers. After the defeat of the “Chichibu Commune”—as that revolutionary insurrection was commemorated by New Left activists—Nakae believed that it was only the example of Saigō who kept him alive as a revolutionary thinker. One of his disciples, Kōtoku Shūsui 幸徳秋水, anarchist activist who was executed in the 1911 *Taigyaku-jiken* 大逆事件 (Great Treason Case), wrote in his memoir of his teacher, “Chōmin-sensei”: “To think that it was because the venerable Saigō Nanshū 南洲 [Saigō’s literary name] existed, I [Nakae] was able to obtain development in my abilities, and each time the words come to say, now that he is dead, I am like a person who cannot endure his feelings.” After Kōtoku was accused as the head conspirator in the Great Treason Case, the plebian poet Ishikawa Takuboku 石川啄木 immediately free-associated in a diary entry on January 5, 1911: “Kōtoku and Saigō!” Matsumoto sees this as a proof that Saigō was still living then within the popular ethos as an image of a revolutionist, and the primary reason that the rightwing was able to root itself in the Japanese popular ethos was because they actively sought to inherit the mantle of Saigō’s spiritual descendants, to ground themselves on the feudal legacy that the modern left had thrown away as archaic or anachronistic. When the anarchist Kondō Kenji 近藤憲二, Kōtoku’s comrade, was released from prison in 1921 and went home for convalescence, his father turned to him and said, “Doing what you’re doing, I guess you gotta do at least something like the *Seinan War*, huh,” and, as Kondō kept his silence, continued, “when that happens, you better be the
flag-holder in one of the sides.” To this, Kondō says, he felt “a gap of the times” between him and his father.

…Saigō was an existence that opposed the establishment by picking up all the parts that the ruling class (liberals) of modern Japan had cut off with their push for the logic of bunmei kaika. Those people in our country who were forced to follow modernization and still kept a struggle in their minds tried to completely stake that ethos of struggle on the image of Saigō. And those who accepted and acted on that were the rightwing. For that reason, the rightwing had to originally be the anti-establishment of modern Japan.⁹²⁸

One of the primary feudal legacies represented in Saigō’s image and developed later in rightwing agrarian philosophy was the Japanese commons. If the rightwing took the political initiative in fighting for the commons within the context of nationalism and pan-Asian liberation, the literary and cultural Romantics defended within the realm of aesthetics the traditional values, customs, and practices of the commons as uniquely Japanese virtues against Western modernity.

As one of the leading figures of Japanese Romanticism--and, along with Kobayashi, a seminal influence on Yoshimoto--Yasuda Yōjirō wrote The Japanese Bridge in 1936, the year of the 2.26 Incident. Four years earlier, a naval officer and an army cadet, along with civilian rightwing militants, invaded the Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi’s 大隈重信 headquarter and shot him to death; this was known as the 5.15 Incident. The 2.26 Incident, which took place on February twenty-sixth, on the other hand, was a full-fledged attempt at military coup-d’etat, in which a group of army officers mobilized approximately 1400 soldiers, occupied government officers and police stations, killing the Ministry of Finance Takahashi Korekiyo 高橋是清 as well as an inner Cabinet minister and former Primer Minister Saitō Makoto 斎藤実. The head of the military pretended to initially tolerate the rebellion to weaken the civil government to make an

⁹²⁸ Ibid., 22.
opening for their seizure but subsequently disarmed the rebels, putting twenty-three of them on trial and executing fifteen.

In the modern liberal and left historiography, the participants in the 2.26 Incident are often equated to fanatical, reactionary forerunners of Japanese militarist aggression in Asia and the Pacific, ideologically the most extreme elements of Japanese-style fascism in their use of violence and absolute adherence to the emperor. This caricature, unfortunately, begs many fundamental questions that are rarely asked, such as who were these officers and why they had revolted. The image of fanatical nationalism certainly cannot be sustained if we look at the actual background of the participants, many of whom came under the influence of neo-Kantian theory of value in officers’ school in their call for “autonomous” and “independent” movement.

One of the executed, Shibukawa Yoshisuke 濱川善助, was expelled from the officers’ school for critiquing its educational policies on the basis of Rousseau’s *Emile*. Andō Terumitsu 安藤輝三, one of the direct participants, had no military background in his family; his father was an English teacher who loved the English language and Shakespeare. Andō was known as one of the most humane officers in the army. “Fixing the numbers”—i.e., stealing from first-year soldiers in order to make up for stolen goods in the military—occurred often and the first-year soldiers, whose own articles were stolen, would be scapegoated and lynched by the second-year soldiers on account of the theft of governmental property. One day, seeing a first-year soldier whose jacket was stolen, Andō immediately went to a military goods store near the regiment and, out of his meager wages, bought a replacement and gave it to the soldier, telling him not to emulate the bad custom of “fixing the numbers.” On another occasion, when Ando was riding on his horse and came up on a desperate soldier who had lost his rifle in the grasses during an outdoor drill, he climbed down and searched
with him for the rifle and, when it was finally found after dark, gladly said “how wonderful that you found it” and departed—a rare gesture in a time when officers severely reprimanded, usually with physical punitive measures, rank-and-file soldiers for such a mishap. Witnessing how the soldiers were thankful even for the poor meals that the military had offered them and recognizing the extent of their poverty when he visited the ramshackle houses of discharged soldiers, Andō realized that helping them find jobs or buying them meals when they visited him did not resolve the fundamental social contradictions that lay at the root of their poverty and this realization led him to the officers’ movement.\textsuperscript{129}

Furthermore, these officers were not seeking to seize state power with the emperor as their rationale. This is one primary reason why the intellectual historian Oketani Hideaki rejects the characterization of 2.26 as a “coup d’etat”: “From the outset the young officers strongly rejected the strategy and idea of forcing to mobilize the royal prerogative by holding within their grasp the emperor.”\textsuperscript{130} This is in great contrast to the October incident in 1931, in which staff officers at the General Staff Office were planning a military coup d’etat of far more extensive proportion than 2.26 but was foiled before it could take place. A number of young officers had dropped out of that earlier conspiracy as they were fed up with its impure motive for power grab among the organizers. One of these officers, Suematsu Tahei 末松太平, heard from a second lieutenant whom he got acquainted at a meeting that “if the coup d’etat is successful, the people in the General Staff Office are saying that they will give out two-ranking promotion” and Suematsu replied:

\begin{quote}
 Wait a second. That’s different from how I think. I believe revolution equals death. Even if you don’t die during the attack, because His...
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129} Oketani Hideaki 桶谷秀昭, \textit{Shōwa seinshinshi} 昭和精神史 (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 1992), 248; 257-59.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 251.
\end{itemize}
Majesty's advisers have been killed even though they may be treacherous ministers on the emperor's side, as long as no pardon is given, you must expect taking your own life. I think failure is, of course, death and success is also death. I have no intention of surviving, being promoted for two ranks, and becoming an ingenious minister. This is the difference between revolution that is discussed every night under the red light with women and liquor at your side and revolution that is thought together with soldiers saturated in sweat and dust.\(^{131}\)

In other words, it was the difference between the false revolution for self-serving promotions organized by the military elites and the real revolution for the traditional commons organized by the rank-and-file soldiers. As Oketani says, “although Mr. Masumatsu was not a direct participant in 2.26, this philosophy was the very motive and philosophy of the February rebellion.”

It is difficult, to be sure, to trace the political objectives of the rebels from their document of the uprising’s intent, for it is couched in the classical kanbun (Sino-sentence) style that largely allots its space to denunciation of domestic ministers and warlords, ending with a typical expression of what Kita Ikki has called “kokutai-ron no fukko-teki kakumei-shugi” (restorationist revolutionism of national polity theory) beseeching the sacred spirit of the Emperor to witness and aid their endeavor.\(^{132}\)

However, we can obtain a measure of the 2.26 officers’ intentions during one of the last sequences of their struggle.

In order to contain the uprising, the martial law headquarter sent troops to surround the rebels and had airplanes distribute leaflets entitled “admonishing the lower-ranking officers,” commanding the soldiers to return to their original regimen, warning anyone who resisted was considered traitors and would be shot to death, and that their parents, siblings, and relatives were weeping for

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 251-252.
\(^{132}\) Although Kita’s influence was certainly in the background of these insurrectionary officers, George Wilson is certainly right in asserting that "he had virtually nothing to do with the preparation or execution of the uprising." Radical Nationalist in Japan: Kita Ikki, 1883-1937 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), 113.
them having become public enemies to the state. When Isobe Sen’ichi 磯部浅一, one of the rebel leaders, proposed that they disperse, among the exhausted comrades it was only Officer Andō who refused, enraged at the treachery of the General Staff Office and regretful that they did not attack them first, along side of the ministers. When Second Lieutenant Ishūin, a leading troop commander of the repression, came to persuade Andō and told him, “Andō, you should feel sorry for the soldiers and let them go home,” Andō snapped back, “We did it because we felt sorry for the soldiers, such a remark from a great troop commander gets on my nerves” and shouting “I’m taking my life” moved his hand to take out his pistol. First-class soldier Maeshima 前島 jumped on his arm and Isobe pulled Andō from the back. This was taking place before all the soldiers in the sixth company, who were called together to be given their last briefing. High-ranking officer Dōkomi 堂込 then tearfully grabbed Andō and said, “if the Company Commander is taking his life, we in the company will all join you” and the soldiers, gathering around Andō, kept crying, “Please don’t die, Company Commander.” Andō shed tears on the arms of Maeshima and said, “What a situation it is today in Japan...let me go, Maeshima, the Company Commander will not do anything, I’ve lost my power to do it. You have taken great care of me. Maeshima has scolded me once, does the Company Commander know what the situation today is like in the peasant homes, and I don’t even forget it now. We are no longer able to save the peasant villages you were worried about.”133 Andō, Maeshima, and other 2.26 officers were arrested, and, during their trial, a massive petition campaign was undertaken, chiefly from the peasantry, asking for their pardon.

This historic event of the 2.26 Incident would live on in the political

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133 Ibid., 271-274.
imaginary of the Japanese rightwing with the same spectral power as the Russian Revolution did for that of the international left. It certainly left a profound impact on the young Yoshimoto:

The time when I fist consciously looked at the rightwing-and-military-conspired fascist terrorist incidents was since the 2.26 Incident in Showa 21. This left a powerful impression on myself as a boy. I must note that, even though there must have been remaining cinders of the Japanese Marxist political and literary movements at the time, none of them mentally influenced me. I felt the radical fascists spoke, with their bodies on the line, on behalf of my rebellion against the irrationality stemming from the difference between wealth and poverty. Similarly, a certain section of the radical fascists, in the purest form, spoke on behalf of the ideology of emperor worship that was ritually implanted in school. As a boy I felt nothing but sympathy for these rightwing terrorists. These autodidactic intelligentsia, young military officers from the agricultural villages and regional areas, typically created a logic out of youthful sentiments repressed by poverty and social irrationality through the gathering together of dogmatic knowledge, fusing it with monomaniacal passion. They, in short, represented the youths of exclusivist Asian intelligentsia who covered over their as yet not fully mature inner world with powerful action. As I grew a little older, although I felt in the actions of these rightwing terrorists an abnormal revolutionary energy and, at same time, smelled a fragrance of dark dogmatism with which I could not help but feel alien, their actions exerted considerable influence upon the consciousness of purity and rebellious mindset of those of us who were urban lower-class plebian boys growing up under the education of the emperor system. Needless to say, the actions of the rightwing terrorists did not, in the essential sense, shake up the urban plebeians who had become even slightly bourgeois.¹³⁴

Mishima Yukio composed his fictionalized 2.26 trilogy (Eirei no koe 英霊の歌, Yukoku 憂国, Tōka no kiku 十日の菊) before attempting to replicate it in action in 1970. For Murakami Ichirō, former naval officer and ex-member of the Communist Party and later Yoshimoto’s comrade and co-founder of Shikō, the 2.26 Incident was also a model of revolutionary insurrection. When Japan declared its defeat in World War II and the U.S. Occupation was imminent,

¹³⁴ Takamura Kōtarō, 144.
Murakami rushed to the army post in Ichigaya intending to join a military insurrection that would continue the war against the Americans, only to be turned away. One way to read the legacy of 2.26 Incident is then to read it as an indigenous working-class struggle for the Japanese commons, led by radical nationalist, romantic revolutionary military officers, against Western capitalist modernity.

With such a violent irruption of insurrectionary soldiers in the background, Yasuda’s *The Japanese Bridge* may appear perplexingly out of sync, for the thrust of its main selfsame-titled essay was a profound appreciation for traditional Japanese aesthetics of natural serenity and balance as embodied in its old bridges. Built during the time before capitalist modernization, these bridges, according to Yasuda, posed a glaring contrast to Roman bridges, which were “in one respect, appropriate for transporting primarily a conquering army and the booty of its victory and signified the palatial extension of Christian mission work.”

“When we think of the relationship between nature and artifice of the Japanese bridges, instead of the ceaseless self-examination and laboriously self-masochistic, faint causal meetings found modestly in their effort to make even artifice indistinct and take on the shape of nature, the bridges of the Romans were formed solely on the spirit of enormously magnificent artifice.”

In contrast to the Western spirit of progressive modernity that viewed history as a linear development, Yasuda saw history as circularly structured, beginning at the end and the end continuing to another beginning. There was no need to trace the past to investigate how to live in the present but sufficient to recollect the past on the bridge that connected past-present-future. In Yasuda’s historical conception, “the emergence of contemporary contradictions” in Japan

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stemmed from “the anxiety of finally having to disguise the bridge by laying out grass and placing a kite on it for the sake of the same science found in this century’s scientific bridges,” from the forcible, historically inorganic imposition of European scientific modernity to establish a modern capitalist state: “Japan, which became a modern state by culturally triple-jumping the Renaissance, had to graft itself to the European spirit initiated since the Renaissance without having a medieval culture in its bloodline.”\textsuperscript{136}

Yasuda’s aesthetics valued the old Japanese bridge, on the contrary, as a non-utilitarian form, representing--as opposed to the artifice and science of European capitalist modernization--the kotodama 言霊 (word-spirits or word-souls) of ancient Japanese culture. Kotodama is an indigenous Japanese belief system of the commons, a belief that every phoneme contains “the energy of life and creation” and that was long utilized in purification rituals of various Shintō and Shingon Buddhist sects as well as traditional martial arts, including Aikidō.\textsuperscript{137} The circuitous structure of history followed the spiral motion of vocalization associated with kotodama, for which “the end of things immediately means a leap.” “Language was not merely a tool of communicating intentions,” but, in fact, “the Jōdai 上代 Japanese who thought of kotodama knew the philosophy of purification that language possessed and, through the words of songs, knew the creativity of language. That was the bridge.”\textsuperscript{138} Although Yasuda himself did not draw this interpretation, the “leap” that Yasuda observed in kotodama could also mean a revolutionary rupture with capitalist modernity, to purify the country from

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 41
\textsuperscript{137} William Gleason, The Spiritual Foundations of Aikido (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1995), 2: “Shinto and aikido are tied together by their common foundation the kototama principle. The kototama principle manifests universal energy (ki). The kototama (word souls…) divides this ki into fifty different functions that underlie all phenomena. These word souls are sounds--but not merely sounds as we usually think of them. They are the a priori dimensions of the universe manifesting through the eight different rhythms of yin and yang...”
\textsuperscript{138} Nihon no hashi, 44.
the pollution of capitalist expropriation and exploitation of the peasantry and establish an agrarian utopia of the commons.

Deguchi Onisaburō 出口王仁三郎 (1871-1948), the charismatic head of the folk Shinto sect Ōmotokyō 大本教 and master practitioner of kotodama rituals, envisioned such a utopia. Founded by Deguchi Nao 出口ナオ, a peasant woman born in 1836 and survivor of the Tempō famine that prompted Ōshio Heihachirō's 大塩平八郎 failed conspiracy of popular insurrection, Ōmotokyō prophetically announced the imminent destruction of the Japanese status quo and millenarian yonaoshi 世直し ("world-reformation"), a slogan of the anti-statist and anti-capitalist peasant movements of the 1850s that had helped topple the Tokugawa regime. Ōmotokyō was "a popular religion that exerted considerable social influence from the period of late Meiji to Showa 10 (1935)" by "expressing in its doctrines and movement the most developed form of millenarian vision of salvation that was born and grown out of the Japanese social tradition."¹³⁹ It was under Deguchi's leadership that Nao's ideas were given a systematic cast, with his distinctively revolutionary interpretation, and Ōmotokyō made into a massively popular sect.

Onisaburō, formerly Ueda Kisaburō, was an occasional farmer, peddler, and day laborer who learned the literary art of poetry and religious science of kotodama from his grandmother, a daughter of kotodama specialist. Studying veterinary and dairy science as well as classical Japanese music in his twenties, Ueda was often beat up on account of his vocal opposition to the village elders in the interest of the poor peasants. After his father's death, he went into Mount Takakusa for a seven-day fast, after which he returned with a claim that he had undergone a spiritual trance and journey through the universe with the buddhas

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¹³⁹ Yasumaru Yoshio 安丸良夫, Ikki, kangoku, kosumoroji: shūensei no rekishigaku 一揆・監獄・コスモロジー: 周縁性の歴史学 (Tokyo: Asahi-shinbun-sha, 1999), 179
and the gods, assigned with the messianic mission of saving the world. Marrying Nao’s sixteen-year-old daughter Sumi, he took on her last name and changed his first to Onisaburō.

Practicing a wide range of the arts, from playwriting, sculpture, music composition, and film direction to calligraphy, painting, and pottery, Onisaburō also produced through oral dictation the eighty-one volume *Reikai monogatari* 霊界物語 (*Stories of the Spirit Realm*), which interpreted the whole of human history from past through the future in light of *kotodama* theory. Ōmotokyō practiced communal labor and organic gardening in accordance to its strict vegetarian diet, viewing agriculture as the basis of the new social order of peace and harmony that would be established after a global war between Japan and the world that Onisaburō predicted. Taking to heart Emmanuel Swedenborg’s prophecy that the New Jerusalem will emerge in the East, Onisaburō also promoted Esperanto and romanized Japanese as the universal language of the New Jerusalem and sought to organize an international network under his spiritual leadership; one such attempt, made during a 1924 expedition with his select followers to create the base of the Promised Land in Mongolia, resulted in a near execution of his entourage at the hands of the Chinese military authority. At the height of its popularity between 1919 and 1921, Ōmoto-kyō boasted membership of several millions, some of whom were connected to the Japanese military and right-wing groups. On February 11, 1921, the government cracked down on the Ōmoto-kyō headquarter, destroying its buildings, confiscating its papers, and arresting Onisaburō and his chief aides. In 1935, Ōmoto-kyō was suppressed even more severely on charge of blasphemy and violating the maintenance of public order.

Both Kita Ikki and Nishida Zei 西田税, both arrested and charged for allegedly having had a hand in leading the 2.26 conspiracy, were considerably
interested in the Ōmoto-kyō sect. Matsumoto Ken’ichi argues that Onisaburō, like Kita, envisioned a “different emperor system,” although the epistemological framework of both these men’s political ontology was quite different. Kita subscribed to the state “organ theory of the Emperor” and used it as a basis of his nationalist socialism while Onisaburō, with his notion of kōdō-ōmoto 皇道大本 (ōmoto—which literally means the “great root”--as a way of the emperor), envisioned a “country of God” that modeled itself on the emperor-instituted state, whose indigenous roots lay in the “nature” of the peasant commons.

The charisma of these two similar people under the emperor-instituted state in the end took its establishment as a model and, interpreting “emperor” as synonymous principle of radical change that was “revolution,” tried to create a state of “emperor = revolution.” This meant the formation of “another emperor system” within the emperor-instituted state that treated the emperor as a dominating principle of the state.\(^{140}\)

In short, in opposing Japanese modernity which took the form of capitalism, Westernization, urbanism, and industrial rationalization, Onisaburō reinterpreted the absolute power of the emperor system as a vector of social revolution by inverting the idea that, “because it is an absolute power, it is the only revolutionary force that could absolutely liberate the taishū from poverty, inequality, discriminations, and repression.” Onisaburō’s indigenous kotodama metaphysics and practice was the epistemology of the commons that grounded this revolutionary paradox.

One of Yasuda’s early writings was “Kokyokorai no uta ni okeru kotodama ni tsuite no kosatsu--jodai kokka seiritsu ni tsuite no autorain” 「好去好来の歌」に於ける言霊についての考察-- 上代国家成立についてのアウトライン (“Study of Kotodama in the Song of Kokyokorai: Outline of the Formation of the Jodai State”), which, “while applying

historical materialist view of the state in Japanese ancient history, positioned Yamakami Okura as a ‘Romantic rebel’ and it indicates that the leftwing movement and Japanese Romantics in the Showa period were expressions of the same sentiments.” In the late 1920s Yasuda had gone to Osaka kōtō gakkō 大阪高等学校 (Osaka High School), an institution well known for the prevalence of leftist students. Although he never actively joined any political group, his writings at the time for the tanka magazine Kagirohi displayed “sympathy for communism” and “inclination for the sentiment of terrorism,” while the progressive Tsurumi Shunsuke described Yasuda of this period as “a radical.”

Writing in the 1960s, Yasuda compared the student radicals of the period in favor of right-wing militants and assassins of the 1930s, remarking that the former lacked the sayakasa (crispness or invigorating spirit) that the earlier generation possessed:

I think we were sayayaka in the earlier period. We had nothing to do with the kind of violent act that the student movement today, while gathering at the airport, exercises against the police with wives and children as the students throw stones at them and beat them with sticks. But I don’t think this means that the earlier students and young people were powerless. It was the youths of that time and not the military who had practiced coup-d’etat, conducted assassinations, and killed the ministers. The reliable young officers of those days were not the “military.” I intimately knew many such youths. I also know very intimately the revolutionaries in the days of the Sun Yat-Sen revolution. I was also relatively acquainted with some of the party politicians since the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement as my elders and who were the last of that generation. In short, I was able to get to know them. On top of that, many of the so-called “apostates” of the early Japanese Communist Party were my friends. People in today’s generation cannot understand these facts and their impressions. But because there were too many facts of the time and organizing them is complex, I have left unwritten many crucial matters. That is why when one looks at even the serious works of those people who are analyzing the period of the “Japanese Romantics,” they are careless. In the larger awareness of history, nothing can be understood from simply source materials...At one

time the great Asian revolution was for the youths of Japan their life, not theory extracted from views in the natural sciences.

After the war, those “progressive” turncoats who madly sold themselves to what was Russian and what was American had, to begin with, not even a sliver of insight on what is creative from the Asian standpoint. Such people had discussed Japanese Romanticism as if it were the cause of the Great East Asia War [i.e., Pacific War], as if it were the biological parents of the special attack corps [i.e., suicide squad]. Of course, I do not deny the spirit or the external aspects of the Great East Asia War, but, in affirming them, I have to repeatedly speak about the actuality of the “holy war.” That was the spirit of ishin 維新 [Meiji Restoration] and for me everything is still like the origin of the heaven and earth....I realized that what I was thinking thirty years ago in terms of war as art is even today different in both quality and level from the general discourse on peace and war.

In the earlier years of Showa [1930s] when leftist intellectuals kept talking about the powerlessness of intellectuals, besides it being, in fact, escapism and abnegation of responsibility, it showed that they had the cunning of worldly wisdom. That cunning was, at its root, same as what is considered bureaucratic, and, as if to oppose that, the rightwing youths preserved the purity of the non-governmental spirit since Meiji. At the time those who actually threw themselves into political revolution and was able to kill themselves in the process was the so-called rightwing, and most of these young people, as intellectuals, were not powerless and sought no glory or profit in this world. Not having any thought of guarantee for worldly profits, they offered themselves for the practice of domestic transformation and, to realize the great Asian revolution under the name of the holy war, had fallen everywhere, from the continent to different parts of South Pacific.¹⁴²

Of course, many factual objections can be made at the level of power politics and social reality of Japanese colonial practices against Yasuda’s description of the “actuality” of Japanese war in Asia and Pacific as a “great Asian revolution under the name of the holy war,” as similar objections can be made against the claim that the Allies were fighting a popular, anti-fascist war (Yasuda himself cites his incapacity for comprehending the necessity of Allies’ firebombing of Dresden).

Nonetheless, however useful and necessary as such neither-nor framework is in critically scrutinizing the ostensible objectives of the various parties in the war and in demystifying the myth of “just war” on all sides, some important issues slip out from the sieve of this framework. One is the pan-Asian

revolutionary possibility that many of the Japanese youths, including Yoshimoto, did see in the continuity from the 2.26 Incident to the Pacific War and, putting aside for the moment the extent to which the actuality of the war co-opted or betrayed this possibility, what the content of this lost revolution was. Another is the role Japanese Romanticism played in this struggle as a kind of fluid, ideological axis around which the last generation of the Freedom and People’s Right Movement, ex-Communist activists, and rightwing militants revolved. And, finally, notwithstanding Yasuda’s rejection of the 1960s student movement, another crucial issue is the revolutionary legacy that this earlier generation had cast on at least on some currents of the New Left.

The first issue is inextricably connected to the question of pan-Asian liberation that I have alluded to in the context of the revolutionary current that the Japanese modern left rejected and the radical right retained in their tradition as a politics of popular nationalism in solidarity with Asian anti-Western-imperialist struggles, rejecting Western capitalist modernity and rooting themselves in the communistic vision of peasant utopia under the emperor’s dispensation. In relation to pan-Asian anti-imperialist solidarity, Yasuda mentions the “Sun Yat-sen revolution.” Most likely this is a reference to the 1911 Chinese Revolution in which the overthrow of dynastic empire and the establishment of the first Chinese republic was temporarily accomplished under Sun Yat-sen’s leadership. The republican government based itself on three principles of the people, which Sun proclaimed at the founding of the League of Chinese Revolution during one of his many stays as a political exile in Japan. These principles were people’s nationalism (equality among all the different ethnic groups of China and independence from Western imperialism), people’s democracy (division between the legislative and executive powers under constitutional prerogatives), and people’s economy (restriction of private capital and equal distribution of right to
the land through the public ownership of naturally increased amount of rise in real estate, imposition of single land tax, and the right of land ownership to the cultivator).

