

SPECIAL FORUM REPORT 014

The Meiji Ishin ('Meiji Restoration') and *Kaikoku*

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The 'Long Revolution' in Modern Japan: Rethinking the Search for Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Japan

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The Meiji Ishin is one of the most significant events in the history of Japan. In recent Japanese Studies, this Meiji Ishin has been referred to as the 'Meiji Revolution.' Although the Imperial House has survived from the Tokugawa era and there was no dismantling of personal property as seen during twentieth-century communist revolutions, it is inadequate to simply explain the reforms instituted by the new Meiji government as 'political change.' Between 1868 and 1890, the hereditary rank system was dissolved, rule by bureaucracy and legislature was established, a legal system based on a written constitution was set up, the right of personal land ownership was brought in, and the economy switched to capitalism. Indeed, there were many Meiji intellectuals, such as Fukuzawa Yukichi and Takekoshi Yosaburo, who referred to the changes as 'kakumei,' which means 'revolution.'

Yet, the familiar English equivalent is not the 'Meiji Revolution' but the 'Meiji Restoration,' even though 'restoration' primarily means the restoration of a monarchy and hence cannot indicate the huge change expressed by 'ishin' (reformation) or 'kakumei' (revolution). Why has 'restoration' become a common English equivalent? Right after the change of government in 1868, the new government transmitted a sovereign message from the Meiji Emperor to the ambassadors of six countries to establish diplomatic relations. This was titled 'A Sovereign Message to Proclaim of the Return of Imperial Rule.' Herein, the new government set out its legitimacy by declaring that it had overthrown the Tokugawa

Shogunate and restored a government with the Emperor at its center. The name Meiji Restoration reflects this ideology of the new regime.

However, the proclamation of restoration that the new government issued within Japan did not merely indicate the revival of an old system. Rather, the name 'restoration' was used to justify the creation of new political institutions. In 1868, a document 'Great Proclamation' was issued in the name of the Meiji Emperor, who proclaimed to the Japanese people the abolition of the Tokugawa Shogunate and restoration of imperial rule. However, the principle behind the 'restoration' was the implementation of 'various matters based on the beginning of the Emperor Jinmu's reign,' which meant a major revolution and justified deep reforms. The phrase 'beginning of the Emperor Jinmu's reign' therefore connects 'restoration' and 'revolution.'

Here one mystery emerges. It was the samurai that led the Meiji Revolution and swept away the Tokugawa Shogunate. Subsequently, they took political power and abolished the han feudal domains, in which the rank-based ruling structure had maintained its stability during the Edo era. This meant that those who ruled the new government destroyed the privileges of their own hereditary rank. One may call it 'status suicide.'

In *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, Fukuzawa names the 1868 regime change 'revolution' or 'reform by monarchical power,' and he distinguishes it from the abolition



of the han feudal domains in 1871. This means that, after abolishing the Shogunate, it was logically possible to maintain the privileges of samurai by creating a system in which the Daimyo were in allegiance to the Emperor. Fukuzawa argues that, from the beginning of the 19th century, there was increasing dissatisfaction with the hereditary rank system, which caused the 1868 revolution. In his view, the anti-Shogunate movement led by the samurai was a manifestation of this dissatisfaction. It was therefore inevitable that this movement progressed to abolish the han feudal domains and the rank system. This long-term social change may be called 'Long Revolution,' derived from Raymond William's book.

Takekoshi published *History of New Japan*, 2 Vols., 1891–1892, arguing that economic growth during the Tokugawa Shogunate had increased wealth and intellectual standards, which had promoted statuses of farmers and merchants. Meanwhile, publishing industry developed, making it easy to disseminate knowledge. Furthermore, the newly wealthy merchants and farmers demanded for academic studies and contributed to the development of academia. Takekoshi particularly focuses on how Confucianism or the political philosophy of Neo-Confucianism spread in the general public. While the constitution presupposed by Confucianism limits political regime to the monarchy, Confucianism advocates that the monarch should earnestly accept the requests of the people. In addition, Neo-Confucian suggests that, if the monarch fails, a person of high moral standing may expel the monarch for a new dynasty. Takekoshi explains that this concept of neo-Confucianism was linked to dissatisfaction with the hereditary rank system, supporting the samurai revolutionary movement.

The concept of 'koron (public discussion)' represented this trend. In 1852, Yokoi Shonan addressed a proposal to the Daimyo, suggesting that a body for public discussion should be established as part of regional governance. Later Yokoi considered the Western parliamentary system as one ideal for administration, from the viewpoint of Confucianism. This positive assessment of the Western system was shared by a range of political groups, and the new Meiji government stated 'Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by open discussion' at the beginning of the 'national policy' issued in April 1868. Eventually, the Imperial Diet was established in 1890.

