Perceptions of Fascism and the New Bureaucrats in Early Shōwa Japan

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This essay criticizes the contention of Anglophone scholars that fascism best describes the polity of wartime Japan. It disputes their claim of a Japanese scholarly consensus on the question of Japanese fascism and points out a historiographical divergence on this matter between Japanese and Anglophone scholarship. It surveys perceptions of fascism in the 1930s, revealing the diverse and imprecise usage of the term and the futility of appealing to the views of any given contemporary observer in order to argue convincingly for a fascist Japan. This survey does indicate the importance of idealist nationalism and the socialist critique of capitalism to the era's nationalist movement, and thus for identifying any fascist components to prewar nationalism and assessing their significance to the wartime polity. The essay also contests the blanket portrayal of the "new bureaucrats" as fascists by revealing the divided nature of contemporary opinion on this matter and their own critical reaction to the prospect of Japanese fascism.

Key Words: fascism, nationalism, new bureaucrats

In this essay I criticize the contention by Anglophone scholars that fascism best describes the polity of wartime Japan. In the first part of the essay, I dispute the claim by some Western scholars that there is a Japanese scholarly consensus on the matter of fascism. In fact, as I show, there is interpretive diversity in Japan and a historiographical divergence between Japanese and Anglophone scholarship on the question of Japanese fascism. Furthermore, I question the presumption that one can reliably identify and gauge the significance of fascism in prewar Japan by referring to the opinion of any favored contemporary observer. In the second part of the essay, I make this point by surveying the perceptions of fascism offered by political commentators, by nationalist activists, and by police officials charged with surveillance of the nationalist movement. While those individuals devoted much effort to defining fascism and identifying fascists, the documents they produced primarily illustrate the term's multifarious definition and imprecise usage. This diversity and vagueness as well as doubts about the extent of any broader influence strongly suggests that much more documentary research is necessary before a persuasive argument for a fascist Japan can be made. As I show below, the historical record provides some clarity on the significance of idealist nationalism and the socialist critique of capitalism to the era's nationalist movement, phenomena that are of crucial importance both for convincingly identifying any fascist components of prewar nationalism and for assessing the significance of fascism to the wartime polity.

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In the final part of the essay, I contest the blanket portrayal of the "new bureaucrats" (*shin-kanryō* 新官僚) as fascists by revealing how contemporary discourse provided diverse, even contradictory, explanations regarding their relationship to fascism. I argue that the critical reaction of influential new bureaucrats to the prospect of fascism in Japan contradicts the portrayal of them as fascists. The fact that these men do not necessarily fit the fascist profile prepared for them by some scholars further contradicts this characterization. I conclude the essay with some brief thoughts on perceptions of fascism, the nature of the nationalist movement, and the historiography of reform bureaucrats.

The Historiography of Japanese Fascism

Debate over whether Japan was fascist began during the early Shōwa period (1926-1945). Postwar scholars inherited and perpetuated many of the characteristics of that initial discourse, including the perennial challenge of definition and the related question of analytical accuracy. However, the observations of Japanese and Anglophone scholars have followed markedly different trajectories. In recent decades in Japan diverse interpretations have emerged following the collapse of a consensus on the applicability of fascism while in the United States there has been a surge of largely unchallenged writing asserting the validity of the concept.

Early writing on fascism in Japan was heavily influenced by Marxists as they attempted to understand the development of capitalism and to plot their nation's position on the path to a socialist revolution. Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, the newly legal Japanese Communist Party revived this perspective in the debate between Shiga Yoshio 志賀義雄 (1901-89) and Kamiyama Shigeo 神山茂夫 (1905-74) over the character of imperialism and fascism in Japan. Marxist-influenced definitions then went on to dominate academic history during the 1950s and 1960s, with alternative perspectives coming primarily from other disciplines and from outside the academy. This state of affairs was revealed most famously in the "Shōwa history dispute" (*Shōwa-shi ronsō* 昭和史論争) that erupted in response to the 1955 publication of a popular survey of the prewar and wartime years written by Marxist historians Tōyama Shigeki 遠山茂樹 (1914-2011), Imai Seiichi 今井清一 (1924-), and Fujiwara Akira 藤原彰 (1922-2003).[1]

During the 1970s, Itō Takashi 伊藤隆 (1932-) challenged this status quo by emphasizing the nebulous character and thus limited utility of fascism as an analytical concept. Itō offered instead an empirical approach rooted in the prewar discourse on *kakushin* 革新 (renovation). Meanwhile, Tsutsui

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[1] Tōyama et al 1955. A heavily revised and less programmatic version was published in 1959 and remains in print. Notable critics from outside academia and the discipline of history included, respectively, the writer Kamei Katsuichirō (1907-1966) and the literature scholar Takeyama Michio (1903-1984). For a look at the dispute that includes reprints of some original contributions to the debate, see Ōkado 2006.

Kiyotada 筒井清忠 (1948-) critiqued Maruyama Masao's 丸山真男 (1914-96) influential "modernist" argument for a peculiarly Japanese fascist movement by demonstrating that most of what Maruyama identified as the distinctive characteristics of fascism were shared by other forms of totalitarianism, including communism.[2] The resulting "dispute over fascism" (*fashizumu ronsō* ファシズム論争) marked a major turning point in postwar historiography that spurred new research ranging from works seeking to refine Marxist interpretations of fascism to histories that dispensed with the concept entirely. For instance, Suzaki Shin'ichi 須崎慎一 (1946-) and Ikeda Jun 池田順 (1952-) continued to argue for Japan's transformation into a fascist polity, whereas Arima Manabu 有馬学 (1945-) and Furukawa Takahisa 古川隆久 (1962-) preferred to write history informed by Itō's *kakushin* schema. Other historians used the term fascism in a generalized, non-conceptual manner to distinguish the 1930s from the previous decade or emphasized instead the impact of national mobilization in creating a wartime structure (*senji taisei* 戦時体制). More recently, some scholars prefer to distance themselves from both the concept of fascism and the *kakushin* thesis in pursuit of other interpretative approaches. In sum, and contrary to claims made in some recent Anglophone scholarship, there is no scholarly consensus in Japan in favor of characterizing the wartime polity as fascist. Rather, the decades since the collapse of Marxist academic hegemony have seen a diversification of perspectives on the question of Japanese fascism.[3]

Until recently most Anglophone scholarship never relied on fascism as an analytical concept. Even E. H. Norman (1909-57), influenced heavily by Marxist ideas and writing at what would presumably be the height of fascist influence, concluded that the power of the bureaucracy had prevented the establishment of a fascist state.[4] During the first two decades of the Cold War, modernization theory held sway as a supposedly "value-free" alternative to the "scientific" pretensions of Marxism and one that tended to consider fascism, along with communism, to be a variety of totalitarianism. Some Anglophone historians did lend a sympathetic ear to Maruyama's conceptualization and periodization of a Japanese fascist movement, but even a rising generation of New Left historians in the 1970s, despite their affinity for the views of Japanese Marxists and disdain for modernization theory, never displayed much interest

[2] Itō 1969; 1976; Tsutsui 1976.

[3] The diversification of perspectives on early Shōwa political history was, in fact, already well underway during the 1970s. For a contemporaneous discussion, see Berger 1975. For recent historiographical considerations of the historiography of fascism, see Furukawa 1999; Katō 2006; Hirai 2010; and Kawashima 2010. Also, for a newly revised and expanded version of her 2006 essay in English translation, see Katō 2017. Even those arguing for fascism's conceptual relevance have noted the tendency in recent research to avoid the term (Hirai 2000, p. 278; Kawashima 2010, pp. 69-70, 79). Nevertheless, some scholars based outside Japan have written of an "overwhelming" Japanese consensus that fascism best explains the wartime polity and characterized dissent as coming from a minority of historians "mostly located outside Japan." See, for instance, Kersten 2009, pp. 540-542, Tansman 2009a, p. 2, Brandt 2009, pp. 126, and Ruoff 2010, p. 18. Proponents of this position tend to cite the summations of Japanese scholarship put forward by Herbert Bix and Gavan McCormack in 1982 (Brandt 2009, p. 135n42, Ruoff 2010, pp. 194-95n45). Aside from the essays by Bix and McCormack, which sympathetically reflected a Marxist consensus already on the verge of collapse, support is found in Andrew Gordon's 1991 argument for "imperial fascism." However, Gordon wrote of a consensus that was "*until recently* overwhelming" (Gordon 1991, p. 333, emphasis added). Also receiving support is Gordon's assertion that Anglophone scholarship that fails to acknowledge Japan as fascist is nominalist and "eurocentric" (Gordon 1991, pp. 333-339; Brandt 2009, p. 126; Mark 2015, p. 36; 2017, pp. 246-249). Interestingly, the charge of eurocentrism was made earlier in the opposite direction by Peter Duus and Daniel Okimoto (1979, p. 72). But surely one can argue either position without necessarily being guilty of nominalism or eurocentrism.

[4] Norman 1940, pp. 205-206.

in building a case for Japanese fascism.[5] Thus, while Japanese historians in the 1970s challenged a historiographical status quo that took the Marxist-inflected concept of fascism for granted, in the United States Peter Duus (1933-) and Daniel Okimoto (1942-) declared efforts to apply fascism to wartime Japan a conceptual failure and prodded scholars to pursue other analytical perspectives, specifically corporatism. In sum, most Anglophone historians, particularly those researching political developments in the 1930s, had not found the concept useful for understanding the wartime Japanese polity.[6] However, declining interest in the empirical study of political history and the accompanying "linguistic turn" that occurred in Japanese studies in the 1980s have resulted in a proliferation of works that apply a blend of post-modern and neo-Marxist theories to cultural and intellectual topics. During the past two decades, practitioners of this perspective have used it to identify fascist proclivities in the efforts of intellectuals, artists, and others to come to grips with the nebulous specter of capitalist "modernity."[7]

It is proponents of this cultural studies approach who have provided the primary impetus for recent Anglophone scholarship arguing that the aesthetic tendencies they perceive in their research necessitate reconsidering Japan as a fascist polity. Downplaying the need for any generic definition of fascism and finessing questions regarding the acquisition and exercise of political power, these scholars proclaim that their concern lies "with the diffusion of fascism as ideology and representation [rather] than with its origins and consequences as a political movement or regime" and thereupon argue for "the presence of a fascist culture in Japan and for the presence of fascistic ways of healing the crisis of interwar modernity."[8] Undaunted by the enigma of how to recognize the fascist "mark on culture," identify the "healing" qualities of fascism vis-à-vis "the crisis of interwar modernity," or "understand the Japanese inflection of fascism" minus a conceptually clear definition by which to determine certain cultural or intellectual phenomena fascist, these scholars perceive "fascist culture" and "fascist aesthetics" seemingly everywhere, leading one historian to muse that "the f-word has become an empty

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[5] The clearest example of modernization theory being employed to counter the influence of Marxist historiography in Japan is that of Edwin O. Reischauer (Brown 2005). However, considering fascism and communism to be forms of totalitarianism was also part of prewar discourse and thus not simply a product of Cold War exigencies. See Gregor 2009. For a consideration of the early postwar influence of Maruyama and non-Marxist arguments for "authoritarian-modernization" fascism by such scholars as Robert Scalapino and Richard Storry, see Wilson 1968.