Such anti-imperialist, popularly democratic-republican, and commonist ideas of pan-Asian nationalism circulated throughout Japan, particularly among “romantic revolutionaries” and right-wing radicals, but, in the wake of their failed insurrections--of which the 2.26 Incident was one--and growing repression of the Japanese military state that co-opted this ideology in order to rationalize its imperialist invasion of Asia in the 1930s, the possibility of their realization was temporarily foreclosed. Yoshimoto elaborates this point at length to the U.S. State Department sociologist Lawrence Olson, pointing the significant differences existing within the ideological spectrum among prewar militarists:

If I were to give you a comprehensible passage of my experience, the Japanese militarists in WWII, in short, nationalists, ultra-nationalists, statist, super-statists [chō-kokka-shugisha 超国家主義者], agrarians, the ultra-nationalists according to Maruyama Masao, these people who are called “emperor-ists” [tennō-shugi-sha 天皇主義者] in Japan, what is different about the way Mr. Maruyama and I think about them is that, of course, our experiences are different and so our ways of thinking about it are different, but, among these people, the ultra-nationalist or the rightwing who imagined a utopia with the peasants as its subject, they accepted the emperor as a kind of religious being and didn’t touch it, seeking to eliminate everything that lies in-between, and, afterwards, connecting in a religious sense the collectivity of egalitarian peasants to the emperor, they thought of that as a type of ideal society, and the Japanese Left, progressives, and liberals such as Mr. Maruyama, say that these agrarians are all the same as fascists, or super-statists, rightwing, militarists, but I think they must be distinguished from them. In short, between the Japanese social fascists who were influenced by the Nazis as well as Italian fascism and such agrarian super-statists.143

To distinguish between “agrarian super-statists” and “social fascists” means, in short, to do justice to the Japanese commons as a vision of pan-Asian liberation, to not dissolve it under the necessity of modernization, whether in the form of

constitutional democratic sovereignty, socialist vanguardism, or capitalist industrialization. This was the primal line of division between Yoshimoto and the Japanese postwar democrats, from the Communist Party to left liberals such as Maruyama Masao and Ōe Kenzaburō. After the 1960 anti-Ampo struggle and the emergence of the New Left, it was also the Japanese commons that defined the divergent paths that the movement took, including Yoshimoto and his two comrades who founded, after the defeat of Ampo, the journal Shikō, the poet and coalminer Tanigawa Gan and the socialist realist writer Murakami Ichirō. The common was so central in these political debates and trajectories because, in the Japanese context, one’s attitude toward it elicited fundamental questions regarding the emperor, nationalism, capitalism, and revolution that can be traced back to mid-nineteenth century origins of Japanese modern history.\footnote{Olson’s baleful influence on Anglophone scholarship on Yoshimoto is apparent in a recent volume by Curtis Anderson Gayle, 
 *Marxism History and Postwar Japanese Nationalism* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), an otherwise important contribution in a field of postwar Japanese intellectual history that is as yet fairly underdeveloped. Although the book only marginally deals with Yoshimoto, its argument that his ideas were a partial source of Mishima Yukio’s right-wing cultural and ethnic nationalism is highly implausible. Gayle approaches the issue of Japanese Left and Right’s relationship to nationalism in too discursive a manner, treating it strictly as an ideological problem, and completely disregarding its intersections with indigenous struggles for the commons in the global pan-Asian context.}

The mid-nineteenth-century millenarian pilgrimage and peasant uprisings of Eejianaika ええじゃないか and Yonaoshi that shook the foundation of Tokugawa feudalism often revolved around a mythic insignia of the imperial Shinto shrine at Ise or revolutionary restorationist fantasies. The *jiyū-minken undō* ("Freedom and Popular Rights Movement," which has important parallels with the English Radicalism of the first half of the nineteenth century) of the late nineteenth century enlisted some of its members from those who had a direct or indirect experience with the anti-Bakufu Seinan War led by Saigō and other rebellions conducted in the name of the emperor against the centralized authority of the *ancien regime*. Others who drew their trajectories and ideas from the latter...
insurrectionary energy fomented by regionally independent, loyalist samurai--
*shishi*--were, for example, Miyazaki Tōten, who contributed to the making of the
pan-Asian revolutionary movement by organizing and supplying arms for the
Chinese nationalists. And there is Kita Ikki, the theoretical godfather to the
rightwing militants who plotted assassinations of parliamentary leaders and
capitalist magnates in a style similar to that of the nineteenth-century Russian
Populists, himself an active supporter of Chinese revolutionary nationalist
movements through Miyazaki and his *Kakumei Hyōron-sha* (*Revolutionary
Criticism Company*). Miyazaki’s brothers participated in the *Seinan* War and
Kita’s father was a saké merchant active in the Freedom and People’s Rights
Movement. Kita was also a friend of Kōtoku Shūsui, antiwar socialist and
anarchist, who--along with Sakai Toshihiko--first translated *The Communist
Manifesto* into Japanese, maintained personal contacts with the Wobblies, and
composed a prescient criticism of imperialism in 1901. Although Kita disagreed
with Kōtoku and his antiwar socialist comrades on the question of the Russo-
Japanese War, he took tens of subscription to *Heimin Shinbun* (*Egalitarian
People’s Newspaper*) that Kōtoku’s organization *Heimin-sha* published,
distributing them among his acquaintances. Both Kōtoku and Kita possessed an
anti-sectarian, international conception of revolution and were executed by the
Japanese state: Kōtoku for his role in the falsely concocted *Taigyaku Jiken*
("Great Treason Case" that allegedly aimed to assassinate the Meiji emperor) in
1911 and Kita in 1937 for his alleged role as a chief conspirator of the
aforementioned 2.26 *jiken* in which militarist youths under his influence attempted
a *coup d'état* the previous year. Such solidarities were, to be sure, precarious in
the long run, formed here, ruptured there, and, furthermore, incapacitated by the
subsequent, ideologically rigid developments of these men’s respective political
traditions.
However, despite the internally distorting vicissitudes of the radical left and right--along with statist repression and co-optation--the conversation remained open even into the postwar. Haniya Yutaka reminisced on how Murakami Ichirō, co-founder of Shikō and a former wartime naval officer, was a major figure who bridged the ideological divides among these radicals in the 1960s:

Around that time Murakami was a representative who had in himself the whole of both the Left and Right. That's why at his funeral both the Left and Right all gathered together and could debate on a common ground...
...This was the reason that made those days good and, at the same time, difficult. You argued considerably and still it was hard to understand. It was a time when you didn’t know whether you were taking a Leftist or Rightist action. So you hesitated to define yourself in a way that someone could say left is left and right is right. I mean, after all, when Mishima Yukio debated the Zenkyōtō at Tokyo University, you couldn’t really tell if Mishima was taking the more militantly radical position and the Tokyo University Zenkyōtō were the rightwing.\footnote{Haniya Yutaka and Matsumoto Ken’ichi, \textit{Haniya Yutaka wa saigo ni kō katatta} (Tokyo: Mainichi-shinbun-sha, 1997), 130-133.}

Although briefly a member of the Communist Party in postwar Japan, Murakami to the end of his life maintained the rightwing revolutionary credo that it was the military who would initiate the revolution and, unlike Yoshimoto--who was considerably impressed by the democratic culture and sensibilities of the U.S. Occupation after a period of deep suspicion and readiness to reject it--Murakami consistently targeted the U.S. as the permanent agent of counter-revolution and Western imperialism, as the prewar radical nationalists did. In fact, upon hearing the news of Mishima’s attempt to foment \textit{coup} among members of the Japanese Self-Defense Force on November 25, 1970 at the Ichigaya Army Post, Murakami immediately recalled his experience of going to the same place right after the war, ready to join the Japanese army to fight off the Americans every step of the way, only to be turned away; Mishima’s failed \textit{coup} and ritual suicide, according to Yoshimoto, exacerbated Murakami’s congenital depression, leading to his
suicide five years later.

After Murakami’s wake, Yoshimoto Taka’aki, Tanigawa Gan, Haniya Yutaka, Uchimura Gōsuke 內村剛介, Hashikawa Bunzō, and Takeuchi Yoshimi repaired to a bar in Kichijōji 吉祥寺 and proceeded to debate each other. Matsumoto Ken’ichi, a scholar of the Zenkyotō generation, was also present and observed the characteristically divergent lines of thought these leading radical figures had traversed. Haniya, in a conversation with Matsumoto right before his death, recalled that moment as the last time when such debates were possible, remarking that it was Murakami, who combined within himself the polarities of the left and rightwing radicalism, that more than anybody else enabled such politically heterogeneous figures to come together and break the bread of their differences with each other.

On that occasion at the bar, for example, Haniya spoke about Vei, a Russian seer who spends his time contemplating in a dark forest inside a village, an old man who can view the totality of the world from where he is sitting; it was a story that overlapped with Haniya’s romantically solipsistic notion of “an eternal revolutionary”—conceived inside a jail—as a person who, as long as he or she could vividly imagine a revolution and envision the details of its program, was a perennial revolutionary even if he or she were isolated in a room and did not do anything (a notion that profoundly affected Yoshimoto and that Mishima, who situated physical action as exceedingly superior to literary creation and intellectual activity by the end of his life, excoriated in front of Haniya at a literary gathering). Uchimura, a critic and specialist in Russian literature who was a prisoner of war in Siberia for eleven years, retorted by saying that such figures were stuff of Russian folklore and the most they could do were to see the totality of the village, that one had to go to the peasants and people under Stalinist Russia in order to understand the actual totality of the country.
Tanigawa and Yoshimoto also expressed disagreements with each other at this gathering. Tanigawa, a charismatic coalmining organizer active in the Chikuhō coalminers’ struggle— which, alongside of Miike coalminers’, forged an intensely pitched battled against capitalist “rationalization” (gōrika) that overlapped with the anti-Ampo demo and represented the most insurgent, nationally supported working class struggle in postwar Japanese history— derived his theory of revolution from the Maoist notion of the base. As epitomized in his poem calling for a return to the countryside from the city and his iconic paean to Mao—whose quietly searing, historically pregnant images moved many students and even impressed Yoshimoto, a thorough critic of Maoism—Tanigawa carried the legacy of prewar radical agrarians by envisioning an Asian commune rooted in the “autonomy according to the three chapters of the law [ancient Chinese stipulation to minimize the law to three simple rules against murder, physical injury, and robbery], peaceful domain of shangri-la, and jōdo [Buddhist paradise] of the final resting place.”¹⁴⁶

For Yoshimoto, however, to return to the “base” of the countryside and attempt to foment a Japanese agrarian revolution from below did not appear plausible and its anti-urban privileging of the pastoral way of life incongruent with “hyper-modern” tendencies of postwar Japanese capitalism. As previously noted, Yoshimoto took Miyazawa Kenji, the agrarian poet of Tōhoku (Northeast) Japan who sought to utilize the latest scientific knowledge to help the lives of peasants, as his model in the immediate postwar period, thinking perhaps that he could so something similar with his knowledge in chemistry, but, in Yoshimoto’s view, by 1975 the terrain of revolutionary focus had shifted drastically in Japan. A consumerist form of capitalism that Yoshimoto dubbed

“hyper-capitalism” had all but marginalized the traditional industrial factory, to say nothing of the agricultural village that Tanigawa located as the base of insurrection, making pan-Asian agrarian revolution rooted in the communal village an increasingly remote possibility in Japan.

The man who intellectually supplied the basis of defining the Chinese Revolution as a model for rethinking Japanese nationalism, defining Mao’s base theory as the primary quality that made the Chinese Revolution a permanent one, was Takeuchi Yoshimi, translator of Lu Xun and scholar of modern Chinese literature. Takeuchi, like Murakami, was a figure impossible to define according to the preexisting categories of the right or the left, and his unrelenting critique of the Japanese Communist Party from a pan-Asian perspective that drew on Chinese revolutionary struggles contributed greatly to the New Left’s political and intellectual independence. Takeuchi’s essay that condemned the JCP for its “slave mentality” vis-à-vis the 1950 Cominform critique of the party “overjoyed” Yoshimoto, for it furnished for him an “incorruptible model for thinking and acting in relation to communality” and “wiped away the cloud from my mind when I could not decide whether my wartime experience and its intellectual legacy was ‘nothing’ or ‘something’.147  Although Takeuchi and Yoshimoto differed considerably on their respective assessment of China--Takeuchi, according to Yoshimoto, held onto a “fable-like” conception of Chinese Revolution that excessively saw in it a model of revolutionary democracy and nationalism--they shared a visceral opposition to the ideologically abstracted “people” and “proletariat” of the JCP.

The power of the Japanese radical right, whom the attendants at Murakami’s wake all recognized in one way or another, lay in its anti-capitalist

147 Tsuitō shiki, 232.
sympathy for the peasantry and, as much as their conception of the emperor originates in an ideological image hegemonically embroidered under the ancient Japanese state, the popular appeal and resonance of their conception derived precisely from its organic connection to the Japanese commons. When Yoshimoto wrote *Communal Illusion*, it was an attempt to close the gap of understanding on this issue; it was also his way of coming to terms with his wartime experience. Reading Marx made the scales fall off of his eyes on the question of society and the state because, as he explains in depth in his 1964 *Karl Marx*, Marx’s writings in 1844 for him presaged three possible paths of investigation, political economy, natural philosophy, and communal illusion of religion and the state. Marx pursued the first but left the latter two unelaborated, and, because Yoshimoto had to struggle body and spirit with the last question in relation to his own viscerally shattering, postwar experience involving Japanese fascism, agrarian ultra-statist sympathies, and critical investigation of the emperor system, he felt it necessary to tread this unexplored path to understand the meaning of that experience.
CHAPTER THREE

COMMUNAL ILLUSION: PECULIARITIES OF THE JAPANESE COMMONS

Japan with its purely feudal organization of landed property and its developed small-scale agriculture, gives a much truer picture of the European Middle Ages than all our history books, dictated as these are, for the most part, by bourgeois prejudices. It is far too easy to be ‘liberal’ at the expense of the Middle Ages.

Karl Marx, *Capital Volume One* \(^{148}\)

In 1965 Edward Thompson published “The Peculiarities of the English,” a polemical historiographical retort to Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn’s treatment of English historical developments. \(^{149}\) By “peculiarities” Thompson meant those indigenous specificities of English history that, in his view, Anderson and Nairn too hastily condemned as prematurely developed in establishing conditions for proletarian hegemony and socialist revolution according to their largely French model of state, class, and ideological formation. The debate had other ramifications: Anderson and Nairn represented a comparative historical-sociological approach, which owed considerably to continental European, particularly French, Marxist theories, to Thompson’s empirically grounded, “peculiarly English” method; generational and political conflict between the first (Thompson) and second (Anderson & Nairn) British New Left; and, most importantly for our purpose, nearly thirty years after writing “Origins of the Present Crisis” (which prompted Thompson’s riposte), Anderson would weigh in

\(^{148}\) *Capital Volume One*, 878.

on Japanese history in ways very similar to the way he did in English history, enumerating the general backwardness of Japanese absolutism and capitalism in the Meiji period in contrast to parallel Prussian developments:

In Japan, however, there was no counterpart to the German industrial bourgeoisie...There had been nothing like the liberal upheaval in 1848--the failed revolution from below that prepared the successful revolution from above. The merchant class lacked any political autonomy or initiative. Nor was there any urban culture comparable to the German Enlightenment or the Hegelian flowering that followed it. The memory of the tragic Osaka uprising of 1837, isolated and doomed, had been confiscated by the bakumatsu period. In the countryside, on the other hand, where the Prussian Reform Era had, over time, converted the Junker class into capitalist landowners managing estates run with wage-labor, the Meiji reforms stripped away the feudal integument of daimyo rule but left in place a parasitic village landlordism that had grown up beneath it, exploiting an often desperate peasantry...These were the circumstances that gave exceptional decisional leeway to the Meiji oligarchs, who had to confront neither a consolidated bourgeoisie in the towns nor an entrenched aristocracy in the countryside, let alone an organized working class or an independent peasantry...On this social basis, no Rechtsstaat, public life, or mass parties of the kind that marked the politics of the Wilhelmine epoch, within the framework of the imperial constitution, could grow.  

This is in keeping with Anderson’s more cautious, though no less ambitiously compressed, presentation of Japanese transit from feudalism to Meiji capitalism in the first of the two notes in Lineages of the Absolutist State, where he wrote: “the Meiji state was not in any categorical sense an Absolutism” but rather, at the outset, “an emergency dictatorship of the new ruling bloc” that “soon proved itself a preemptory capitalist state, whose mettle was within a few decades to be fittingly tested in action against a genuine Absolutism [i.e., Tsarist Russia],” adding finally that “[t]he passage from feudalism to capitalism was effected without political interlude in Japan.”  

The “political interlude” here most likely refers to something like the “liberal upheaval of 1848” quoted in the above

Using as his standard of comparative evaluation the West European model, much crucial understanding slip from the narrowly tightened vise of Anderson’s account of Japanese transition of feudalism to capitalism. First, there is no elaboration of the class struggle that played an essential role in this transition, apart from a cursory reference to the “isolated and doomed” “tragic Osaka uprising of 1837” (in Lineages, this is described as a “desperate attempt at plebeian insurrection,” again without any further explanation). Second, the very distinctive and powerful chōmin 町民 [urban plebeian] culture, as well as its newly emergent dynamic philosophies and scholarships, of the late Tokugawa period are given short-shrift, in fact, completely ignored, in Anderson’s presumptuous line regarding the superiority of “German Enlightenment or the Hegelian flowering that followed it.” Third, the revolutionary nature of eighteenth and early twentieth-century Japanese social movements and insurrectionary currents is completely misunderstood in Anderson’s privileging of “political interlude” that is defined in terms of “Rechtsstaat, public life, or mass parties of the kind that marked the politics of the Wilhelmine epoch,” i.e., some semblance of the modern bourgeois state.

On the first point, reading Anderson, we search in vain to find any mention of the numerous hyakushō ikki (peasant rebellions) throughout the Tokugawa era (numbering to 1,300 since the seventeenth century, most of them taking place after the Kyōhō period, i.e., 1716) and urban popular riots known as uchikowashi [literally “strike and destroy”] in which the urban poor attacked merchants’ houses to expropriate their wealth, fueled by fief lord’s surplus taxation and money-lender’s high interest, often in the context of terrible famines, such as the Tenmei famine of 1782-1787 and Tempō famine of 1836: these were the proletarian seismic waves that cracked the seeming stable foundation of
Tokugawa hegemony. The 1837 Osaka uprising to which Anderson alludes, in fact, occurred as a response to the Tempō famine. Organized by Ōshio Heihachirō, a former public official in the Osaka city government, in order to help the starving poor suffering from the effects of the famine, it was to be an armed insurrection, but the popular conspiracy was foiled before it could be launched. Ōshio was a student of Yō-mei-gaku, a branch of neo-Confucian philosophy that historians have generally interpreted as a hegemonic ideology of the Tokugawa ruling class. It is clear that Ōshio’s Neo-Confucian reading points to one of the many counter-hegemonic hermeneutics available to the popular classes, which Anderson's dismissal of late Tokugawa culture prevents him from noticing, let alone consider with the careful analytical attention it deserves.

It is true that this culture did not produce any singularly bourgeois world philosophy akin to “German Enlightenment” or the subsequent “Hegelian flowering,” but we may turn to Prussia and can as meaninglessly declare that it did not produce “any urban culture comparable” to the Tokugawa plebeian culture and the various schools of learning that followed it. The first produced the ukiyo [floating world] aesthetics in the paintings of Kitagawa Utamaro and Katsushika Hokusai which had great impact on European late impressionism, kabuki theater of Chikamatsu Monzaemon, sōshi novels of Ihara Saikaku, and Ishida Baigan’s plebeian philosophy of the mercantile class. Additionally, a proto-modern, if not bourgeois, world philosophy can be found among the political and cultural philosophies of Kogaku [Ancient Learning] which sought to study Confucius and Mo-Tzu in the original, Kokugaku [National Learning] which developed systematic research into Japanese language as a philosophy and refined a native conception of Japan through the reading of Kojiki and Genji monogatari [Tales of Genji], and Yōgaku [Dutch Learning] which pursued scientific studies of anatomy, astronomy, and technology through translation and
commentary on Dutch texts in the natural sciences.

I will not belabor the point about how these contributions are unique on a world-historical scale or how making comparative evaluations of them with a set cultural standard, as Anderson does, harbors the danger of ethnocentrism or, at best, provincialism beneath the veneer of European cosmopolitanism. However, since Anderson refers to the “flowering of Hegelianism” in Prussia, it is worth mentioning that, as the historian Terao Gorō persuasively argued, approximately fifty years before Hegel, Andō Shōeki, the eighteenth-century communist thinker of the Japanese peasantry, had not only come up with a cosmological theory of materialist dialectics based on agricultural labor but also rejected the irrationality of all existing ideologies and religions, putting forward a historically unprecedented ecological, feminist, and communist vision of the world (that he had an internationalist orientation, seeing Holland as a utopia of self-sufficient peasants--mistaken as he was, it was a rare view to hold in a time of strict, increasingly xenophobic isolationism--and an indigenous sympathy for the Ainu struggles are also noteworthy). Andō certainly did not produce anything equivalent to the “flowering of Hegelianism,” as his ideas were driven underground after his death, but the very fact of the survival of his independent philosophy indicates the danger of underestimating the subterranean “flowering” of peasant and proletarian weltanshauung that was as surely present in the Tokugawa period as its visible signs of cultural efflorescence or Hegelianism in nineteenth-century Prussia.

Finally, to say that there was no equivalent of “liberal upheaval of 1848” in Japan is true in the sense that there was no compressed moment of revolutionary upheaval in the interest of liberal “forces from below” (let us leave us the obvious problem here of reducing 1848 to just that, ignoring the unmistakable silver lining of proletarian insurrection that ran through it and
presaged something clearly beyond bourgeois liberalism, a fact both Marx and Engels clearly recognized). However, the anti-Bakufu struggles of the 1860s--whose last prominent expression was the Seinan War--constituted something similar as well as different from 1848. Their social base was the aforementioned peasant rebellions, urban popular riots, and millenarian movements from below, such as Yonaoshi and Eei janaika, of the period. We can say about Japan in the 1860s what Marx said of France in 1848 and after, “just when they appear to be engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they timidly conjure up the spirits of the past to help them; they borrow their names, slogans and costumes so as to stage the new world-historical scene in this venerable disguise and borrowed language.”

The restorationist and feudal aspects of these forces, as well as those of movements they inspired from the late nineteenth century to the first three decades of the twentieth, concealed what was so radically new about them.

In the same way that the moral economy, popular law, and traditional customs of the English peasants and plebeians became, as Thompson said, “a rebellious traditional culture” in the face of enclosure, work-discipline, and free market, so it was with the peasants and samurai and their immediate progenies who faced similar developments in Japanese society. Anderson equates the Satsuma-Chōshū samurai, who played a pivotal role in these struggles, to the Prussian junker class in the beginning of his article, but the latter never played an analogously revolutionary role in 1848 that the Satsuma-Chōshū samurai, inspired and threatened as they were by the proletarian undercurrents from below, did in the bakumatsu period. While acknowledging that it was “a well-

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organized insurrection in the name of the Emperor,” Anderson’s modernist
attachment to the liberal-bourgeois form of constitutionalism and political party
system as a benchmark of defining “political interlude” incapacitates him from
grasping how much this insurrection was a “political interlude” as significant as
1848 and whose precedent left indelible echoes throughout the insurrectionary
movements against Meiji and later Japanese capitalism.

Anderson’s gloss on Japan and Prussia as well as the thirty-year-old
Anderson-Thompson debate are, in fact, a part of another debate that went back
to at least the early 1950s: the debate on the transition of feudalism to
capitalism.153 This was an international discussion that took place largely on the
pages of the North American Marxist journal *Science and Society* and English
social history journal *Past and Present*. Contributions ranged everywhere from
the United States (Paul Sweezy) and England (Maurice Dobb, alongside some of
Thompson’s comrades from the Historians’ Group of the Communist Party of
Great Britain: Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Rodney Hilton) to France
(George Lefebvre) and Japan (Takahashi Kohachirō). The debate was initially
waged over the relative merits of Dobb’s argument for the feudalism-to-capitalism
transition in the *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, which Hobsbawm said
was “the major historical work which was to influence us [the CPGB Historians’
Group] crucially” and “which formulated our main and central problem.”154 The
main and central problem in the debate was to historically specify and locate the
economic and social forces that dissolved feudalism and originated capitalism,
particularly in England.

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153 In fact, the origin of the transition debate can be dated even earlier to 1940 when Christopher
Hill published his *English Revolution* and the debate on the revolution among British Communist
historians ensued. For the reprinted highlights of the 1950s debate, see Rodney Hilton, ed., *The
154 “The Historians’ Group of the Communist Party” in Maurice Cornforth, ed., *Rebels and Their
The Japanese contributor Takahashi Kohachirō—whose analysis of Japan Anderson liberally borrows—positioned himself closely but critically to Dobb’s thesis that the transition in the English case was due to more endogenous factors within its own feudal system, particularly the dissolution of its land system and guild regulations, than exogenous factors, such as international trade, as was argued by Sweezy. Takahashi contrasted the Japanese and Prussian types of transition to the classical bourgeois one of England, noting how “in Prussia and Japan it was quite the contrary...in Prussia and Japan, the erection of capitalism under the control and patronage of the feudal absolute state was in the cards from the very first”:

The organisation of feudal land property remained intact and the classes of free and independent peasants and middle-class burghers were undeveloped. The bourgeois ‘reforms’, like the Bauernbefreiung and the Chiso-kaisei (agrarian reforms in the Meiji Restoration), contain such contrary elements as the legal sanctioning of the position of the Junker’s land property and parasite land proprietorship of semi-feudal character. Since capitalism had to be erected on this kind of soil, on a basis of fusion rather than conflict with absolutism, the formation of capitalism took place in the opposite way to Western Europe, predominantly as a process of transformation of putting-out merchant capital into industrial capital. The socio-economic conditions for the establishment of modern democracy were not present; on the contrary capitalism had to make its way within an oligarchic system—the ‘organic’ social structure—designed to suppress bourgeois liberalism. Thus it was not the internal development itself of those societies that brought about the necessity of a ‘bourgeois’ revolution; the need for reforms came about as the result of external circumstances.\(^{155}\)

Takahashi called this latter style of transition to capitalism, which he observed in Asia and Eastern Europe generally, as “Way No. II (merchant --> manufacturer)”, “Way No. I (producer --> merchant)” being the transitional model for Western Europe. Signal characteristics of Takahashi’s “Way No. II” model make certain striking assumptions as far as Japan is concerned: 1) to define the post-1868 Meiji state that initiated capitalist modernization as “semi-feudal” because it

\(^{155}\) *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, 96.
developed out of fusion, rather than conflict, with absolutism (here equated to the emperor system) implies that a classic Western-European-style bourgeois-democratic revolution was necessary to overthrow absolutism (emperor) and other associated “semi-feudal” elements for it become fully capitalist; 2) transformation of putting-out merchant capital into industrial capital as the basis of capitalist formation defines capitalism solely on the basis of narrowly adumbrated, logically sequenced economic function, locating the motor of historical change of capitalism within an economic category of capital; 3) to say that social-economic conditions were unripe for “modern democracy” because Japanese capitalism developed within an anti-bourgeois-liberal “oligarchic system--the ‘organic’ social structure” is to openly say what was assumed in #1, namely that the entirely undifferentiated “oligarchic system--the ‘organic’ social structure” which includes everything from the Meiji state bureaucracy to provincial customs of the Japanese peasants--are hopelessly reactionary and backward while bourgeois-liberal “modern democracy” is progressive and necessary; and 4) since modern Japanese society was so obviously “semi-feudal” since 1868, it had to rely on “external circumstances” of its defeat in World War II and the U.S. Occupation to be forced to “reform” toward genuine bourgeois-liberal modern democracy.

Takahashi’s first three assertions, in fact, are the classical tenets of the Kōza-ha 講座派 (Lecture School) Marxists, a school of Japanese Marxist scholars dating from the 1920s and 30s who pioneered the study of Japanese capitalism. Takahashi, a professor at the University of Tokyo, was one of the leading exponents of Kōza-ha views in the postwar period, according to Germaine Hoston: “Educated in occidental history at Tokyo Imperial University [former name of the University of Tokyo before the end of the war], where he taught after the war, Takahashi quickly established an international reputation for
his efforts to incorporate Western work on economic history with Kōza-ha scholarship on Japan to produce new insights into the process of the transition to capitalist society.” Hoston has also pointed out that in the above transition debate, what Maurice Dobb asserted was “what in fact Kōza-ha Marxist Ōtsuka Hisao had discovered two decades earlier from his work on European history.”156

The works of Kōza-ha Marxists were indeed at the center of Japanese debate on capitalist modernization, and their arguments developed congruently with the Comintern’s “1932 Thesis,” which stipulated Japan as being even more backward than Russia, requiring an overthrow of the emperor, waging of an anti-war struggle, and a bourgeois-democratic revolution. On the other side of the debate were the Rōnō-ha 労農派 (Farmer and Labor School) Marxists who viewed the bourgeois revolution as fait accompli in the sweeping Meiji reforms from above and, therefore, judged the conditions of Japanese society as ripe for a socialist revolution—a view which, apart from the latter conclusion, resonates synchronously with Anderson’s.

Undoubtedly, these debates have left us with remarkably valuable, empirically driven analyses on a wide range of topics on Japanese capitalism, producing an “impressive literature” which “has exercised a powerful influence over Japanese Marxist and non-Marxist scholarship on Japan’s political and economic history, and the controversy that gave rise to it continues to cast an imprint on Japanese politics—descendants of the prewar Kōza-ha lending support to the critical perspectives of the JCP on the shortcomings of contemporary Japanese democracy, on the one hand, and the successors of the Rōnō-ha comprising the theoretical leadership for the Japanese Socialist party’s (JSP) conceptualization of social democracy, on the other.”157 Among the monuments

156 Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan, 287-289.
157 Germaine A. Hoston, The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan
of postwar Japanese historiography and economics, neither E.H. Norman’s classic study *Origins of the Modern Japanese State*, which drew on both Köza-ha and Rōnō-ha scholarship, nor the work of Uno Kozō, who started as a distinctive voice within the Rōnō-ha camp, and his Unoist school of Marxist economics, whose national and, increasingly, international impact is renowned, would not have been possible without the enormous contributions of these Japanese Marxists.

However, the limitations of the Köza-ha-and-Rōnō-ha debate and the flood of research it spawned are also glaring. Its very framework, as can be seen in Takahashi’s propositions, assumes far too much and leaves too many important questions unasked. One assumption shared by both Köza-ha and Rōnō-ha Marxists is that modernity, whether in the form of democratic-bourgeois or socialist revolution, is a welcome phenomenon, a social and economic process that is as necessary as it is preferable to what had come before it, thus fetishizing modernity, economic development, progress, and other associated concepts that, in the end, legitimized the expropriation of the peasantry and path toward capitalist industrialization. Another related assumption is that a Western form of capitalist formation and development, with some minor modifications (such as that of Takahashi’s “Way No. II”) but with the essential nature of such formation and development left intact, can be universally applied to Japan or other non-West-European parts of the world. This latter assumption is a methodological equivalent of the first, what Foucault termed in a broader sense as an *episteme* and what Marx explicitly rejected as a way of applying his ideas to non-West-European contexts.

What follows from these assumptions is an exclusion of a whole set of

important questions concerning the specific nature of Japanese state power, emperor system, village commune, and indigenous ideologies, to say nothing of capitalism. To sweep all of these essential issues under the one-size-fit-all rug of "semi-feudalism" or "absolutism" begs the question of what complex historical social relations and structure of power these terms, in fact, are referring to. Yoshimoto Taka’aki observed these limitations of Kõza-ha and Rônô-ha Marxists:

In the academic world, there are many people such as Noro Eitarō in Kõza-ha and Sakisaka Itsuro in Rônô-ha, but we were critical of the orthodox thinking of both camps that were in the lineage of the Communist Party. If there were some logical remainders, they got rid of them by adding “semi” as in “semi-feudal.” They were doing it according to formula, and for us there was nothing interesting in that. Among them we thought that Kamiyama Shigeo’s theories of the emperor system and the state were the best. I think Mr. Takimura falls within this lineage.¹⁵⁸

Kamiyama Shigeo was a dissident Marxist within the JCP, a former central committee member in the Party who had undergone several expulsions (finally for good in 1964 for “anti-Party activism”); he forged what is widely known as the “Kamiyama theory” in critical relation to the Comintern “1932 Thesis” and orthodoxy of “legalized Marxism”, i.e., Kõza-ha theory. “Mr. Takimura” is Takimura Ryuichi, a foremost postwar Marxist theoretician of the state who, through a meticulous study of the early Meiji period, forged an entirely unique, historically specific understanding of the Japanese state, clarifying in the process the difference between historical materialism as a general theoretical construct and as a practical method of historical analysis.

Both Kamiyama and Takimura are a generation apart, the former constituting a type of Marxist dissidence in the Old Left and the latter in the New Left, and the man who linked both of them was Miura Tsutomu, a Marxist grammarian who influenced both Yoshimoto and Kamiyama’s thinking and was

¹⁵⁸ Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga sengo 55-nen o kataru, vol. 4, 7.
himself a creatively original thinker of the state. The significance of this genealogy of Kamiyama-Miura-Yoshimoto-Takimura lies in their asking and trying to answer those very difficult questions that Kōza-ha and Rōnō-ha Marxists had excluded from their mode of analysis, those questions that would delineate clearly and convincingly the historical “peculiarities of the Japanese.”

