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# THE CLASH OF FASCISMS, 1931–1937

> **Fascism [*fassho*] is hardening day by day; the political parties are in panic; truly the sky is threatening.**
>
> —“Chokugen,” *Yomiuri shinbun*, May 13, 1932

## The Names of Fascism

Only two days after this anonymous line appeared in the daily *Yomiuri shinbun*, officers in the Imperial Japanese Navy, in collaboration with the right-wing League of Blood (Ketsumeidan), killed Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi as part of a wider plot to overthrow parliamentary rule and impose a “Shōwa Restoration.” What the media quickly nicknamed the May 15, 1932, Incident was funneled into a broader—and more ominous—debate. Fascism, it was feared, was raising its head in Japan. Indeed, anyone who had observed Mussolini’s rise in Italy and Hitler’s successes in Germany would have recognized Japan’s own fascist symptoms. From 1930 to 1936 military radicals, often consorting with civilian right-wing associations and ideologues as well as the criminal underworld, embarked on an unprecedented campaign of violence. Hoping to foment a coup d’état, they killed and intimidated leading politicians and industrialists in a series of high-profile “incidents,” prompting one Western observer’s deft remark about Japan’s “government by assassination.”[1] The state unleashed the Special Higher Police (*tokkō*) on “subversive” groups, especially communists, but also on all those suspected of “thought crimes.” In Manchuria, annexed by the Kwantung Army in 1931 and made into the “jewel in Japan’s crown,” a coalition of bureaucrats and soldiers experimented with autarky, developing centralized, technocratic industrial planning.[2] Even though none of these events triggered a dictatorship, their combination left contemporaries in no doubt that in the first half of the 1930s Japan had entered a process of “fascistization” (*fassho-ka*).



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Fascism no longer carried the same meanings as in the 1920s. In a shift from an earlier discourse that identified fascism with Italy, Japanese intellectuals, politicians, and bureaucrats now associated it with a world trend. Recognizable fascist movements were springing up seemingly everywhere, its members donning a rainbow of shirts—white in Syria, green in Egypt, blue in China, orange in South Africa, gold in Mexico. Politically, Hitler took office in Germany in 1933; in China, Chiang Kai-shek launched the New Life Movement (1934) to counter socialism, liberalism, and democracy; two years later, Spain's Francisco Franco staged a military coup with the support of the right-wing Falange movement.[3]

Moreover, it became clear that fascism could no longer be reduced to a form of rejuvenated nationalism, as Shimoi had described it. Fascism's expansion around the world in the 1930s coincided with an increase in capitalist class conflict, which fascism promised to resolve by appealing to the force of the organic national community. To reconstruct the nation as a harmonious unit, fascist regimes and theoreticians devised an array of strategies, including the corporate state, anticommunist and anti-union policies, militaristic mobilization of the civilian population, and cultural rebirth. Thus Japanese commentators sought a broader understanding of fascism, one that accommodated its manifestation as an ideological force in several milieus.

By the early 1930s, then, fascism had entered the political lexicon of the twentieth century as a concept in its own right. Yet the centrality of fascism in the Japanese political and cultural debates in this decade has gone largely unnoticed.[4] Fascism stirred a protracted controversy that raged among intellectuals, activists, and politicians from across the political spectrum. As a global ideology, it unsettled assumptions about the Japanese state and national identity at their core. If, as some liberal and Marxist critics argued, fascist symptoms were to be taken seriously, the uniqueness of the Japanese state, based as it was on the filial relationship between the emperor and his subjects, had to be questioned: Could the emperor system operate as a fascist dictatorship? Comparing the fundamental principles of Japanese politics with foreign developments may not have been contentious in earlier decades; but at a time of heightened nationalism these assertions could not be left unchallenged, especially by those on the right who called for a return to the true spirit of Japan and rejected foreign influences of all kinds, including fascism.

The clash of fascisms was therefore a struggle for the control over the many meanings the term had assumed. Whereas antifascist forces expanded the definition of fascism to include the ideological and political changes in Japan, the functionaries of Japanese fascism—the motley crowd of ideologues, bureaucrats, politicians, and military—fought for a narrowing of its meaning by making fascism congruent with Fascist Italy—or, at least, by setting very clear limits to the

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extent to which fascism could be relevant in Japan. By 1937, in many respects, it was the discourse of the Right that had asserted itself. An increasingly military-dominated government enforced the ideological orthodoxy of the "national polity" (*kokutai*). In asserting the notion of Japanese uniqueness through the "unbroken imperial line" that was implied in the *kokutai*, officials recast this old term to serve the contemporary purpose of a counterpoint to the argument that Japan was becoming fascist.[5] In this sense, the official line overlapped to a large extent with the arguments of the Right, which, undeniably, had contributed to the formation of imperial discourse. With critical voices silenced or co-opted, the debates on fascism waned.