[6] Duus and Okimoto 1979. The closest examination of the era's political history does not bother with the concept (Berger 1977). Two notable exceptions to the general lack of interest in fascism are the arguments put forth by Andrew Gordon (1991) and in the essays edited by E. Bruce Reynolds (2004). For considerations of generic fascism in relation to what Japanese political historians have written, see the essays by Gregory Kasza (1984; 2001). Recent political histories by Japanese scholars tend to make arguments similar to the emphasis on the pluralist competition for power at the heart of Gordon Berger's account (e.g., Furukawa 2005, Kurosawa 2013, and Yoneyama 2015).

[7] For an example of this approach by a pioneering practitioner, see Harootunian 2000.

[8] Tansman 2009a, p. 1. For an appreciative review of this approach, see Hijiya-Kirschnereit 2011. The current essay is concerned primarily with this body of scholarship. More recently, however, some historians have begun reconsidering the question of fascism in relation to earlier concerns with politics and ideology. For instance, Janis Mimura (2011) has argued for the transformative influence of "techno-fascism" within the bureaucracy and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (2013), while rejecting the idea that the presence of fascist ideas in Japan means that the polity itself was fascist, makes a case for the development of fascist thinking prior to and independent of European developments. Also see Reto Hofmann (2015), who argues that the interwar discussion of fascism by Japanese nationalists constituted a "fascist critique of fascism" and thus is evidence that Japan was fascist. A notable characteristic of this recent work, and one perhaps related to the downplaying of previous political definitions, is the proliferating linkage of the f-word to modifying adjectives or conceptual terms as scholars attempt to redefine fascism. Notable examples would be "techno-fascism" and "fascist imperialism" (Mimura 2011; Moore 2015; Hofmann and Hedinger 2017).

signifier—or at least a badly overinflated one."[9]

Regardless of these demurrals regarding political movements and regimes, exponents of the cultural studies argument are clearly concerned with the relationship of fascist culture to politics and what they infer to be its decisive influence over the exercise of political power and the character of the wartime Japanese polity. For example, take Alan Tansman, a leading proponent of this approach. He assures readers that "culture is where fascism forms its ideological power" and that the "fascist moments" born of literary sensibilities and aesthetic concerns had far-reaching political consequences. He thus proclaims that "an accumulation of fascist moments over time and in a variety of contexts had an ideological force with real-world implications," so much so that "each articulation represents a place where aesthetic expression becomes culturally and politically consequential."[10] Another exponent argues that certain literary aesthetics "colluded with fascist ideology" and became predominate "at the same time that Japan was becoming *politically* fascist."[11] In short, the inference is that, as one historian has approvingly summarized this approach, "fascist aesthetics drove changes in political and economic institutions rather than the other way around in Japan."[12]

Yet despite such confident declarations of consequence the significance of fascist aesthetics and culture for political developments remains poorly demonstrated, more an article of faith to be believed together with a given scholar's assurance as to which cultural or literary aesthetics are fascist, as opposed to, for instance, nationalist or militarist. Even if one did not insist on clarity of definition and accepted the subjective assurances of cultural studies scholars on the existence of a fascist culture with transformative political consequences, the transformation itself requires demonstration, a task that in turn necessitates gauging the influence of fascist ideas in competition with other preexistent political ideologies and values. In this sense, doubts about the significance of this scholarship for understanding the nature of the polity in general are analogous to the problems raised by a leading student of generic fascism regarding fascism and culture, which is that "the study of fascist culture itself does not explain how fascists acquired the power to control culture, nor how deeply into popular consciousness fascist culture penetrated in competition with either preexisting religious, familial or community values or with commercialized popular culture."[13]

Skirting the matter of clearly defining fascism and relying largely on inference to argue for the significance of fascist culture to politics and to the fundamental character of the Japanese polity leaves these scholars with few empirical options for countering such criticism. This fact may help to explain efforts to enlist the agreeable views of certain Japanese observers who experienced the 1930s. Tansman, for instance, asserts that "having lived through the 1930s, many of them knew in their bones how the regime differed from other regimes" and proclaims that "the groundwork for this understanding of Japan

[9] Duus 2010, p. 612
[10] Tansman 2009b, pp. 1-2, 3-33; also, see Tansman 2009a, pp. 1-29.
[11] Cornyetz 2009, p. 322; emphasis in the original.
[12] Hein 2018, p. 10.
[13] Paxton 2004, p. 215.

as fascist was established by such scholars, journalists, and writers who lived through fascism and who were attuned to the sphere of culture and language."[14] No contemporary critic has enjoyed as much popularity with cultural studies scholars as the Marxist ideologue Tosaka Jun 戸坂潤 (1900-1945), who is credited with being "perhaps the most penetrating and sustained prewar analyst of the relationship of fascist culture to politics in Japan."[15] Likewise given attention are the liberal perceptions of a fascist threat from political scientist Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 (1878-1933) and journalist Hasegawa Nyozekan 長谷川如是閑 (1875-1969).[16] Though much less popular with scholars than these men, the political scientist and journalist Sassa Hiroo 佐々弘雄 (1897-1948), a prominent and influential commentator on fascism, also receives praise for understanding "the salience of control of representation to an analysis of fascism" and for courageously revealing the same to his readers through "the haze created by the censors."[17]

When practitioners of the cultural studies approach do feel compelled to consider how fascist culture interacted directly with politics, they have presented reformist "new bureaucrats" as conduits for the fascist power of the state. Their choice of these officials is reasonable given that both contemporaries and historians have sought to divine the role and significance of the various reform bureaucrats of the 1930s.[18] These officials worked to weaken party power and to create and staff new planning agencies from which to control socio-economic activities. Later in the decade, the technocratic expertise of reform bureaucrats played an important role in the mobilization of the material and human resources needed to wage total war. Consequently, the role of these bureaucrats—and of the bureaucracy in general—is essential to any consideration of the mobilization and governance of Japan's wartime polity. Moreover, and of particular relevance to recent scholarship on fascist culture, their efforts extended to the promotion of nationalist cultural organizations. This was particularly true in the case of the Home Ministry's Matsumoto Gaku (Manabu) 松本学 (1887-1974), who has appeared in this scholarship as representative of the "fascist" new bureaucrats.[19] However, the accuracy of this sweeping portrayal of

[14] Tansman 2009a, p. 2; Tansman 2009b, p. 5. It is not clear what "other regimes" are being referenced. Of course, this tactic begs the question of why the views of contemporaries who perceived Japan as fascist should carry more weight than the opinions of those who, despite also being culturally and linguistically attuned, failed to share that perception. For an example of a culturally attuned observer who disagreed on the matter of fascism, see Takeyama 1956.

[15] Tansman 2009a, pp. 2; Tansman 2009b, pp. 4-5. For other positive appraisals of Tosaka's perspective on fascism, see Harootunian 2009b, pp. 80-111, Driscoll 2010, pp. 203-205, 322n1, and Hofmann 2015, pp. 70-87. Little consideration is given to Tosaka's political motivations, despite his obvious frustration with the collapse of the proletarian cultural movement and consequent penchant to "equate any group, idea, or cultural work that was not Marxist with fascism" (Doak 2009, p. 42).

[16] Torrance 2009, pp. 58-59, 76n5; Hofmann 2015, pp. 68-75.

[17] Tansman 2009a, pp. 2-5, 21n4.

[18] Their grasp of the identity of these men is less sound. Richard Torrance (2009), for instance, mistakenly refers to the Justice Ministry veteran Hiranuma Kiichirō (1867-1952) as "leader of the new bureaucrats in the Ministry of Home Affairs" (2009, p. 66). Kim Brandt identifies "influential career bureaucrats known as the *shin-kanryō*" as supporters of fascism, but her example of such an official is not a career bureaucrat but the playwright, critic, and journalist Kamiizumi Hidenobu (1897-1951), who was appointed assistant head of the culture office of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Brandt 2009, pp. 116, 128-129, 133n5). Mark Driscoll's expansive definition includes Gotō Shinpei (1857-1929) as "the pioneering new bureaucrat" who paved the way for the activities of Kishi Nobusuke (1896-1987) in Manchuria (2010, pp. 264-270), despite the fact that Gotō was born three decades earlier than those usually identified as such and was already dead before journalists coined the term. Less unusual is Driscoll's identifying of Kishi as a new bureaucrat, although most historians group him with the economically-focused and socialist-inspired "renovationist bureaucrats." While hardly an exact science, the historiographical practice has been to distinguish "new" and "renovationist" officials by such factors as age, ideological inspiration, and ministry affiliation. For more, see Hashikawa 1968; Spaulding 1970; Furukawa 1992; Brown 2009; 2012; Mimura 2011.

[19] Torrance 2009, pp. 63, 75, 77-78n23, 78-79n35.

Matsumoto and his colleagues will be called into question later in the essay.