Kamiyama Shigeo drafted a part of his “Kamiyama theory” while in prison during the war (he was jailed three times for his underground activism to rebuild the Communist Party: 1935-1936; 1937-1939; 1941-1945). Carefully comparing the Meiji constitution with that of Prussia--after which the former modeled itself--Kamiyama wrote, “while the Japanese constitution learned primarily from the Prussian constitution, its characteristics lie in clearly putting into writing the enormity of the monarchy, the independence and autonomy of the bureaucratic machinery, the independence of military power, its success in extreme disempowerment of the parliament, maintaining the right of budgetary planning, etc., and its greatest characteristic is its fundamental spirit which is posited in the relationship between an ancient ‘monarch’ and ‘subjects’.”

On this latter point especially, he took to task the interpretation of his fellow Marxists: “The general defect of Marxists who theorize the significance and function of the emperor system derives from them merely touching on the constitution at most and forgetting the significance and function of the rules of the imperial household [kōshitsu tenpan 皇室典範].” Hence to treat the Meiji constitution as “a political reflection of bourgeois development,” as the Rōnō-ha did, was “one-dimensional”; it was more appropriate to assess the Emperor system generally as a dictatorial power ‘lightly guised under pseudo-constitutional form” in the Kōza-ha style.

159 Tsuda Michio 津田道夫, ed., Tennōsei ni kansuru rironteki shomondai 天皇制に関する理論的諸問題 (Tokyo: Kobushi-shobō, 2003), 95.
However, Kamiyama went even further, criticizing those among his comrades who, beguiled by the language of “pseudo-constitutional form,” mechanically applied to Japan a phase after the establishment of German imperial constitution that Engels characterized as “pseudo-constitutionalism”--which was posited as simultaneously a dissolute form of absolutism and existing form of Bonapartist monarchy--and saw the emperor system, after the establishment of the constitution, moving toward Bonapartism. Noting that Japan was still in the period of “primitive accumulation” while Germany had already become an industrial capitalist state, Kamiyama stressed the ideological function of the emperor system which had no parallel in Germany:

...the establishment of this constitution and the rules of the imperial household is precisely the characteristic of the Japanese emperor system--that its dictatorial power is, institutionally and legislatively, especially constitutionally, legalized and, on that occasion, even at the risk of distorting historical development and facts, the emperor is turned into a “lineage of eternally unbroken succession” [bansei ikkei-ka 万世一系化] while preserving its inviolability and prerogative.

And, furthermore for this purpose, after absorbing the international lesson of reaction and counterrevolution, it was concretized through the ancient restorationist spirit of Japan. Through the emperor, political and religious rituals were fused, made into a representative of patriarchal society and spirit, etc.--we understand that these were codified and institutionalized. This is where its real defining characteristic lies.\(^{160}\)

Miura Tsutomu, while critically reviewing the “Kamiyama theory,” indicated that its strength lay in going beyond the Leninist theory of the state in Lenin’s State and Revolution by seriously taking the religious and ideological segments of the Meiji state on their own terms. Formulating his views according to Engels’s Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, Lenin had militarily defined the state as “the body of armed men,” failing to take cognizance of the ideological function of the state that was more than a mere cover for direct ruling-class violence against the working class--which Kamiyama insisted was essential

\(^{160}\) Ibid., 98-100.
to do in relation to the role of the emperor system in the case of Japan. Kamiyama successfully rebutted the Rōnō-ha Marxists who held that, after the orthodox Marxist formulation of equating economic power with political power, political power in prewar Japan lay in the hands of the bourgeoisie. However, as Miura pointed out:

At the same time Engels did not forget to indicate a ‘transitional’ and ‘exceptional’ state that is absolutism and Bonapartism. Japan is this “exception” and its emperor system must be understood as an absolutist power. As is well known, Kamiyama Shigeo emphasized this and lambasted the Rōnō-ha.¹⁶¹

Kamiyama was, however, still bound by his orthodox Communist commitments when it came to international affairs, trying in the end to acrobatically force those non-Leninist elements of his theory back into a Leninist framework: “one of Kamiyama’s weaknesses was his blind subservience to international authority and, although his studies of the emperor system were excellent, it cannot be denied that his blind subservience to Lenin and Stalin set the limit of his studies.”

Miura’s views, in contrast, were unhampered by such ideological considerations and, along with his fellow dissident Tsuda Michio, more thoroughly critiqued the Leninist theory of the state as inadequate to Japanese conditions, for the role of state’s ideological function was much more extensive than in Russia, given that Lenin was writing in the twilight years of Tsarism in a largely illiterate society while the educational institution was far more firmly developed in the newly formed Japanese Meiji state (even in the high feudal Tokugawa period, Japan had one of the highest literacy rate per capita due to the plebeian culture of terakoya [temple schools] that drew its membership from the popular classes of merchants, artisans, and peasants) and necessitated a different kind of state formation. Most importantly in this respect, Miura stressed

¹⁶¹ “Fumeiryō na mono ni kansuru riron’ o megutte” 「不明瞭なものに関する理論」をめぐって in Shikō No. 11 (June 30, 1964), 36-37.
the religious nature of the emperor system as peculiarly Japanese:

The emperor system was different from absolutism that emerged in Europe also on the point that it was a new religion in possession of power. The ideology of the emperor system was not the exact resurrection of ancient Shinto but, just as the ideology of Sokka Gakkai appeared as a reform of the Nichiren sect, it was the reformation of Shinto as an ideology appropriate for power. The emperor was a living god, but alongside of him, Buddha, the Christian God, and the gods of new religions were also objects of worship. Many religious beliefs were not exclusionist and many-layered faith, with simultaneous relations to many religions, was practiced. At home, hands were put together in front of a Buddhist altar, marriage was conducted in a Christian church, and during a honeymoon prayer was offered up at a Shintō shrine. The government kept a close eye to see if Christianity or the new religions put the gods in their teachings above the emperor and exercised strict control over them. The specificity that the ideology of power possessed was extremely transparent. And although the force of the state, namely the navy and army, which supported power, was composed of workers and peasants, they were thoroughly indoctrinated with the ideology of the emperor system in the form of “military men’s spirit” [gunjin seishin], that they constituted the “imperial army” [kō-gun] and that the order of higher-ranking officers was the order of the emperor, the will of the emperor necessitating absolute obedience. Also, the Ministry of Education infused into the children the ideology of the emperor system through compulsory education, putting an effort to raise them as national citizens subservient to power. Therefore, even non-Marxists could have understood that the theory of the emperor system or state theory could not be developed by ignoring the function of ideology.¹⁶²

Such a view certainly made partially explicable how this state ideology of the emperor system could also function, in the hands of discontented military officers who, in many cases, were drawn from workers and peasants, as a unifying revolutionary fulcrum against capitalism and for an emperor-centered peasant utopia, in short, a revolutionary current that runs from the post-Seinan-War Freedom and People’s Right movement activists to romantic, nationalist, and right-wing revolutionaries in the 1910s through the 1930s, from Miyazaki Tōten and Kita Ikki to right-wing assassins of industrial magnates and parliamentary bureaucrats and participants in the 2.26 Incident.

¹⁶² Ibid., 37.
this ideologically autonomous power of the Japanese state to their over-reliance on Lenin. As a revolutionary organizer and leader, Miura noted, Lenin’s study of the state had to be done in-between his hectic political activism, “a makeshift work of cramming that was written in about a year and a half.” Moreover, in Lenin’s “On the Question of Dialectics,” Miura noticed remnants of vulgar materialism—“not a forward movement from Marx and Engels but a regression”—that disabled his state theory:

Materialism ultimately recognizes the superiority of matter in relation to mind, but this does not in any way deny that, under special conditions, mind is in a superior position to matter. In ideological alienation, which is such a condition, the will of the state is superior to the force of the state, in other words, mind moves matter. Because even the bureaucrats, judges, policemen, and military men who make up the state machinery do not act upon their will, which is formed on their economic living conditions, but, as personifications of the will of the state, act according to the will of the state, this ideological specificity must not be overlooked...But vulgar materialists persistently attempt to bring into the will of the state the principle of matter’s superiority over mind and, inserting here the Marxist definition that privileges content over form, also furnish an interpretation that views the force of the state as the content. Introduction to State Theory, which Kamiyama published in 1954 and which says, “In reality, the essence of the state is the armed body of men whom the constitution represents and who are, in fact, the true content,” is an example of this. Vulgar materialists not only cannot understand the meaning of Engels’s “ideological power” but also can only take in Tsuda Michio and my critique of state functionalist view and privileging of the will of the state as mere idealism. This is why even now Kamiyama has to cling onto Lenin.¹⁶³

These words were written on the pages of Shikō, a widely influential New Left journal that Yoshimoto Taka’aki had co-founded, with Tanigawa Gan and Murakami Ichirō. The journal came into being after the defeat of the 1960 anti-Aampo (U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Pact) struggle when Yoshimoto, Murakami, and Tanigawa expected the public outlet of their voices to be shut out by the orthodox Marxist and their fellow-traveling liberal, progressive publications.

Shikō was also where Yoshimoto serialized his Kyōdō-gensō-ron

¹⁶³ Ibid., 39.
(Communal Illusion), which appeared as a book in 1968, the year in which the second Japanese New Left in the form of the anarchic Zenkyōtō students' occupations of universities and street confrontation with the police was in full swing. If Miura pushed Kamiyama's ideas on the Japanese state to their logical conclusion by rejecting Lenin's theory and appealing to Engels's more nuanced views on the state, Yoshimoto considered the very framework of Maxism in which the Japanese discussion on the state was conducted problematic. Communal Illusion expressed, among other things, a rejection of Engels's analysis of the state in terms of economic categories--and all the Japanese Marxist tradition that went with it--and, through such a rejection, Yoshimoto went back to Marx's thesis in 1843:

The hereditary powers of the ruler flow from the concept of the ruler. He is supposed to be specifically distinct from all other persons and from the whole species. What is the final, solid distinguishing factor between persons? The body. Now the highest function of the body is sexual activity. The highest constitutional act of the king, therefore, is his sexual activity; for by this alone does he make a king and so perpetuate his own body. The body of his son is the reproduction of his own body, the creation of a royal body.164

Apropos of this passage, Tsuda Michio had written: "Led by Marx's 'Critique of the Hegel's Doctrine of the State', Kamiyama Shigeo, who was a self-conscious state-functionalist theorist, came close to the secret of the monarchical right and system. He came close but did not reach it."165

Communal Illusion was an ambitious tour de force that sought to reach this secret, as embodied in the Japanese state and emperor system, once and for all.

I first learned from Marx to think of the state as a community of illusion. But this thinking is deeply rooted in Western thought and its sources may be traced even further back. When I encountered such

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165 Tsuda, ed., tennōsei, 227
thinking for the first time, I was shocked. According to the vague image I had before then, the state was like a bag covering up the whole of the people in the nation up to their feet and I thought that, even though human beings could move from one bag to another, travel, or change citizenship, as long as they lived in this world, none of them could go outside of this bag. I realized that this notion of the state was a unique characteristic of Asia, including Japan, and that it was completely different from the Western one.

What initially astonished me was the Western image of human beings leading their actual lives as they created society within a society, with the state standing on top of this society as communal illusion. In the West, no matter how much statist tendency emerged or nation-centered assertions were made, the state is never conceived in the image analogous to a bag that covers the entire people of the nation. The state is there always the community of illusion that stands above society and is viewed as a concept that is smaller than the society in which we actually live and even separate from society.

At a certain period when I realized this difference in the image of the state, I remember being shocked to the point of growing pale. At the same time my curiosity was deeply stirred up by how such heterogeneous images could be drawn from the same word "state." If I had known this earlier, I thought that I could have seen the struggles between states with different eyes. Did someone else grasp this difference of imaging the state in the West and Asia? And, on this basis, judged his or her thought and action? That still seems to me an inexhaustible mystery.

The state is communal illusion. Customs, religions, and laws are also communal illusion. The spiritual inertia forged for a long time through customs and popular, indigenous beliefs are also communal illusion. Communal illusion exists wherever human beings create a commonly structured system that they defend and disseminate, turning it into customary practice. And the various communal illusions that existed prior to the formation of the state must have become condensed into a single center while existing as many religious and ethical customs. What this book treated were such themes.

Nakagami Kenji 中上健次, the novelist of the Japanese outcastes, recognized that *Communal Illusion* was “utterly an Asiatic (agrarian) book” that was inseparable from the street battles of the Zenkyōtō students:

In 1968, precisely at the end of the 1960s, along with the irruption of violence by a group of people on the streets, *Communal Illusion* exposed the state as communal illusion, predicted the imminent situation, and prophesied that the state was, above everything else, sex, that the state was sex made into an illusion which suddenly emerged under broad daylight. The emergence of this book, which read sex as a dual illusion that transplanted itself into communal illusion--a book that is utterly Asiatic

(agrarian) depending on how one reads it—was, historically speaking, beside Mishima Yukio’s ritual suicide, the greatest event between the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s.¹⁶⁷

We can find the autobiographical thread that connects Marx’s 1843 thesis, which announced that the “highest constitutional act of the king is...his sexual activity,” and Yoshimoto’s analysis of the origins of the Japanese state as sex in the formative experience of defeat that confronted Yoshimoto at the end of the war, which prompted him to ask: what was the state and its power over the human imagination that he and other members of the Japanese taishū had experienced within themselves during the war and found abruptly and inexplicably vanish afterwards? It was this urgent problematic that led Yoshimoto to study the classics of political economy and social sciences, to his decisively eye-opening reading of Marx.

Having had no experience of the prewar underground Communist movement and having never joined the postwar Communist Party, in fact feeling a great sense of unbridgeable chasm between himself and the JCP/liberal intelligentsia’s attitude toward Japan’s defeat, Yoshimoto’s study of Marx invariably led to the political struggle of overturning sterile Marxist debates that obliterated the experience of taishū from their arguments and to the personal struggle of explicating the mechanism of his own wartime delusion. The first struggle signified an opposition to reified conceptions of the working class, not dissimilar to the one Edward Thompson criticized in his preface to The Making of the English Working Class; the second an exploration of the roots of the consciousness of the Japanese taishū to a time preceding the birth of class in modern bourgeois production, tracing these roots all the way back to the ancient communal relations of Japanese and Asiatic customs, laws, and family.

The two theoretical works that Yoshimoto wrote immediately preceding

¹⁶⁷ "Kaisetsu: Sei to shite no kokkā" in Kyōdō gensō ron, 332.
and simultaneous with *Communal Illusion, What Is Beauty for Language* and *Introduction to the Phenomenology of the Psyche*, are indivisible components of a theoretical triptych. *What Is Beauty* was a direct outcome of Yoshimoto's polemical engagement with the Old Left on the battlefield of literature and politics as he withdrew himself into the workshop of his own craft to identify literary language as a conduit of human consciousness, discovering an autonomous logic that the history of literary expressions possessed (i.e., autonomous from the economic history of production) and utilizing Marx's *Capital* as a basis of formulating his literary conception of value. *Introduction* expanded the frame of his investigation from language to consciousness as such and constituted among other things a continuing dissent to the orthodox Marxist dogma that reduced mind to the motion of matter, amplifying Marx's notion of “alienation” into “original alienation” (alienation human beings experience from having a body) and “pure alienation” (alienation that organic “life” experiences in relation to inorganic “nature”) into the realm of individual illusion.

*Communal Illusion* takes us forward into the realm of communal illusion (tribal and state power) via analysis of dual illusion (sex and family). Again, the point of departure, just as with the discussion of literary value in *What Is Beauty*, is Marx. In “On the Jewish Question,” published in the same year in which “Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State” was written, Marx wrote:

> Where the political state has attained its full degree of development man leads a double life, a life in heaven and life on earth, not only in his mind, in his consciousness, but in reality. He lives in the political community, where he regards himself as a communal being, and in civil society, where he is active as a private individual, regards other men as means, debases himself to a means and becomes a plaything of alien powers. The relationship of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relationship of heaven to earth. The state stands in the same opposition to civil society and overcomes it in the same as religion overcomes the restrictions of the profane world, i.e. it has to acknowledge it again, reinstate it and allow itself to be dominated by it. Man in his immediate reality, in civil society, is a profane being. Here, where he
regards himself and is regarded by others as a real individual, he is an illusory phenomenon. In the state, on the other hand, where he is considered to be a species-being, he is the imaginary member of a fictitious sovereignty, he is divested of his real individual life and filled with an unreal universality.\textsuperscript{168}

Of course, Marx is discussing here the nature of the modern bourgeois state, as indicated by his reference to “private individual” in civil society, a point of departure for his later study of political economy that sought to unveil the class antagonisms within civil society that the “unreal universality” of the bourgeois state masked. However, given that Yoshimoto’s focus is on the state before the emergence of civil society and particularly on the Japanese state, he pursues the path of research that Marx did not take and thus abstracts the economic relations out of his analysis (as Marx abstracted the state out of his analysis of capital--a study of the capitalist state was to be allotted a separate volume).

This is undoubtedly Yoshimoto’s way of disposing with the Marxist formula of the base-superstructure, in which the state is merely viewed as a superstructure reflecting the economic relations and forces of production in the base, as he makes it explicit in a reply to an interview he quotes in his preface:

I think there is something that by and by has become understandable. That is, until now, there were all these problems that I viewed as categorically different problems specific to a particular field, such as literary theory as literary, political philosophy as political philosophy, economics as economics, and so on. Especially as regards the problem of expression, there being political expression, intellectual expression, artistic expression, in such a way what appeared as fragmented and separate problems have now come to appear in a largely unifying way.

If I were to say what is that unifying perspective, I think it is to consider them all as fundamentally the realm of illusion. Why don’t I call them the superstructure? Although it’s fine to say that they are a superstructure, because there are many preexisting conceptions attached to the word “superstructure”, in short because it is soiled with handling, I tend not to want to use it and I don’t but I think you can grasp them as a total realm of illusion. So, in here, the question is, how can you capture the structure of this total realm of illusion? By bringing what axis can you grasp the key to clarify the structure of the total realm of illusion?

\textsuperscript{168} Marx, op. cit., 220.
According to my thinking, one is the problem of communal illusion. That is, there is the problem of the structure of communal illusion. That turns into the problem of things like the state and law.

Another is--and this is my own use of language--dual illusion, that is, illusion that is paired up. There is another axis like this. According to previous concepts, this is the problem of the theory of family, the problem of sex, in short, the problem of relationship between man and woman. The structure of such matters becomes relatively clear when you posit the axis of dual illusion.

Another is self illusion, or you can call it the illusion of the individual, you can posit the axis of self illusion. Aesthetic theory, literary theory, everything within the field of literature goes there.

So by elucidating the internal structure of each axis and the expressed structure as well as the mutual relationship among the three axes, you can resolve the problem of the total realm of illusion, that is, you ought to be able to resolve it, I think. In being able to see, shall I say, in this unifying way the relationships within the totality, one of the things is, for example, I can see afresh that the problem of literary theory I’ve been doing has been the problem concerning the internal structure and expression of self illusion. And, for instance, what people in the world talk about as the theory of the family or sex between men and women, I can grasp those problems anew as problems of dual illusion. And I could summarily grasp the problems that are generally discussed in terms of politics, state, law, and also religion as problems of communal illusion. Hence what is important is to clarify their mutual relationship and internal structure, those are the problems, this has been my consciousness of the problem.

If this is so, I think there are criticisms on the order of “isn’t your thinking extremely Hegelian?” But I have a premise. When you are dealing with such realms of illusion, when you treat the realm of illusion as an internal structure of the realm of illusion, the base structure and various economic categories can be largely put aside, this is my premise. To “put aside” does not mean to ignore them. You can put them aside to a certain extent. I have a premise that by putting them away, you can put them away to the extent of not treating them as a particular reflection or mirroring but relating them as a problem of illusion mediated by a certain structure.

To put this in reverse to make it clearer, when you deal with economic categories you can abstract out the realms of illusion. You can throw them out. You can largely abstract out how self illusion is or how communal illusion is.

However, when you treat the illusory category in terms of its structure, at least not as a reflection or mirroring, you can put aside economic categories to the point of a relationship mediated by a certain structure. I have a premise of putting them aside to that extent. So, if I were to say it, this is not at all Hegelian, but, by being able to, shall I say, in this unifying way see a graspable axle, the work I’ve been doing has expanded in this form and, as it expands, has been able to be related to each other.\footnote{Kyōdō gensō ron, 25-27.}
How are Marx's economic categories different from Yoshimoto's illusory categories (which, as said, owes their original inspiration from Marx's own ruminations in the 1840s)? One possible way is through Marx's labor theory of value, wherein Marx laid out the fundamental economic categories to critically grasp historical capitalism and which had helped Yoshimoto formulate his literary linguistic theory in *What Is Beauty* in the preceding years. For, as we read Yoshimoto's explanation that touches on questions of reflection, interrelationship within an expanded totality, mediation, and abstraction, it is impossible not to be reminded of Marx's discussion of the value-form in Chapter One of Volume One of *Capital* in terms of simple, isolated, or accidental form; expanded form; and general form, all of which respectively perform roughly approximate function as Yoshimoto's categories of self illusion, dual illusion, and communal illusion.

For Marx, the simple, isolated, or accidental form was the most basic form of understanding value as the "economic cell-form" of the commodity (which was, in turn, the "economic cell-form" or the "elementary form" of capitalist society) because it posited the simplest question of how one isolated commodity relates to another. This relationship is obviously not one of one commodity *equaling* another, for not only do the two arbitrarily chosen commodities NOT share the same material constituents or labor-process under which they were made but the relationship is expressed in terms of a certain quantity of one commodity (a relative form) being worth or having the same value as that of another (equivalent form). This irreversible relationship between relative and equivalent forms is what Marx calls "reflective mediation" or a relationship analogous to that of an object and its mirror-image. Similarly, self illusion consists of a relationship between the phenomenological self and the illusory self, the former projecting its own image in the form of the latter. Now just as one cannot call the mirror image as equaling what it reflects or dead labor of capital equaling the living labor of the
working class, what the self imagines and conceptualizes as its self and the conceptualizing and imagining self cannot be said to be the same. But there is a reflective relationship which, understood on its own terms, appears as a kind of solipsism, just as trying to understanding the whole of capitalist society in terms of one arbitrary commodity to another appears often in the form of a solipsist bourgeois origin myth in which the market spontaneously and ahistorically emerges as a neutral social mechanism that arbitrates over the multiplicity of natural human needs and interests among separate but equal buyers and sellers of commodities, repressing the long-drawn-out and bloody history of enclosures, expropriation, and imposition of work-discipline.

At the next level of abstraction, the expanded form, we can go beyond relating two commodities to each other, being able to relate a commodity to an infinite number of other commodities. In Yoshimoto’s notion of dual illusion, we find also an approach that relates an individual to another human being through reproduction and the formation of a family, relating him or her to theoretically an infinite number of people in the matrilineal and matriarchal form of the ancient Japanese tribal kinship system. “What is certain is, as long as a ‘myth’ is formed with the intent of historically situating agricultural society of various peoples at the historical origin of the state, that ‘myth’ is attempting to imply the existence of a ‘matrilineal’ or ‘matriarchal’ society.” This dual illusion is, therefore, the fundamental root of the Japanese commons and, as we will see later, becomes crucial in understanding the peculiarities of Japanese capitalism, social movements, and popular consciousness. The expanded form of value allows us to understand the infinite and totalizing aspects of capitalism (what is ideologically understood in terms of ever-expanding growth, development, and

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170 Ibid., 156.
progress) and dual illusion the infinite and totalizing aspects of the family within agricultural society (which is culturally expressed in Japanese and many Asian societies in their variant incorporation of, for example, ancestor worship, filial piety, head family schools, and blurred border between public and private life), but neither of these terms can adequately grasp, respectively, the relationships among commodities within capitalism or among families within a tribe, or, to put it another way, how a cluster of randomly relating commodities becomes the integrated totality of capitalism and how a cluster of matrilineally relating families transforms themselves into a tribe.

In the general form of value, the bad infinity of endless commodities is turned into a good infinity through its elucidation of how these commodities relate to each other and are integrated within the totality of capitalism. Recall Yoshimoto’s comment on how the notion of “communal illusion” allowed him to “be able to relate to each other” the various fields of investigation (language, literary theory, family, religion, law, state) into an integrated totality, as opposed to the bad infinity of disconnected subjects juxtaposed arbitrarily next to each other. The general form of value enables us to make integrative sense of the “world of commodities” by positing a universal equivalent that brings all the commodities into a coherent whole, directing our attention to the universal way in which all relationships among commodities are mediated; the concrete form of this universal equivalent is, historically and customarily, the money-form. The universal equivalent in Yoshimoto’s case is communal illusion, which integratively binds all family relations into the totality of a tribe and whose concrete and historical form is the law.

These comparisons are, to be sure, conducted on at a fairly abstract level of formal correspondences. To borrow Marx and Yoshimoto’s term, we have simply abstracted them from their respective historical conditions. The latter are
certainly crucial in understanding the differences between the two: Marx’s forms of value apply specifically to a fully developed society of capitalist commodity production while Yoshimoto’s illusory categories refer to the historical arc of the Asiatic, especially, Japanese commons. As Part VIII of *Capital* reminds us, what made possible the emergence of a society based on the value-form of the commodity were the historical expropriation of the peasants, commoners, and plebeians’ means of subsistence and production and the subsequent disciplining of the thus expropriated population into an exploitable proletariat whose cultural and moral habits were made to fit the quantitative micro-management of the capitalist clock and rhythm of work. Marx drew on a wide array of historical documentation to corroborate this historical process, from the enclosure of the commons in England and Scotland to enclosures and enslavement in Java, Africa, and the Americas, as Chapter 31 on "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist" in Part VIII shows.

For Yoshimoto, who is stretching his analytical imagination to literally a time out of mind, a period long preceding the emergence of the ancient state and revolving around a non-specific moment in which the tribe emerges as an embryonic state through its formation of law, historical documentation in the usual sense of the word is impossible. Hence he turns to myth and folklore, respectively to *Kojiki* and Yanagita Kunio’s 柳田國男 *Tōno Monogatari* 遠野物語 (Tales of Tōno). *Kojiki* 古事記, the central canon of Japanese Shinto and the oldest book in Japanese history, was completed in 712 as a hegemonic compendium of origin myths to legitimize the ritsuryō state system, and it furnishes Yoshimoto the essential source of tracing the origin of Japanese law. *Tales of Tōno*, a compilation of folk tales and legends from Tōno Village in Iwate Prefecture in the northeastern region of Japan, which has become the classic of Japanese ethnology, on the other hand, provides a concrete sampling of the
If Marx’s section on commodity fetishism at the end of Chapter One of Capital prods us to unveil from our eyes the religious illusion of the money-form which conceals the social relationship of workers producing commodities under the reified spectacle of commodities producing and ruling over human beings, Yoshimoto invites us to bring the same demystifying perspective to communal illusion, which inverts self illusion through the imposition of law. In Kojiki as well as in a number of ancient norito 祝詞, prayer chants that make up important part of kotodama practice among Shintō priests and shamans, two types of prohibitions are frequently mentioned, kunitsu-tsumi 国つ罪 (crimes of country) and amatsu-tsumi 天つ罪 (crimes of heaven). The two correspond to two types of laws, the first regulating matrimonial and sexual conduct and the second agricultural practices, both of which came into being as separate legal categories at the moment of transition from clan family to tribal community.

If we extract the common points in this concept of “kunitsu-tsumi,” we can say that it is “crimes that belong in the natural category.” Even the taboos concerning “sexual” acts are grasped merely in the category of natural act of sexuality. This means that the concept of “kunitsu-tsumi” can retrace the stage of pre-agrarian community to a fairly distant primitive stage. That it does not include taboos on “sexual acts” between “brothers” and “sisters” and that it includes even magical ideas in the concept of “crime” shows us that it is a primitive “legal” concept which faces no particular difficulty even if we go back to the rules of a time before the primitive tribal (pre-tribal) community when dwellings took the shape of caves and huts. It does not appear to be inappropriate to posit the emergence of the concept of kunitsu-tsumi to a form of “communal illusion” shouldered by Amaterasu and Susano’o, who are fictively postulated as ruling founders of divine and political rights in Kojiki that the Yamato dynasty edited.

Here a problem appears concerning the emergence of “kunitsu-tsumi.” Did the indigenous tribes of our island only possess “communal illusion” as “kunitsu-tsumi,” a legal concept belonging to natural category? And did the dominating forces of agricultural society that brought the concept of “amatsu-tsumi” to our islands bring this concept of “amatsu-tsumi” over the upper layer of “kunitsu-tsumi” concept as orders from above?

Here several problems are hidden. One is whether the
conquering powers generally bring in “law” into the process of establishing their ruling bloc. Another is whether we concretely think about the emergence of the concepts of “amatsu-tsumi” and “kunitsu-tsumi” as difference in historical time. And also whether we can think about “amatsu-tsumi” and “kunitsu-tsumi” as corresponding to the “law” of ruling monarchy and the “law” of the tribal chief.

It is quite natural to think that indigenous agrarian tribes existed in small portions even in a pre-agricultural society dominated largely by indigenous tribes which subsisted on appropriating wild animals and plants living in the mountains and fields and capturing fishes from the lakes and rivers. We can conceive that the “communal illusion” of kinship relations posited in such a society had, on the basis of “kunitsu-tsumi” or, in other words, natural category belonging to communal rules, came to somewhat mix agricultural elements within itself. We cannot conclude whether the forces of Yamato dynasty emerged from the womb of pre-agricultural society by expanding and refining agricultural technology and gradually spread through the island, or whether they arrived from elsewhere and brought with them agricultural technology, and there is no need to make such a conclusion. But we can easily speculate that, as tribal communality was formed within the tribal (pre-tribal) system, gradually the agrarian social laws belonging to “amatsu-tsumi” came to be abstracted as “communal illusion.”