Japan's modernization in the 19th century is often characterized as 'Japanese Spirit, Western technique.' However, Japanese intellectuals did not merely comprehend Western culture as technique. Rather, they imported Western culture because they positively evaluated it in the light of traditional Japanese values. This phenomenon can be explained by what Samuel P. Huntington calls the 'Commonalities of Civilization.' In his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, he discusses a single upper-case Civilization. This Civilization means the universal values shared by all

the cultural systems that have spread across specific regions. Huntington argues that it is crucial to aim for dialogue and coexistence via using this Civilization.

It is perhaps these Commonalities of Civilization that Japanese of the 19th century discovered. They found mutual elements in the West, which had been considered to be completely different from their own culture, and hence tried to accept them. Their attitude of using the Commonalities as hints for dialogue is even more important in this age of globalization.



Following the presentation, the moderator pointed out that today's general view of 'Meiji Ishin' had been significantly influenced by works of Ryotaro Shiba, a prominent Japanese author, which made it difficult for the general public to understand its history based on academic evidence. The discussant also argued that, from the global historian's perspective (i.e. connect and compare), Meiji Revolution needs to be interpreted not just a simple artifact of Japanese society but also as a global phenomenon under wider contexts including politics, economy, technologies, culture, and so forth. Indeed, paying attention to the global economic depression in 1870s, he discussed that it was a coincidence that domestic development in many parts of the world had encountered global dynamics, which widely affected political economy of various countries including Japan. Further, he introduced the concept of 'Leviathan 2.0' to emphasize that it was the late 19th century when modern states began with the advent of administrative technology to govern the whole population. The discussant also indicated that, comparing Japan with other countries, Houken (feudal government) and Gunken (military government), in addition to neo-Confucianism, were important characteristics of Japanese society for its societal transformation. Focusing on economics and society, rather than politics, he further pointed out the fact that dual-sector economy had been progressing in tandem with the accumulation of capital including human resources even before Meiji Revolution. He also highlighted the importance to consider cultural aspects including languages (literacy), which had been essential inputs into progress that required accuracy and representation. In response to the comments, Professor Karube extended his argument, explaining that the term 'revolution' had not been favored by academia to describe 'Meiji Ishin' especially after World War II, because it had been frequently used in the context of communist revolution.

Focusing on the influence of Shiba, a participant then asked about the way to get more realistic understanding of Meiji Restoration. Professor Karube, after joking that we should stop reading Shiba's books, emphasized the importance to pay attention to the roles of multiple stakeholders

including upper-class Daimyos in promoting the movement of Meiji Ishin, rather than excessively featuring the contribution of lower-class samurais like Ryoma Sakamoto. The discussant agreed with this idea, adding that it was essential to deepen our understanding of history by combining different perspectives from subdivided domains.

The next question from the floor was about the reason why it took long time (more than 20 years) to open the Imperial Diet in 1890 after the Meiji Ishin in 1868. Professor Karube responded that, considering the very strict hierarchical system of statuses in Edo era, 20 years were not long, but rather very short. He also highlighted that neo-Confucianism had played an essential role in making this rapid societal transformation possible.

The next commenter asked about the contribution of historians after Fukuzawa and about the physical/mental conditions for people to tolerate the burden imposed by authority to pay for the war. He also argued that it was important to pay attention to realism existing locally within Japan as described by Kunio Yanagita. Following Professor Karube's comment on the strong influence of Marxists in post-war Japan, the discussant agreed with the idea of taking account of local realism and also argued that the description of realism based on one approach did not necessarily delineate the whole reality and hence we needed to continue researching and talking across boundaries.

The next question was about the implication of Meiji Restoration for other countries that attempted to restore a constitutional monarchy. Professor Karube responded that the core concept of successful constitutional monarchies was that a monarch was subject to the constitution. He emphasized that recent movements of restoring monarchies (ex. Brazil, Georgia) seemed to lack this perspective.

The next commenter asked about the roles of Marxists in Japanese academia in perpetuating the typical image of Meiji Ishin created by Shiba among others as well as their influence on young historians. He also shed light on the fact

that women had been excluded from the discourse of human rights, asking about the process of the expansion of equality in modern Japan. Professor Karube commented that, although women's human rights in Japan had been secured relatively rapidly as compared to European countries, it was true that male chauvinism and other types of segregation had been existing even in contemporary Japan. The discussant further argued that the expansion of human rights should not be taken for granted because there were different models of human rights in different societies and specific groups of people had been arbitrarily included/excluded.