Perceptions of Fascism in the Early Shōwa Period

The rise of Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) and the Fascist Party in Italy elicited global interest in an apparently new way of governance. Similar attention was given to Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and the Nazi Party, especially after their acquisition of power in Germany in 1933. Commentators within Japan's political and intellectual classes, ever sensitive to the latest world trends, were no exception, and the 1920s and early 1930s witnessed a flurry of attention to the phenomenon of fascism, how it might be identified, and whether it would—or should—transform Japan. The efforts of commentators and government officials to stay abreast of the latest global developments was nothing new and thus marks a thread of continuity in the interwar period, but such developments as the Agricultural Crisis, the Great Depression, the Manchurian Incident, and right-wing terrorism underscored the general sense of national crisis and likely intensified interest in fascism.[20] Nevertheless, discourse on fascism often produces more heat than light, and this was true of the intense debates of the early 1930s. As revealed in the following survey of contemporary opinions, multifarious definitions and labels proliferated among activists and observers, including the few self-proclaimed fascists. Charged with the task of distilling from this diverse discourse the meaning of fascism, the police settled for applying the term broadly to extreme, possibly violent nationalists and consistently perceived a fundamental division within the right-wing movement between nationalist idealism and state socialism (*kokka-shakaishugi* 国家社会主義).

The most consistent, concise, and influential definition of fascism came from Japanese Marxists, who conceptualized fascism in response to the directives of the Communist International. Although the Comintern's 1923 definition of fascism acknowledged a genuine revolutionary dimension that appealed to some workers, under the influence of Stalinism, such recognition disappeared by the early 1930s in order to cast fascist anti-capitalist discourse as the rhetoric of false revolution (*giji-kakumei* 擬似革命). The revised definition provided the well-known and influential description of fascism as "the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital" which sought "to secure a mass basis for monopolist capital among the petty bourgeoisie, appealing to the peasantry, artisans, office employees and civil servants who have been thrown out of their normal course of life, and particularly to the déclassé elements in the big cities, [while] also trying to penetrate into the working classes."[21] And it was this focus on monopoly capitalism that exerted tremendous influence not only on the outlook of those pursuing socialist revolution, but also upon those aiming to implement a nationalist variant in the form of state socialism.

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[20] This perpetual attentiveness was particularly true of high-ranking bureaucrats, who were attuned to the latest global trends in administrative practices. While much is made of the interest of bureaucrats in Nazi and Fascist administrative initiatives in the 1930s, earlier periods likewise saw expressions of interest in the examples afforded by the German Historical School, American Progressivism, and European social democracy, and such eclectic interests did not disappear in the prewar years. See Pyle 1973; 1974; Garon 1987; Brown 2012; 2017; Mori 2018.

[21] Griffin 2009, pp. 260-263.

Whatever the merits of Marxist explanations of fascism, the impact of this analytical approach is starkly visible in contemporary perceptions of the phenomenon. For instance, the aforementioned Sassa Hiroo, a prolific commentator on the matter, drew heavily on Marxist doctrine in identifying finance capital as the driving force behind fascism and one that was aided and abetted by bourgeois parliamentarianism and the actions of the established political parties. He thereby argued that party-led cabinets were facilitating the process of "fascisization" (*fuassho-ka* フアッショ化) through economic policies designed to save monopoly capitalism.[22] Linking this view to the global situation, Sassa declared that "American capitalism, as the leader of world capitalism, will achieve global hegemony," a phenomenon that had already "under the pressure of monopoly finance capital appeared in the form of [US] imperialist policies." The US was thus serving as the lynchpin for the global spread of fascism, the essence of which was most "scientifically" understood as monopoly capital's effort to defend capitalism by suppressing the proletarian movement. Consequently, it was "unscientific" to try and understand fascism around the world apart from American imperialism.[23]

Despite the influence of the Comintern definition, perceptions of fascism were not bound tightly by Marxist criteria and, as the following paragraphs demonstrate, idiosyncratic categorization and labeling was a distinctive characteristic of efforts to define the concept and identify fascists. Indeed, Sassa himself broke his fascists down into the categories of "military bureaucrat fascists" (*gunbu kanryō fuasshisuto* 軍部官僚フアッシスト), "national essence fascists" (*kokusui fuasshisuto* 国粋フアッシスト) who ran "sundry reactionary groups," "national fascists" (*kokumin fuasshisuto* 国民フアッシスト) whom he also described as "national socialists" (*kokumin-shakaishugisha*), and, finally, "social fascists" (*shakai fuasshisuto* 社会フアッシスト). German literature scholar Nakajima Kiyoshi 中島清 (1883-1966) identified fascists in adherents of "Japanist socialism (*Nihonshugi-teki shakaishugi* 日本主義的社会主義)," including members of the Dai-Nippon Seisantō 大日本生産党 (Great Japan Production Party) and "other reactionaries," in those influenced by "social nationalism (*shakai kokuminshugi* 社会国民主義)," such as party politician Nakano Seigō 中野正剛 (1886-1943), and in practitioners of "nationalist-style socialism" (*kokuminshugi-teki shakaishugi* 国民主義的社会主義), a category in which he placed such veterans of the proletarian parties as Shimonaka Yasaburō 下中弥三郎 (1878-1961) and Akamatsu Katsumaro 赤松克麿 (1894-1955).[24]

Meanwhile, economist and scholar of colonial policy Kada Tetsuji 加田哲二 (1895-1964) perceived two styles of fascism: "fascism proper (*fuasshizumu puropaa* フアッシズム・プロパー)" and "social fascism (*shakai fuasshizumu* 社会フアッシズム)." In Kada's judgment, while both versions supported control by the bourgeoisie, they differed in that "fascism proper" persistently focused on "traditional

[22] Sassa 1933a, pp. 99-113.
[23] Sassa 1933b, pp. 339-344. As Katō Yōko has observed, this linking of the United States with fascism is also visible in Maruyama Masao's early postwar writing (Katō 2006, p. 144; Katō 2017, pp. 225-226). The same could be said of early postwar Marxist historiography. Similarly, some cultural studies scholars appear possessed of an abiding interest in what they see as the fascist proclivities of the contemporary US and a general belief that fascism is perpetually on the verge of reemergence. See, for instance, Ivy 2009, pp. vii-xii; Harootunian 2000, pp. 430-431n18.
[24] Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, pp. 13-14.

morality" and "national essence-ism," whereas "social fascism" encompassed both socialism and state socialism. Breaking his two styles down further, Kada decided that "fascists proper" included the following groups: first, "national essence (*kokusui*) fascists" as exemplified by members of the Kōchisha 行地社 (Society for Realizing the Principles of Heaven), Jinmukai 神武会 (Jinmu Society), Kokuhonsha 国本社 (National Foundation Society), and Kokuikai 国維会 (National Mainstay Society); second, "Diet (Gikai) fascists," a reference to participants in the "cooperative cabinet movement" and the right-wing party Kokumin Dōmei 国民同盟 (National Alliance); and, third, "national fascists group A (*kokumin fuasshisuto A* 国民ファッシスト A)", which covered members of the Sakurakai 桜会 (Cherry Society), Kozakurakai 小桜会 (Small Cherry Society), and Dai Nippon Seisantō. Moving on to the category of "Social Fascists" he attached the label "national fascists group B" to members of the Shin-Nippon Kokumin Dōmei 新日本国民同盟 (National Alliance for a New Japan), Nippon Kokka-shakaitō 日本国家社会党 (Japan State Socialist Party), Nihonshugi Kenkyūjo 日本主義研究所 (Japanism Research Institute), and Kokka-shakaishugi Gakumei 国家社会主義学盟 (Scholarly Alliance for State Socialism), as well as to such "proletarian party fascists" (*musantō fuasshisuto* 無産党ファッシスト) as Abe Isoo 安部磯雄 (1865-1949) and Matsutani Yojirō 松谷與二郎 (1880-1937), and to former members of the Japanese Communist Party.[25]

Yatsugi Kazuo 矢次一夫 (1899-1983), a veteran of the labor movement and co-founder in 1933 of the influential National Policy Research Institute (Kokusaku Kenkyūkai 国策研究会), classified fascists on the basis of their activist origins and used the term in a manner virtually synonymous with the nationalist movement in general. First, there were those initially concerned with foreign affairs and ethnic strife, such as members of the Kokuryūkai 黒龍会 (Amur River Society), Yūzonsha 猶存社 (Society of Those Who Remain), Kōchisha, and Jinmukai; second, there were those opposed to parliamentarianism and class struggle and devoted to destroying socialism, including activists of the Kokusuikai 国粋会 (National Essence Society), Seigidan 正義団 (Justice Corps), Sekka Bōshidan 赤化防止団 (Group to Prevent Bolshevization), Kenkokukai 建国会 (Founding of the Nation Society), and Shūyōdan 修養団 (Moral Cultivation Group); in the third category he placed nationalist state socialist groups that had departed from the social movement, as exemplified by such activists as Akamatsu, Shimonaka, and Takabatake Motoyuki 高畠素之 (1886-1928), and associates of Uesugi Shinkichi 上杉慎吉 (1878-1929); and, fourth, there were those involved in fascist groups connected to the military.[26]

Self-proclaimed state socialist Akamatsu Katsumaro put forth the following three criteria by which to identify fascism. First, there was the criterion of the communists, which classified all political forces outside the party as fascist and defined fascism as the prop of the "finance bourgeoisie." Following the Third International, they identified everyone not under the direct leadership of that organization as "reactionary." More specifically, he argued that communists singled out the "bourgeois fascism"

[25] Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, pp. 14-15.
[26] Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, p. 15.