In this newly emergent tribal formation the distinctions between kunitsu-tsumi and amatsu-tsumi were due to a development of hegemonic power in two directions: the political power of the tribal patriarchal chieftains and the religious power of the matriarchal priesthood. As Yoshimoto explains in his comment on the origin of the Yamato dynasty and Japanese agricultural society, over which massive scholarly controversies have prevailed, it is empirically impossible to determine precisely how these dual powers came into being and intersected--which is tantamount to tracing the origin and development of the tennō 天皇 system. Furthermore, such empirical verification is unnecessary because it is sufficient for the study of communal illusion, which aims to clarify the nature of this dual power and the means with which it established hegemony over the Japanese commons, to simply note that it is the hybridization of these two powers, at times fusing, at other times separating, throughout Japanese history took place in the transition from clan to tribal society.

171 Ibid., 227-228.
In relation to the eighteenth-century English plebeian experience of the commons, Edward Thompson indicated in the phrase “class society without class?” the paradoxical nature of paternalist hegemony of the times. Yoshimoto’s problematic, though similar, is wider and more complicated, for unlike Thompson, he is not dealing with a particular stretch of historical time but an experience of hegemony from time immemorial. This raises again certain methodological congruence between Marx and Yoshimoto’s approach.

Commenting on “[t]hose small and extremely ancient Indian communities...based on the possession of the land in common, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts and on an unalterable division of labour”, Marx wrote in chapter 14 of Capital, “The law that regulates the division of labour in the community acts with the irresistible authority of a law of nature, while each individual craftsman, the smith, the carpenter and so on, conducts in his workshop all the operations of his handicraft in the traditional way, but independently, and without recognizing any authority.” The Japanese equivalent of this law regulating the division of labor, in its primary form, is amatsu-tsumi. Marx continued:

The simplicity of the productive organism in these self-sufficing communities which constantly reproduce themselves in the same form and, when accidentally destroyed, spring up again on the same spot and with the same name--this simplicity supplies the key to the riddle of the unchangeability of Asiatic societies, which is in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic states, and their never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the fundamental economic elements of society remains untouched by the storms which blow up in the cloudy regions of politics.  

What Marx describes here as the “structure of the fundamental economic elements” in Asiatic society approximately corresponds to the structure of communal illusions; Yoshimoto’s preoccupation, of course, is not with economic structure per se--which, as pointed out earlier, is abstracted out of his analysis--

172 Capital, 477; 479.
but with the nature of non-economic power of law and religion that played a
greater role in controlling and reproducing precapitalist communal society in
Japan, to further clarify “the riddle of the unchangeability of Asiatic societies.”
What Thompson stated about Capital, that it “is not a work of ‘history’” but “a
veritable cornucopia of hypotheses” that are “immensely fruitful,” applies to
Yoshimoto’s Communal Illusion as well; the latter aims to unmask the state-form
that presided for unspecified millennia over the Japanese commons from within
by, for example, making hypotheses on the formation of law in prehistorical
Japan on the basis of myth (hegemonic discourse of the commons in Kojiki) and
hypotheses on taboo, possession, and female shamans on folklore (discourse of
commons from below in Tales of Tōno).

The distinction between what is “from below” and what is “from above” in
terms of class formation is, however, far more ambiguous in Yoshimoto’s case
than either Thompson or Marx’s. Thompson was dealing with a pivotal moment
when the proletariat, at least in the modern sense, was emergent in the face of
market revolution that made the conservative popular tradition and customs of
the English commons a radical and rebellious culture while Marx’s work, for the
most part, makes as its object of study a later historical period when the English
proletariat was in full maturity (soon after their “adolescence until its early
manhood” between 1780 and 1832, which was the subject of Making of the
English Working Class). Yoshimoto, on the other hand, is theoretically covering
a longue durée of the Japanese commons when it was established and persisted
as the very modicum of a “conservative” tradition. The hegemonic role of
“communal illusion”—which all state systems and ruling classes from the Yamato
dynasty and most likely earlier tribal formations exploited—was precisely effective
in preserving, even incorporating, the customary practices and popular traditions
of the commons; as regional and tribal rulers emerged and struggled for
domination, the conquests that came out of these conflicts almost always kept the local customs and traditions generally untouched and, in fact, fused them into a new hegemony. The multitudinous hybridization of Shintō and Buddhist practices throughout Japanese history is a signal example of this, but Yoshimoto’s point is that folk Shinto itself, given its innumerable varieties, is the effect of this very historical process of hegemonic incorporation.

Japanese peasants and commoners’ experiences of the commons, therefore, remained relatively unchanged for centuries, even with the changes among the rulers. This harbored an attitude of general indifference towards the actually existing authority and why the latter had to appeal to the tennō or the emperor to legitimize their rule, for whatever the tennō may have been historically, he was treated as the physical manifestation of the divine cosmology of the Japanese commons. However, what makes the understanding of the Japanese tennō system difficult is that it was not simply an expanded version of a local deity in charge of agricultural fertility rituals but, in being hegemonically utilized for the purpose of domination among various ruling classes, it has come to historically accrue a complex admixture of multi-layered religious and political powers:

In asking what is monarchical power, the easiest way to understand it in Japan is the institution of living deity that existed locally in Nagano Prefecture in Suwa region as a center. This living deity traveled through the peripheral region as a divinity and its male relatives ruled the region. We think that such an institution originated in an intersecting period between the Jōmon age and the Yayoi age in Japan. In Nagano region there were colonies that people in the Jōmon age had built relatively early and there religion and political power had a distinctive connection.

Also, in Setouchi, there is a community of Kawano Suigun centering on Dai-san Island and, there was also an institution in which the elder brother was a religious living deity and the younger brother ruled its region. The early tennō system had an aspect that wasn’t much different from that and also had an aspect in which, within a matrilineal system, the women were religious and the brothers had political power, I think both of these were connected in a fairly ambiguous fashion.
So, although it is considerably difficult to think about this, when Buddhism entered Japan, a powerful hierarchical organization similar to the Indian caste system came together with the religion and added onto this a strange political taboo. The early tennō system must have been originally simple but, because various elements interfused with it, I think it became something very difficult. This is why, even viewed as a problem of power, the problem of the tennō system is extremely difficult to understand.\textsuperscript{173}

We have observed this difficulty in recognizing how the tennō system worked as both a repressive organ of capitalist state power and a revolutionary fulcrum of anti-capitalist struggles for the commons from the late nineteenth century through the first three decades of the twentieth century. The tennō system, therefore, has a dimension—in short, communal illusion—that transcends class lines. Hence it is not so much that class or class struggle does not exist in Yoshimoto’s analysis, but that the notion of “class” as conceived within the modern discourse of capitalism has no meaning in the context of the actual experience of the commons.

Yoshimoto stresses this point in defending Yanagita’s use of the term jōmin 常民 (folk) against Murai Osamu's criticism that the term was devoid of class content:

When Yanagita Kunio says “jōmin,” “jōmin” is extremely ambiguous from the concepts of modern state since Meiji, as it includes those who entirely affirm the rulers, those who oppose them, and those unrelated to either positions. From Mr. Murai’s theoretical perspective, that is obvious. The method that Mr. Murai makes as his basis is a concept that comes from Marxist analysis of the modern state, in short, he has the concept of class as the subject of his methodology and if you go with this, it turns out the same way with any origin of an ethnic group. For example, even in the case of primitive, uncivilized society you say “the elder is different from others” or, taking even the classical ancients you say, “there are the slaves and the ruling class who are not.”

Such a perspective is, of course, never bad, but, if you say that this perspective comprehends completely what is primitive and uncivilized, I think this is not so. What it can comprehend completely most likely is, at the very least, the modern state and what came immediately before it or, to put it in a Marxist way, the feudal state. I think

Mr. Murai’s perspective is applicable as far as that. But, when you go back further and talk about the origin of an ethnic group, we should think that it is no longer applicable.

Mr. Yanagita’s concept of the “jōmin” indicates, as an image, something long before that. Hegel and Marx’s view of history posited a stage called “Asiatic” between primitive society and classical ancient society, and Mr. Yanagita’s “jōmin” is conceived at least as far back as a step before the “Asiatic” stage, the primitive stage. That is how he has created the concept of “jōmin.”

So, from today’s modern concepts, certainly you can say that “in Mr. Yanagita’s ethnology, there is no notion of class” but this is not the case. Mr. Yanagita has created the concept of jōmin by thinking before the Asiatic stage, at least the primitive stage. He is not using “jōmin” in the same sense that we use “shomin” [plebeian] instead of “shimin” [citizen] after the modern period but, because he says this by including in it a period as far back as the primitive community, our understanding is, to say that it hasn’t any notion of class is no good. Before the modern state, that is, the feudal state, we can take the Tokugawa Bakufu or at least after the Muromachi period, I think the problem has validity as long as we enrich the problem of class, but, if we go back before that, I think it is best to stop thinking in terms of class.174

Moreover, the contemporaneous significance of jōmin for Yanagita lay in its opposition to, as Najita and Harootunian have rightly argued, “one of the most divisive aspects of modern Western capitalism,” namely “its relocation of the people according to a functional division of labor based on presumed rational premises that in fact had come to be manifested in contending classes.” It identified the distinctive feature of the Japanese commons to be its “communitarianism, which referred to the horizontal social relations held together by a system of mutual assistance and confirmed by a territorial tutelary shrine deity” and which was “in imminent danger of disintegrating before the relentless penetration of Western capitalism and central bureaucracy.”175 And Yanagita’s Tales of Tōno sought to capture the consciousness of jōmin by faithfully recording the indigenous folklore and legends of ghosts, monsters, supernatural vanishing, and mountain people that appeared in the daily life of the peasants in

174 Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga kataru sengo 55-nen, vol. 6, 77-78.
the Tōno village.

Yanagita’s approach in Tales of Tōno and his other work stands in great contrast to that of Western ethnologists, as he lets his collected stories largely speak for themselves, seamlessly and unobtrusively weaving in his observations and refraining from constructing theoretical models of classification and categorical analysis as we find in Western anthropology. Yoshimoto has called Yanagita’s style “a method of non-method” akin to a “flow of bodily fluids” in which the reader experiences from within his or her sensibility an arrival of an image of, for instance, matrimonial customs as a “déjà vu phenomenon”:

His method and style are formed on the premise that the reader’s unconscious will share the feeling of being inside the village. As long as one is drawn to its appeal (magical force), the reader’s unconscious is invariably stimulated to feel that he or she is inside the customs of a Japanese village. That appears to be the reason why I (we) receive the impression like that of a déja-vu phenomenon.176

Such a style and method have led Western scholars to view Yanagita’s popularity—owing in part to the New Left students’ rediscovery of his work—as “attributable solely to peculiarities in the contemporary Japanese situation” and “thus ‘untranslatable’” for Western audience, consigning Yanagita “entirely to the realm of literature” that had no particular “social-scientific value.”177

Weighing on the postwar debate between statisticians and social historians on the nineteenth-century English workers’ standard of living and quality of life, Thompson, however, underlined the importance of literature in grasping the experience of English workers:

From food we are led to homes, from homes to health, from health to family life, and thence to leisure, work-discipline, education and play, intensity of labor, and so on. From standard-of-life we pass to way-of-life. But the two are not the same. The first is measurement of qualities: the

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second a description (and sometimes an evaluation) of qualities. Where statistical evidence is appropriate to the first, we must rely largely upon “literary evidence” as to the second.\footnote{\textit{Making of the English Working Class}, 211.}

Yanagita’s major preoccupation was also with the jōmin’s “way-of-life” and to describe this “way-of-life” from within. That he is dealing with the Japanese commoners and peasants or jōmin in their traditional village setting, in their indigenous community that is the modicum of “the unchangeability of Asiatic societies,” from the jōmin’s perspective and values and not with their culture after they had suffered expropriation under modern economic developments make his work necessarily grounded in “literary and poetic qualities” rather than in the modern method of the social sciences.

Yanagita, in fact, consciously challenged the latter in \textit{Tales of Tōno}, invoking his intention in the preface: “In the mountain villages of Japan, in areas yet deeper into the mountains than Tōno, there must be countless other legends about mountain gods and yamabito. May these legends be told and send shudder to those who live in the lowlands.”\footnote{\textit{Tōno Monogatari}, 5.} By “those who live in the lowlands,” Yanagita meant those in the agrarian and urban communities who have acceded to capitalist modernization that threatened to extinguish such stories--and their correspondent lived experiences--as Yanagita compiled. In a review of Edward Said’s \textit{Orientalism}, Yoshimoto stressed how Yanagita posed his method also as a critical challenge to Orientalist discourse of Western modernity:

At this point I remembered that Yanagita Kunio in the opening of \textit{Tales of Tōno} made a dedication, “I dedicate this book to people in foreign countries.” Yanagita didn’t think particularly that \textit{Tales of Tono} would be read by a Western Orientalist. Although \textit{Tales of Tono} is a narrative about the Orient (East Asia) from a view inside the Orient (East Asia), in its style and method he did not try to use Western methods, except those he absorbed unconsciously. If Western Orientalists read these “tales,” they will no doubt read them as written source materials of
indigenous folk stories from the Yaponasian islands that have come into contact with a continent spanning from Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia. But Yanagita’s dedication demanded the Western Orientalist to understand and read into the style and method of writing in Tales of Tōno, to see in it something more than indigenous source materials. The dedication signified such a challenge from Yanagita to Western Orientalists. This lies at the opposite pole of the attitude and mode of our country’s “generally Oriental (East Asian)” Western scholarship which, mastering foreign languages and Occidentalizing (Westernizing) its intellect and methods, makes Western culture and institutions its subject.¹⁸⁰

Yanagita’s approach was the road that Japanese scholars--and Western scholars of Japan--did not take and, in Tales of Tōno, this appears as an articulated experience of a world in which prohibitions and customs are not codified and institutionalized as visible forms of authority but felt and experienced as shamanistic curses, dreams, mysterious disappearances, various kinds of monstrosity, haunting and possession, seasonal rituals and festivals. In closely reading Tales of Tōno we are drawn to these stories as if they were our own material experience, discovering within ourselves a sense of the déjà vu Yoshimoto mentioned.

Yoshimoto’s Communal Illusion extracted a particular kind of logic from these seemingly inchoate experiences, which capitalist and Marxist discourse of modernity expunged as superstitious, backward, reactionary, and feudal, and indicated its intractable power even after the lands and ecology that had nourished them were enclosed, forcing impoverished peasants into the city to look for work. One expression of this was the young military officers’ attempt at a coup d’état in the 2.26 Incident and related radical rightwing assassinations of capitalist magnates and their political and bureaucratic allies. Although Yanagita himself worked as a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Agriculture until 1919, he dissented against the cupidity and fury of capitalist modernization, openly opposing the attempt on the part of state Shintō under the Meiji system to

¹⁸⁰ Shin shomotsu no kaitaigaku 新・書物の解体学 (Tokyo: Metarōgu, 1992), 311-312.
enclose folk Shintō temples and practices under its ecologically destructive, hierarchically restructured authority:

He believed state Shintō to be dishonest and artificial representation of popular religious practices. In folk Shintō, he emphasized, there were no professional priests or formalized doctrines. Its beliefs had sprung from the experiences of the collectivity and had been transmitted as an oral tradition since ancient times by ordinary laypersons. Moreover, these beliefs were centered on respect for communal deities wherever they were enshrined. These deities, accordingly, represented the spirit of human ancestors, both men and women equally. No deity was to be seen as hierarchically superior to another, as proposed in state Shintō. Also important, the collective beliefs of folk Shintō were rooted in a worship of nature in which trees, creatures, and all other natural objects were endowed with a spirit comparable to that of human beings...Often this form of worship was associated with fertility deities of agricultural production. In all of this, he emphasized that folk Shintō exemplified the continuing reality of agrarian community and solidarity between human beings and nature. In place of the state that was responsible for bureaucratization of folk Shintō, Yanagita envisaged an expanded tutelary shrine. In short, popular community would assume greater importance than the hierarchic state.\(^{181}\)

The man who solicited Yanagita to join the anti-enclosure campaign against state Shinto was Minakata Kumagusu 南方熊楠, a brilliant polymath bacteriologist and ethnologist who eventually succeeded in preventing the enclosure of Shintō shrines and forests in his home region of Tanabe in Wakayama Prefecture after a decade of struggle (including an eighteen-day imprisonment). In 1886 Minakata had traveled to the United States and stayed in East Lansing, Michigan, where, instead of attending classes, he prowled through the fields in search of various species of animals and plants. In 1891 he went to Cuba and, while collecting new plants species, observed the Cuban anti-imperialist struggle for independence. Moving to London a year later and, after winning first prize in a contest for astronomical studies, Minakata worked in the British Museum organizing documents related to archaeology, anthropology, and religion, publishing a number of articles in *Nature* and *Notes and Queries* and

\(^{181}\) Najita and Harootunian, “Japan’s Revolt against the West,” 249-250.
befriended the Chinese nationalist revolutionary Sun Yat-sen who was at the time in exile. He finally returned to Japan and settled in Tanabe for the rest of his life, focusing most of his energy as an independent scholar to explore the cosmology and ecology of the commons of his region. He was also an intellectual mentor to the Aikido founder Ueshiba Morihei, who digested after his own fashion Minakata’s distinctive, mandala-centered philosophy of nature into his kotodama-grounded practice of martial arts.

It is true that, although Yanagita and Kumagusu opposed state Shintō, they both respected the tennō (Yanagita had worked as an imperial secretary and participated in formal ceremonies of the imperial household while Minakata had given a lecture on his research in botany and bacteriology to the Emperor in 1929). But their tennō was not the tennō to which the bureaucratic modernizers had appealed to legitimize their policy of state-building and capital accumulation, both of which assaulted the commons and expropriated the peasants.

Miyamoto Tsuneichi 宮本常一 was one of Yanagita’s leading disciples who made extensive ambulatory trips through Japan and collected a massive amount of raw materials on peasant folklore and popular traditions, establishing his own unique brand of popular ethnology from below. Miyamoto, who was himself of a peasant background, vividly described some key aspects of the Japanese commons in his masterpieceWasurerareta Nihonjin 忘れられた日本人 (“The Forgotten Japanese”), published in 1960. Here Miyamoto comments on the communal practice of yoriai (gathering together) in which members of the village assemble and discuss matters of significance to the community for hours, sometimes days, on end as long as it took for the issues to become settled:

This form of yoriai did not start recently. Some of the old request records of the village date back to nearly two hundred years ago. That is what remains as a document but yoriai must have existed long before that. According to a story of a seventy-year-old old man, during his childhood it
was done the same way as it is today. But what was different then was, if you were hungry, you did not go home to eat but someone brought bentō [boxed meal] from home and, while eating that, continued talking and, if the conversation did not stop at night, there were those who spent the night there, others who talked on through the night, and it was continued until they came to a resolution. However, even difficult problems were resolved in about three days. It required a lot of patience but the point was not to force anything. Everybody talked until they felt satisfied. That had to be firmly followed. Talking did not mean making argumentation. It meant putting forward all related matters you knew in relation to a particular matter.  

Like Yanagita and Minakata, throughout his life Miyamoto was concerned with how to defend and revive in new ways those long-held customs and traditions, such as that of folk Shinto and yoriai, of the Japanese commons. Here their sympathies cross over with those of Edward Thompson’s, who posed the moral economy of the English commoners against the “economic man” of both capitalism and orthodox Marxism. In his autobiography, Miyamoto also distinguished the basis of his commonist project from Marxist historical materialism and how the latter was blind to the actuality of how people lived, to their irreducible agency:

At the time historical materialist history was in vogue and the prevalent views were how the rulers and capitalists all exploited the people who, thus sucked dry, lived like dregs, but I myself did not necessarily think in this way. It is true that such exploitation exists. But did not the people live on their own with everything that they had and carried their own world with them? I have walked all over the country and, getting to know many peasants, have learned from them. If you look at the imprints of their nails that they had carved on this land, you can understand that. A single paddy, a single field, a cedar tree, a pine tree, and everything from a narrow path to a ditch to a habitat were all made by the hands of the people. And a single paddy had produced rice for hundreds of years and a single field had produced many kinds of food. It was the peasants who put in the effort to produce them but, during that long period, did not exhaust the earth. They did not become immiserated from exploitation but continued to live on vitally.  

In the context of Yanagita, Minakata, and Miyamoto’s scholarship of the commons from indigenous perspective of Japanese commoners, the aim of

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Communal Illusion was a search for a method to affirm this agency from the perspective of social power. It sought to do this by finding in the particular logic of the commons a means to transcend and dissolve communal illusion through which the state-form expressed itself throughout Japanese history, to relativize the tennō system, so that the repressive and reactionary elements of the Japanese commons could be removed and, as Marx said of the Russian obschina, act as a “fulcrum of social regeneration” of Japanese society.

Of course, no more than Marx’s Capital does for commodity fetishism, Yoshimoto’s work does not specify how a dissolution of communal illusion is to take place. But a vector of such historical possibility is implicit in their respective methods. For Yoshimoto the two realms of the “individual”--which was the subject of What Is Beauty and Introduction--and the “communal” has an a priori opposition, just as the commodity-form is an inversion of actual social relations among human beings: “For human beings communal illusion has the structure of inversion in relation to self illusion.” Communal illusion puts enormous burden on the individual, but human beings are “an existence that can create many burdens under the force of inevitability about which one can do nothing, at times in order to exterminate one’s existence, knowing that one is going to be exterminated.”

For Yoshimoto, human beings are animals that have to inevitably live through their “illusions.” The totality of these illusions, as noted, are separated into three realms that exist on different levels and that cannot be conflated with each other, self illusion, communal illusion, and dual illusion that revolves around the axis of sex. In Asia, the latter “dual illusion” retains the most ferocious power, unleashing destructive and anarchic illusion of the individual to the level of communal illusion, as exemplified in the rightwing militarists’ struggle for the commons under the banner of the tennō system, and focuses it into the center of the community because of its deep-seated agricultural practices and traditions in
the commons whose aftereffects long remain—as grotesquely distorted as they may be in the wartime ideology of “East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere”—even after capitalism has destroyed them materially.

This is why, while violently suppressing rightwing militants, Ōmotokyō sect, and underground Communist activists, the Japanese wartime state also could, on the one hand, co-opt pan-Asian and rightwing radicals into such war efforts as the Manchurian colonial policies, whose slogans and ideas preserved traces of utopian peasant commonism of the radical right-wingers and pan-Asian ideology of the radical nationalists; and, on the other hand, create droves of apostates among the Communist activists by appealing to the indigenous traditions it was nominally defending—contra the abstract discourse of dogmatic Communism—and by making use of the latter’s modernizing impulse for state socialism and politically valorized proletarian literature into, respectively, the collectivist elaboration of a wartime state economy and politically valorized popular pro-war propaganda literature. Communal illusion thus worked as the most potent leverage to contain revolution and defuse it into identification with the state.

However, both Marx and Yoshimoto approached each of their subjects, capitalism and communal illusion, as a historical system that, relativized through their critical analysis, could be de-fetishized from its appearance as an eternal form of domination and viewed as having a historical end. Yoshimoto expresses this fundamental premise of his work:

And the expulsion of communal illusion inside individual illusion and dual illusion means the annihilation of communal illusion depicted on the “other shore” of communal illusion. Whether communal illusion appears in the temporary form of primitive religions or, as it does today, in the temporary form of institutions and ideologies, the theme of how all the communal illusions depicted on the “other shore” of communal illusions must become extinct, alongside of the theme of the extinction of communal illusion itself, is even now an essential and radical theme for human
For Marx, the “other shore” of capitalism was, as he said at the end of *Capital*, the expropriation of the expropriators and “co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself.” That is a vision very similar to the one held by Yanagita, Miyamoto, and many of the right-wing radicals. *Communal Illusion* tells us how difficult is the fulfillment of that vision is but also how necessary.

Moreover, in taking apart Engels’s approach in *Origins of Family, Private Property, and State* (and, in turn, Lewis Henry Morgan’s method that Engels emulated in his work), *Communal Illusion* offers a way to entirely bypass the inadequacies apparent in the works of Engels’s epigones among the Japanese Marxists who, like the Kōza-ha and Rōnō-ha Marxists, sought to understand the modern Japanese state merely in terms of economic power of the bourgeoisie and residual legacy of feudal land ownership. The analytical framework of communal illusion allows Yoshimoto to do exactly what he did for the history of literary expression, to recognize a structure of human experiences that modern economic categories and the Marxist base-superstructure model leave out, namely a structure of experiences traceable to the Asiatic commons. To understand the latter communal relations purely in terms of economic relationships, to define human reproduction in pre-capitalist society as an economic category of division of labor, as Engels did in *Origins*, was to replicate the mistake the eighteenth-century bourgeois thinkers and their nineteenth-century descendants had committed and which Marx had criticized in the “Introduction” to the *Grundrisse*. The terms of understanding the origin of the state had to be found elsewhere, for, even historically speaking, the existence of the state antedates both the notion and practice of economics as a central

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184 Kyodo-genso-ron, 135.
mechanism of organizing society. In going to *Tales of Tōno* and *Kojiki*, Yoshimoto was roping in a way of seeing that took the language and world-view of, respectively, the Japanese village commune and ancient origin myth as a method of analysis that could successfully combat Marxist and modern bourgeois analysis from reducing the commons, emperor system, traditional laws and customs as superstitious, unenlightened, backward, and reactionary remnants of pre-capitalist society.

When we compare *Communal Illusion* with Edward Thompson’s *Customs in Common*, we observe ample proof of how their respective sensitivity as poets to the texture of language show up in their seamless uses of literary and mythological sources as an essential means of augmenting their reasoning. More importantly, their approaches toward history and anthropology share the commonality of seeking to recover those actors and moments in history that are suppressed or discarded by traditional top-down narratives, to rescue them, as Thompson famously put it, "from the enormous condescension of posterity."

Yoshimoto has also said in a 1982 lecture:

> It is a frequent misunderstanding to think that what we have learned as Japanese history is the real history, but this is not so. History is the record of the activities of the dominant communities and what those communities have orally transmitted are mythologies. In reality, this is not the case, and we can say that what the agricultural commune was like within the Asian agricultural community that hardly changed for thousands of years and how the people participated in non-agrarian occupations outside the agricultural commune make up the greater part of really studying Japanese history. In order to reconstruct history, there is no other way but to take this path. And it is extremely difficult to investigate this from what survives in mythologies and historical records. Hence we have no other way except to explore it in our own way. There is no other way to supplement Japanese history but through this method.\(^{185}\)

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\(^{185}\) Yoshimoto Taka’aki zen-kōen raibu-shū 1: Ajia-teki ni tsuite 吉本隆明全講演ライブ集 1: <アジア的>ということ (Tokyo: Yūdachisha, 2001), 42.
If we are to put aside all the distinctively biographical and historical details out of which both Yoshimoto and Thompson’s ideas emerged and if we are to simply zero in on those elements in *Communal Illusion* and *Customs in Common* that explicitly deal with ways of critically investigating popular rituals, we find several points of convergence and difference.

Both Thompson and Yoshimoto are weighing in on the questions of the historical commons--in the case of Thompson, on how popular rituals, such as the sale of wives and rough music, historically changed and functioned as expressions of English plebian customary culture of moral economy and, in the case of Yoshimoto, on how rituals pertaining originally to the Japanese agricultural community transformed into the hegemonic ritual of the ruling class of the ancient Japanese state, symbolically compressed into the figure of the emperor of the Yamato dynasty. Although both Yoshimoto and Thompson have been critical of structuralism in their different ways, a structuralist analogy may be drawn here, albeit with none of its assumptions of trans-historical formalism, to emphasize the distinctions between these two approaches to rituals: Thompson’s approach may called a "synchronic" while Yoshimoto’s "diachronic."

*Customs in Common* as a whole deals with the eighteenth-century English landscape in which the conservative tradition of the commons, faced with the progressive threat of enclosures and repression from above, transformed into a popular culture of resistance and rebellion against the new dispensation of capitalist market innovators. Hence the book deals with this particularly heated and intensified moment of radical change in the eighteenth century when history
could have moved one way or the other, especially in the 1790s, when the trans-Atlantic revolutionary proletariat from Haiti to France to the Americas linked up and created a profanely illuminating time of global revolutionary possibility from below that Professor Peter Linebaugh, borrowing a phrase from Wordsworth, has called "a spot in time." This focus is "synchronic" in the sense that it is dealing with a very peculiar and rare moment in history for the emerging industrial capitalist system as well as its plebian, commonist, and antinomian antithesis that can be productively studied, as Thompson does, in a chronologically self-contained fashion.

We can see the "synchronic" character of Thompson’s reading of popular rituals more concretely in the chapter on "Rough Music": the piece begins with a question of the term *charivari* as a universal category for this peasant ritual of making noise and playing loud music to humiliate someone within the community who has violated its norms, particularly those dealing with transgressions of sexual nature; Thompson proposes the term "Rough Music" instead, thus emphasizing the indigenously specific nature of this practice among the English commoners. Thompson’s sumptuously empirical details of the different instances of "Rough Music"—whether it goes by the name of "stang" or "skimmington" depending on various local and contextual inflections--give us a whole range of what this practice meant in different moments and places in eighteenth-century England, and the picture he paints is a profoundly complex one: for example, "Rough Music" functioned, according to Thompson, as much to repress and contain libidinous and rebellious acts of women within the fold of
patriarchy as to enforce community punishment on child-abusing fathers and wife-beating husbands; it also extended into the sphere of bringing popular justice of public humiliation and sometimes fatal violence against those members of their class or those in relatively intimate contact with it who violated the unspoken code of the commons and, again, the range here is wide, from legitimate ones against functionaries of the capitalist enclosures to public lynching of racist nature.¹⁸⁶

Thompson’s sympathetic ambivalence toward "Rough Music" is echoed in Yoshimoto’s ambivalence toward the commons or what he calls the "Asian agricultural community" in his lecture on the specificity of the Asiatic commune. While clearly recognizing the commons as full of superstitions, confusions, and repressive characteristics that the capitalist or socialist "modernizers" deem "unenlightened" and "backward," he, like the late Marx whom he cites in this lecture, sees it as also exhibiting profoundly positive relations of mutual aid and communal sharing of resources that are important for us to appreciate on their own terms. Nowhere does this perspective appear more clearly than in his chapter on rituals in *Communal Illusion*.