The next question from the floor was about the reason why radicalism including 'class suicide' had emerged around 1868. Professor Karube explained that neo-Confucianism had become prevalent in the general public, which operated as the foundation for radical reforms. The moderator introduced another perspective, that is, most feudal domains had been on the edge of bankruptcy and suffering from long-lasting financial constraint as well as stressful lifestyle, hence they were happy to give up traditional systems.

The next question was about the difference in understanding of the Meiji Ishin between 'winners' and 'losers' of the Boshin War. Referring to the fact that the democratic movement in Meiji era had been significantly promoted by losers of the war, Professor Karube agreed that it was important to pay attention to both winners and losers. The moderator added the story that losers had been integrated into the new system, especially the military force, which had helped losers as well as the new system per se settle in.

The final question was about the reason why Japan's commemoration of the Meiji Ishin was low-key. Professor Karube responded that the Meiji Ishin was too remote for ordinary Japanese people, and he remarked that the 60th anniversary was thoroughly commemorated. One commenter pointed out that there were several events at the prefectural level and that the extent of the commemoration varied depending on the local government.

The Play of Virtues: A Transnational History of Revolutionary Civil War Losers and Criminals

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This presentation investigated civil war losers and their nonstate transnational relations with fellow losers in the narrative of Western modern progress. Specifically, focusing on the Orthodox Church, Professor Konishi offered fresh conceptual contours and transnational connectivity to uncover little known figures in modern Japanese historiography and to overturn our understanding of modern Japanese intellectual history.

An intellectual ‘loser’ of Ishin, Kaitokudo, the Merchant Academy of Virtue continued on into Meiji in the form of the Orthodox Christian seminary. Indeed, the Orthodox Church carefully preserved and heavily relied on the Kaitokudo library and archive to teach its students virtue and Chinese classical philosophy. It is a startling revelation for anyone who has studied ‘modern’ history along the lines of civilization discourse or the liberal tradition that the Kaitokudo survived among the losers of civil war. To say that it helped give birth to one of the largest popular intellectual phenomena in Meiji Japan, Tolstoianism, is even more startling. To explain these striking phenomena, Professor Konishi sees them in three stages of intellectual plays revolving around the idea of virtue, marked by the phenomena of translation and conversion.

When Orthodox Christianity first spread in Ishin Japan, it spread in the north, among the dappan shishi. They converted to Orthodoxy at the time when the new Republic of Ezo in Hakodate declared independence from the newly conceived modern nation state. It was in the context of visceral conflict engendered by the civil war, on the revolutionary site of Hakodate, home of the ‘rebel’ Republic, that Nikolai would encounter his first convertee. In secrecy and through the northern samurai underground network, Orthodoxy began to circulate among those on the losing side of the revolutionary civil war. At a time when Christianity was still banned by the new government, their activities went into hiding, not just from the government’s eyes, but also from the eyes of historians.

Partly influenced by the rebels and revolutionaries that he sought to convert, Nikolai gave a unique global meaning to his mission in Japan. He viewed the Meiji ‘Revolution’ as the beginning of a new progressive era in which Westerners played an ambiguous and sometimes obstructive role. Nikolai shared with his converts an interpretive prism that provid-

ed a key reformist interpretation to historical time. Nikolai penetratingly read the historical texts that were ideologically behind the revolutionary actions of the Meiji Ishin. Relying on knowledge circulating among the network of criminals, Orthodoxy spread in Japan in a reverse flow of knowledge from the way we have learned about the spread of knowledge in the Meiji ‘revolution from above.’ It was here in this process of reverse formation of knowledge, another set of losers from Osaka, key figures from the Kaitokudo, joined the circle of losers in the North. They revered the notion of the ordinary people’s virtue in everyday life, challenging the ideological landscape of the wider world of state-centered Western civilization discourse. These figures’ encounter with Nikolai of Japan was the Play One of Virtues.

Three things came out of this first Play. Former key figures from the Kaitokudo, Nakai Tsugumaro and Shuko, became leading figures in the Orthodox Church of Japan. Under their leadership, the Orthodox Seminary in Tokyo began to teach a certain history and historicity based on revolutionary historical texts. Nakai Tsugumaro made use of histories read and used by the dappan shishi to inform their revolutionary acts in the 1800s. In the context of the nonimperial encounters of civil war losers, Nikolaido seminary merged with the discourse of virtue inherited from Kaitokudo as a means to critically engage with central authority that revolved around ideas critical to the oligarchs of Meiji. From their view, these elites had committed appalling violence in the civil war, of which the early convertees to Orthodox Christianity in the North had first-hand experience. Kaitokudo as Nikolaido revolved around the idea of the narod, or ‘people’. In Nikolai’s understanding, Japanese commoners were very literate, and conscious of revolutionary historicity and progress. Commoners were conceived of as ‘the people’ in distinction from the oligarchs from Satsuma and Choshu. Gradually the school’s identity formed in its difference from the Protestant Church that these oligarchs’ sons and daughters who were converting to or affiliating with.