(*burujoa fuassho* ブルジョアフアッショ) of capitalist political forces, the "social fascism" of leftist socialists who "peddle in communistic critiques but avoid action," and the "national fascism" (*kokumin fuassho*) of "state or national socialist forces" (*kokka mata wa kokumin shakaishugi-teki seiryoku* 国家または国民社会主義的勢力). Akamatsu next identified the fascist criterion of the parliamentarians (*gikaishugisha no kijun* 議会主義者の基準) who, representing the finance bourgeoisie and social democracy, viewed those critical of parliamentarianism to be representatives of fascism and thus deceived the masses by portraying fascism as an inherently violent anti-parliamentarian movement. Finally, Akamatsu introduced "the criterion of we state socialists (*wareware kokka-shakaishugisha no kijun*)", declaring that "when we say fascist or fascism, we are denoting the movement and ideology that successfully grasped nationalism (*kokuminshugi* 国民主義) but failed to implement socialism; we are referring to distilling and synthesizing the vibrant movement and distinctive ideological qualities being realized by Italy's Mussolini and Germany's Hitler." Counseling that Japanese should not "blindly accept fascism" or become "trendy copycats who cry 'it's fascism for us!'," Akamatsu recommended that they instead become "cool critics" of fascism, because "it is necessary to investigate its special characteristics, absorb its strengths and purify its defects."[27]

The political scientist Imanaka Tsugimaro 今中次麿 (1893-1980) delineated no less than seven different varieties of fascism. First, there was fascism as "pure ethnic nationalism, national essence-ism" (*junzen-taru minzokushugi*, *kokusuishugi* 純然たる民族主義、国粋主義), which was exemplified by the Kokusuikai and Kenkokukai. Second, there was fascism as the equivalent of state socialism, a view represented by Akamatsu's faction and which posited that socialism could not be realized through internationalism but only through state power and the reconstruction of society. A third view held that fascism emerged in states with no or few colonies, growing populations, and a domestic surplus production. A fourth perspective argued that fascism was something that only appeared in late developing capitalist states that were suffering under and struggling to break free from the pressure of foreign capital, which meant that fascism was unlikely to appear in advanced capitalist states or, if it did, would be very weak. A fifth definition was that of the Communist Party which proclaimed that fascism was the exact opposite in being the "various reactionary phenomena that appeared in advanced capitalist societies," with only the communist party being excluded from that category. A sixth approach, reflecting a schism among communists, concurred with Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938) that fascism was something that originated in the social crisis of advanced capitalist societies and thus that "true fascism" (*shin no fuassho* 眞のフアッショ) appeared in the various reactionary policies that emerge in the end stage of capitalism. Imanaka's final category held that fascism was the offspring of the strategic failure of the communist movement, as exemplified in Italian Fascism. In this conceptualization, capitalism was already in the period of collapse, but the Communist Party's strategy had failed because it was underdeveloped, thereby enabling the middle class and one portion of the proletariat to gain political

[27] Quoted in Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, pp. 39-41.

control.[28]

Marxist influence and diverse, idiosyncratic perceptions similar to those surveyed above also characterize the views of those few Japanese who openly proclaimed themselves to be fascists. Although the era's nationalists generally refrained from identifying themselves or their organizations in this fashion, the most obvious exception was that of the Nippon Fashizumu Renmei 日本ファシズム連盟 (Japan Fascism League). The league was formed in January 1932 by writers, theorists, lawyers, and poets, many of whom felt alienated from mainstream literary circles, and published a monthly newsletter with the straightforward name *Fashizumu*.[29] The league's official principles of renovation placed it clearly in line with what the police called the "guiding spirit" of "state socialism," as exemplified in the intent of members to "join hands and bravely fight until the creation of a new Japan liberated from the deceit of the party faction and the exploitation of the capitalist faction."[30] The league called for overthrowing the existing parties and rejecting parliamentary government in order to realize *tennō seiji* 天皇政治 ("emperor politics") and for destroying the capitalist economic structure in order to replace it with a state-controlled economic structure (*kokka tōsei ni yoru keizai keitai* 国家統制に據る経済の形態). *Tennō seiji* was said to equate with the unity of sovereign and people (*ikkun banmin* 一君万民) under an emperor who carried out benevolent governance based on the people (*tennō wa tami o moto to suru seiji o okonawaserare* 天皇は民を基とする政治を行わせられ). This benevolence was to be recompensed by selfless loyalty on the part of the people to the emperor, and education and the arts would both be directed toward bolstering such a loyalist ethnic spirit.[31]

Successfully implementing "direct imperial rule" (*tennō shinsei* 天皇親政), the statement asserted, required removing from between the emperor and people the "one group" that exploits the nation and people for selfish gain, a euphemism referring to "powerful families" and an "irrational *bakufu*-like presence" or, more clearly, the zaibatsu and the political parties. The league thus proclaimed: "Is not the Diet system monopolized by two or three corrupt parties whose primary purpose is pursuing party interests and strategies?" Rather than correctly representing "the popular will" the parties "are destroying the life of the people. In order to thoroughly implement emperor politics we call out for the destruction of the conservative parties under the great spirit of Japanese fascism." The league further attacked the parties for failing to address the period of national crisis except when it came to monetary policy. As to why the government was able to change monetary policy, the statement proclaimed: "Is it not all possible because of the two or three monopoly capitalists who are the patrons of both parties?

[28] Quotes are from Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, pp. 41-42.

[29] Kawanishi 1986, pp. 133-149. The league would seem to be a natural subject for close attention by those interested in literary aesthetics and a culture of fascism in Japan, but as yet has received only passing notice. Although Hofmann states that "the league's publications are lost" (2015, p. 159n62), Kawanishi Hidemichi earlier located seven of the twelve issues produced (Volumes 1 and 2 in Tokyo University's Meiji Bunko and Volumes 1 through 7 in the holdings of the Ōhara Social Research Institute at Hōsei University; 1986, p. 135). Hedinger briefly cites the second issue in reference to a "vague and even meaningless" definition of fascism (Hedinger 2013, pp. 149-150). Nevertheless, the statement of principles from police records and Kawanishi's study of internal debate demonstrate the significance of socialist ideas and internal discord related to that and other differences over the meaning of fascism. Except where otherwise indicated, the following examination relies on Kawanishi's account.

[30] Quoted in Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, p. 142.

[31] Naimushō keiho-kyoku 1933, pp. 144.

And what do the masses gain from this? What they gain is the burden of international debt. As partners, the parties and monopoly capitalists are more and more strangling the proletarian working masses." Reliance on fascist politics would enable the rejection of parliamentary government and the destruction of democracy, but this would also require the overthrowing of the capitalist structure, because the capitalist economic system was based on management interests and took as its fundamental principle the making of a profit and, consequently, ignored the state and the people. Indeed, "capitalism is creating a system of wage slavery," ruining the state and the proletariat, and bringing about a "system of class warfare."[32]

Nevertheless, the straightforward statement of state socialist principles outlined above did not result in harmonious theorizing on the part of the league's leaders, whose discourse on what fascism meant split between those who emphasized regional culture or race as the foundation for fascism and those who stressed state socialism, with the division being further complicated by growing emphasis on Japanist particularism. This trend, together with criticism from Japanist nationalists, led to the league's quick collapse.[33] For instance, Iwasaki Junkō 岩崎純孝 (1901-1971), a scholar of Italian literature, emphasized the importance of regional culture within a nation because it was from there that a country's unique artistic sense emerged. Thus, while listing no less than fifteen elements as essential to fascism, Iwasaki described local ethnic spirit as "the one element indispensable to fascism." Consequently, he was unhappy with what he saw as the slighting of regional identity in nationalist discourse and warned it was "a fundamental mistake" to think of "the sharpening of state-to-state conflict," "patriotic statist nationalism," and "state authority based on love of race" as being "the most important principles of fascism."[34]

Novelist Nojima Tatsuji 野島辰次 (1892-1965) regarded fascism as a national movement that demanded the awakening of national consciousness and as one that, while originating in Marxism, had then "understood Marxism correctly and from that point been reborn." True fascism, he believed, fused *minzokushugi*, *kokuminshugi*, and *kokkashugi* to form a "vague totalitarianism" (*bakuzen to shita zentaishugi* ばく然とした全体主義) encompassing the Japanese race (*minzoku*), nation (*kokumin*), and state (*kokka*). "We Japanese, we the Japanese nation, it is enough that we awake clearly to and recognize the racial consciousness of being Japanese, to national consciousness of being the Japanese nation, and from the standpoint of such recognition and awareness understand how we must regenerate Japan. If we just understand and accomplish that, [all] will be fine and sufficient." As with Iwasaki's view, Nojima's perspective provided little of the clarity visible in the league's statement of principles, and he was criticized by the renovationist right-wing for peddling empty, futile theories. And indeed, despite his references to fascism's correct understanding of Marxism, he sought to distance his view of fascism from state socialism, writing that "Japanese fascism, as put forth in our principles, calls for

[32] Quoted in Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, pp. 145-149.
[33] Kawanishi 1986, pp. 133-149.
[34] Kawanishi 1986, pp. 141-142.

establishing an economic structure based on state control, but it is doubtful whether that content conforms exactly to what is called state socialism."[35]

Economist Hayashi Kimio 林癸未夫 (1883-1947) wrote on labor issues in the early 1920s before emerging as a critic of proletarian literature in the latter part of the decade. By 1932, he had become known as yet another theorist "riding the wave of fascism."[36] In contrast to Nojima's emphasis on fascism as a movement, Hayashi used his own dialectical synthesis to analyze fascism and form. The result was his idea of fascism being the synthesis born of the interaction of democracy (bourgeois dictatorship) as thesis and bolshevism (proletarian dictatorship) as anti-thesis. The fascist result would, he believed, replace "quantitative politics" and "mass dictatorship" with a dictatorship of the wise and gifted few. Hayashi envisioned in fascism a "transformation from quantity to quality" that rejected parliamentary government, exalted elitism, and slighted the masses. Nevertheless, while looking upon fascism as "one inevitable form of politics needed to relieve social evil and national calamity," he also considered it to be but another transitional historical phenomenon. And herein Hayashi, too, sought to differentiate fascism and state socialism. While seeing in both concepts a "supra-individual, supra-class ideology," he rejected the former's ideal of "harmonizing labor and management." "Japanese fascism," he wrote, "even though it can learn much from Italy in the area of economic organization, should not get bogged down in the concept of harmonizing labor and management, but must firmly push forward to socialism" so that "fascism and state socialism will become for practical purposes the same thing." Nevertheless, for Hayashi fascism was not up to the task of "eliminating the poison of capitalism" and was thus mainly a method for attaining the higher concept of state socialism.[37]

Finally, the poet and founder of the league (with Iwasaki) Fukushi Kōjirō 福士幸次郎 (1889-1946) understood fascism as a fervid expression of local culture that equated each nation with a region of the world and maintained that "each of the world's races has its own special racial qualities." On the basis of such unique racial or ethnic consciousness, and "following a fascism that merged with my own present thinking," he argued that fascism required "unconditional love of one's homeland." He criticized Pan-Asianism by refusing to recognize the possibility that concepts such as the Confucian Kingly Way could transcend regional racial identities and, furthermore, argued that efforts to do so could only "muddy racial consciousness" and result in the "destruction of our racial life." The problems of a given racial or ethnic community, he believed, had to be left to the "unique efforts of that race." Consequently, Fukushi's version of fascism had him criticizing many established right-wing and proletarian supporters of the puppet state of Manchukuo, while also targeting state socialists for slighting tradition and the concept of race. Of the latter group, he wrote bluntly: "Gentlemen, even while you speak of the state, you are unable to forget the taste of having kissed Marx's ass."[38]