Yoshimoto reads the historical origins of rituals in Japan as stemming from the seasonal practices of the Japanese peasants to perform shamanistic rites and rituals to ensure a good harvest and explains their development through three sequences. Citing *Kojiki*, Yoshimoto notes that the earliest manifestations of ancient agrarian Japanese agrarian festivals treat the experience of birth and

death as interchangeable, excepting the fact that "birth" is thought not so much as a product of the sexual act as an act that the woman performs by herself and, for this reason, the dual illusion of sex and family as objectified by the female--whether in the form of the goddess Izanami or Princess Ōgetsu--is here projected as the communal illusion of the peasantry. Here the mythical and/or ritual slaughter of the goddess, the metamorphosis from life into death back into rebirth, is intimately linked with the birth and transformation of grain through the peasants' agricultural cultivation. This is the first sequence.

In the second, more developed sequence, citing the Okunotō agrarian festival, we find that the need for the sacrificial killing of the goddess is eliminated because she is paired up with a god and the balance of sexual forces in the dual illusion is struck in a clear recognition of sex as an act that produces birth, with the offering of paired fish and mata- (or "crotch-") daikon to the ritual visit of a deity of the farm land (played by a properly attired and masked member of the community) to every home within the village. There is a clear ritualized understanding of space and time: lasting for two months between December fifth and February tenth, it covers a crucial phase of the annual season preceding the spring harvest, and the space between the land--from whence the agrarian deity comes--and the home corresponds to the interaction between communal and dual illusions.

In the third and final sequence, we find how these rituals and festivals of the commons are co-opted and internalized into the logic of the ancient Japanese state. The Daijō festival that the emperor performs after he is
enthroned, offering the new crops to the gods, and only once during his reign compresses and abstracts the space and time of the commons described above. Space between the land and home is compressed through the emperor’s passage through the two sacred rooms of Yuki and Sumi-den where the ritual takes place, while time is compressed from two months into a single night. Such compression abstracts from the concrete agrarian popular practices of the Japanese peasants and, through this abstraction, the original intents and purposes, even the traces, of communal working and cultivation of the land is obliterated. Furthermore, the emperor’s manner of sitting in this ritual, one side of his face turned to the sacred seat (shinza) to indicate his divine status as an agrarian god while the other facing away makes the emperor a symbolic functionary of none other than the peasantry themselves in the form of a presiding shamanistic priest. The general effect of this hegemonic synthesis of abstraction results in fictively condensing in the figure of the emperor the ideological representation of the state, folk religious conceptions associated with the commons, and the imagined identity of the peasantry themselves.

Taken as a whole, we can describe Yoshimoto’s approach here as a "diachronic" one because it deals with the longue durée of how the rituals of the commons changed over a long span of historical time and were absorbed into use for ruling-class hegemony of the ancient Yamato dynasty. Of course, Thompson himself suggestively gestures toward this synchronic approach, as when he mentions the adaptation of "rough music" to nineteenth-century industrial conflict and, in passing, "to the public humiliation after the liberation of
European countries of women who had kept company with members of the occupying forces during World War II, or to the rites of public humiliation practised during the Cultural Revolution in China" in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{187}

Nonetheless, Thompson’s stress is decidedly on the class nature of these rituals from the perspective of commoners, peasants, and plebeians while Yoshimoto’s is on the nature of how the ruling class adapts the form of the rituals of the commons in order to fortify its rationale for ruling over the commoners and peasants even as the latter create their own particular world-view from them. Apart from the obvious geographic difference of focus, we may also notice how Yoshimoto is primarily dealing with a historical time period that is far longer and considerably predates the moment of capitalist enclosures, imposition of work-discipline, and quantitatively rationalizing abstraction of time, the latter being the crucial moment that Thompson makes his analytical backdrop.

Even as we keep these differences in mind, some productive convergences emerge from Yoshimoto and Thompson’s respective approaches in interpreting the culture of the commons. One is self-evident: in order to do a fully worked-out history of class struggle, the ways in which each of the contending classes uses and reconstructs culture for their own end have to be carefully fleshed out and analyzed. This question leads to the historical study of the state itself and how popular laws, customs, and rituals often form the seeds and roots out of which the state emerges on non-economic terms of communal illusion. The rejection of modernist stadialism is connected to this, recognizing that we can no longer undertake such fundamental investigations of the

\textsuperscript{187} Customs in Common, 524.
commons that assume the progressive model of historical and economic evolution. When we place Yoshimoto’s stress on abstraction of time and space as the necessary constituent for the formation of the emperor-centered state hegemony over the Japanese commoners next to Thompson’s analysis of how time is abstracted through capitalist discipline of forcibly hammering subsistence and artisan labor of concrete use-value through the punishing and homogenizing exchange-value of the wage-form, we recognize the necessity of certain forms of abstraction in establishing both state hegemony and capitalist discipline and how they do not necessarily cancel out each other, as in the case of modern Japanese state and capitalism. Specifying the nature of these abstractions may be immensely helpful in exploring ways of meaningfully escaping these strategies of ideological and disciplinary containment, in forming non-economic culture of subsistence and envisioning the “extinction of communal illusion itself.”

We can continue to find comparative continuities in Yoshimoto and Thompson’s methods of reading the commons in their other major works, e.g., *What Is Beauty for Language* and *The Making of the English Working Class*. Both of these latter books, for example wrestled in their own way with the Marxist base-superstructure paradigm, forging theoretical frameworks that rejected its mechanical, dogmatic Marxist conception of economic reductionism; they made possible a way of developing the early Marx’s incipient meditations on the state and religion into the sphere of literary language and communal illusion, on one hand, and more fluid application of historical materialism on the analysis of
culture of the embryonic English working class and plebian moral economy of the commons, on the other.

But there is also a comparative continuity of politics in relation to the question of commitment and apostasy, which, in the postwar Japanese context, took the form of the debate over *tenkō* (転向, literally, “turnaround,” referring to the act, for example, of changing one’s allegiances, from antiwar to pro-war, Communism to anti-Communism, etc.). The latter was one of the defining debates that set the stage for the beginning of the first New Left in Japan, fundamentally challenging the unquestioned authority of the Communist Party as the popular vanguard organization of the working class.
CHAPTER FOUR
BETWEEN TENKŌ AND DEFAULT: ONTOLOGY OF COMMITMENT

A whore makes a huge yawn.
The red 0
In the 0 it darkens,
and the darkness of fleshy vermilion traced with blood.

Her freckled, yellow skin
and scraped knees,
people turn,
and, as she is pulling eyes and pulling sleeves,

The whore makes a yawn
that might eat up anybody around her.
I have never seen a hole in Japan
as deep as this yawn.

From long-winded debates,
to war crimes and liberalism,
even if you shove them into this yawn,
they scrape & rustle. They still scrape & rustle.

Kaneko Mitsuharu, “From That Day When the War Ended”

The postwar intellectual and political hegemony of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) largely derived from the wartime persecution it had suffered as a seeming minority of consistent opposition to the Japanese militarist state. With the end of the war and its attendant reversal of fortunes, what was previously considered their moral and political liability became their moral and political capital under the U.S. occupation, which, at least in its first few years before the anticommunist “reverse course” became its official policy, partly

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abided by its dictum of democratizing political institutions and fragmenting the centralized authority of the zaibatsu, legalizing unionism, and undertaking land reform. Even after the largely CP-based labor union leadership's capitulation to General MacArthur's notorious January 31st 1947 cessation directive for the planned general strike and the ensuing “red purges” of unions and workplaces, the Communist Party continued to function as a center of political gravity for much of the liberal and left intellectuals, who had come to dominate the various cultural and educational institutions from which erstwhile fascists and rightwing militarists found themselves increasingly marginalized (politically, however, under careful U.S. backing, the restoration of pro-militarist industrialists and politicians gradually proceeded, institutionally making up for the temporary loss of their voices within the cultural sphere of production).  

Among these postwar democrats, questions of the extent of Japan's modernity, the degree of its economic and cultural retention of feudal values and relations of production, and the forms of social subjectivity it was in need of establishing were vigorously argued, most of them a continuation of the same questions and themes traversed by prewar intellectuals and philosophers from the Köza-ha and Rōnō-ha Marxists' arguments over the nature of Japanese capitalism to the debate over Japanese transcendence of modernity among thinkers affiliated with the Kyōto school of philosophy.

One issue that was decidedly new in the postwar climate and, in many ways, the thorniest, given its


incendiary ramification concerning one’s political and intellectual legitimacy, was that of tenkō.

According to Honda Shūgo’s *Tenkō bungaku ron* (On Tenkō Literature) --which Yoshimoto cites at the beginning of his influential essay on the topic-- tenkō contains three possible meanings: “the first is the case of a communist renouncing his communism, the second is when--as in the cases of Katō Hiroyuki 加藤弘之, Mori Ōgai 森鴎外, and Tokutomi Roka 徳富蘆花--a progressive rationalist thought in the general sense is renounced, and the third refers to the general phenomenon of intellectual rotation (conversion).”¹⁹¹ The term had in its most prevalent usage a sense of returning to indigenous or feudal Japanese tradition, rejecting all the ideologies and practices associated with modernity. The negative implication of the term had an especially politically volatile effect in postwar Japan because a flurry of debates ensued in literary and intellectual circles over who was guilty of tenkō and who was not during the war, tenkō here equated to collaboration with the wartime state.

Some leading figures who were associated with the now reconstituted JCP and who purportedly preserved their ideological purity in wartime prison employed this as a litmus test for entrenching the authority of the party (anyone who thus proved themselves a tenkō-sha--an apostate--now had a chance to convert back into the fold of the church of the revolutionary vanguard with their past political sins not so much forgiven but used as a means of tightening party discipline). In the confused tumult of this discussion, Yoshimoto’s three essays--“Tenkō ron” 転向論 (“On tenkō”), “Bungakusha no sensō-sekinin” 文学者の戦争責任 (“War Responsibility of Writers”), and “Shijin no sensō-sekinin ron” 詩人の戦争責任論 (“Concerning the tenkō of poets”)--along with the heated

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polemics he exchanged with the literary critic Hanada Kiyoteru 花田清輝 over the political function of literature, cleared the air of backhanded innuendoes and loosely defined notions of tenkō, spelling out in deft clarity what was at stake in the debate. Of these interventions, “On tenkō” sets the skeletal axis of Yoshimoto’s position.

“On tenkō” argues that what characterized the famous 1933 tenkō of Sano Manabu 佐野学 and Nabeyama Sadachika 鍋山貞親, the two Communist Party officials—who collaborated on their statements of change of heart after perusing some classical Japanese Buddhist texts in prison—were their failure to come to terms with the tradition and consciousness of the Japanese taishū. Sano and Nabeyama uncritically pursued Communism as a form of Western modernity while rejecting anything indigenously Japanese in the manner of “backward country intellectuals”; therefore, in the face of being forced to confront the least bit of “genetically superior elements of feudal culture,” their conviction easily crumbled to pieces. Alongside of this uncritical consumption of Western modernity, what crucially contributed to their tenkō was their isolation from the Japanese taishū, whose support of the war effort they were, therefore, unable to withstand intellectually or politically.

Yoshimoto found the most potentially productive way out of this dilemma of either/or absorption into Western modernity or Japanese feudal tradition in the Communist writer Nakano Shigeharu’s 中野重治 short story, “Mura no ie” 村の家 (“A House in the Village”), a fictionalized autobiographical account of Nakano’s own struggle to deal with the tenkō he had made in order to get out of jail. In the story, after his release from jail, the protagonist goes home in the country, where his father—a common villager who had no sympathy for his son’s politics but expected him to die for what he believed in—chides him for playing around with revolutionary ideas without committed action, further remarking that if his son
wants to keep alive what he had heretofore written, he must stop writing. To this, Nakano’s alter ego can only reply, “I understand very well; nonetheless I’d like to keep on writing.” Yoshimoto read this as foreshadowing the protagonist’s renewed realization of the necessity to confront the “genetically superior elements of feudalism” as represented by his father, who symbolized the traditional village life. While Sano and Nabeyama’s tenkō signifies an unconditional surrender to these Japanese feudal elements, the main character of “A House in the Village” transforms his surrender to “the superior quality of Japanese feudalism” into an opportunity to seize the substance of the real enemy whom he must confront.192

In contrast, Yoshimoto considered the “non-tenkō” of those leading CP members--such as Miyamoto Kenji, Miyamoto Yuriko, and Kobayashi Takiji--who refused to draft and sign conciliatory statements to the military authority as also another form of tenkō because the ideas they were defending, namely the 1932 Comintern Thesis on Japan and their conception of Marxism had no more critical relation to historical and social reality in Japan than Sano and Nabeyama’s blind adherence to Western modernist ideas did. This is a point that would be incomprehensible to those who insist on ideologically understanding tenkō in terms of being for or against the Pacific war, in identifying a particular position assumed during that period with liberal, Communist, or rightwing militarist ideology. For the critical confrontation with "genetically superior elements of feudalism" that Yoshimoto perceived as latent in Nakano’s declaration to his father was tantamount to absorbing the original image of the wartime taishū, not to uncritically accept the popular support of the war, as a facile populist might, but to work through the social and historical basis (working-

192 Ibid., 11-14.
class self-activity, the popular consciousness of the Japanese commons and emperor system) of this support, to struggle through it to the other side of opposing the war from the grassroots. The Communists failed at this because they were less interested in what the Japanese workers, taishū, actually did and thought than in forcing them to fit a foreign ideology they had imported from Russia, defining the really existing peasants and proletarians as "backward," "reactionary," "pre-industrial," "feudal," and insufficiently "revolutionary" in their narrow sense of accommodating themselves the dictates of their vanguard leadership, which at the time was defined by the 1932 Thesis.

The 1932 Thesis established the Comintern dogma of opposing the category of class against that of nationality and race--based on the vulgar Marxist doctrine of opposition between feudalism and capitalist modernity--and, because the majority of the Communist intellectuals, whether or not they had committed tenkō, failed to perceive that the feudal and modern elements in Japanese society did not necessarily contradict or oppose each other, all they could manage was either their powerless co-optation into Japanese tradition or vacuous repetition of a dogma--consistently left unexamined in relation to historical reality--that only proved how far removed they were from the direction and movement of the Japanese taishū.193 It is this latter dogmatism that survived the war and became the mainstay of the reconstituted JCP in postwar Japan, creating in its wake an aura or "myth of the vanguard" whose veil, after the end of the war, took fourteen years to be shattered.

At the same time Yoshimoto is careful to not conflate different types of tenkō even within the Japanese Communist mode. In 1958, when Yoshimoto published "Tenkō-ron," he had already made, from 1954 onwards, several major

193 Ibid., 19-23.
interventions in postwar Japanese debate on commitment and war responsibility, and one of them was printed one month after his resignation from Tōyō Inki Manufacture Company over his union activism, entitled "Minshu-shugi bunkgaku hihan--nidan tenkō-ron" 民主主義文学批判--二段転向論 ("Critique of Democratic Literature: Two-stage Theory of Tenkō"). As its subtitle suggests, this essay posits two stages that the Japanese proletarian literary movement had undergone between 1937 and 1942. In the first, the "process of tenkō" was one in which the movement "due to repression, had its defects as a historical movement exposed, became isolated and retreated"; while the second one was a "process of active tenkō" in which the former activists "ingratiated themselves with power by using their skills and theories learned during the golden age of proletarian literature and rationalized its cultural and literary policies."

The first type of tenkō is "symbolized by the despotic murder of Kobayashi Takiji"--a Communist novelist who, before his death under police torture, authored Kani-kōsen (Factory Ship), "Fuzai jinushi" 不在地主 ("Absentee Landlord"), and "Tō-seikatsu-sha" 党生活者 ("Party Worker"), all emblematic fictional works of the 1930s proletarian literary movement--and was committed "against one's conscience". The second type was done "following one's conscience," a process in which "the defects within the literary theory, practical work, organizational theory of proletarian literary movement self-rotated and reproduced themselves." This reproduction was nowhere more glaringly demonstrated than when apostate Communists seamlessly applied their "literary theory, practical work, organizational theory" that they had learned and practiced during their activism in the proletarian literary movement to the war effort, with required modifications in their slogans, labels, and categories.

Edward Thompson also accorded two sequences to what he called the "ideology of apathy" in his 1960 "Out of Apathy," which served as one of the
major discursive points of departure for the first British New Left, just as
Yoshimoto’s writings on tenkō in the late 1950s did for the first Japanese New
Left:

In the first stage, responsible minds recoiled from a social reality
which they found inexplicable or unbearable. The characteristic form of
recoil was disillusion in Communism, so that by mid-forties this
disenchantment had become a central motif within Western culture…

In the second stage, withdrawal leads on to capitulation to the
status quo; it is proper to speak of a cultural default. Disenchantment
ceases to be a recoil of the responsible in the face of difficult social
experience; it becomes an abdication of intellectual responsibility in the
face of all social experience. And, in the context of the Cold War, and of
exhausted imperialism, the withdrawal or despair of the disenchanted
was twisted--often by lesser men--into an apologia for complicity with
reaction.\footnote{\textit{Poverty of Theory}, 145-146.}

The core of these two stage theories is morphologically very similar: the first is
forced on oneself through historical force and circumstance (fascist repression or
Stalinist betrayal of the revolutionary movements), the second is an active
collaboration with the status quo (the Japanese wartime militarist state or the
anticommunist Natopolitan--as Thompson dubbed--world order). Their nuances
and frameworks, on the other hand, are vastly different.

Yoshimoto’s critique is aimed against the postwar resuscitation of those
prewar proletarian literary ideas that he considers seriously defective and, in
fact, responsible for tenkō (the proof being that they could be reemployed for
military propaganda and industrial policy) while Thompson’s is against the
general ideology of the 1950s Western Cold War culture (that is subsidized, in
part, by the CIA-funded Congress of Cultural Freedom). Thompson is seeking to
rescue "the aspirations of a generation," "a political movement, which embodied

\footnote{\textit{Poverty of Theory}, 145-146.}
much that was honourable," and "the notion of disinterested dedication to a political cause" that he saw Orwell’s *Inside the Whale* burying. For Yoshimoto, such "aspirations" and "disinterested dedication" do not belong to the Japanese Communist movement of the 1930s, which lacked popular support unlike in England and other parts of Europe, but to those who sought to seriously face and critically inherit in their own way those aspirations and values that were co-opted by the fascist components of the militarist ruling class, namely aspirations and values of pan-Asian peasant communal tradition found in its peculiar form in Japan. Unlike Thompson, Yoshimoto cannot write about commitment and apathy in a clear-cut sense of one’s relationship to an active anti-fascist Communist or Left *popular* movement in the 1930s, for there was no such thing in Japan. This is why he attacks the general ideology of the orthodox Left and Communists in 1950s Japan who cannot conceive of their alienation from *popular* tradition as a form of *tenkō* no less egregious than an uncritical support of wartime militarism.

What Yoshimoto took particular exception to was the postwar JCP’s fabrication of its oppositional track record during the war--when even the handful leadership remaining in jail who did not recant their Communism failed to call for or attempt to organize any popular antiwar movement--and pretension that it always stood on the side of the Japanese workers when it simply dismissed the working-class soldiers who died on the battlefield as brainwashed and dying a "dog's death" without seriously analyzing how the wartime state could mobilize such popular support in the first place. Strangely enough, the few Anglophone
scholars who have commented on Yoshimoto almost universally find themselves incapable of comprehending this fairly straightforward critique of JCP postwar politics as anything other than a species of "populist nationalism" (usually embellished derogatively with the adjective "sentimental").

One of the major sources of this misperception is the East Asia specialist Lawrence Olson, who has devoted a chapter of his book *Ambivalent Moderns* to Yoshimoto. As the only full-fledged, English-language treatment of Yoshimoto's work for over a decade, Olson's interpretation has been highly influential in shaping a rather skewed--to say the least--image of Yoshimoto in Anglophone scholarship. There he characterizes Yoshimoto's notion of the *taishū* thus:

His ideas about "the people," which he said lay at the core of his thought, had no sustained political consequence. He built no system, proposed no special theory, but persistently exalted the notion of emotional solidarity between intellectuals and "ordinary" Japanese. Like the American poet Carl Sandburg, he proclaimed "the people, Yes!" He was a symptom of the pluralistic intellectual search for cultural identity that accompanied economic recovery and political confrontation in the postwar period, and especially in the decade 1955-65.¹⁹⁵

Yoshimoto's stress on "the people" as a kind of poetic, vitalistic entity, whose daily life and "thought" were endowed with affective qualities of at least implied virtue, did not spring primarily from mere antiquarian tendencies or nostalgia of "the people" as a kind of anti-elite to reify his own elitist existence. On another level, his yearning for them stemmed from a massive sense of personal and national loss after 1945. Because he identified most naturally with those Japanese intellectuals who were least representative of the *Keimōsha* (Enlightener) tradition, he spoke with some approval of Yanagita and especially of Origuchi, who, he thought, had grasped the "unchanging idea of community" throughout Japanese history.¹⁹⁶

...one felt that, by design, his "people" remained metaphysical to a degree, more idea than reality, or, rather, seen by him to be more real as idea than as fact. This tendency to idealize them, which Yoshimoto readily admitted, was attributed by Maruyama to Yoshimoto's literary

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¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 109.
vocation as well as to his despair over the masses in defeat in 1945. With no personal experience of the evolution of prewar thought, Yoshimoto's own intellectual pilgrimage had taken him from conventional chauvinism to a shocked desire to identify, not with a class-conscious proletariat but with a romantic image of the masses.\(^{197}\)

There are many things wrong with these descriptions, the most obvious of which is Olson's own persistent mode of reifying Yoshimoto's taishū (which stems from the more general reification of Yoshimoto as "a symptom" of a sociological disease of alienated Japanese intellectuals, whose clear-sighted first-world diagnostician Olson fancies himself). Since, as is apparent from Yoshimoto's admission in an interview from whence Olson liberally draws many erroneous conclusions, "taishū" is not a sociological category and neither is it part of any academic method of analysis, then it must be something far more simplistically comprehensible in the scheme of Olson's reductive "sociology of intellectuals," namely "a kind of poetic, vitalistic entity" of Sandburgian type, a factually baseless "romantic image of the masses," that Yoshimoto has concocted to "reify his own elitist existence."

One can literally smell the livid stench of Cold War kulturkampf arising from between Olson's lines (was it not the reigning argument then and now against dissident intellectuals who showed even the slightest sympathy for the plight of popular and working-class movements that they were "romanticizing" or "idealizing" such movements out of guilt for their own privileged status?). This is not an altogether ad hominem point. After all, the arc of Olson's career, from his tutelage at the Naval Japanese Language School during World War II to his work as a Cultural Attaché in the American Embassy in the postwar Philippines and as

\(^{197}\) Ibid., 110.
a writer for the American Universities Field Staff, Inc., to his retirement from the Wesleyan University (where he established the East Asia Studies Program) in 1985, corresponds fairly closely with the entire arc of Cold War cultural policy from its roots in World War II military intelligence to CIA-sponsored establishment of ideologically manicured Area Studies departments and institutes throughout U.S. academia. And, as an erstwhile fellow of the Council of Foreign Relations and a recipient of Order of the Sacred Treasure, Third Class, from the Japanese government, Olson must be enormously seasoned in how to conduct, with considerable sophistication and scholarly attentiveness, such skirmishes in the Cold War "battle of ideas."

Olson demonstrates a general mastery of the Japanese language, even if he either does not or is unable to make the effort to capture the nuances of such fundamental terms as taishū and dochaku. For reasons already cited earlier, taishū cannot simply be translated as the "people" unless one is willing to do a class reading of it that does full justice to its myriad historical vicissitudes in experience and meaning. As for translating dochaku-teki as "nativist," this is rather problematic for the simple reason that it turns the word into a merely abstractly discursive notion--with decidedly ideological, unsavory implications--and ignores its sense of the "indigenous" and, literally, "wearing or arriving at the earth," whose semantic universe squarely belongs in the Japanese commons and the popular traditions, laws, and customs associated with it.

I do not doubt Olson's commendable earnestness in trying to grasp Yoshimoto's ideas in their sui generis complexity. For example, Olson is always
careful to distinguish Yoshimoto from the "nativist" nationalism of such figures as Yanagita and Orikuchi (of course, this still raises the serious question of misrepresenting these latter ethnologists of the Japanese commons too narrowly and derogatively in the sense just noted). But Olson’s Cold War sociological framework, which assumes an ideologically dichotomous conception between the intellectuals and the "people" that Yoshimoto was precisely combating, ultimately makes a pathetic caricature of Yoshimoto as a solipsistically elitist intellectual who, in Olson's words, "often seemed as much enclosed in a glass paperweight of intellection as those whom he attacked, caught up in disputes about modernization or illusion" but who, nonetheless, still "seemed confident that his thought would inevitably be an influence over events, because by definition it was more real than any events."¹⁹⁸ Such characterization has the considerable merit of being untrue in every sense.

Yoshimoto has never viewed his "thought" as an inevitable "influence over events" because that view---more rightly associated with that of the JCP and postwar democratic liberals who sought to exert "influence over events" by enlightening the "people" and raising working-class consciousness--was what he was attacking. If anything was "inevitable" according to Yoshimoto, it was not his or anybody else’s "thought" to determine the course of historical events; rather, it was the tendency of human thought to take its flight into abstraction, for human cognition to remove itself from the material life of subsistence and self-activity of the taishū, including the cognition and thought of the historical taishū themselves. Notwithstanding Olson’s claim to the contrary, a "sustained political

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 111.
consequence," therefore, *could be* and *was* derived from such a critical epistemology of intellectuality, namely that intellectuals "by definition" had no special privilege or expertise in molding or leading the *taishū* and that, in fact, the idea that they could or had done so historically was a self-serving ideological illusion that the actually existing lives and movements of the *taishū* historically disproved time and time again. Therefore, the genuinely meaningful function of intellectuality did not lie in reproducing this ideological illusion of intellectual privilege but in absorbing what the *taishū* actually did in their daily lives and struggles.

If we must situate Yoshimoto's ideas in the genealogy of intellectual history, it is not with the tradition of reconstituted Japanese "nativism" but with that of the international radical libertarian left. This tradition encompasses everything from the anarchist and council communist opposition to the Bolshevik version of state socialism to the "Marxist humanism" of Raya Dunayevskaya, the "socialist humanism" and "libertarian communism" of Edward Thompson, and other currents of autonomist Marxism that draw directly from the "self-activity" of the working class. To be sure, there are considerable differences among this latter tradition and many included in it, perhaps Yoshimoto himself, would take exception to this type of ideological classification. But I think it is fair to say in a broad brushstroke that they all share a common political epistemology concerning the relationship between the people/masses/proletariat and radical intellectuals, averring the function of the latter to be not of leading or organizing
the former but that of theorizing, thinking through, and working with the activities of the former on their own terms.

This is hardly the case of intellectuals fabricating "a kind of anti-elite to reify [their] own elitist existence," a charge more appropriate for the majority of the liberal and orthodox Marxist intelligentsia who do not question their "enlightening" vanguardist role, but constitutes, in fact, its direct opposite, a vigilant effort to avoid reifying "the anti-elite" and to enrich the empty abstractions of "workers," "proletariat," "taishū," and such terms through the study of and direct engagement with the historical and ongoing experiences of the living social subjects referred to by these latter categories--a view that Olson stubbornly refuses to acknowledge, let alone understand. This not only leads Olson to falsely attribute--really his misunderstanding--to Yoshimoto, as when he states that Yoshimoto's idea of the "'people' remained metaphysical to a degree, more idea than reality, or, rather, seen by him to be more real as idea than as fact" (where does Olson find such a tautological dissimulation of metaphysical logic as seeing "idea" as "more real as idea than as fact" anywhere in Yoshimoto's work?). It also prompts Olson to allow the very people Yoshimoto is criticizing to have the final say on his ideas, adding the insult of ideologically scurrilous attacks to the injury of incomprehension.

For instance, in the above quote that sums up Yoshimoto's supposed limitations as a thinker, Olson cites Maruyama Masao, the leading political theorist of postwar Japanese democracy whom Yoshimoto has criticized meticulously in his feature-length book (whose content Olson ably summarizes,
though with an unnecessarily prejudicial editorializing) and whom we have

199 Without making any empirical case to buttress his evaluations, Olson goes on to liberally pass judgments on Yoshimoto's supposedly analytical errors concerning Maruyama's work, e.g., "In taking this line [of "dismissing Sorai as a mere tool of the ruling class" and treating Jinsai as having "had a far truer insight into the artificialities of the neo-Confucian orthodoxy and how to naturalize it to Japanese conditions"] he [Yoshimoto] not only revealed his temperamentally uncongeniality with Maruyama, he also dealt rather carelessly with Maruyama's scholarly method, and he showed little or no appreciation of his analytical achievements...He could not tolerate the notion that Japanese intellectual history might have had and might still be having a growth similar to, or at least analogous to, the Western experience, or that, in the broadest sense, Japanese experience might be converging toward the experience of the rest of the human race," ibid., 98.