## Nazism as Fascism

Adolf Hitler's appointment as German chancellor in January 1933 changed the course of European—and world—history. Under his rule, Germany turned into a dictatorship, fomented World War II, and annihilated millions of Jews, as well as other individuals deemed by the regime as racially or politically undesirable. Yet, what in hindsight stands out as a turning point did not necessarily appear so to contemporaries. To be sure, Japanese took note of Hitler's singularly intransigent and bellicose leadership; his regime's bold claims to reconstruct Germany's economy on the blueprint of an economy that was neither liberal nor socialist; and the anti-Semitism that pervaded his ideology, National Socialism. But many remained unconvinced that the Nazis represented something new, largely because they recognized a host of commonalities with Italian Fascism. Just like the early Blackshirts, so Hitler's Brownshirts, the SA, assassinated and terrorized political adversaries; both Fascists and Nazis developed mass parties by gaining the support of the middle classes as well as sections of the liberal elites; and Mussolini and Hitler were appointed to lead a government by their respective heads of state. Until the mid-1930s, then, Nazism stirred fewer emotions than might have been expected in hindsight. As far as the Japanese were concerned, the politics and ideology of Nazism complemented Italian Fascism and confirmed the concept of fascism as the trend of the times.

The Third Reich, however, had a very eager audience among young elite intellectuals and bureaucrats. These groups' interest in Nazism was not coincidental, because they had mediated German–Japanese interactions since the late nineteenth century. Then, legal scholars modeled the Meiji constitution on the German one while the founders of the Imperial Army borrowed the organizational structure of the Prussian military. Japanese students attended German universities to learn about technology, the economic theories of the German Historical School,

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medicine, and philosophy.[6] This trend continued—indeed, expanded—after World War I. More Japanese learned German during the interwar period than in Meiji, and Germany was the prime destination for government-sponsored students.[7] Starting in the early 1920s, bureaucrats and military planners studied Germany's wartime mobilization of its human and economic resources to learn lessons for a future total war. Thus, examining how the Nazis reformed Germany was part of a longer history of intellectual relations between the two countries.

The young Japanese technocrats, also known as "reformist bureaucrats," were drawn to Hitler's Germany because of Nazi ideas and policies of scientific management.[8] The Great Depression wreaked havoc on societies around the world and, to the technocrats' mind, it had also discredited the principles of free market that underpinned liberal capitalism. They sought a solution to this crisis by giving the state a leading role in the economy. State planning, it appeared, had been a policy in the three countries that had weathered the Great Depression most successfully: namely, the Soviet Union with its five-year plans; Fascist Italy's corporatism; and, after 1933, Nazi Germany's efforts to build a "national economy" (*Volkswirtschaft*). Soviet planning, though experimented with in Manchuria, was problematic because it smacked of communism. Italy's corporatism was appealing because of its attempt to break the deadlock between the interests of capital and labor. The legal scholar Alfredo Rocco theorized that the state would create social harmony by integrating nationalism with legal and industrial reforms. Hijikata Seibi (1890–1929), an economist at Tokyo Imperial University and a pioneer in the research of Fascist economics, endorsed Fascism's "machinery of control" (*tōsei kikō*).[9] Many Japanese, however, were disturbed by the Italian model because it seemed to invoke a large degree of state involvement, which some commentators described as quasi-communist. By contrast, Nazi policies seemed to respect private initiative and safeguard the interests of capital to a greater degree. As Janis Mimura has shown, there were widespread plaudits for the national economics of academics like the Werner Sombart and Friedrich von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld, whose theories predated the Nazi rise to power but found an articulation into policy in the Nazi state.[10] Technocrats such as Kishi Nobusuke, a rising star in the bureaucracy and future postwar prime minister, admired the German rationalization movement, its industrial relations and "management technologies."[11]

Yet many technocrats were unconcerned about the distinction between Nazism and Fascism, especially when economic policies were mixed with the larger question of state reform. A case in point is that of the political scientist Rōyama Masamichi, a colleague of Hijikata at the Imperial University and an exponent in the Shōwa Research Association (Shōwa Kenkyūkai). Founded in 1933, the research group came to include high-level intellectuals, such as the philosopher

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Miki Kiyoshi, the political scientist Sassa Hiroo, and the economist Ryū Shintarō, and provided policy advice to the higher echelons of the government: after 1937, the association counseled Prime Minister Prince Konoe Fumimaro on a wide range of issues from Japan's policy toward China to the domestic New Order Movement.[12] Rōyama had observed Italian Fascism since the 1920s and, by the 1930s, had hailed it as a positive ideology because it created new principles for a "national economy" while dispensing of the parliamentary system. To him, Nazism merely built on what Italian Fascism had already started, reaffirming the need to link nationalism to policy reforms. Consequently, he often used "fascism" as shorthand for both Italian Fascism and German Nazism.[13]