The brief tale of the Japan Fascism League illustrates the substantial ideological divisions and

[35] Kawanishi 1986, pp. 142-143.
[36] Kawanishi 1986, p. 143.
[37] Kawanishi 1986, pp. 143-145.
[38] Kawanishi 1986, p. 145.

confusion that existed even among self-proclaimed fascists. It is thus not surprising that the league fractured into competing factions of self-identified fascists, state socialists, and Japanists, and then disbanded within a year of forming. Moreover, the activities of key members appear to have been insignificant. Indeed, in addition to ideological discord, members ran into practical problems when attempting to put their ideas into practice. For instance, one member had believed that even if people did not clearly understand "what sort of doctrine fascism was," local activists would still welcome it as a way of addressing pressing issues; however, he quickly found his efforts to expand the league's influence frustrated by a lack of interest. His experience further underscores the fact that the league and its members had little impact on the history of the 1930s.[39]

More generally, it is not difficult to fathom why the police, having closely surveyed the literature of nationalist organizations, concluded in a 1932 report on "Theories of Fascism" that such groups possessed "a great variety of doctrines and assertions," and cautioned against the tendency to label all of "our country's right-wing renovationist groups fascist."[40] A 1933 police survey of conditions in Japan's "renovationist movement" likewise pointed out that "even within so-called fascist organizations opinions of what fascism is are diverse and multifarious," and that within mainstream opinion, as well, "a unified view did not necessarily exist."[41] In short, the perceptions of contemporary commentators and activists reflect the conundrum of definition and the profligate usage that has characterized discussions of fascism ever since.

Nevertheless, this state of affairs did not prevent the police from attempting to determine several key characteristics of fascism, some of which resonate with postwar scholarship on the concept, including the distinction between conservative and radical nationalism and the rejection of liberalism and communism. For instance, the 1932 report posited that fascism could be thought of as a "peculiar form of movement that appeared via the turmoil of capitalist economic organizations" and, while cautioning that not all reactionary groups were fascist, applied the label to Japanist groups characterized by "statist nationalism (*kokkashugi* 国家主義), anti-parliamentarianism (*han-gikaishugi* 反議会主義), and anti-communism (*han-kyōsanshugi* 反共産主義)." Noting the varied degrees of radicalism on the question of capitalism and recognizing that some groups stressed vague theories of the *kokutai* 国体 (national polity) while others drew heavily on Marxism, the authors decided one could divide the movement into two major categories based upon whether their fundamental guiding ethos rested in the Japanese spirit (*Nihon seishin* 日本精神) or in theories of state socialism.[42] The 1933 report similarly identified the nationalist movement as comprised of a pure Japanist faction and a state socialist faction, but also noted the existence of an agrarian self-rule faction (*nōhon-jichishugi-ha* 農本自治主義派). The authors then presented the following characteristics as representative of fascism: 1)

[39] Kawanishi 1986, p. 146.
[40] "Fashizumu no riron" 1932, p. 295.
[41] Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, p. 39.
[42] "Fashizumu no riron" 1932, pp. 295-296.

anti-internationalist nationalism (*han-kokusaishugi-kokuminshugi* 反国際主義国民主義) and "homeland first-ism" (*sokoku daiichishugi* 祖国第一主義); 2) anti-communism (*han-kyōsanshugi* 反共産主義); and 3) anti-parliamentarian dictatorship and mass action (*han-gikaishugi dokusaiseijishugi oyobi taishū kōdōshugi* 反議会主義独裁政治主義及び大衆行動主義).[43] A survey from 1936 examining "theories of renovation" drew a similar distinction between idealist Japanism and state socialism and, as with the 1933 report, devoted attention to agrarianism (*nōhonshugi* 農本主義).[44]

Finally, a January 1936 report by the Special Higher Police (*tokubetsu kōtō keisatsu* 特別高等警察 or *tokkō* 特高) declared that fascism referred to "extreme rightism" and "extreme rightist organizations and ideologues." The authors then listed the following characteristics: statist nationalism (*kokkashugi*) placing the state's interest over international cooperation and requiring that the people devote themselves to the state; nationalism or ethnic-nationalism (*kokuminshugi, minzokushugi*) rooted in particular traditions and prioritized over those of other nations; support for great national accomplishments under "heroic dictatorship" (*eiyū-dokusaishugi* 英雄独裁主義) of the sort exemplified by Hitler and Mussolini, which entailed rejecting the leveling ordinariness of parliamentarianism; strong opposition to a communist movement that would impoverish all and that promoted internationalist opposition to fascist nationalism; and support for the nationalization of finance and private capital and for implementing planned economic control and the state-led rationalization of production and consumption.[45]

The authors concluded by declaring that "our country's far-right organizations" shared these traits but differed in that the "dazzlingly brilliant core thought lay in national polity-centrism (*kōsai-rikuri-taru chūshin shisō wa, kokutai chūshinshugi no ten ni aru* 光彩陸離たる中心思想は、国体中心主義の点にある) … which has led them to mobilize the original Japanese spirit to limit the rampant excesses of the great zaibatsu and erect economic organizations in the interests of the national masses, to purify the established parties that had merged wickedly with the zaibatsu and [instead] erect politics in the interests of the national masses, to eradicate subservient diplomacy and replace it with autonomous diplomacy, and to pursue a powerful ideal state through the unified efforts of the nation." Following this affirmative reference to rightist appeal to the "Japanese spirit" and the *kokutai*, the authors closed with the matter of greatest concern to the "thought police," which was the fact that "this deep passion to move forward rapidly is accompanied by the danger they will use violence against their opponents."[46]

The above survey of contemporary commentary illustrates a proliferation of diverse definitions and underscores the importance of nationalist idealism and a socialist-inspired critique of capitalism to

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[43] Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, pp. 17-20, 42-43.

[44] Naimushō keihokyoku 1933, pp. 17-20, "Kakushin riron to kakushin jin'ei" 1936 pp. 193-209. The post-1932 addition of agrarianism likely reflects the motives of those behind the Ketsumeidan and May Incidents of that year. Agrarianism and other traits listed above clearly warrant closer attention, but that is beyond the scope of this essay. Such scrutiny would of course entail explaining why such characteristics should necessarily be judged fascist.

[45] Shisō keisatsu tsūron 1936, pp. 225-229. I thank Lance Gatling for bringing this source to my attention.

[46] Shisō keisatsu tsūron 1936, pp. 229-230.

perceptions of fascism in the 1930s. The former factor, while not necessarily useful for clarifying the concept of fascism, does help explain the broad application of the word to nationalist organizations. This loose usage of the word was accompanied by a distinction between those nationalists who relied on an "idealist" form of "pure Japanism" and those who drew on the "scientific" critique of "state socialism." While groups and individuals associated by police with both categories were often labelled "fascist," those utilizing a socialist-inspired rejection of the liberal and capitalist status quo generally appeared more open to the idea of some form of Japanese fascism. Meanwhile, the willingness of some of these men to engage in terrorism resulted in the fascist label becoming closely associated with the most extreme and violent elements of the right wing. Nevertheless, violent methods failed to facilitate a change in government and the inability of even the few self-proclaimed Japanese fascists to agree on what that term meant further indicated the conceptual blurriness and subjective perceptions that are perpetuated today both in scholarly and popular commentary. Finally, whatever fascist content one might distill from this discourse, its significance to the development and character of the Japanese polity will remain obscure without close consideration of it in relation to other preexisting values and ideologies, and of the relevance of them all to the political history of the prewar and wartime years.

The New Bureaucrats: "Flat Beer" Fascists?

In the early 1930s, Japanese authorities increasingly associated the threat of terrorism with fascism. And few officials were more concerned with the violent potential of political extremists than the members of the Home Ministry's Keihokyoku 警保局 (Police Affairs Bureau). The leadership of the bureau during this period was in the hands of officials whom journalists labelled the "new bureaucrats." For instance, Matsumoto Gaku took charge of the bureau immediately after the 15 May Incident of 1932, overseeing the harsh suppression of communists and leading the ministry in its stand-off with the army in the so-called Go-Stop Incident that dragged on from June to November 1933.[47] In his preface to the aforementioned report from January 1936, Matsumoto stressed the duty of the police to preserve public order by preventing violent extremism from the Left and the Right, identifying the former with "international communism" and the latter with the "intense nationalism-fascism" (*mōretsu-na kokkashugi-fuasshizumu* 猛烈な国家主義―フアッシズム) of those men behind the assassinations perpetrated in the Ketsumeidan 血盟団 (Blood Pledge Corps) and 15 May Incidents.[48] This statement also reflected the basic outlook of Matsumoto and his bureaucratic associates, which favored renovation of the status quo that would enhance bureaucratic autonomy at the expense of party power and counter the threat posed to the constitutional order by radical ideologies and political violence. While socialist revolution constituted the primary threat from the radical Left, these officials associated fascism with

[47] In the May Incident, the prime minister was assassinated by radical young officers. The Go-Stop Incident revolved around determining the authority of the police to detain an active duty soldier, which became a matter of dispute when the army protested the detention of an enlisted man for ignoring a stop signal and crossing the street. Hori 2006, pp. 178-181, 232-233.