This is one among innumerable examples of Olson's questionable interrogative method in torturing an interpreted text to say precisely what it does not say, loading it up with presumptions that would hardly pass muster under the critical eyes of a fair-minded jury. For one, it is patently untrue that Yoshimoto dealt "carelessly with Maruyama's scholarly method" and showed "little or no understanding of his analytical achievements." In Yoshimoto's writing on Maruyama (Maruyama Masao ron) that Olson is here citing and criticizing, Yoshimoto states from the outset that Maruyama's stature as a "strange existence" (kininaru sonzai) of being neither a scholar (possessing too much of a critical consciousness to be as such) nor a thinker (being "too skinny and sinewy" in his thinking) as marking Maruyama's "rare value and sign of superiority in our contemporary intellectual situation." Now, Olson may disagree that this is the appropriate "appreciation" to be shown Maruyama's "achievements" but that is a case that he must make an effort to prove, not ignore and unilaterally equate as a lack of appreciation as he himself defines it and leaves unexplained. As for dealing carelessly with Maruyama's method, it is again not at all clear what Olson means, for he does not say what exactly what this "method" is nor does he elaborate on what he finds so problematic about Yoshimoto's "carelessness" in dealing with it. What is clear is that it is Olson who "could not tolerate the notion that" Maruyama's "scholarly method," as Yoshimoto argued, is premised on the exclusion of the Japanese taishū's historical experiences. Such a failure did not derive from, in Olson's paraphrase of Yoshimoto's view, Maruyama's "supposed overintellectualization of his wartime experiences: although conscripted as a common solider toward the end of the war, Maruyama had had no real understanding of other soldiers' lives or of popular feelings about the war" (97); Yoshimoto's actual argument was not that Maruyama "overintellectualized" his wartime experience as "a common solider" but that he failed to intellectualize it sufficiently from the perspective and actuality of what the rank-and-file Japanese soldiers had undergone, dismissing as "trivial" his own personal experiences of class antagonisms and tensions within the Japanese military according to his abstractly ideological measuring rod of liberal democracy. It is this crude instrument of universal measurement that made, in Yoshimoto's view, Maruyama blind to the fact that the "taishū exist on their own" and led him to instead "create a fictional image of the taishū on the basis of ideology" (is this not what Olson, in fact, was accusing Yoshimoto of?). It is also what made Maruyama blind to the fact that the "indigenous aspects of the taishū's mode of existence" or self-activity that "the emperor ideology absorbed during the war" are "retained by the taishū themselves even today in a changed form." These are serious propositions hardly resembling the Sandburgian acclamation of the "people" and require serious investigations in their turn, not Olson's mischaracterizations compounded on his ideological ax-grinding. See Yoshimoto Taka'aki zenchosaku-shū, vol. 12 (Tokyo: Keisō-shobō, 1969), 5-6, 22, 28-29. In a way the ideological cat is out of the bag when Olson pontificates on Yoshimoto's inability to "tolerate" the fact that "Japanese intellectual history might have had and might still be having a growth similar to, or at least analogous to, the Western experience, or that, in the broadest sense, Japanese experience might be converging toward the experience of the rest of the human race." First, it is assumed a priori that Japanese or any non-Western intellectual history marches inevitably to the beat of a teleological drummer called "Western experience" (one is tempted here to ask rather bluntly, "And, pray tell, M. Olson, what in the world is this ahistorically homogenized baggage that goes by the impressive name of
previously encountered as a highly respected intellectual not above denouncing Yoshimoto as a second-rate critic whose resentment in his failure to secure an academic position presumably motivated his support of the New Left students. This is tantamount to passing the final judgment on the United States on the basis of Soviet propaganda in Pravda or on the Soviet Union on the basis of anticommunist propaganda found in Sovietology or in such CIA-funded apostate publications as God that Failed and Encounter magazine. Even if such Cold War analogies are indecipherable within Olson's ideological radar screen, I wonder if even the pretended adherence to the supposed standard of "objectivity" or "neutrality" which defined the ideology of Olson's intellectual generation would not have at least made him somewhat uneasy in not citing the other side of this hardly uncontroversial debate over Yoshimoto's ideas, namely the students and fellow dissidents in the movement who struggled against the Communist Party's "myth of the vanguard" and such "enlightened" postwar democratic liberals as Maruyama.

Such unfair-minded distortions are all the more lamentable when in a 1977 interview Yoshimoto self-effacingly cautioned Olson against an Orientalist treatment of his ideas, which would posit him as an "ethnographic object" to be studied under the narrowly gauged Western scholarly apparatus. Yoshimoto intuitively sensed the problem from the outset of the dialogue, having taken a Western experience’?). Second, this undefined and unexplained "Western experience" is then, by some strange slip of seamless dissimulation, equated to the "experience of the rest of the human race." This is a sort of ideologically nonsensical prose that comes straight out of some cobwebbed basement of the colonial office before the era of national liberation struggles, but Mr. Olson is writing in 1992. The most imperially antiquated reflexes of a fulltime Cold Warrior have obviously not freed this cosmopolitan American scholar's mind even after the vaunted collapse of the Soviet empire.
look at Olson’s *Postwar Asia and Japan* before their meeting, and noted that he “felt like a raw material for ethnology (laugh).” Yoshimoto tried to circumvent Olson’s academically reductive, Orientalist approach by acknowledging the tremendous achievements of Western scholars of Japan, such as Donald Keene and E.H. Norman, while also indicating their limitation:

But if I’m allowed a critique from the inside without any reservation, Japanese literature—and it’s not restricted to Japanese literature—I don’t think there’s any sense of despair [among Western scholars] over how one nation doesn’t understand a literature of another nation from the outside. I question that they don’t have this [despair]...To put it in a more contrary fashion, I think the fact that they don’t have it is a lie. I think it’s a lie or the fact that they can discuss it so well without such despair means, in short—how can I put it?—they wrapped up Japanese literature, including the classics, in the middle as being merely at this level and, to use a Japanese phrase, *taka o kukutta* [underestimate, as if they’ve understood it all]. Otherwise they excessively lack despair. To understand the literature of another nation is a little more difficult. I think they lack too much of this despair that can say in the end, our work is no good after all.

At the end of the war, Yoshimoto made the "despair" from his experience of defeat the fertilizing ground for his thinking. In their brilliant but too neatly exposited survey of Japanese history and literature, what "despair" did Norman, Keene, et al. (by implication, including Olson himself) bring to their own work, a "despair" that would have made them question the fundamental premises of Western modernity that they uncritically assumed in their interpretation of Japan, a "despair" that would have prompted a critical reflection on their personal struggles as participants in the course of historical forces already in motion? Instead of such creative "despair," there was excessive confidence in their *taka-o-kukkuta* understanding, an unwitting expression of their Western imperial hubris. Olson, however, manages to remain deaf to this critical warning, not only deflecting its application on himself and distortedly caricaturing it as a species of Japanese "separatism" but also accusing Yoshimoto—typically, without any
evidence--of elitist alienation from the *taishū*:

He clung to the notion of Japanese separateness, claiming that foreigners lacked the requisite degree of "despair" in their efforts to understand the country. His writing about "the people" was often obscure; their role in the cosmos of his ideas about culture was never precisely defined. Just as unclear was his perception of himself vis-à-vis them: he needed to feel some emotional closeness to them, but like most other intellectuals he also needed to keep them at arm's length, and the possibility of condescension in his attitude toward them were consequently very great.200

Later, Yoshimoto elaborated the meaning of this "despair" by contrasting the European absorption of African influences into their art (citing the French avant-guard practitioners of the 1930s, including Fauvism and Picasso) and the way Japanese have absorbed cultural influences from Europe or America:

Picasso and others, in certain cases, received their influences by taking and stealing. And even in those instances, how can I put it, they unreservedly absorbed only what was useful to them or what they could understand. But what they didn’t understand, what didn’t interest them, they threw away without leaving a single reverberation. Whether or not this way of looking at it is wrong, this is how I thought about it. In the case of Japan, say, a Japanese anthropologist going to Africa, it doesn’t matter where it is, could be Mr. Olson’s specialized area, Southeast Asia, for fieldwork. When that happens, as I think I understand it, the Japanese scholar will most likely try to assimilate himself there. In other words, the Japanese scholar will most likely first delude himself that he is going inside or can go inside...In Mr. Olson’s book, there was cited a case of a Japanese worker who entered somewhere that was taboo in Southeast Asia and got killed, and that’s the same thing. You could enter there to some extent and understand it. But because you deluded yourself as having finally assimilated yourself, you received a blowback somewhere and so, while leaving some sentimental reverberations, you couldn’t get inside. But neither did you take away what only you could understand and quickly departed--to go without such a clear-cut sense is what the Japanese scholar and researcher do. Southeast Asia, Africa, it could be anywhere, or it could be in relation to the developed countries, Europe, America, as well, when you go there, you try to assimilate and receive a blowback, clashing onto the nucleus of a blowback, and, because of that, you get yet another blowback. In short, as a result of not being able to become assimilated or to take what you understand and depart quickly, I think such reverberations that Japanese scholars and researchers leave is one general type of despair in which they find themselves when they enter others nations. I couldn’t

help but think that this way of despairing, this way of receiving blowback, is different from the way European scholars, researchers, and artists receive their influences from the underdeveloped regions or despair.

The point posited here is the contrast between peculiarity of Japanese cultural illusion concerning its ability to assimilate itself into foreign cultures, certainly not the unique "separateness" of its national identity, and the Western cultural capacity to utilize what it thinks fit and dispose everything else from foreign cultures, which establishes a "separatist" autonomy that does not question its difference, superiority, etc. These comments require careful unpacking, for even as they are at one level a criticism of Japanese assimilationist assumptions that invariably induce "blowbacks" from cultures that Japanese scholars seek to understand, they are at the same time critiquing the utilitarian arrogance of Western modernity to keep itself safe from such "blowbacks."

In spite of these cautionary remarks, which were met with Olson's incomprehension and impatient prompting to be allowed to ask his "ethnological" questions, Olson's resulting assessment of Yoshimoto, alongside of Takeuchi Yoshimi, Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Etō Jun, fell precisely into this trap of insufficient "despair" and Western "utilitarian arrogance," that is, condescendingly categorizing Yoshimoto into a sociological typology comprehensible to Olson and other Western scholars--i.e., utilizing what they could make use and disposing the rest--and forming, in effect, a taka-o-kukutta understanding. The question Yoshimoto was seeking to open up with Olson and which the latter persistently misinterpreted as implying simply the impossibility of fully understanding a culture alien to oneself--namely the question of how Keene, Norman, Olson, and such scholars did not critically interrogate the fundamentals of their own thinking rooted in Western modernity when they investigated Japanese literature, history, and culture--went completely unacknowledged. In refusing the risk of seriously
asking this question, they merely became a competent summarizer, a perceptive historian, or, in the case of Olson, a well-intentioned but ill-equipped sociologist seeking to squeeze ideas and people into pre-existing ideological models.

Olson’s exchange with Yoshimoto over his pivotal notion of *taishū* is paradigmatic in this sense. Sensing that there was some “romantic mood” associated with Yoshimoto’s use of this word, Olson asked Yoshimoto to define it but, as we saw previously, Yoshimoto’s explanation completely eluded the Western interrogator.

I define and use the word *taishū* in my very distinctive way. If I were to say that definition, it’s one’s everyday process of life, that other things happening outside of that life, such as what’s going on with the Vietnam War or what a Japanese literary figure had written and reading it and finding that interesting, *taishū* refers those people who do not think about or show interest in any such thing outside of their life, to put it simply, those people who never into the process of knowledge. There are no such people in the pure sense, but the important thing is that they never enter into the process of knowledge, in short, they never think, have never thought, or never go to the place of thinking anything other than what happens in their immediate life. To put it differently, positing those people who don’t even read weekly magazines or popular novels, who are not interested in the process of such things as printed words and culture, I define them as *taishū*. I think I use the word *taishū* by positing those people who never enter into the process of knowledge or who are not interested in anything other than the gains and losses relating to their life. Of course, there is a motif as to why I have come to develop and use such a definition. Generally, because the Japanese Left imitate the thinking of the Russian Left after Lenin, they posit a minority group with a lucid consciousness about politics, in short, a party, a Communist Party, and, in relation to it, workers who belong to a labor union and workers who don’t belong to a labor union. There is an understanding that intellectuals are an appendage to these workers from the outside. I disliked the ambiguity of that way of understanding and decided to clearly define *taishū* as such and use that word in my own way.

Olson cannot register this as anything more than “mystical,” “idealistic,” or "emotional" because it is inconceivable to him that an intellectual does not have a particular program or ideology with which to mobilize the *taishū*, and he equates such a refusal to assume either Leninist or liberal conception of the
vanguard/consensus-manufacturing intellectual to a position that has "no sustained political consequence": "He built no system, proposed no special theory, but persistently exalted the notion of emotional solidarity between intellectuals and 'ordinary' Japanese." That Yoshimoto's view of the taishū was hardly one of one-dimensional emotionally sentimental solidarity is transparent had Olson bothered to actually read Yoshimoto.

I think such doubling of volume occurs inside that portion of the taishū that goes too excessively into good or that goes too excessively into evil. When coming to the point of certain extremity, I think the taishū do not hold onto their irritation but goes wild. So I think you can't absolutize the petty complaints in grasping the taishū and to take that out and assess them on their basis gives you the wrong image of the taishū. The ordinary fishmonger or confectioner knows how to complain about how taxes are high and they can't eat, slightly fudging the number for income tax by keeping double account books. But, when the moment comes, they still vote for the Liberal Democrat government. In China, that happened in he opposite direction. Usually they make petty complaints but, ultimately when Mao Ze-dong cheered, they went wild. And the intelligentsia are always left behind and can't move.

But, in my view, if the intellectuals clearly, as a matter of principle, could have submitted their ideas, they would have never been caught confused in such a situation. One original form of an intellectual is someone who could, in such a situation, place a check on the leaders and also place a check, as a matter of principle, on the taishū. When you draw an intellectual in his or her original form, he or she is an existence that can place checks on both leaders and the taishū. In my own of saying, that is jiritsu (autonomy) and, if one is able to comprehend the world, whatever circumstance arises, whatever anybody says, there is no reason to be unsettled. There is also no need to withdraw oneself on account of something having gone too far.

I've said at the beginning, but, in fact, wasn't the excess of the anti-establishment movement one of not having gone far enough? There was not even once it has gone far enough. Even if it were something that could be assessed as wrong on the basis of the principles in my ideas, I have never once rejected it on the grounds of it having gone too far. (laughter) Whether it was during or after war, we never put forward the question of why we completely lost, why we completely got tired, as a problem to think through. Ceaselessly, it doesn't go too far or gets tired. Those who get tired are only those at the bottom but the organization goes on just as before. This is what appears strangest in my view. That is why I don't think the taishū can become an object of rejection, whether they go too far in war or go too far in such-and-such a movement. But the only problem is whether or not the intellectuals can form ideas that can place a check on that. The excesses of the taishū cannot be checked by
anything other than ideas forged as principles. That is my image of the taishū.²⁰¹

Right now I don't make political interventions but, if I were to make politically oriented topical remarks, I will never do it from the position of the Communist Party that says I'm the people's vanguard. I think I will do it by searching and seeking for a position that channels in what is popular. Leaving aside whether this is understood, that is what entirely distinguishes those people from myself.

During the period I was writing The Last Shinran, such matters came up in concatenation and I thought about them a great deal. But that doesn't mean I believe that what is of the taishū is good or that the people are good. I think that they make good judgments as well as bad ones. The characteristic of the taishū to immediately ride on public opinion when it is brought out, I also think that there is nothing good about this. But it is wrong to try to make that better. Because I think the only problem is whether or not they are channeled into one's own ideas, there are times when my opinions are very different from as well as similar to those who deem themselves the people's vanguard…²⁰²

These two comments were made at an interval of thirty-five years (the first one in 1967 and the second one in 2002), chosen randomly from a huge output of Yoshimoto's writings on the subject that Olson could have easily consulted (and perhaps did, if his endnotes to Yoshimoto's collected work is any indication, but in a highly selective, to say nothing of distorting, manner). They transparently demonstrate Yoshimoto's consistent view of the taishū as capable of both excessive good and evil, that the intellectual's responsibility lies in not blindly following such excesses or attempt to generate or utilize them for the consolidation of their power but, at most, to "place a check on them" by forging their ideas through the everyday experience of the taishū. It was the betrayal of this experience, continually apparent in the activities and ideas of the Japanese orthodox Left from the wartime Communists to the postwar democrats such as

²⁰¹ "Doko ni shisō no konkyō okukain Yoshimoto Taka'aki zenchosaku-shū, vol. 14, 479-480.
²⁰² Yoshimoto Taka'aki, "Watashi no bunkgaku: hihyō wa genzai o tsuranukeruka" 私の文學-- 批評は現在をつらぬけるか in Mita Bungagku, vol. 81/no. 70 (August 2002), 154-155.
Maruyama and the JCP, that Yoshimoto defined as *tenkō*.

The two books of incendiary criticisms that Yoshimoto wrote on this theme were published in 1959 (*Geijutsuteki teikō to zasetsu* 芸術的挫折と抵抗 [Artistic Resistance and Breakdown] and *Jojō no ronri* 抒情の論理 [Logic of Lyricism])—to be followed in 1960 with his final volume *Itan to seikei* 異端と正系 [Heresy and Orthodoxy] on what could be called his *tenkō* trilogy. They contained essays that were "a portion of work" that sought to "come closer to the essence of August fifteenth," to "clarify the meaning that could not be understood objectively" on that day of defeat, and, in summing them up, Yoshimoto distinguished the condition of Japanese intellectual life from Poland where a truly popular anti-fascist movement existed, employing metaphors taken from Andrzej Wajda's masterpiece film about the Polish Resistance: "What is somewhat different from the work of the artists of the old generation is that I was able to clarify the Japanese intellectual condition, which was different from Poland where, in the postwar, wartime 'diamond' undertook the function of 'diamond' that took on the appearance of 'ashes' while wartime 'ashes' were, in postwar Japan, merely 'ashes' that took on the appearance of 'diamond'."203

Superficially, however, in terms of ideological classification, it may appear that both Thompson and Yoshimoto are arguing almost at cross-purposes: Thompson is defending the commitment of the Communists of the 1930s against...

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203 Haikei no kioku, 158-159. In a 1957 dialogue with Yamamoto Satsuo 山本篤夫, while reserving some criticism for its somewhat dispersed impression, Yoshimoto exhibited considerable appreciation for Wajda's *Kanal* (1957) for showing an "antithesis to the heroism of traditional Resistance movies," rhetorically asking if there wasn't a "significance for the young people who had directly participated in the war to re-experience it by not depicting the war as
contemporary Natopolitan ideologues of apathy while Yoshimoto is excoriating
the contemporary Japanese Communists whose commitment served merely a
reified idea of "the working class" and the "taishū" and did nothing to absorb the
politically and intellectually apathetic nature of everyday, working lives of the
*taishū*. To put it rather reductively, a reader could interpret this to mean that
Thompson is defending the commitment of Communist activists while Yoshimoto
is defending the apathy of the *taishū*, on whom the Communists were unable to
lay the roots of their commitment. But this is to lose sight of the specific
historical and cultural grounds of their arguments and to fail to appreciate
Thompson and Yoshimoto's differences that arise from these respective grounds
in approaching questions of commitment, apathy, and *tenkō*.

Japan's defeat in the war taught Yoshimoto that he had erroneously
viewed the state as being larger than society; what he had realized in the few
months between August fifteenth and the U.S. Occupation was that society
could manage to function well without the state. His reading of Marx further
confirmed this experience, leading him to understand how the communal illusion
that the state generated operates by inverting the illusion of the *taishū*. Because
the Communist ideologues, no less so than the ideologues of the wartime state,
were seeking such "inversion" to establish hegemony and forge a socialist state-
-though without coming to terms with the popular nationalism that the wartime
state had maintained and utilized--Yoshimoto took them severely to task. The
very model of activism that the Communists pursued posited, on the one hand,

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something heroic." *Chika suidō no iyoku* 『地下水道』の意欲 in Yoshimoto Taka'aki
the Central Committee of the Party at the pyramidal top of the hierarchy and the working class, who were to be the former’s passive ideological receptacle and its mass base, on the other. This was what Thompson critiqued as a Stalinist "theory of substitution" in which "the party, sect, or theorist" discloses "class-consciousness, not as it is, but as it ought to be." Yoshimoto, however, went further than Thompson in generalizing this as a phenomenon not unique to the Communist Party but to all intellectual activities that failed to question the process of their own formation, for "intellectuality" as such inevitably and naturally fled by their way of abstraction the concrete realm of working-class subsistence and self-activity.

Yoshimoto’s essay on the Book of Matthew, "Machiusho shiron: hangyaku no rinri" マチウ書試論--反逆の倫理 ("Hypothetical Essay on the Book of Matthew: Ethics of Rebellion"), collected in Artistic Resistance and Breakdown, is the earliest formulation of this view in its fullest range of expression. Although the essay nowhere mentions the postwar democrats, its allegorical intention is unmistakable, as it describes Jesus and his new sect of disciples as those who adhered to the "absolute nature of relations." Excluded completely from the ancient Jewish tradition of law, customs, and social relationships as represented by the Pharisees and Sadducees, primitive Christianity posed a new "ethics of rebellion" in which all relativized social orders, including ancient Judaism that fused itself with Roman rule, were perceived, with limitless hate, as "nature"; the author of Book of Matthew,

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according to Yoshimoto, forged a text of ethics in which ideas--such as the establishment of direct relationship with God--were relentlessly posed as an absolute antithesis to this "nature."

Although many have read this essay as an allegory of Yoshimoto’s struggle with the postwar democrats, a personal manifesto against the new intellectual and cultural rule of the orthodox Left, commentators have disagreed over the actual identity of what primitive Christianity and ancient Judaism each represents. Majority of them take the view that Yoshimoto is ventriloquizing his voice through primitive Christianity (New Left) against the ancient Jewish tradition (Old Left and Communist Party). However, this does not appear congruent with Yoshimoto’s famous stress on the "absolute nature of relations," as opposed to the "absolute nature of ideas" that emerges out of his exegesis on Matthew 23:29-33:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus, you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?"

Contemporary Christianity, which is on the side of all miseries and irrational domination and law, must, of course, accept these words. The cause and effect of participation revolve around the fulcrum of order. This is the moment when social ethics has to grasp the meaning of participating in the relationships of reality. If we were to forcefully extract contemporary significance from what the Book of Matthew proposes here, it is that, regardless of human will, what forces us to participation is the relationship between human beings. Human will certainly has the freedom to choose. But this human will, which is given the freedom to choose, is merely relative in the face of the absolute that the relationship between human beings imposes. When the scribes and Pharisees say that, if they had lived in the days of our ancestors, they would not have
taken part in shedding the blood of the prophets, they are declaring the correctness of their free choice.

But in the absolute situation that the relationship between human beings imposes, the author of Matthew declares, "In spite of this, are you not persecuting me, who is a prophet." The scribes and Pharisees, who mistakenly views a human being’s free choice as something absolute, cannot understand this. Ideas that are not conscious of relations are nothing more than a phantasm. Therefore, the Pharisees could reply, "You are not a prophet. You are a mob and a destroyer" if they wanted to, and this answer would not have been anything other than correct from any position that does not contain the element of absolute nature of relations between human beings. To connect participating in the rebellion against order with ethics can only be made possible by incorporating the perspective of the absolute nature of relations.

Contemporary Christianity turns to the poor and the alienated and says, we show sympathy to you all and, determined to save you, always practice it. We are free to call ourselves your defenders. If anything happens, it is because they can choose it with their free will. But regardless of their will, in the absolute nature of relations in reality, they can do nothing about them being the defenders of order who take part in aiding the enemy of the poor and the alienated. The meaning of participation is transferred from human sentiment to the mechanism of totality in the absolute nature of relations.

The author of Matthew, in the form of an attack against the scribes and the Pharisees, speaks about the kind of contradictions between the relative and the absolute that the human beings who must live within the order of reality are continuing to live out. He is saying that no idea ever guarantees meaning to human life.

Human beings can believe in revolutionary ideas while cunningly weaving and walking their way through order or can be forced to defend poverty and irrational laws while despising revolutionary ideas. This is because a free will chooses. But what determines the human condition is only the absolute nature of relations. Only when we try to burst asunder this contradiction, we gouge out what lies at the bottom of our thinking. At that moment we find our loneliness. Loneliness asks itself: What is revolution if we cannot burst asunder the contradictions in human existence?205

Hence, as Ayukawa Nobuo 魚川信夫, poet and erstwhile friend of Yoshimoto’s, has noted, it is not ancient Judaism that stands in for the Old Left and Communist Party but, rather, contemporary Christianity: "The reason it [the essay] can be called an original form is because, if we make partial revision, it is possible to analogously read the relationship between the author of Book of

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Matthew, primitive Christianity, and contemporary Christianity as, for example, between Marx, communists, and contemporary Communist Party. Of course, between the author of Matthew and Marx, his [Yoshimoto’s] degree of inclination is different, but it should be sufficient to point out that that his critique against the Communist Party is not unrelated to his logic in critiquing the Book of Matthew."

Moreover, Yoshimoto shows sympathy to neither primitive Christianity nor the Pharisees in the essay but to the ancient land and its cultivators—we may say the commons and commoners of ancient Mesopotamia—that populate the landscape of ancient Israelite imagination, as found in Jesus’s remark on "the lilies of the field," which Yoshimoto cites:

Incidentally, in Matthew 6:26, there is a beautiful change of tone that is different from the dominant melody of the Book of Matthew:

"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; the neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."

Although in this passage there is a sense of liberation that does not at all fit the narrow-minded neurosis of primitive Christian dogma, we understand that this sense of liberation does not in any way come from such words as "birds of the air" and "lilies of the field." Because no concept exists here that connects the meaning of human life to God or that wounds the movement of the human spirit for being an estrangement from God. Rather, what is not primitive Christian here liberates the Logos from its tension. Here the sky and fields of ancient Judea are reflected. There are cultivators here. There are spinners here. And their natural mind is connected to God. This is not a fantasy, and it seems that the relationship between God and human being in Judaism was grasped in this way...

206 Ayukawa Nobuo, "Yoshimoto Taka’aki shiron: ‘Machiu-sho shiron’ madē"吉本隆明私論—「マチウ書論」まで in Yoshimoto Taka’aki o ‘yomu,’ 64.
207 Yoshimoto Taka’aki zen-chosakushū, op. cit., 87-88.
The Communist Party and the Old Left or anyone who raised the banner of Western modernity had approached the traditional social relations and ethos of the Japanese commons with absolute rejection, as was the case with those intellectuals in the 1930s who had posited traditional Japan as hopelessly backward and taken on Western models of development and progress, whether liberal, Communist, or otherwise, as an ideal model. The consequence of such a reified choice was for these intellectuals to invariably break down before the pressure of the indigenous tradition, as skillfully elaborated by the wartime state, and in the process turn into apostates. At the same time, Yoshimoto’s description of primitive Christianity is not wholly negative but quite ambivalent, indicating that there might have been a path of apostasy that was more honorable and in critical sync with the indigenous tradition, such as the conduct of the protagonist in Nakano Shigeharu’s “House in the Village.”

If we were to somewhat forcefully juxtapose Yoshimoto’s line of argument with Thompson’s, we may consider Yoshimoto’s position as a moment issuing from what Thompson defined as "disenchantment," wherein "responsible minds recoiled from a social reality which they found inexplicable or unbearable," but, for Yoshimoto, instead of going forward into "cultural default," that is, a "capitulation to the staus quo," the disenchanted here goes into an embattled form of commitment that declares its persistence to think and write on the basis of its defeats, which are not forged upon ideology ("absolute nature of ideas") but the ever-changing composition of class ("absolute nature of relations") for which the thus committed writes. Yoshimoto, to be sure, does not talk about
class composition, but his "original image of taishū" works from a similar political ontology: since neither the party nor intellectuals can substitute for the taishū or the working class, any meaningfully committed intellectual process must ceaselessly channel within itself how those who are completely alienated from this very process, those whose lives are fully allotted to working, are living. As Yoshimoto himself concedes, there is no such taishū in this pure sense of the word, that is, workers who do not at all abstract or think beyond their daily life in some ways, and this is why Yoshimoto is not so much posing a sociological concept of the taishū as a concept that can endure those experiences of daily living, working, and struggling that are inevitably filtered out from the process of intellectuality. Like many of the ideas of his intellectual model Marx, it is a self-abolishing concept that is, contra the reified treatments on the part of latter-day Marxists, set to auto-destruct the unquestioned privileged assumptions of intellectual activity that, even in their conception of workers, proletariat, etc., alienate the latter's historically existing actuality.

There is an inescapable paradox here: if the process of intellectuality inevitably and naturally leads, with increasing abstraction, to its estrangement from the taishū, why is it necessary to reverse this process at all, why is it necessary to reground this entire process in the experience of the taishū? We have to look back to Yoshimoto’s first major experience of defeat to understand this: for without such a continuous reconstruction of one’s ideas from below, those ideas will suffer translation into reasons of state, as happened to Yoshimoto under the Japanese wartime state, or, as in the case of the majority
of prewar and postwar Communists, become a rarefied system of abstract self-validation that mistakes its abstraction for the rationale of its privileged status, which presumably gives its holders the power to lead and raise such-and-such-abstracted class consciousness of such-and-such-abstracted working class, an orthodox Marxist position that Thompson critiqued and disproved, with empirically formidable details, in the *Making*.

Yoshimoto indicts the latter defect of Marxism on the basis of Marx’s ideas. As shown in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, Marx understood the history of capitalism as a part of natural history and, therefore, saw no point in condemning the individual consciousness or actions of the capitalists or landowners:

> I do not by any means depict the capitalist and the landowner in rosy colours. But individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests. My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.  

Yoshimoto reads this passage as a proof that it was not ideas (whether one’s identity is that of a capitalist or a worker, whether one identifies with capitalism or communism) but relations in which human beings find themselves beyond their control on which Marx grounded his analysis. And this was the point Yoshimoto makes too in his essay on the *Book of Matthew* by bringing those two antinomies—"absolute nature of ideas and relations"—against each other, stating at the end that "if there is anything that could justify the severely aggressive

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208 *Capital*, Volume One, 92.
pathos and dismal psychological hatred of primitive Christianity, it has nothing else to rely on but the perspective of the absolute nature of relations."

Marxism, according to Yoshimoto, forgot this original point of Marx’s and became instead a set of dogma, a system of dead ideas and language that "aided the enemy of the poor and the alienated" in the same way contemporary Christianity did. Just as the thirteenth-century monk Shinran broke various laws of Buddhism to destroy the religious aura and privilege associated with Buddhist practice and to bring the taishū --who could not practice such laws due to the necessity of subsistence living--into his own thinking, this let Yoshimoto break the "laws" of Marxism in forging his own thinking.