Konishi Masutaro, who would become the Dean of the Orthodox Seminary in Tokyo, best embodied this formation of knowledge at Nikolaido. Konishi and Tolstoy spent every day in Tolstoy’s private home working on the translation of Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching into Russian in Russia. In Japan, when the Christianity of the West was tantamount to

the newly invented term *shūkyō*, modern religion and part and parcel of Western civilization discourse, Konishi redefined the meaning of religion, *shūkyō*, as virtue and therefore 'everyone' has it. His efforts made Tolstoy become the most widely read foreign writer in Japan. It explains why Japanese (unlike in the West) were primarily reading Tolstoy's religious and philosophical writings first, rather than his novels. Konishi's introductions of Tolstoy not only levelled Christianity with all other religions, but also boiled it down to essential elements that were shared by all religions. He promoted the idea of naturally endowed virtue in Tao Te Ching through the writings of Tolstoy, as a way to critically engage with the ideology of Imperial Japan on the one hand and with Western modernity on the other. This was the Play of Virtues Number Two.

Out of that converted meaning of *shūkyō*, the Third stage of the Play of Virtues emerged. Konishi's act of transfiguring Christianity struck a deep chord with those in Japan who were waiting for a radical undoing of the authoritative idea of *shūkyō* that morally undergirded the development of the state modeled after the West. Out of this transfiguration of *shūkyō*, 'religious consciousness' became the most popular expression in Japan at the time, marking a shared experience of conversion. It allowed for a new self, distinct from the modern atomized individual, and thereby invited broad public participation in the making future society. Here, religion and moral discourse finally merged in Meiji Japan.

By revealing new transnational connectivities of civil war and revolutionary losers, the history recounted here challenges one of the most long-standing historiographical assumptions of modern Japan: that Christianity and its assumed Westernization of converts provided the primary critical basis for protest against the given political and social order of late Meiji Japan. Christianity was meant to civilize Japan from within. In the case of Tolstoian religion, however, the Christianity of Western modernity was rather the object, and not the source, of critique. The translations of religion discussed here were thus never translations of Western metaphysics or of Western modernity. They instead uprooted the undesirable meaning of 'religion' that has defined the futures of human moral communities. These re-articulations allowed for the liberation and independence from the culture and ideology of the imperial Meiji state and of Western modernity. Professor Konishi views translation here as intellectual history, with the examination of translation as a part of transnational relations on the nonstate level as a methodological strategy. Existing theories of translation as either processes of cultural nationalism or self-colonization have precluded the rich intellectual history in modern Japan examined here.

In the 12th century, the Benedictine Abbess Hildegard von Bingen wrote the Play of Virtues for female voices in the completely male dominated church. Much like the Play of Virtues, the performance of this history was enacted by individuals whose voices spoke beyond the realm of what

we have assumed to be the dominant Western civilization discourse of the 19th century. It was also outside the nexus of elites and power of the Meiji oligarchs. Yet, as much as Hildegard's religious drama of female voices left its mark on the emergence of opera in the theatrical world, the power of these voices disenfranchised by the discourse on civilization and political deployment of 'civil war' as national unification narratives, losers and criminals of civil war left an unmistakably deep mark, as it played out on the transnational cultural and intellectual stage of modern Japan.



Following the presentation, the discussant first acknowledged the significance of Professor Konishi's research as a counterargument against conventional wisdom that Japan, as a passive and monolithic society, had 'opened' it in response to strong pressure from western countries. Paying attention to the fact that Tolstoy had influenced Shirakaba-ha, a Japanese literary coterie, and that he had later rejected states and private property as an anarchist, the discussant then asked about the actual impact of Tolstoyanism and Japanese followers on real politics and the body politic in Japan. The discussant also extended his question to the impact of the connection between Nikolai-do and Kaitokudo on Japan's external/diplomatic relations, as well as how the relationship between Kaitokudo and the Orthodox Church had ended. Subsequently, he asked about the impact of Japanized Orthodox Church on concepts and practices of religion in other parts of the world, particularly focusing on whether the concept of religion as virtue had stayed only inside of Japan or had affected religion in other societies. Further, the discussant shed light on the term 'western modernity' and asked its specific meaning and whether it had existed in Japan before encountering western culture. He also asked about the attitude of civil war 'losers' toward western modernity, that is, whether they had completely rejected or selectively accepted it. Finally, as a fundamental issue, the discussant asked whether it was still relevant to distinguish between 'west' and 'others' when it comes to the discussion about 'modernity.'