[48] Matsumoto 1936, pp. 1-3. Since Matsumoto left the police bureau in July 1934, it is likely his preface was penned earlier and simply reprinted. In the Ketsumeidan Incident, which preceded and was loosely linked to the May Incident, civilian radicals assassinated a former finance minister and a high-ranking executive of the Mitsui zaibatsu. For more, see Hori 2006, pp. 129-131.

the terrorism and coup plotting of the radical Right. Fears of communism and rumors of coup plotting, together with actual terrorist acts, contributed to the expansion of activism on the part of these officials, a development most notably revealed in the formation of the Kokuikai (National Mainstay Society).[49]

In 1934, the appointment of numerous Kokuikai associates to the "national unity cabinet" of Admiral Okada Keisuke 岡田啓介 (1868-1952) drew the attention of contemporary political commentators. Most determined the rise of those they dubbed the new bureaucrats to be an anomalous and transitory phenomenon made possible by the political uncertainty that followed the seizure of Manchuria and the 15 May Incident. While some argued that the Home Ministry officials behind the Kokuikai had seized a long-awaited opportunity to move against their "sworn enemies in the parties" and had joined hands with the military, few commentators viewed the bureaucrats as an autonomous, sustainable political force whose emergence was born of "historical necessity (*rekishi-teki hitsuzensei* 歴史的必然性)."[50] Those observers who saw evidence of fascism in the ideology of the new bureaucrats tended to do so from a socialist-inflected perspective, as when one writer in the left-leaning magazine *Kaizō* 改造 (Reconstruction) declared the bureaucrat's "Oriental *bokumin* ideology" 東洋的な牧民思想 (*Tōyō-teki na bokumin shisō*) to be merely bureaucratic artifice emblematic of the society's lukewarm fascism, which the author characterized as resembling "flat beer."[51] Postwar Marxist and progressive historians generally followed suit in linking the new bureaucrats to the emergence of fascism.[52] This perception of "new" and "renovationist" bureaucrats (*kakushin kanryō* 革新官僚) as promoting fascism is also a staple of recent Anglophone scholarship.[53]

One does not find anywhere near such unity of opinion on fascism and the new bureaucrats in the views of contemporary commentators and thus, as with general observations on fascism, their perceptions provide no easy answer for scholars. Indeed, opinions on the new bureaucrats and fascism were even more disparate than were those on fascism in general. For example, although at the start of the 1930s Sassa Hiroo had predicted that a non-party cabinet of the sort associated with the rise of the new bureaucrats would herald the arrival of fascism in Japan, by the middle of the decade he was defending the Okada government from that charge and arguing that Japan's economic health would preclude the emergence of fascism. He likewise supported the cabinet's Election Purification Movement (*senkyo shukusei undō* 選挙粛正運動), a forerunner of later national mobilization campaigns and

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[49] Brown 2009, pp. 310-311.

[50] *Naimu jihō* 1936a, p. 96.

[51] Tamura 1934, pp. 148-55, 311-15; see also, "Kokuikai no zenbō" 1934, pp. 29-38.

[52] For postwar association of the new bureaucrats with fascism, see Maruyama 1964, pp. 37-38; Rekishigaku kenkyūkai 1953, pp. 157-159; Maejima 1969, pp. 157-162, 292-296; Otabe 1981; 1983.

[53] This assessment is not limited to recent cultural studies scholarship on fascism. Besides Gordon's 1991 argument for "imperial fascism," the most sustained argument is made by Janis Mimura (2011), whose book, while not a study of culture, deals with ideology and identifies with cultural studies scholars in inferring the fascist character of the wartime Japanese polity (p. 5n8). This perspective is also visible in the research of Aaron Moore (2013), Max Ward (2014), and Reto Hofmann (2015). However, these works tend to either conflate "new" and "renovationist" officials or simply pay little heed to the former. Most recent scholarship on the new bureaucrats and the Home Ministry, in both Japanese and English, pays close attention to the distinction and does not make an argument for fascism (see Furukawa 2005, Brown 2009, 2013, and Kurosawa 2013). Nor, in fact, does Robert Spaulding's pioneering look at the new bureaucrats present them, or even their reformist successors, as proponents of fascism (Spaulding 1970, pp. 67-68). The closest study of the Cabinet Planning Bureau, the headquarters of economic-minded reform bureaucrats, also rejects the conceptual utility of fascism (Furukawa 1992).

directed by new bureaucrat and Home Minister Gotō Fumio 後藤文夫 (1884-1980).[54] Analyzing the phenomenon of the new bureaucrats for the monthly magazine *Chūō kōron* 中央公論 (Central Review) in 1935, Sassa located the reason for their appearance in the stagnation of party rule and a level of "official discipline" that contrasted favorably with party decadence and disorder, yet dismissed the prospect of them becoming an independent political force and, moreover, proclaimed that the moment of their collapse was already at hand.[55] An early 1936 Home Ministry survey of opinions on the new bureaucrats quoted Sassa to illustrate the view that the new bureaucrats would be unable to accrue political power without army support and would ultimately fail because they did not represent the interests of any particular social strata or have any mass support.[56]

The same survey reported that liberals (*jiyūshugisha* 自由主義者) reacted to criticism of party rule from these Home Ministry officials with charges of "bureaucratic fascism" and "bureaucratic dictatorship," yet generally expected that phenomenon to be temporary and followed by a resurgence of "normal constitutional government" (*kensei no jōdō* 憲政の常道), which for party politicians meant the return of party-led cabinets. Although the Meiji Constitution did not specify that the party with a majority in the lower house would form and lead the cabinet, by the late 1920s the reality of party power was making this customary, a development that party politicians defended with rhetoric supporting this as the constitutional norm. In turn, the new bureaucrats had explicitly rejected this presumption in their critique of party rule. Indeed, it was likely an effort to counter such criticism of party rule by bureaucratic and other nationalist sources that led the journalist Baba Tsunego 馬場恒吾 (1875-1956) to declare that, "I don't know about countries that reject constitutional government in favor of dictatorial and autocratic rule, but in countries with parliamentary government such as Japan, something like a national unity cabinet is chimerical."[57]

Opinions on the Right were characterized as particularly diverse. Some rightists welcomed the prospect of the new bureaucrats facilitating a transition away from liberalism toward some sort of totalitarian structure. However, others on the Right rejected that view out of hand, identifying the same reformist officials associated by party politicians and liberal commentators with "bureaucratic fascism" as in fact bearing "democratic liberal thought" and lacking the "Japanese spirit." These shortcomings

[54] Sassa subsequently assumed a leading role in the Shōwa Kenkyūkai (Shōwa Research Society), a reformist study group viewed by some as developing fascist policies for three-time premier Konoe Fumimaro (1891-1945) (Fletcher 1982, pp. 98-99; Tansman 2009a, p. 11). The shifting trajectory of Sassa's opinions took a new turn after the war when he wrote a short pamphlet for NHK on "the tragic history of Shōwa politics." Sassa opened his account with the Anti-Comintern Pact and Tripartite Alliance and displayed little interest in the first half of the 1930s or in the structural consequences of capitalism that had so occupied his warnings of fascism and his activities for Konoe's study group. Indeed, he only mentioned the term fascism in passing to describe pro-Nazi "intellectuals" with links to renovationist bureaucrats and to those army officers who took a hardline toward China after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 7 July1937. In summing up the origins of the war and what had made Japanese behave like "slaves" he concluded: "What brought out our servile character was militarism. However, if we henceforth were to carry that forward it would prove that we ourselves are a feudal race." Sassa 1946, pp. 38-42, 76.

[55] Sassa 1935, pp. 254-265. Sassa's 1946 opinion remained fairly consistent in viewing the bureaucrats as incapable of exercising political leadership, but he added a new criticism regarding their ineffectiveness in wartime administration. Sassa 1946, pp. 63-68.

[56] *Naimu jihō* 1936a, p. 96, *Naimu jihō* 1936b, p. 56.

[57] *Naimu jihō* 1936a, p. 97; Baba is quoted in *Naimu jihō* 1936b, p. 55. On the criticism by the new bureaucrats, see Brown 2012, pp. 308-311. For a recent study examining the significance of the shifting discourse on "normal constitutional government" in the rise and decline of party power, see Koyama 2012.

were visible, these rightists argued, in the lukewarm response of new bureaucrats such as Home Minister Gotō to the "Minobe affair" concerning the nature of the emperor's relationship to the constitution.[58] The fact that the ministry's police were also involved in the investigation and suppression of "right-wing patriotic groups" further convinced some radical nationalists that the new bureaucrats were not allies of the Right and did not possess "right-wing reformist ideology." For instance, Imasato Katsuo 今里勝雄 (1904-66), admirer of national socialism and biographer of Hitler, wrote that "this new bureaucrat faction possesses nothing like fascist thought" and instead "walk a middle path." They present themselves as seeking "reform in the national interest of all the people," he continued, but are in reality "progressive liberals linked to the neo-liberalism advocated by Tsurumi Yūsuke 鶴見祐輔 (1885-1973)."[59]

Disagreeing wholeheartedly with Imasato's perspective were proletarian party politicians Asō Hisashi 麻生久 (1891-1940) and Kamei Kan'ichirō 亀井貫一郎 (1892-1987), who saw the new bureaucrats as potential allies in bringing about some form of state socialism. Having proclaimed the enthusiasm of their Social Masses Party (Shakai Taishūtō 社会大衆党) for the "control economy (*tōsei keizai* 統制経済)" outlined in the "Army pamphlet" of 1934, they similarly praised the new bureaucrats for having "broken free from the puppetry of the capitalist political and economic structure" and thereby drawn closer to others in the army and industrial unions who "burn with the renovationist spirit." Kamei was particularly impressed with what he saw as the "strictly fair and impartial" role of the police in handling the recent Tokyo streetcar workers strike. To their mind, efforts on the part of reformist bureaucrats to restrict the interests of management, and not just labor, indicated that these officials shared the anti-capitalist ideology of their party.[60]

Also characterized as "defying easy summary" were right-wing views of the new bureaucrats and the two extra-ministerial administrative offices in which these officials were heavily involved, the Cabinet Deliberative Council (Naikaku Shingikai 内閣審議会) and the Cabinet Research Bureau (Naikaku Chōsakyoku 内閣調査局). While there was overall agreement that the former was essentially a status quo force, "the general opinion in progressive Japanist circles (*shinpo-teki Nihonshugi no rondan* 進歩的日本主義の論壇)" was that both offices provided venues for the legal gathering of military and civil officials and that, while the council was the last stronghold of status quo forces, the bureau was qualitatively different and offered the opportunity for bringing together people of "renovationist

[58] The affair in question derives its name from constitutional scholar Minobe Tatsukichi (1873-1948), whose view of the emperor as an organ of the state had long held sway over a rival interpretation which held that the emperor transcended the constitutional order, which was merely the current political expression of the national polity he embodied. In 1935, a constellation of political factions used what had been a relatively obscure academic dispute to create an incident that would force the resignation of the Okada cabinet. The cabinet successfully resisted the pressure to resign but was compelled to denounce Minobe's views and launch a "movement to clarify the national polity (*kokutai meichō undo*)" that would help solidify nationalist orthodoxy during the wartime years.