Shinran is connected to the Pure Land sects of Buddhism from Genshin to Honen only by the skin of his neck, and, if he had cut that off, it was tantamount for him to have renounced being a monk. But Shinran held fast by the skin of his neck. The way he held fast was important to us. As an actual problem at that time, we had doubts about Marxism and, if that meant doubting Marx's ideas themselves, we would not allow it to let this easily happen.

I thought that, against Marxism, you could break all the laws. The laws here mean things like vanguardist manner of acting, the dialectic of theory and practice, and such. Umemoto Katsumi's subjectivist materialism merely revised three out of ten laws from Russian Marxism, and our fundamental thinking was, what's the difference? We had thought that more than half of them had to go. That was decisive, and the place where this could be grasped readily was the mentality of sectarianism.

Subjectivist materialism's attitude toward sectarianism was extremely ambiguous, and it was as if it were forcing it to make it valid even though it wasn’t. The critique against Russian Marxism and its subsequent currents of thought--in Buddhist term, that will be the law--we had waged with the skin of our neck that it had lost its meaning.

In that situation what we sympathized the most with was Haniya Yutaka-san's "Sorrows of an Eternal Revolutionary." Mishima Yukio-san was a pragmatist to some extent so he said, "if you practice it on your own, such things will blow apart at once" and, against this, Haniya-san asserted, "No, that's not the case; if you firmly possess a vision of the future, even if you are lying around in a room filled with cobwebs, you are still a revolutionary."

I had thought that Haniya-san was also hanging by the skin of his neck in a different sense and, keeping the situation of that time in mind, I
think I wrote *Saigo no Shinran* (*The Last Shinran*). The doctrine of one incantation may be considered an exaggeration and some had critiqued me in this way. But that was fine as it was and, if I'm asked why I hold fast by the skin of my neck, it's because we had a perspective in which the way you held fast by the skin of your neck was important.  

To hold fast to Marx by the skin of your neck, as Yoshimoto says here, means to hold fast to commitment in the last instance, to take intellectuality on the other shore of where the *taishū* and proletariat actually lived while completely dissolving the privilege that comes with knowing, what Shinran called the *hichi no chi* (knowing of unknowing). Contemporary Marxists, Shin Buddhists, and Christians have all participated in the act of killing of their own prophet by treating their doctrines as a theoretical or belief system in which the actual relationships of human beings were expelled in favor of the correct sectarian credo. What the credo or the law said was neither here nor there; in fact, they were to be entirely discarded but they were to be discarded without going over to *cultural default*, stopping in the last instance for commitment to infuse the experience of the *taishū* and the proletariat into oneself.

Yoshimoto’s unique use of the term *tenkō*—which, unlike his contemporaries, as we have seen, did not simply mean the ex-Communists who recanted and came out in support of the Japanese war but the Communists who did stay in jail, refused to recant, and ostensibly maintained their anti-war position until the end of the war—lies in persistently defining it from the perspective of proletarian experience. According to Yoshimoto, the Communists were apostates in the sense that their opposition to the war did not derive from working

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209 Yoshimoto Taka’aki ga kataru sengo 55-nen: shoki kayō kara genji monogatari made/Shinran to sono shisō 初期歌話から源氏物語まで/親鸞とその思想, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Sankō-sha, 2002), 53-
from the standpoint of the Japanese *taishū* but from the ideological prescription of the Comintern, an automaticity of an ideological system that had no organic relationship to the really existing, living working class. Yoshimoto’s debate in the 1950s on literature and politics involved, on the one hand, the JCP and its fellow-traveling intellectuals’ attempt to put literature under some hegemonic political model and, on the other hand, their tendency to define the Japanese *taishū* during the war as ideological receptacles whose agency and deaths on the battlefield counted for nothing.

The *tenkō* debate, therefore, closed in on the ideological and experiential gulf between the JCP-centered postwar democratic intellectuals and the Japanese working class, a gulf that was repeatedly expressed by the JCP in the preceding years, with its zigzagging policy of clandestine guerrilla tactics fashioned after the Chinese Communists to its accommodationist policy of taking the lead in containing strikes and endorsing the servile slogan of “lovable Communists,” to say nothing of its relentlessly sectarian vanguardism and various major schisms and splits it had suffered in the span of less than fifteen years. The cataclysmic event that threw Yoshimoto and others directly into the political maelstrom of a social movement to directly confront and mark an end to the JCP’s “myth of vanguard” was the anti-Ampo struggle of 1959.210

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55. ibid., 85-9.
210 ibid., 85-9.
CHAPTER FIVE
AUTONOMY AND “MYTH OF THE VANGUARD”: ORIGIN OF THE FIRST
JAPANESE NEW LEFT

If I forget to love, put me on the stage
If I attain praises and wealth, throw me away
If I call, bring me a wreath and listen to my last will
If I die, let the world reconcile itself
If I say revolution, let everyone take up arms

Yoshimoto Taka'aki, "Love Song"211

The recovery of postwar Japanese capitalism was premised on its geo-strategic role as a center of the Asian Natopolis, as exemplified in the economic boost that Japan had received from both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. 1960 Nichibei ampo hoshō jō-yaku 日米安保保障条約 (U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Agreement), or Ampo for short, was engineered to cement this role, to further entrench the structure of Japanese capitalist development in intimate congruence with U.S. military objectives during the Cold War. After all, "America funded the doubling of Japan’s manufacturing output between 1949 and 1953, and it is no accident that 1966-1970 were the years of peak Japanese growth--no less than 14.6 per cent per annum"; these two critical periods of 1959-53 and 1966-70 in Japanese economic growth were crucially mobilized by the U.S. interventions in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, respectively.212 In addition to the permanent presence of U.S. military bases in Okinawa, Ampo thus stood as a critical

211 Yoshimoto Taka'aki zen-shishū, 205.
institutional bridge that connected these two moments of accelerated accumulation, revealing the extent to which the postwar Japanese economic and political system was shaped in the interests of U.S. hegemonic needs. In 1956, the Japanese government’s Economic Planning Board (けいざいきかく-ちょう) published the historic Economic White Paper for the year 1955, declaring that the postwar was over, in effect a statement of supreme confidence on the part of Japanese monopoly capital in establishing a ruling bloc that consolidated its political and economic leadership in conjunction with the state with the U.S.-supported foundation of the Liberal-Democrat Party, which would hold a virtually permanent monopoly on the parliamentary system.

This incorporation of the Japanese economy into the U.S. Cold War world system preceded political realignments that the U.S. had initiated in the early years of its Occupation of Japan in the late 1940s, which paralleled similar developments on the domestic front. In the United States at the time, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which originally established in 1938 under Martin Dies's leadership, was actively reinvigorated as an instrument of Cold War kulturkampf against domestic dissidence. As the documents released--albeit in a constrained fashion--in the wake of 1976 amendment of the Freedom of Information Act amply reveal, 1947 was the year in which HUAC and FBI initiated their illegal partnership, unleashing a series of anticommunist purges in the culture industry, initially in the movie industry, that resulted in the jailing of the "Hollywood Ten" and establishment of the "Hollywood blacklist." Such attacks in the cultural front were initiated in response to the general spread of working-class militancy that most expressively translated in the immediate postwar years in the form of the 1946 strike wave. Business counter-offensive to this legislatively took shape in the passage of the Taft-Hartley (or the Labor Management) Act of 1947, which severely restricted the autonomous power of
the labor unions; its infamous Section 9 (h), which explicitly denied the right of any union with a elected or appointed Communist or radical officer to use the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), was, for the labor movement, the ideological corollary of the anticommunist campaign over which HUAC presided, leading to the political decomposition of the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO), expulsion of militant union organizers and members, and legal sanction for the rise of business unionist consensus of "no reds in the union" policy (finalized in the AFL-CIO merger of 1955).

Although there was no exact counterpart group like that of HUAC or the legal equivalent of the Section 9 (h) of the Taft-Hartley Act in Japan, the U.S. Occupation administration Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) started to implement similarly repressive anticommunist policies in 1947, a set of policies generally known as the "reverse course."²¹³ "Reverse" because the initial course SCAP instituted was one of considerable democratizing impetus, covering everything from the dissolution of the traditionally capitalist conglomerates zaibatsu to land reform and encouragement of grassroots labor unionism, and they were being rolled back or "reversed" into the hands of a conservative ruling bloc consisting largely of industrialists and bureaucrats who collaborated in the war effort. There is no doubt that in these initial years of postwar occupation, the U.S. had undertaken democratic reforms that many Japanese sengo minshu-shugisha 戦後民主主義者 (postwar democrats)--a wide swath of orthodox left and left-liberal political opinion that included the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, independent liberal political scientist Maruyama Masao, radical liberal Tsurumi Shunsuke, and constitutional democrat

²¹³ This does not in any way mean that HUAC did not affect those involved in U.S. foreign policy on the Pacific and Japan. In fact, a number of prominent pre-"reverse course" policymakers and scholars who contributed to the democratizing policy of SCAP fell victims to HUAC's anticommunist crusade, the two most famous figures being the Canadian diplomat and historian E.H. Norman and State Department employee T.A. Bisson.
Öe Kenzaburō—considered positive and necessary.\textsuperscript{214} Even erstwhile supporters of the wartime Japanese state, who were alienated from the general tenor of the postwar democrats, found many of these policies admirable. Yoshimoto, at the time a typical working-class youth devastatingly disillusioned by the Japanese defeat in the war, was greatly impressed by the "fundamentally democratic" character of the U.S. Occupation:

It was only one or two years after the war so I thought I was meticulously looking at what they were going to do with stubbornly suspicious eyes. Then, they issued statements about why they were doing what they were doing, asking for consent even on matters that were entirely inconsequential to the Japanese people. This is one major reason why my suspicions softened.

I felt that "this was entirely contrary to how the Japanese did it." I felt that the Japanese could not have issued statements asking consent from the people they had occupied. This was the greatest factor that made me think that we shouldn't go to war with a country like the U.S., that, even if we did, we couldn't win.

[...]

Observing how the Occupation force conducted itself, I thought that this was not a difference due to material goods, that to say we had lost due to lack of material goods was just sour grapes. My feeling was that there was mentally...or, rather, they [the Americans] had built for themselves a fundamental democracy.\textsuperscript{215}

Just as U.S. workers sought to widen the scope of their power through the strike wave of 1946, Japanese workers creatively made use of the opportunities afforded by these openly democratic initiatives in the first few years of the U.S. Occupation, developing \textit{seisan-kanri} 生産管理 (production control) as a means of circumventing the general ban on strikes and forming various forms of rank-and-

\textsuperscript{214} As John Dower rightly pointed out, these postwar democrats remained the stalwart defenders of pre-"reverse course" U.S. Occupation policies even after their abandonment due to Cold War exigencies: "Although the 'reverse course' helped establish a domestic conservative hegemony of politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen that remained dominant to the end of the century, Communists and Socialists continued to be elected to the Diet and to command serious attention in debates over public policy. They became the country's most articulate critics of acquiescence in U.S. Cold War policy—and (no small irony) the staunchest defenders, for decades to come, of the initial occupation ideals of demilitarization and democratization." \textit{Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company/The New Press, 1999), 273.

file co-operatives and grassroots organizations that took over functions formerly administered by the state.\textsuperscript{216} One of the prominent examples of the latter were student organizations, such as the *Shakai kagaku kenkyū kai* (Social Science Study Group) that were formed in many universities to collectively study heretofore forbidden social subjects, *Gakusei toso kyōgi kai* (Student Book Association) that sent its committee members to various publishers to collect books to make them accessible to students, and *Gakuseki shokudō rengō* ("Congress of Student Cafeterias") and *Daigaku seikyō* ("University Co-ops") that were organized to meet the minimum demand of subsistence among students.

Encouraged by SCAP, the movement of *gakuen-minshuka* (democratizing the schools) that these students led yielded the first postwar political expression of the Japanese working class. The strike that occurred in October 1945 at Mito College, only two months after the Japanese defeat in the war, was first in a series of radical chain reaction that the *gakuen-minshuka* movement mobilized, demanding the removal of a militarist educator as a principal and reinstallation of progressive professors. Takei Akio, the first *Zengakuren* chairperson, commented on this movement as "a serious search to try to recover ten years worth of scholarly and human gap." Such strikes circulated to Ueno Woman's College, Physics School (today Tokyo Science University), Shizuoka College (today Shizuoka University), and other colleges and universities throughout Japan. Their demands were various, from the dissolution of the centralized wartime educational agency *Gakuen hōkoku dan* (学園報国団), expulsion of teachers guilty of war crime, restoration of democratic educators, and formation of student organizations, but their most important was

the call for the formation of *jichi-kai* 自治회 (autonomous collective). In contrast to the prewar student organization that was based on individual enrollment, the *jichi-kai* system was premised on the automatic enrollment of the entire student body. Organizationally, this enabled students to act collectively and forge a popular movement of their own.

In May 1946, students at Waseda University, which had a tradition of student struggle from the prewar period, voted for the formalization of the *gakusei jichi-kai* 学生自治会 (autonomous student collective), with the approval of the administration, establishing the first independent student organization based on student-body membership enrollment. Following the Waseda model, *Zenkoku gauseki jichi rengō* ("National Congress of Student Autonomy") or *Zengauren* was formed in November as an umbrella organization of all the autonomous student collectives, stating its objective as one of "collectively discovering the student will and realizing the power of student autonomy, to conduct activities for the improvement of student life and democratization of the schools." In December, with about six thousand participants, the Waseda autonomous student collective organized the first postwar street demonstration, demanding the government to restore the schools and terminate the freeze on bank savings.

It is unquestionable that the Communist activists were the leading energetic force in these *gakuen-minshuka* movement and formation of *gakusei jichi-kai*. Notwithstanding its lack of popular base in the prewar years and apostasy among many of its many membership during the wartime repression, the claim that the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) made for its incarcerated leadership, namely that it supposedly maintained a consistently anti-militarist and antifascist stance, was taken at face value, giving the party a tremendous credence in the immediate postwar years as a democratic political organization of the working class. In February 1946, the JCP established the *Nihon seinen*
kyōsan dōmei 学生青年共産同盟 (Seikyō: League of Young Japanese Communists) and many leading student organizers joined it, becoming the vehicle of the many Shaken (aforementioned Social Science Study Group) organizations and spreading its formidable influence through university branches. The latter linked into regional bloc organizations with national network that spanned into Western and Eastern divisions of Gakusei seiji kyōgi kai 学生政治協議会 (Student Political Association). However, this relatively creative influence of the JCP on student organizations soon ceased and started to follow its own logic of "reverse course" after SCAP implemented its official "reverse course" policy of restoring former militarist elites, of forestalling and reversing radical militancy spreading among working-class organizations, restoring former militarist collaborators into positions of power, maintaining the anti-democratic power of the capitalist conglomerate zaibatsu, attacking the very civil liberties it helped introduce into the country, and unleashing a series of anticommunist "red purges" to stabilize Japan into a reliable Cold War ally.

In the face of this reactionary onslaught of U.S. Occupation in 1948 and in the succeeding years, the professed organizational leadership of the Left responded poorly, fragmented, and generally demonstrated a level of dogmatism and sectarianism that proved their alienation from working-class struggles on the ground. The latter struggles were directly linked to innovative forms of working-class self-organization that, particularly obvious in the strategy of production control, bypassed both the control of management and state; had it not been for the cautionary and suffocating restraints imposed by the JCP leadership (in inverse proportion to their revolutionary rhetoric, a tendency that would become exacerbated to the point of self-parody in the subsequent years), they had the enormous potential to become, if not a revolutionary workers council, significant vehicle for workers’ self-management of production.
This weakness of the postwar Left had been indicted earlier in its 1947 capitulation to General Douglas MacArthur’s order of prohibiting the general strike of February 1. Led by the railroad workers and with the support of the Communist-led union Sanbetsu-kaigi and Socialist-Party Sōdōmei, as well as active involvement of students, in response to the repression of production control strikes of the preceding years, this general strike was to mobilize six million workers into the streets. The day before the strike, on January 31, 29,000 students from approximately forty schools demonstrated in the people’s square in front of the imperial palace, raising the banner of “democratize” and “resuscitate the schools.” The defeat of this struggle not only constituted a major setback, contributing to the retreat of the working-class movement, but also prompted in the U.S. Occupation a cautionary attitude toward the students.

SCAP’s information and education department sent out a notice on February 7, awkwardly stating that “students who go outside of their self-governing laboratories and illegitimately intervene in school polices must be prevented from doing so.” The Communist Party abetted this policy by ordering students to “return to school.” JCP’s such conciliatory attitude to the U.S. Occupation was not at all unusual, following their Kōza-ha-based interpretation of the occupation as an acceleration of the needed “bourgeois revolution” in Japan. JCP’s purported adherence to revolutionary objectives and self-regard as a vanguard working-class party was thus heavily hampered by its inability to understand the historical significance of the U.S. Occupation, following the Party Secretary’s Nosaka Sanzō’s 野坂参三 unconvincing assertion that revolution was possible even under the Occupation. The JCP also established ideological roadblocks to grasping the revolutionary agency of the class they were nominally representing by viewing the students as a floating, petty-bourgeois social group whose autonomous interests and struggles required to be subordinated to those
of the proletariat. The JCP thus developed an almost patterned response of imposing constraint and disciplined submission against the developing militancy and self-organization among its student members and their fellow travelers. The divide between the JCP central committee and student radicals became even more discernible with the founding of Zengakuren, a national student union, in 1948, totaling a membership of 222,581 with 266 schools participating.

Electing Takei Teruo, who collaborated later with Yoshimoto in criticizing the Communist Party intellectuals' interpretation of prewar political apostasy, as its first committee chairperson, the founding assembly of the Zengakuren raised six slogans as their general program: oppose fascist and colonialist reorganization of education; protect freedom of scholarship and student life; oppose the low wage and scabbing among part-time student work; oppose fascism, protect democracy; immediate unification of struggles among the youth; complete freedom for students to participate in political activities. As clearly seen in its slogan for higher wage and opposition to scabbing, students' embryonic sense of themselves as part of the working class lay at the foundation of Zengakuren. On June 1, 1948, with the aim of opposing centralization of university control and tripling increase of tuition increase, about 5000 students assembled in the Hibiya Music Hall in Tokyo and demonstrated in front of the Ministry of Education, organizing a general strike in the same month from the twenty-third to the twenty-sixth. About 20,000 students struck in 114 schools and, in Tokyo, demonstrators daily petitioned the Diet and publicized their demands at train stations on the Yamanote line. This was the greatest student general strike in postwar Japanese history.

In the face of this massive protest, the government backed down from its university legislative proposals, thus earning the Zengakuren its first victory. As the "red purge" became intensified under the U.S. Occupation in the wake of the
1950 Korean War, with MacArthur's order of expelling twenty-four members from the Community Party central committee, prohibiting the publication of the Communist Party periodical *Akahata* 赤旗 (*Red Flag*), establishment of the 75,000-strong reserve police force (a predecessor to the Self-Defense Force), and purging of militant activists from all branches of industry, it was only the *Zengakuren* who was able to successfully wage a struggle against this anticommunist policy that directly affected more than 20,000 people. Notified to disband under the organizational regulatory order, the *Zengakuren* made a state-of-emergency declaration, sent out a message of solidarity to Korean students, and, in September and October, boycotted exams and organized a general strike across universities around the country. In order to diffuse the struggle and prevent confrontation with the police, university administrations shut down the schools but the student opposition refused to relent and the Ministry of Education was forced to retreat from applying "red purge" in the schools.\(^{217}\)

This power of student self-organization was in vast contrast to the fragmentation within the JCP, which was severely split at the time between the mainstream *Shikan-ha* 所感派 (Impressionist Faction) and opposing *Kokusai-ha* 国際派 (International Faction). The split came about from the new Stalinist party line that the Cominform had laid out for Japan in 1951. This party line entirely denied the accomplishment of democratic revolution achieved under the U.S. Occupation, treating it as a mere façade to colonize Japan and preserve, even strengthen, its semi-feudal character under the emperor and calling for a "national liberation democratic revolution" modeled on Chinese anti-feudal, anti-

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imperialist struggle. This factually erroneous assessment, which condemned the previous line under Nosaka—asserting the possible of peaceful socialist revolution under the U.S. Occupation—as anti-Marxist, anti-socialist, pro-U.S.-imperialist, anti-Japanese, and anti-patriotic, was composed by Stalin at the behest of Nosaka and Tokuda Kyūichi 徳田球一, both of whom made use of this officially sanctioned document to seize the leadership of Shokan-ha, purge dissidents, and temporarily lead the Party to a disastrously incongruent path of armed struggle. The opposing faction of Kokusai-ha or the Internationalists was composed of various groups, which counted among its ranks the later Party Secretary Miyamoto Kenji and the dissident state theorist Kamiyama Shigeo as well as many students in the Zengakuren. Many of them were expelled and purged from the Party after the Cominform had openly come out in support of the Shokan-ha and judged the Kokusai-ha to be engaging in factionalist activities that divided the Party.

The students acted autonomously and initially remained aloof from these power struggles within the Party that amounted to little more than a dispute over legitimate succession and acquisition of approval from the international Communist authority, focusing their energy in organizing a nation-wide popular struggle against war, U.S. hegemony, and the red purge. In the face of the Korean War and the preparatory phase of the 1955 "San Francisco System" (so-called after the 1951 "San Francisco Peace Agreement"), symbolized most acutely in the establishment of Ampo and the Nichibei gyousei kyotei 日米行政協定 (U.S.-Japan Legislative Pact), that would allow Japan formal independence in accordance with U.S. Cold War objectives in Asia, the students organized the Hansen gakusei domi 反戦学生同盟 A.G. (League of Anti-War Students A.G.--anti guerre), most of whom consisting of former student members of the Party expelled by the Central Committee in the summer of 1950.
However, because the JCP Central Committee viewed these students as "anti-Party elements" for such political autonomy and proceeded to infiltrate the Zengakuren with student party members who adhered to the Shokan-ha line, Zengakuren soon became depoliticized and entered into a period of retreat. By June 26, 1952, at the fifth Zengakuren meeting, the JCP mainstream had taken over the leadership, expelled the twenty-seven members in the former committee, and dissolved the Hansen gakusei dōmei.

The revolutionary myth of Stalinism still had too much ideological hold among the student activists for them to resist the pressures of the new JCP line backed by the Cominform. Most of them duly repented and capitulated to the new line in order to be taken back into the fold of what they perceived as the only viable revolutionary organization in existence at the time, not a few of them sent--as punishment for their political heresy--to the frontline in the countryside to organize an armed guerilla struggle after the model of the recently successful Red Army in China. But social and economic conditions in Japan in the early 1950s were hardly those of China in the late 1940s, and this politically suicidal policy, based on the erroneous proposition that Japan was a semi-feudal colony of the United States, led to further decomposition of the student movement.

During the 1959-1960 anti-Ampo mass mobilization around the Diet, the JCP persisted in this policy of de-radicalization, disavowing any radically confrontational tactics and instead called for a derisively termed “incense march” in which a plea of grievances would be made to the political representatives in the Diet through a peacefully orderly march. When the students resorted to spontaneously organized, "zigzag" snake marches that radically disrupted the norm of such well-disciplined demonstration and stormed the entrance of the Diet, risking injuries and, in one instance, death, the JCP denounced them as “Trotskyist provocateurs.” The composition of the demonstrators was diversely
knit; its most conspicuous distinction was the tremendously large turnout of the taishū, the general working class who usually exhibited little interest in collective political endeavors outside of the narrow confines of their workplaces and daily life. Yoshimoto called the anti-Ampo movement the first and last taishū movement after the war. It signaled the coming out of the Japanese New Left. Many of the representative postwar democratic intellectuals also showed up in droves, under varying ideological banners. One group of protesting university professors even went so far as to admonish the police that they were academics and, therefore, should be relieved from suffering any physical abuse as did other protesters, thus exposing the elitist reflex of their privileged social status.²¹⁸

Unlike many such intellectuals, Yoshimoto daily participated in the demonstration as a simple rank-and-filer who turned up with little fanfare, suffering arrest and staying outside the margin of leadership position in the public limelight. The pressure point between the orthodox left and the proletariat, the ideologues of the centralized party and the shapeless movement from below had finally burst asunder on the streets. A witness recalls the critical day in June 1962:

Yoshimoto was sitting down among the columns of main currents of Zengakuren at the Shinagawa Station last year on June fourth. I do not question whether Yoshimoto was a subsistence-earner or thinker/poet. His image as a solitary human being who shall not, for whatever reason, be moved floats in my eyes even now. If one were to write on Yoshimoto, this is an image that ought to be placed at the opening or concluding section of a chapter. Many “cultural elites” came and went, one after the other, to persuade the main currents to retreat from the train station. Outside the station the support group that was “leading” the national people’s assembly had, in an orderly fashion, made a gentle circle around the announcement truck, already emanating that familiar atmosphere. And, in the station, in contrast to that, there was a black bloc, silent and refusing. In my eyes, at the center of that refusal sat Yoshimoto, motionless as stone.

I was moved by the painful comedy of ideas. There was no way

²¹⁸ For background on the Ampo struggle, see chap. 4 of Takagi, Zengakuren to Zenkyōtō, 40-56.
I could become one of those who tried to persuade Yoshimoto and the main currents of the Zengakuren. But I also did not think of myself as someone like Yoshimoto who could indefinitely sit there as if it were the most obvious thing to do. Limiting my remarks to Yoshimoto, his wartime experience and the solitude of where he was now going seemed concentrated in that night at Shinagawa Station. And I also saw my own history of the war resurrect like a specter in my mind.\textsuperscript{219}

Although Yoshimoto did feel that a continuity of sensibility existed between his wartime experience and his participation in the Ampo struggle, his postwar season of despair had immunized him from losing himself in the maelstrom of political passion to the point of gambling with his own life, for he saw the struggle as a “last opportunity” to protest against Japanese capitalism but not sufficient to overthrow it:

\begin{quote}
I did think the opposition to Ampo was the last opportunity to declare dissent against Japanese capitalism, but, no matter how I analyzed it, I didn’t think Japanese capitalism would be overthrown by it.

In fact, my understanding was the opposite, that Japanese capitalism had fully come into being through this. I knew well that you could defeat the Kishi administration but that was different from defeating capitalism.

I think during the Ampo opposition the students put their bodies on the line to the point of being “ready to die.” I also think there were those who believed that Japanese capitalism was about to fall and “revolution” was imminent. I wanted to work with such students but didn’t want to die merely for the overthrow of the Kishi administration. That might be what distinguished me from the students.

Because I thought that I couldn’t and wouldn’t die here, even as we broke into the Diet building, I felt it was painful but, using my experience of pushing and shoving each other during the war, thought I’d survive and come out no matter what. That is, whatever happens, you don’t allow your feet to float from the ground. But, unlike the slow-witted actions of the Japanese Left who only talked big, the way the students in the main currents of Zengakuren fought was truly refreshing. I think the war, as experience, influenced the young people’s mode of action. After the defeat of the 1960 Ampo, those students who genuinely thought that they didn’t mind dying, I think, experienced tremendous despair.\textsuperscript{220}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{219} Hashikawa Bunzō 橋川文三, “Yoshimoto-zō danpen” 吉本像断片, Yoshimoto Taka‘aki o yomu, ’92.
Yoshimoto took part in the only intellectual action group that supported the main currents of Zengakuren, Rokugatsu kōdō iinkai 六月行動委員会, the “June Action Committee,” whose organizational policy was never to set up any program or directive to lead the students but to determine its action on a day-to-day basis in autonomously cooperative relation to what the Zenkauren students were doing.

The students of Zengakuren were the primary organizing force in this historically unprecedented demo--for its level of participation and heterogeneity--and, again, unlike many of the left and progressive intellectuals who circulated in close constellation to the JCP or kept an arm’s distance from what they deemed the students’ rabble-rousing and anarchic force, Yoshimoto took every opportunity to signal his essential support for the valiantly dedicated efforts and independence of spirit the students had demonstrated by their organizing and critical appraisal of the traditional left parities, groups, and intellectuals:

Because my student days were during the war, I was a militarist young man who thought that it’ll be all right if I died in that struggle and, when we were defeated, that was going to be the end of my life. From what I felt then, I thought that I could fully understand their [the Zengakuren students’] passion...

I assessed their mode of action to be something completely unprecedented and new in the tradition of the Japanese left. This was because I considered it to start the world’s first left movement that was independent from what flowed out of the policies of the Soviet Communist Party. Because of their excessively radical mode of action, the student leaders got arrested and, after the 1960s, the movement broke up into pieces. I think their mode of action was unprecedented in the Japanese left and quite admirable.

The thing was, the Japanese Communist Party and the Left that came out of the currents from the Soviet Communist Party would say “go on, go on” to the average students, but they always put themselves somewhere safe.

But the students, starting with their leaders, rushed right into the middle of it. And they also had a different temperament and knew how to go into it lightly like “let’s just do it, man, let’s just do it” while reading comic books or something. If you say this is bullshit, it may be bullshit, but what appeared then as something new in their mode of action has no counterpart in the world and we can appreciate it accordingly.