In response to the comments, Professor Konishi responded that it was still useful to separate western modernity from others. He explained that, in his view, (western) modernity is a set of ideas about progress and change in an intense manner, while there is a variation in how it proceeds in conjunction with sovereignty, science and technology (S&T), rationality existing behind S&T, Christianity, and a departure from nature with preference for males and whites. However, Professor Konishi argued that these characteristics were not necessarily shared with (or completely different from) other types of concepts of modernity such as what he called 'anarchist modernity' that took nature and culture as symbiotic. He introduced an agricultural college as one example, in which the discourse of civilization had been actualized based

on the concept of western modernity including male only admission, learning English and S&T as well as rationality, converting to Christianity, and doing military training. In terms of the question about the impact of Japanized concept of religion, Professor Konishi indicated that, although detailed research had not been conducted, there might be the domino effect in other parts of the world given that Japan had been considered as a 'successful model of westernization' and hence had been expected to provide insights into what 'west' was. He also pointed out that, once a critical discourse on western modernity had been developed and interacted, a completely different historical narrative had to be written in the future. He further emphasized the importance to develop research methodologies, considering such movements tended to emerge underground rather than public places. Professor Konishi then talked about the impact of Tolstoy and the Orthodox Church, starting with the story about Masutaro Konishi, who had evaluated Nikolai as a real practitioner unlike Tolstoy who had enjoyed private property, although Nikolai had ended up with hating Konishi. Subsequently, Professor Konishi drew attention to the close relationship between Tolstoyanism and Kropotkinism among others as an influential movement at least in the Japanese intellectual scene, which had incorporated the concept of symbiotic and S&T including Darwinism. He further argued that we could understand the association between this type of concept of progress and anarchism by seeing that Fabre's 'Insect Adventures' had been translated by anarchists including Osugi Sakae.

The commenter asked about the influence of Tolstoy in terms of political implications. Professor Konishi responded that it depended on the meaning of 'political' because we could conclude that there had been little impact when it comes to the formation and activity of political party, while there had been various anarchist movements influenced by Tolstoy. In response to the comment on Soho Tokutomi as an influential journalist/historian, Professor Konishi pointed out that although Soho's use of Tolstoy may have been one way of using the writer in modern Japan, in fact Roka Tokutomi, Soho's brother, better represented the use of Tolstoy in Japanese cultural and intellectual life.

The next question from the floor was about the tendency

of 'losers' to convert to Christianity, which seemed to have been attractive to them. Professor Konishi responded that it depended on the historical contexts and what kinds of meaning were given to particular Christianity among a variety of types, and hence it did not necessarily need to be interpreted as something for 'losers.' He also noted, however, there might be a sort of pattern as a persistent negotiation process if we examined history in various occasions. In addition, he emphasized that Nikolai's approach had been different from other parts of the Christian Church, say protestants, in the sense that Nikolai had valued Japanese culture whereas the latter had merely attempted to 'civilize' Japanese people.

The next commenter asked about how we could re-describe social practice. Professor Konishi shared the story of Arishima Takeo, a famous author and anarchist, whose father had been a capitalist and owned vast land in Hokkaido. Professor Konishi described that, while Arishima had been renowned as a writer, he had opposed capitalism as a practitioner and liberated his tenant farmers whilst sharing his land as mutual aid farms, which had turned into a number of cooperatives.

Following Professor Konishi's comment that the impact of Nikolai on today's religious aspect was limited, the next commenter asked about the reason why Tolstoy had lost his influence overtime in Japan. The commenter also asked the place/meaning of 'western modernity,' which could be characterized by concepts including progress and civilization as well as Christianity, in today's globalized world. Professor Konishi first responded that it was not correct to understand that Tolstoy had not been used any more, but rather it was important to recognize that the way of utilizing his notion had shifted depending on the historical contexts. Professor Konishi further argued that, while a variety of thoughts and values of individuals were emerging and respected in contemporary society, the idea that there was something wrong to be changed could be universal.

Finally, the moderator concluded that today's discussion could be one small but novel step toward 're-examining Japan in global context' via bridging the gap between research conducted by Japanese scholars in Japanese language primarily for Japanese readers and the one carried out and disseminated in other languages such as English and Russian.

Reexamining Japan in Global Context The Meiji Ishin ('Meiji Restoration') and Kaikoku

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