[59] Quoted in *Naimu jihō* 1936b, pp. 55-56, and *Naimu jihō* 1936a, pp. 97-98.

[60] Quoted in *Naimu jihō* 1936a, pp. 97-98. Officially titled "The Cardinal Principles of National Defense and a Proposal for Their Strengthening (*Kokubō no hongi to sono kyōka no teishō*)," the army pamphlet detailed the mobilization of all natural and human resources in the service of preparing to wage total war, to which end the conditions of workers and the excesses of capitalism would also be regulated. Asō's statement praising the army and calling for all "good socialists" to support this agenda is reproduced in Hata 1980, p. 339.

consciousness (*kakushin-teki ishiki* 革新的意識).” Others, however, dismissed the bureau as merely the research arm of the council, and thus lacking real power. Still others perceived the new bureaucrats in the bureau as linked to conservative forces, as lacking the ability to call on public social forces, and, rather than melding with the masses and bringing about true reform, as merely ingratiating themselves to one portion of the ruling class. The gap between such views and those of “progressive” rightists was neatly summarized by the self-described state socialist Akamatsu, who argued that should the new bureaucrats be correctly cognizant of this period of national renovation (*kokka kakushin*) and actively form a “great block” with the military, they would bolster the “legitimacy (*gōhō-sei* 合法性) of national renovation” and themselves progress to a “new historical stage.” If, however, the bureaucrats lacked the proper consciousness and determination and continued to act in “ignorance of the spirit of the age and absorbed in the preservation of public order,” they would simply “share the same historical position as the Shinsengumi of *bakumatsu*.”[61] In short, the new bureaucrats would function as a reactionary police force on the wrong side of history.

Clearly, as with the question of fascism in general, simple reliance on the assessment of any given contemporary observer is unlikely to lead historians out of the wilderness when it comes to explaining whether or not the new bureaucrats and their reforms represented the forces of “Japanese fascism.” Nor will the views of these officials themselves easily resolve the matter. As was true with earlier global trends that might prove useful to the execution of their administrative duties, such as progressivism and social democracy, the bureaucrats were very aware of the discourse on fascism and some participated in it. One example would be the Kokuikai’s most fervent member, Yoshida Shigeru 吉田茂 (1885-1954; not to be confused with the diplomat and postwar premier of the same name), an official who epitomized both the ongoing, eclectic interests of elite bureaucrats and the Home Ministry’s ethos of *bokuminkan* 牧民官 (officials [who] shepherd of the people).[62]

In the early 1930s, Yoshida also aptly exemplified the critical wariness with which these bureaucrats viewed the examples of Nazism and Fascism. For while German National Socialism and Italian Fascism might offer some attractive ideas and methods, they also clearly contained qualities of revolutionary violence and mass politics that were unsettling to the “emperor’s officials.” As representatives of Japan’s presumed “best and wisest”—to quote a favorite phrase of their preferred ideologue Yasuoka Masahiro 安岡正篤 (1898-1983)—these men were happy to see progress made in rolling back what they viewed as the disruptive effects of “Diet omnipotence,” but they did not wish to see their expertise disrupted or the polity destabilized by outsiders agitating the masses and promoting violent, revolutionary nationalism. It thus comes as no surprise that Yoshida stressed the need to avoid the unstable oscillations between liberalism and dictatorship visible in Europe, and to argue that Japan’s national mission was “to break through the current impasse via the true principles of the imperial way”

[61] Quoted in *Naimu jihō* 1936b, pp. 52-58. The Shinsengumi was a group of samurai organized in 1863 by the Tokugawa shogunate to capture and sometimes assassinate radical samurai who engaged in terrorism in an effort to overthrow the shogunate.
[62] On Yoshida, see Brown 2012.

and "not go astray via the destabilizing methods and objectives found in the dictatorial politics of fascism."[63]

As already noted, Matsumoto, like Yoshida a founding member of the Kokuikai, is sometimes presented as exemplifying fascist influence. He has re-appeared in that guise in recent work on fascist culture, wherein he is said to represent "a reform faction of the bureaucracy with close ties to the elements in the military calling for a radical, antidemocratic, fascist transformation in society."[64] Matsumoto's connections to the new bureaucrats began as a consequence of the escalating politicization of ministry personnel appointments that occurred during the late 1920s. These years saw him draw close to Yasuoka and work with him to spread a form of agrarianism amenable to strengthening bureaucratic rule in the localities vis-à-vis the conservative political parties and in order to counter the spread of radical political ideologies. Throughout his career Matsumoto was also a firm exponent of the *bokuminkan* ethos that comprised the core of both the Home Ministry's institutional identity and the society's Japanist ideology, and he worked to spread this outlook among younger officials during the 1930s.[65]

In June 1932, Matsumoto condemned recent terrorist incidents and the rising interest in fascism while utilizing these developments to further question the propriety of party rule. In a column in the society newsletter *Kokui*, he blamed party-led government for allowing conditions conducive to fascism to arise and characterized interest in that ideology as but the newest example of naïve Japanese rushing to mimic the latest foreign trend while forsaking indigenous political ideals.[66] This predilection, he predicted, would cause further political deadlock and possible instability. More specifically, Matsumoto denounced the assassinations of the recent Ketsumeidan and 15 May Incidents as attempts to destroy the current political system and to plunge "the capital into utter chaos." No matter the motives, he wrote, "we cannot support such unprincipled and illegal methods. However," he continued, "it is also true that we cannot suppress our indignation toward the intellectual class and above all toward the politicians participating in contemporary politics" for lacking "resolute decisiveness and vigor to act on principle" and "doing nothing for social justice." Matsumoto then charged that Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi 犬養毅 (1855-1932) and Minseitō 民政党 leader Wakatsuki Reijirō 若槻礼次郎 (1866-1949) had, through their public expressions of opposition to fascism, raised undue "alarm and fear" about a fascist threat to parliamentarianism. Such acts, together with the failure of the parties to possess an "accurately recognize objective conditions," he wrote, made it "quite clear how deeply implicated the outlook of party politicians is in inviting the terrible conditions that brought this about; before making declarations defending parliamentary government, they must reflect on this."[67]

Turning to the general topic of "Fascism and Our Country," Matsumoto associated the appearance of

[63] Brown 2012, p. 317. For a concise overview of Yasuoka's worries about the threat posed by radical nationalism to the national polity, see Brown 2015, pp. 214-220.
[64] Torrance 2009, pp. 63, 66, 77-78n23, 78-79n35.
[65] Kurosawa 2006, pp. 5-73; Brown 2009; 2011.
[66] Matsumoto 1932, pp. 9-11.
[67] Matsumoto 1932, p. 9.

German and Italian fascism with the unique conditions of those two countries and stressed that without close recognition of this point "thinking that fascism can be directly adapted to our country is blatantly mistaken." Identifying the three principles of "Japanese fascism" as "socialism, opposition to international pacifism, and rejection of parliamentary government," he criticized them as mutually contradictory and obscurantist in providing no "procedural proposal (e.g., for repudiating parliamentarianism)." Above all, he continued, it was very doubtful that proponents of fascism had a "proper grasp" of Japan's condition. Their principles merely conveyed "very abstract impressions and emotions," and any effort to systematize them impressed one with the impossibility of that task. "In short," he concluded, "in addition to considerations of practicality, the impression one has is that [fascism] is simply a collection of various convenient principles for the purpose of appealing to the masses. Is it not a great mistake to think that one can directly apply Italy's fascist thought to our country?"[68]

In addition to viewing the surge of interest in fascism as a potentially destabilizing development, Matsumoto reiterated his belief that this was just the latest example of a Japanese penchant to "gobble up the newest thing" and "chase after fads." Tracing this weakness back to the Meiji Emperor's use of the Charter Oath to call for involving popular opinion in the making of state decisions (*banki kōron ni kessu* 万機公論に決す), he noted the "damage" that had followed from this idea and wondered "why didn't our predecessors consider differences in national character more seriously before choosing this [parliamentary] system?" Their failure "to study our country's history and national character and reflexive imitating of Western political institutions led to today's rejection of the Diet. Beginning from around 1919 and the importation of democratic thought everybody brandished democracy. As an extreme example," he continued, "I can still remember like yesterday that even the police idiotically affected democracy and policing was weakened. No one recalled the splendid democratic thought possessed by Japan from old, but merely [engaged in] shallow thinking affecting the latest Western trends, and for this reason democracy was not properly understood but twisted, and no small damage done."[69]

Matsumoto took essentially the same approach to fascism, writing that "until now Japanese have gobbled up new things until they are sick and tired, [and] having learned nothing they are now about to blindly follow (*unomi* 鵜呑み) Italian fascism." But, he cautioned, "fascism is essentially nothing more than a political methodology (*seiji-teki hōhōron* 政治的方法論)" that "lacks consistent philosophical principles," and "it is for this reason that people today are going to great pains attempting to impart a philosophy to fascism. Today our country is confronting a crisis, and it is a big mistake to try and rescue

[68] Matsumoto 1932, p. 9.
[69] Matsumoto 1932, pp. 9-10. The statement about policing reflects Matsumoto's belief that Taishō-era reforms to expand police social activities and contacts within the community "went too far in flattering the masses and dulled the police's ability to execute their primary purpose." In the early 1930s, it was Matsumoto and other new bureaucrats, such as his successor in the police bureau, Karasawa Toshiki (1891-1967), who emphasized the idea of "his majesty's police" (*heika no keisatsukan*), although the term itself dates from the Taishō period. See Miyachi 2018, pp. 159-187.

the situation with concrete methodologies (*keijika-teki na hōhōron* 形而下的な方法論). This is nothing more than replacing parliamentary doctrine with another kind of formalism. One cannot expect to address people's expectations and fix today's crisis through this sort of vague approach." As to what was required to accomplish those tasks, Matsumoto answered in line with Yasuoka's lectures and called for "awakening to the Japanese spirit" by "casting aside legalist learning and returning to the teachings of the Sages (*seiken no gaku* 聖賢の学). For over three thousand years," he declared hyperbolically, "our country's government has had a consistent philosophy and leadership principles. Casting aside leadership principles that can be called a national faith to get drunk on Western political morphology is an ongoing mistake." Therefore, he concluded, "without being distracted by today's shallow and superficial fascism (*senpaku-hisō na fuassho* 浅薄皮相なフアッショ), it is vital to devise contemporary political institutions based on our country's unique spirit, and it is to this [task] that the new Saitō [Makoto] cabinet must devote its utmost energy."[70]