In the midst of the opposition between the Soviet and U.S.
establishments, in the sense of not getting squashed by both and not taking the mode of either one, their way of doing things was most justifiable and their movement needed to be defended.\textsuperscript{221}

Coupled with his admiration and loyalty, Yoshimoto also expressed a candidly open, partisan critique of the political limitations the students were exhibiting in their assessment of the meaning of the anti-Ampo struggle. The two major student groups leading the opposition to Ampo were the action-oriented \textit{Bunto} ブント (League of Communists) and organizationally oriented Trotskyist \textit{Kakukyōdō} 革共同 (League of Revolutionary Communists). \textit{Bunto} retrospectively asserted the imminence of revolution in 1959 on the condition of organizing a revolutionary general strike that led to armed insurrection while \textit{Kakukyōdō} denied such a possibility because Ampo was merely a struggle over treaty agreements and, therefore, could not have been anything beyond a struggle for an anti-Stalinist proletarian party. Yoshimoto critiqued the ahistorical framework of orthodox Marxist formulas that both groups mechanically applied to contemporary Japanese conditions and the vanguardist conception of revolution and party organization that they both shared. In Yoshimoto’s view:

We know that during the Ampo struggle we had to often experience a contradiction. It was the dilemma that no matter how much we developed radical street demos, all that was conceivable at most was the political consequence of overthrowing and dispersing the Kishi administration before the natural institution of Ampo treaties and that, nonetheless, it was impossible to even do this without radical street action. Not the slightest revolutionary condition was present and, because Japanese capitalism was implementing policies that stood behind the successes of a fairly stabilized economic base, citizens and workers did not possess the subjective position necessary in the dissolution of the establishment. However, that is not because, as in the view of the National Committee of \textit{Kakukyōdō}, Ampo could not immediately turn into a class confrontation with monopoly capital. It goes without saying that the new Ampo treaty was about to be renewed as the will of the state and the interests of Japanese monopoly capital were involved in that. The Ampo struggle itself only began to exist as something containing class confrontation with monopoly capital. Under such conditions, even if there were a citizen-

\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Waga “tenkō,”} 11-13.
worker revolt after Zengakuren’s radical street actions, it would have meant an overthrow of an administration, at most temporary seizure of administrative power in the manner of a riot, and could have never been a revolution. Needless to say, the overthrow and seizure of administrative power have nothing to do with the movement of power to the people. The mere change of administration from the Liberal Democrats to the Socialists and Communists is nothing at all like a revolution and is merely an exchange of administrative power.222

Although Yoshimoto deeply sympathized with these two currents--especially Bunto--of Zengakuren, he perceived in their attempt to summarize the direction of Ampo struggle in terms of proletarian party organizing and vanguardist notions of revolution a theoretical retreat into the bureaucratic logic and bankrupt political framework of the JCP. For the greatest lesson of Ampo was, according to Yoshimoto, “the vortex of spontaneously developing mass actions of the students and people that went beyond all existing leading groups and even buried them in wild currents of action” and that “in order to deal with all the various tragicomedies that took place in the process of the Ampo struggle,” this must be done by “clearly making a distinction between the leading ideologues and the taishū.”223

Such a valorized conception of “mass spontaneous action,” of course, has striking parallels with Rosa Luxemburg’s emphasis on “mass spontaneity” as the creative force of proletarian revolutionary movements and her critique of Leninist vanguardism on the grounds that its tendency was to stultify and repress this creative power from below. It was, in fact, one of the recurrent themes of the 1960s New Left throughout the world. In the U.S., SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) made “participatory democracy” the keyword in grasping the momentum unleashed in the wake of the Civil Rights and, later, antiwar movements, implying a perspective that went beyond the vacuous machination of electoral politics as well as beyond the political sclerosis of anticommunism and

223 Ibid., 61.
technocratic or vanguardist elitism among liberal Democrats and surviving Marxist sects. In Britain, during the first phase of its New Left, E.P. Thompson and others posed “socialist humanism” on the pages of The New Reasoner and The University and Left Review as a genuinely democratic alternative to Stalinist “democratic centralism.” In France, May ’68 gave a concrete example of a general strike and factory occupation that signified the autonomous self-activity of students and workers fusing in mass action outside the control of the Communist and Socialist parties. In Italy, in the 1970s, the extra-parliamentary left consisted of students and workers who organized and theorized “the social factory” and central significance of the radically democratic, free association of Autonomia beyond the sterile, compromised politics of the Italian Communist Party. It is in this context of New Left libertarian radical politics from below--some of which, given their respectively varying historical and social conditions, as well as theoretical differences, evinced crucial differences of ideological genealogy--that Yoshimoto’s own positions and ideas must be located.224

At the same time, it is instructive to touch on an obvious difference between Yoshimoto and his counterparts by briefly contrasting Yoshimoto’s attitude toward the radical student demonstrators with that of Herbert Marcuse, the leading New Left thinker in the U.S. The Yoshimoto-Marcuse comparison is quite appropriate, for the Japanese contemporary thinker Asada Akira had gone so far as to claim that the effect Yoshimoto had on the students were "Marcusean," influencing them to become “more and more subjectivist and romantic, either pursuing an illusory unity with the masses or seeking a quasi-erotic communality of its own, in a Feuerbachian or Marcusean spirit.” However,

Yoshimoto and Marucse were hardly alike in their "subjectivist and romantic" orientation. If Yoshimoto saw a continuity of sensibility between the militancy of the students and his experience as a militarist youth during the war, Marcuse instead saw among the American students the birth of what he called the "New Sensibility," an expression of the "ascent of the life instincts over aggressiveness and guilt" that practiced an "aesthetic morality" that was tantamount to "methodical desublimation" found in the utopian vision of artistic creation, from the German Romantics to the Surrealists.225

Not only is Marcuse's approach heretically Freudian but expressively utopian, reflecting the distinctive tenor of the American student demonstrators. Marcuse recalled witnessing the "unity of moral-sexual and political rebellion" at an anti-war demonstration he participated in Berkeley in the late 1960s. With the police cordoning off the streets to hem in the demonstrators and possible violent confrontation in sight, "the thousands of marchers sat down in the street, guitars and harmonicas appeared, people began 'necking' and 'petting,' and so the demonstration ended." Marcuse believed "that a unity spontaneously and anarchically emerged here that perhaps in the end cannot fail to make an impression even on the enemy."226 This optimistically carnivalesque view is in marked contrast to the existentially romantic and subjective dimension of the Japanese student demonstrators that bordered on the suicidal: "during the Ampo opposition the students put their bodies on the line to the point of being 'ready to die.'" This readiness to die certainly has a specific aesthetic genealogy no less so than the life-affirming "New Sensibility" of desublimated eros, in the Japanese prewar Romantic movement, to say nothing of double-suicide leitmotifs found in

kabuki plays of Tokugawa mercantile culture and Zen ethos of the samurai code (we can find a similar sensibility in the German Romantic theme of tragic, unrequited love, from Goethe's Sorrows of Young Werther to Wagner's Tristan and Isolde). However, as Freud well understood, eros and thanatos are two sides of the same coin, and Marcuse and Yoshimoto were simply articulating the same oppositional and subversive energy in their respective societies that, due to various historical and cultural factors, took drastically different forms.

However, what above all distinguished Yoshimoto from his New Left libertarian comrades across the globe was that he did not define his politics and analysis in relation to the “absolute nature of ideas,” whether the latter took the form of anarchism, situationism, council communism, Marxist/socialist humanism, or even the politically non-partisan populist notion of “participatory democracy.” His steadfast adherence to the “absolute nature of relations” meant that he took the ever-changing existing social, economic, and cultural conditions in Japan as the necessary point of departure for thinking through fundamental categories for political and social transformation. This resulted in Yoshimoto’s conceptualization of jiritsu 自立 “autonomy” as the defining principle of his political philosophy. According to this principle, it was necessary to “grasp the taishū existing now as they are” and to channel this “original image of the taishū” into every step of one’s own thinking:

This original image of the existence of the taishū as they are becomes, when we try even in the slightest to be intellectual beings, the first object from which our thought must take off. Upon such a takeoff, as if we can’t help spiraling up the sand and dust in reaction, the taishū appear as an existence that needs to be enlightened, an ignorant existence that must be injected with knowledge, lost souls hanging onto their own lives and pursuing merely their self-interest. Today this is the inevitable path that the intellectual or political philosophy of enlightenment--which derives from categories based on ideas of intellectuals and the vanguard, their political group--takes. However, what is the taishū’s essential mode of being?

The taishū only grasp the composition of society through the
standard of living and, because they never depart from this, they stand on an extremely powerful and gigantic foundation. And, because they do not pay attention to situations, they are an extremely phenomenological being in relation to contemporary conditions. The contradiction that they exist on the most powerful and gigantic foundation of life as well as within the most microscopic illusions is the essential mode of being that the taishū possess.  

Keeping this “original image of the taishū” in mind, Yoshimoto restricted the “sole universal function” of the vanguard or intellectuals to be the “fate, or, in other words, natural process in which, in terms of global epistemology, [they] must reach the highest level of the existing world today even in an uncivilized, backward society.”

Noting Lenin and Trotsky’s failure in apprehending “the process of the taishū to intellectually elevate themselves from the original image of their mode of being toward the political group of intellectuals” as “a natural process without any meaning” and “the vanguard as a group of intellectuals as an illusory natural group appearing without conditions of impediment,” Yoshimoto declared that “if one seeks to establish a political group of intellectuals as a meaningful group, the intellectual task can only be sought, in reverse to what they [Lenin and Trotsky] did, in channeling the original image of the taishū’s mode of being into oneself.”

The “autonomy” of thought that Yoshimoto was calling for, in short, necessitates autonomy from liberal enlightenment, revolutionary vanguardism, economic determinism, and other questionable components of modern rationalism. Putting aside the philosophical underpinnings and ramifications of Yoshimoto’s notion of “autonomy”--whose prodigious theoretical and analytical tasks he would set himself to complete in a series of landmark texts published from the mid-1960s through the following three decades--this line of theoretical and intellectual inquiry helped accelerate the opening up of political space within the Japanese

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228 Ibid., 102-6.
New Left.

In the aftermath of the Ampo struggle, as if fulfilling the very vanguardist logic of sectarianism that Yoshimoto criticized, the Zengakuren was no longer able to withstand the strategic and political differences seething in its ranks and split into several factions. Immediately preceding this split—materialized in the seventeenth congress of Zengakuren in July 1961—Shagakudō (League of Socialist Students, a student organization stemming from Bunto) and two other radical student groups attempted to work together to oppose the ideologically constricted sectarianism of the Trotskyist Kakukyodō and its student section Markugakudō (League of Japanese Marxist Students) who had now effectively become the mainstream of Zengakuren. After the initial, violent confrontation between the three anti-mainstream currents and the mainstream faction at the congress and the former’s eventual boycotting of the entire proceeding, the Zengakuren—now under the monopoly of Kakukyodō and Marugakudō—became ever more sectarian in its emphasis on anti-Stalinist and anti-imperialist policy under the theoretical leadership of the leading Japanese Trotskyist Kuroda Kan’ichi.

Meanwhile the remaining old-Bunto-style activists—after not a few of their erstwhile comrades joined the Kakukyodō—attempted to undertake the reconstruction of Shagakudō, which had now ceased to exist except in name. It was among these non-sectarian radical students who sought a way out of Marxist-Leninism, opposing party formation and vanguardism, forming an autonomous student group “Sect 6,” and emphasizing popular mass participation, that Yoshimoto’s ideas circulated most widely. In Yoshimoto's words, Sect 6 "politically received considerable influence from crossing the border into the autonomous political movement that Tanigawa Gan and the workers of the Taishō Action Brigade organized," and the "group’s political
consciousness, compared to our country's leftist common sense, was advanced" because "in the way they posed their problem they sought in their unique way to grasp the student movement as a movement of the taishū." Yoshimoto went as far as to say that "this group's critical consciousness almost entirely contains, in their germinal form, all the critical consciousness of the student movement in the 1960s that subsequently traversed a zigzagging course." The seminal text that these and other students read most frequently was Yoshimoto's summation of the significance of the Ampo struggle in relation to postwar Japanese democracy, "The End of Fictive Rule" (1962), whose impact is comparable to that of Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man on the U.S. New Left.

The "fictive rule" over which Yoshimoto pronounced his death sentence was that of Japanese postwar democracy. In the famous opening of his essay, Yoshimoto wrote:

The Ampo struggle elaborated the turning point in postwar history. In the face of hundred of thousands of workers, students, and citizens, those leading prewar fictive vanguards who, in the fifteen years after the war, concealed their wartime decay and tenkō and pretended that they had continuously struggled during and after the war have finally exposed themselves beyond any shadow of a doubt their incapacity to struggle on their own, their lack of ability to give any direction to the struggle by themselves. The bankruptcy of the vanguard aristocrats, who, though making mixed marriage with idiots and the incapacitated, preserved their respectable genealogical consciousness, had been theoretically clear at the level of debates over war responsibility. But no one predicted how this would be given such merciless empirical proof. Of course, even they may able to connect the apologetics of assuming a low profile and refuse to fight for the prospect of nationalist democratic revolution, decorating themselves with a theory of the cooperative popular front. Maybe they can make a defense by referring to the contemporary conditions in which labor organizations cannot struggle or to the strong stability of monopoly capital, adding that those who struggle last are the ones who struggle well. However, it is precisely here that their delusion lies. Their blind spot is that they have covered their eyes over bourgeois democracy's complete

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230 Takagi Masayuki, op. cit., 57-70.
permeation over the whole of society and its corresponding facts. Here it has become completely difficult for them to understand that, as it has been repeated a number of times after the war, if you fight mistakenly, you self-destruct; if you do not fight, you fall back to the rearguard; and if you remain still, you rot and transmute yourself through the fictively instituted stability within the monopolistic establishment. Their prewar memory of total collapse, in fact, covers up and conceals the fact that if you don’t fight, the only thing you can do is to go to the grave holding onto your secret stash.\textsuperscript{231}

Yoshimoto’s point about “bourgeois democracy’s complete permeation...and its corresponding facts” is the crux here, for he was not decrying the vacuity or absence of bourgeois democracy but recognizing its “permeation.” And some of the “corresponding facts” he had in mind were “the complete disappearance of the emperor system as a legal institution,” the increased expansion of layers between monopoly capital AND medium- and small-sized capital, and the dissolution of parasitical landlord class, all of which entailed a significant change in popular consciousness. The recognition of these “facts” enabled Yoshimoto to accurately read the negotiation over the Ampo treaty as a “treaty among the international bourgeoisie within the internal logic of Japanese capitalist development and battle over capturing markets” (as opposed to the deepening of Japanese dependency, as the majority of the Left perceived).\textsuperscript{232}

Such facts resulted in a radical shift within popular consciousness, the most significant of which was its maturation within the shell of bourgeois individualism. This was an argument also against the foremost postwar political scientist Maruyama Masao, who had concluded that the social subjectivity of contemporary Japan was as yet insufficiently developed in exhibiting characteristics of genuine political modernity and thus dismissed the general apathy of the Japanese population as a proof of its immaturity to fulfill the participatory responsibility conferred upon their democratic citizenship.

\textsuperscript{231} “Gisei no shūen,” 47-8.
\textsuperscript{232} Washida, op. cit., 154-9; 163-8.
Yoshimoto, in contrast, considered such apathy the very foundation of the mature bourgeois democratic citizenry. Thus, it was this growing indifference to political institutions, generated and accelerated as it was by the rapid and steady development of consumer capitalism in Japan, which furnished the liberating momentum for the taishū who had participated in the Ampo struggle to organize a truly independent action from the existing political parties and intelligentsia fictively representing their interests.

And this same healthy indifference of bourgeois individualism circulated among the post-Ampo radical students, who demonstrated in their agitation during Ampo an antagonistic social subject that was unwilling to toe the JCP party line for fear of breaking ranks when their interests and independence came into conflict with it--unlike their immediate predecessors of the previous decade of the late 1940s and 50s who still constrained their activities within “the myth of the vanguard.” The collapse of Zengakuren after 1959 partly stemmed from this slight generational difference among the students, and it was the younger group, associated with “Sect No. 6” and other efforts to forge a non-sectarian radicalism free from Marxist-Leninism, that became the crucial transitional midwife to the spontaneously militant and confrontational student radicals of the late 1960s affiliated with Zenkyōtō (Zengaku-kyōtō-kaigi: “Congress of Collective Struggle of All Schools”). These non-sectarian radical students avidly read and passed around Shikō, a journal that Yoshimoto co-founded with Tanigawa Gan and Murakami Ichirō. In the editorial statement of the founding issue, Yoshimoto, Tanigawa, and Murakami declared:

We make this journal surrounded by excited Ah Qs and Ah Qs with their tails tucked between their legs. In a period when the fetishism of capital is pushed to its extremes, that is to say, a period when fetishistic ideas are consciously placed as an organizing machine at the center of the industrial machinery--what happens at such a moment
A world that pretends to exist is now unfolding. Poetic meaning is lost from every fixed form. All fictive rules cannot induce even a single theatrical effect. Words and action can only take a breath as self-denying concatenation of similies destroying similies.

Thus fearful waves of apathy assault us. It is as if, no matter how much we mobilize and combine all the spectrums of color, registers of sound, and appearances of form, their value cannot match the weight placed at the very tip of the modest existence in front of us. It is not that we can no longer be moved. It just does not stay fixed. This is because even shadows of ambiguity are sucked into the side of capital's anarchy at the hyper-speed of about one millionth of a second, either becoming pebbles that construct the architecture of fictive rule or dispersing into the empty sky.

We sneer at simple "senseless unknowing" related to the ferocity of this contemporary apathy and at optimistic "methodological consciousness." They are the same sickness. They are both a naive will to power that cannot understand the general model of phenomenon of disintegration that characterizes today. And they are precisely the metaphysical capital that today guarantees the surplus excess for the contemporary monopoly.

What is power? We must closely observe the grave foundational parts of words. How do human beings transpose the second first-person pronoun within themselves, which must be objectified and at the same can never be entirely objectified, into the first third-person pronoun; what is the idea of integration of power that is scattered as a result of trying to avoid a fight when we are confronted by an incomparable difficulty whose KO punches we find unendurable?

We are making an effort to build a truly genuine power. What we can now ascertain with our hands is only the sense of exfoliation that occurs when ideas are trying to unify the self. Outside of making the autonomy of dogged, anonymous ideas from such a place, there can never be a path to power that denies power. Because this is the final expression of our despair, it shall not change. It will be erected on top of the interplay between one drop of intellectual sense that is won at the price of the whole body and one drop of physical sense that is won at the price of all ideas. A bet must be total. No spare change should remain.

In order to search for the physics of a transitional period in which we must stand without words and fight without words, this journal was born. We—who is and who is not that? Confusion may start here, but, in light of the aim of the journal, it is our view that the determination of first-person plural pronoun is not particularly necessary.233

Although both Tanigawa and Murakami would subsequently resign from the editorial board of Shikō, the very fact that these three radically different figures could initiate a collaborative intellectual project owed considerably to the

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formation of independent political space that the Ampo struggle had made possible. It was on the pages of this privately printed journal that Yoshimoto, who found himself barred from any free publishing outlet due to his support of Zengakuren during Ampo and his critical stance toward the JCP and its associated liberal and left intelligentsia, would pen his trenchant political commentary and theoretically original ruminations on language and epistemology that some of the Zenkyōtō students read with uncomprehending excitement.234

Zenkyōtō emerged as part of the international upheaval of 1968 and originated in the student occupation of the Tokyo University on July 5 and Nihon University on May 27 of that year, setting up barricades and defending themselves from attacks by police and rightwing students armed with Japanese swords and axes. The majority of these students were ideologically non-affiliated, and their struggles, initially prompted by tuition increase and the administrative punishment of striking students, were overwhelmingly cultural in orientation. For example, at Nihon University, where the hierarchical relations between upperclassmen and lowerclassmen were strictly observed, the Zenkyōtō struggle dissolved these relations and established, in their stead, a profound experience of equality and solidarity that reached towards the very revolution of one’s own being. Such a focus gave the Zenkyōtō students tremendous independence from all the sectarian New Left groups, and they took this ideological independence to the point of anti-intellectualist valorization of direct action, spending more time occupying university buildings, setting up barricades, and participating in street action than studying Marx or, for that matter, Yoshimoto’s writings.235 This is not to say that these students did not read

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235 Takagi, op. cit., 109-134.
Yoshimoto; in fact, as one activist recalled:

However, what’s so strange thinking about it now is that, though Yoshimoto’s writings were sharp when it came to his comments on current situations, there wasn’t a word of agitation in them like “set up barricades,” “it’s Quartier Latin,” or “move forward toward revolution.” So why did we get excited reading even works like What Is Beauty for Language or Theory of Communal Illusion...and got the same sense of exhilaration as we did watching Takakura Ken movies? These were not light books that average students like us could understand. And, in fact, we didn’t understand them...Although we couldn’t understand the surface of his commentary, we felt them in the depth of our minds like poetry.

At that time it was fashionable for female and male college students to securely carry close to their breasts a copy of Asahi Journal and Yoshimoto Taka’aki, or Haniya Yutaka.236

But the majority of these students were influenced less by any theoretical analysis of Japanese capitalism or of the state of the university than by the popular culture of their own times, most acutely expressed in yakuza movies and comic books. What the students digested from consuming the latter two forms of popular entertainment was expressed in their notion of “self-denial” (jiko-hitei), a romantic ideal of self-destruction in which the life-or-death struggle of the protagonist--be it the principled yakuza who selflessly goes into the volley of enemy’s bullets or accepts a lifelong jail sentence for the sake of loyalty in Yamashita Kōsaku’s 山下耕作 movies (many of which featured the actor Takakura Ken) or a boxer in Ashita no Jō 明日のジョー (Tomorrow’s Jō) fighting in the ring with self-annihilating energy to his death--was superimposed on their street skirmishes with the riot police, rightwing students, and, eventually, among themselves.237

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237 Amano Kei’ichi, “Zenkyōtō to jimesu no romanchizumu” 全共闘と自滅のロマンチズム in “Nonsekuto” to iu tōhasei, 89-109. That some of these Zenkyōtō students read Yoshimoto incongruently through the prism of their self-destructive romanticism can be seen from the fact that many of the sentences expressing the latter sentiment, such as “injecting all our powers into the struggle, can we gamble without caring a whit about our own extirpation,” “what can we do by getting smashed up, we’d like to place our bet on this,” “long line toward annihilation without victory,” and “struggle like this which will inevitably get destroyed,” appeared on the pages of a...
For, alongside of the ideologically undefined orientation of supremely action-based sensibility of the Zenkyōtō, the various outflow of Trotskyist and Maoist sectarianism after the 1961 split in the Zengakuren continued to flourish throughout the 1960s, absorbing those within the Zenkyōtō who sought a more stable purpose, coherent direction, and unifying theory to their actions. At the same time, paradoxically, the autonomous independence and existential intoxication with the purity of action found in the Zenkyōtō posited a kind of sectarianism in itself. Its decentralized combative militancy and apocalyptic sense of complete self-conflagration tended to make a fetish out of all-or-nothing confrontation without positing any meaningful strategy or long-term objectives, romanticizing revolutionary violence with their pipes, Molotov cocktails, and “hard-hat” helmets—all of which, of course, necessarily emerged in response to the repressive violence of the state and that of right-wing students (many of whom were members of student martial arts clubs). As energetically refreshing and organizationally liberating as the Zenkyōtō was at its prime, it unwittingly laid the basis for the denouement of the movement as it progressively broke up into sectarian infighting of relentless violence (uchi-geba 内ゲバ—short for “internal gewalt”), alienating many of its erstwhile fellow travelers and activists in the process. The fictive rule of postwar democracy may have ended but those social forces that brought their demise disintegrated as well.

No other event emblematized the end of the movement of the 1960s more vividly than the nationally televised event that occurred in the Asama Mountain Villa in 1972. Having executed fourteen of its members while conducting military training in the Japanese Alps and suffering police arrest, the remaining five

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“Let’s Go Far Away, a magazine that was read widely and whose core readers were the non-sectarian activists (a magazine that centered around people under the strong intellectual influence of Yoshimoto Taka’aki)”: ibid., 97.
members of Japanese Red Army Faction, many of them formed from former 
Zenkyōtō activists turned Maoists, occupied the Villa, located in Karuizawa City 
in Nagano Prefecture, and took one hostage, pursuing a gun battle with 1500 
police officers that lasted for ten days, killing two members of the police force and 
wounding twenty-three people. The mass media blitzkrieg on this shocking event 
was joined by a chorus of erstwhile progressives and leftists who denounced the 
entire radical New Left on account of such a concentrated outburst of violence by 
some of its latter-day dogmatically sectarian members.\(^{238}\)

In the massive wave of emotionally volatile and often self-serving media 
criticism of the Red Army Faction and, by implication, the whole of the New Left 
in Japan, Yoshimoto—who had consistently criticized the sectarian tendency of 
the New Left as an impediment in building a successful mass movement that 
rooted itself in the existing popular mode of being and its corresponding 
consciousness—was one of the few public voices that criticized the tenor of this 
media backlash. In the June 1972 issue of Shikō he responded:

...The Red Army Incident is not only an incident that reflects the 
political confusion of the contemporary world. It is also an incident 
that symbolically characterizes the confusion of contemporary civil 
society. In that sense, none of us can denounce their lynching 
murders. This is because, if, in the communality of the “rules” of the 
“Red Army,” the “family” and the “individual” that they believed they 
could hammer in completely had been revived among themselves 
during their life in the mountains, regardless of their error at the level 
of political theory we can also say that everyday relationships took 
revenge on them. All of us are living as we try to barely knit together 
fragile everyday relationships of family, husband and wife, friends, 
acquaintances, and close relatives. We can put this in another way. 
In these relationships within civil society, we are repeating lives of 
meaninglessly experiencing, time and time again, intentions to murder

\(^{238}\) Parallels can be drawn between the armed tendencies that led to this “Red Army Incident” in 
Japan and the breakup of the SDS in 1968 after its takeover by the action-faction Maoist 
Progressive Labor Party and the rapid disintegration of the movement into underground armed 
insurrectionary groups, such as the Weathermen and Symbionese Liberation Front, in the U.S. In 
Europe, too, the German Baader-Meinhof Gang and the Italian Red Army of the 1970s generated 
similar media furor and climate of general tolerance for state repression in their respective 
countries.
the other and the erasure of these intentions, or a will and effort to choose apostasy or to believe in something. At the end of such a path we cannot see the light of day nor can we find hope that we will someday recover from this. We can say that we are just blindly making our way through the muddy swamps. If this is so, we can even perceive the lynching murders of the “Red Army” as the “symbol” of what we repeat within our minds and repress in reality. Why is it that they have really put this into practice and the nature of our everyday prevents us from committing it in our minds? Is it because we are afraid of a murder charge? Or is it because we are “the good” in possession of “normality,” “health,” and high “ethics” as compared to them? I cannot believe in any of these reasons and do not feel that they even deserve evaluation and commentary.

The only thing I can say is, our only difference derives from the fact that, while we inhabit the nature of the everyday of the “family” or the “individual,” they tried to hammer everything into a communality that could only be ideologically inhabited from the outset. This only difference, in short, lies in the fact that, while I have a recognition within my “ideas” that the communality of “organization” belongs to a completely different level from that of the “family” or the “individual,” they were dominated by the “idea” that forcefully tried to shut in the level of the “family” and the “individual” into that of the communality of the “organization.” Those powers and mass media that have openly denounced them as “insane,” “abnormal,” and “inhuman” and those people who have followed suit, if they turned their eyes inwards even for a slight moment, will realize that this is not someone else’s business. What await here are probably the problem of contemporary “political idea” and the task of the “situation.” Here lies the difficulty that can be easily dealt with as a problem of the “political idea” but, as a problem of the “situation,” can never be resolved of its own accord. This difficulty cannot be resolved by repressing the “family” or the “individual” into the communality of the organization and shooting rifles; neither can we do something about it by wading through the endless muddy swamps of the everyday. They have posed this task to us.239

For Yoshimoto, politics is a matter of “communal illusion,” not simply of “facts” or “material power,” and what the Red Army Faction did was to remind us that the "communal illusion" that we live out and repress in our daily lives cannot be recast, in its unrepressed and exposed form, as "the communality of organization" under the dictates of a particular ideology. This is because it cuts off the blood supply of our ideas and practices from the actuality of the everyday, the original image of the taishū that ceases to be an "original image" as soon as it

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is reified into an ideological conception (of popular “Third World revolution," "revolutionary proletariat," etc.). Furthermore, the great intellectual and political distortion that the Red Army Faction and other armed sectarian groups—as well as the established powers, mass media, and the people who criticized the actions of the Red Army on the basis of “insanity” or “inhumanity”—had committed were one of confusing the distinct levels of “communal illusion” (of the self, the other, and the community or the state), mistakenly assuming that one could resolve what occurs at one level through an intervention into another or through the subordination of one level to another; such confusions made possible not only violently futile sectarianism but the tissues ideological lies and distortions that tyrannized civil society under the aegis of an authoritarian closed state (Yoshimoto’s ideal, expressed in his more recent term, is to “open up the state” so that the taishū would have an immediate right of recalling the state).

Such a critical observation unattached to any sectarian loyalty continued to earn Yoshimoto the ire of traditional left and the mainstream media as well as the admiration of those dwindling segments of the New Left that had been reading Shikō and his writings therein as a guide to think through the times in which they have lived through and participated so passionately. However, as the movement dismantled into more localized forms of grassroots activism over anti-nuclear, environmental, feminist, and other issue-oriented causes, Yoshimoto’s readership waned. This was partly because he kept a critical distance from these latter-day movements that, in his view, reproduced an ideologically rigid and one-dimensional characteristics of what he called “soft Stalinism,” with their failure to come to terms with the new stage of Japanese consumer capitalism that he defined under the rubrics of “hyper-capitalism.” Yoshimoto’s such insistence on maintaining his own jiritsu has made him into one of the most formidable and lonely intellectual long-distance runners in the last fifty years.
If I have an intellectual method, in contrast to the ideologues of the world who believed that they have acquired their realistic “position” by throwing away and concealing their experiential thought, it lies in the fact that I have not thrown mine away but absorbed it. This inevitably keeps the intellectual speculations of the world’s ideologues and my intellectual contribution at times away from each other to the point of infinity and at other times close to each other within a point-blank range. They sway according to “position” and I sway only according to reality. When I sense within myself a foundation for timely thought without peers, they turn into a name of annihilated “position.” When they emphasize this “position,” I appear a solitary figure. But, of course, I’m the one who is more of the shapeless organizer, the shapeless majority, and resolutely “reality” itself.²⁴⁰

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