Matsumoto did not specify what such spiritually informed institutions might look like, and it might be tempting, as one recent study argues, to characterize appeals to a unique national spirit by nationalists assessing fascism as a "fascist critique of fascism."[71] However, before dismissing such discourse as merely the obscurantist rhetoric of a theoretically impoverished fascist retreating into vague ideas of national uniqueness, it is worth recalling that the society's principles and reform plans argued that Japan's national spirit would be best expressed through a renovated Meiji constitutional system governed by what resembled a revitalized form of bureaucratic "transcendentalism" and weakened—but still functioning—representative institutions. Thus, while the members of the Kokuikai desired reform of the party-led status quo, they sought neither dissolution of the parties nor the creation of a one-party state. Rather, their primary objective was to bolster their own administrative authority as a means for implementing change in an elite-directed and non-revolutionary manner. Moreover, the ideological inspirations for their agenda, both in the Home Ministry and in the lectures of Yasuoka, well predated the public interest in fascism that peaked during the early 1930s.[72]

After retiring from the bureaucracy in 1934, Matsumoto devoted himself to the Nippon Bunka Renmei 日本文化連盟 (Japan Culture League), an organization he created the previous year in order to counter to the left-wing Puroretaria Bunka Renmei プロレタリア文化連盟 (Proletarian Culture League) by supporting "Japanist" literary and artistic activities. As the 1930s progressed, Matsumoto used the league as a vehicle for promoting Japanese culture abroad and attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to place his organization at the center of the 2,600-year anniversary celebrations of 1940. In addition to his activities in literary and artistic circles, Matsumoto promoted a nationalist mass exercise program and nationalist film projects, all while continuing his efforts to foster in rural villages a totalitarian or

[70] Matsumoto 1932, pp. 9-10.
[71] For this approach to nationalist responses to fascism, see Hofmann 2015, especially chapter 3. From this perspective, one might also read Matsumoto's reference to leadership principles as an effort to offer an analogue for the fascist idea of the great leader; however, one would also need to consider the fact that he made the same point regarding what he saw as Weimar Germany's leadership principles in education reform (Matsumoto 1931, pp. 18-19).
[72] For details, see Brown 2009; 2012.

"totalistic" national unity to combat extreme ideologies and strengthen loyalty to the national polity.[73]

Historians who have looked closest at Matsumoto's ideas and activities differ on whether these endeavors represent a form of Japanese fascism or a "Japanist" style of conservative, authoritarian nationalism.[74] Pursuing this matter in greater detail is beyond the scope of this essay, except to say that, whatever one makes of Matsumoto's totalitarian ideas, there are ways in which he does not easily fit the profile of the fascist new bureaucrat invoked in recent work on fascist culture. For instance, in addition to his skepticism toward and association of fascism with the terrorist incidents of 1932, there is the issue of his notably poor relations with an increasingly politicized army. His critical attitude deepened as a consequence of the standoff during the Go-Stop Incident and the coup attempt by young army officers in February 1936. As the latter incident was unfolding, for instance, Matsumoto expressed his anger toward both the insubordinate junior officers and complicit senior officers of the Imperial Way faction in his diary entry for 28 February:

> At home all day, listening to the radio. There may soon be a clash with the rebel troops. A government directive "To the Soldiers" has appeared. Despite martial law being invoked and an imperial order issued they still refuse to yield. The reason for the hesitation and inability to resolve the matter is the support by [General] Araki [Sadao] and others for the rebels and the suspicious behavior of Aide-de-camp [General] Honjō (Shigeru). The sun has set on an ominous day. All around Akasaka the rebellious officers are agitating excitedly through street-side oratory [in] the exact same manner as Reds. They are dancing to the tune of Kita Ikki and Nishida Mitsugi, and [General] Masaki [Jinzaburō] and Araki are pouring fuel on the fire.[75]

The next day Matsumoto directed his anger toward former colleagues in the Police Affairs Bureau for failing to prevent the incident, scolding them for "cracking down on Ōmotokyō", "focusing on election purification", and "rounding up gangsters," while remaining "dumbly" oblivious to the planning of such a predictable event.[76] Thus, while there are aspects of Matsumoto's nationalism wherein one might perceive fascist elements, there are other components of a different lineage, in particular his career-long affinity for the Home Ministry's Confucian-influenced *bokuminkan* ethos. When considered together with his generally poor relations with the army and abiding concern for political stability, there is reason to question the portrayal of Matsumoto as the prototypical, fascist new bureaucrat working closely with

[73] On the exercise program, see Sasaki 2016, pp. 236-268; regarding the film projects, see Furukawa 2003, pp. 47-48. For a contemporary statement of his ideas on unity in rural village life through moral education and on the importance of *hōjinshugi* 邦人主義 (translated into English by Matsumoto as "the oneness of man and land"), see Matsumoto 1931; 1938.

[74] For arguments stressing fascism, see Otabe 1981; Unno 1981; Koshikawa 2016; Hartmann 2017. For emphasis on Japanist or authoritarian conservatism, see Itō 1995; Kurosawa 2006; Brown 2009; 2011.

[75] Matsumoto 1995, pp. 149.

[76] Matsumoto 1995, pp. 149-150. Matsumoto was specifically unhappy with his successor as bureau chief, Karasawa, who was on close terms with army staff officers and, in Matsumoto's view, derelict in his duty to keep tabs on radical elements within the army. Ōmotokyō was a new religion closely associated with right-wing nationalism and increasingly viewed by authorities as a potential threat to political stability.

the military in order to implement a "radical, antidemocratic, fascist transformation of society."[77]

Conclusion

Prewar perceptions of fascism were diverse and, as has been true ever since, observers grappled with the conundrum of defining the concept and assessing its significance for Japan. Consequently, appealing to the amenable views of certain contemporaries resolves little regarding the question of whether fascism had a transformative impact upon the Japanese polity. The fact that even self-proclaimed fascists such as those of the Japan Fascism League were unable to agree on what their ideology meant underscores this point. Furthermore, even were one to have a consensual definition in hand, the very brief and apparently fruitless activities of league members is indicative of the need both for gauging the success or failure of fascism in competition with existing ideas and values and for investigating its influence upon the larger polity. Such assessment is necessary if one wishes to make a convincing case that the "culture of fascism" or "fascist moments" reveal the character of the wartime polity. Finally, just as appealing to favored commentators from the 1930s offers no shortcut to resolving the question of fascism in the early Shōwa era, invoking the long-defunct consensus of early postwar Japanese scholarship provides no historiographical high ground in the debate over the concept's usefulness for explaining the history of those years. Besides having collapsed close to forty years ago, that consensus reflected the hegemony of one programmatic historiographical perspective, Marxism, that essentially picked up where prewar communist party assessments had left off. And while early postwar academic writing on fascism was not entirely Marxist, the influence of that outlook was pronounced even among non-Marxist scholars, including the most influential of those, Maruyama Masao.

This is not to say that Marxist-influenced analytical views are not important for understanding the history of interwar nationalism, culture, and politics. Indeed, socialist critiques of capitalism and the Comintern's definition of fascism exerted powerful influence upon those both participating in and observing the interwar nationalist movement. This is clearly visible in the widely remarked upon division between the nationalism of the "idealist" Right and that of "state socialists," a phenomenon that is clearly significant for comprehending the nature of the nationalist movement in Japan and, consequently, elucidating any fascist component. Similarly, the negative definitions visible in police documents resonate with the so-called "fascist negations" of anti-liberalism, anti-communism, and anti-conservatism put forth by Stanley Payne in his postwar studies of fascism.[78] At the same time, the first two of these dispositions are not limited to fascists, and thus the third negation, anti-conservatism, suggests how elucidating the elements of conservatism and radicalism visible in the era's nationalist movement may enhance our understanding of the history of early Shōwa Japan.

The above factors are also relevant to understanding and judging the ideology and influence of the

[77] Torrance 2009, p. 63. Indeed, at least in the context of the Police Affairs Bureau and the ministry's relations with the army, Kurosawa suggests excluding Matsumoto from the new bureaucrat group. (Kurosawa 2013, pp. 124-139).
[78] Kasza 1984, pp. 608-609.

various reform bureaucrats and of the bureaucracy in general. For instance, the reformist outlook and objectives of the so-called new bureaucrats in the Home Ministry possessed significant conservatism and continuity with past bureaucratic practice and ideology, whereas historians have long noted the socialist-influenced thinking of younger, more radical renovationist bureaucrats coming from newer ministries focused on economic and technological concerns. While the value of such labeling can be questioned, the differences are likely significant to any bureaucratic component to fascism in Japan. Relatedly, one would then need to effectively assess the overall influence of these officials and their ideas, for clearly no one set of bureaucrats—nor any other faction within the governing elite—ever managed to gain control of the Japanese state. It is also worth remembering that all the attention given to reform bureaucrats elides the fact that these officials were a minority within their respective ministries and not always appreciated by their mainstream colleagues. It is thus not necessarily clear to what extent the character of bureaucratic rule (*kanchi* 官治) should be equated with the ideas of reform bureaucrats.[79] Meanwhile, the closest study of the Home Ministry and politics argues that this powerful institution, long considered by many to be an unassailable pillar of bureaucratic power, fascist or otherwise, actually lost influence to other ministries during the years of wartime mobilization, or the exact period when those making an argument for Japanese fascism have placed the ministry at the core of a newly realized fascist order.[80]

One might protest that the above observations are the unfair expectations of a historian and that it is sufficient for cultural studies scholars to theorize the aesthetic characteristics of fascism and fascist culture, but it is these same scholars who either state explicitly or infer the transformative political consequences of their observations. It thus seems reasonable to point out that, to be persuasive, their making of what is in essence an argument about the history of the prewar and wartime years requires some sort of clear standard by which to define fascism in relation to other ideas, such as nationalism and militarism, and close historical research that delineates the degree that fascist ideas did or did not shape the polity of early Shōwa Japan.

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[79] Furukawa Takahisa (2005) has explored the larger concept of competition between advocates of bureaucratic rule and party rule (*tōchi*). For a concise survey of relations between the bureaucracy and the parties, see Brown 2017.

[80] Kurosawa 2013.

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