When discussing the practicality of Fascism and Nazism as models to be appropriated, technocrats may well have distinguished between Italy and Germany; but, ideologically, the two generally fell under the umbrella term of "fascism." This trend is confirmed elsewhere. Before *Nachi* became the standard Japanese word for Nazi, newspapers often translated National Socialist Party as *kokusui-tō*. *Kokusui*, meaning "national essence," was the same word that had been used to translate "Fascism" in the early 1920s.[14] A decade later, the sociologist Shinmei Masamichi formalized the genealogical affinity between Nazism and Fascism in a series of articles he wrote in Germany, where he was studying. He concluded that fascism was a world phenomenon and that "we should regard the NSDAP as the most typical frontline of fascism."[15]

Thus, when Nazism came of age, fascism was already in place. When it came to classifications, Nazism rarely stood on its own, as emerges also from the indexes of studies on fascism that were published during these years. In 1933 the left-wing Tokyo Research Institute for Social Science published the *Guide to the Study of Fascism* (*Fashizumu sankō bunken*), a sixty-page reference work that included studies of Italian Fascism, Nazism, and a range of similar movements and ideologies in Europe and Japan. Even the Japanese state followed this pattern. Several ministries, including the Home Ministry, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Justice, kept watch on right-wing publications and associations. Often, as in the case of the Police Bureau of the Home Ministry, officials classified the spectrum of the Right under the general rubric of fascism, which they then divided into subcategories wherein they sought minute differences between Fascism, Nazism, and, indeed, such domestic movements as Japanism (*nihonshugi*) and national socialism (*kokkashakaishugi*).[16] As a result, although Italy lacked the clout of Germany, it was the Italian ideology that defined its German counterpart—and, in due time, the Japanese version.[17]

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## Theorizing Japanese Fascism

On October 27, 1930, Benito Mussolini proclaimed that fascism, as an "idea, doctrine, and realization, is universal."[18] Japanese liberal and left-wing intellectuals could not have agreed more with the Duce. Mussolini's popularity around the world, Hitler's headway in Germany, and, at home, the anti-parliamentary tide as well as the rumblings about autarky, made contemporary observers aware that Fascist Italy merely foreshadowed a larger, global, trend. As early as 1927 the progressive current affairs journal *Kaizō* published an article entitled "critique of fascism," a roundtable discussion in which intellectuals weighed the possibility that fascism might also take root in Japan. In the words of the anarchist writer Ishikawa Sanshirō, one of the participants, "Musso's [*Musso kun*] Fascist movement may be a dictatorship, but it is the expression of a new era."[19] By the early 1930s, intellectuals realized that the conventional political lexicon failed to capture the ideological shifts to the right and proceeded to analyze their present through the concept of fascism.

Japanese liberal and Marxist critics produced theories of fascism in an attempt to answer this question: How could one explain that even though fascism arose at the same time around the world, in Japan it was assuming a configuration of its own? It was a problem that presupposed a comparative analysis with Italy and Germany as the prime points of reference. As even the research branch of the Japan Industrial Club was willing to admit, "Italy offers the raw materials for the study of world fascism."[20] The result was a number of sophisticated analyses of fascism in Japan and in general. Intellectuals affirmed the commonalities between fascism in Japan and the two European countries without, however, elevating Italian or German fascism as a quintessential model. For example, on the crucial issue of the seizure of power they were unconvinced that it was necessary for a movement or a party, such as the Fascist Party or the NSDAP, to take over. Rather, they suspected that fascism could infiltrate political and social institutions gradually, without causing a neat rupture. Moreover, they recognized that, ideologically, Japanese fascism concealed itself as mainstream nationalism and, in this guise, won over the support of actors beyond the radical Right, including liberals and socialists. In so doing, during the first half of the 1930s, an antifascist discourse emerged that reflected the wider concern about Japan's slide into fascism and that depended on a conscious comparison—and connection—with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

In their assessment of fascism, liberal intellectuals were primarily concerned with offering a diagnosis of the crisis of liberal democracy. The threat to political parties and "constitutional politics" (*rikken seiji*) posed by a broad and heterogeneous fascist "movement" (*undō*) had become apparent to most people, including

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the figurehead of 1920s liberalism, the political scientist Yoshino Sakuzō. In 1932, shortly after the Manchurian Incident and only months before his death, Yoshino published "Fascism in Japan" in the semiofficial English-language journal *Contemporary Japan*. The article reveals his pessimism about the future of democracy in Japan. "[Fascism] has come to Japan, and although its various exponents in this country have carefully explained that it is something very different from Fascism anywhere else, the principles upon which it relies, the methods it adopts, the nature of its support and the ends it pursues are the same as those of similar movements in other parts of the world." Fascism, he concluded, was obviously a "commodity" for export.[21] Yet the article is of interest also because it exemplifies the attempts made in the early 1930s to widen the scope of the concept of fascism. Abstracting from the Italian variety, Yoshino proposed a remarkably generic definition of fascism as the "rule of the disciplined and resolute few as against that of the undisciplined and irresolute many."[22]

In his analysis of fascism in Japan, Yoshino argued that a broad, if as yet dispersed, fascist movement had enveloped Japanese politics, and that, given the right circumstances, it could indeed seize power.[23] Although he singled out the military as the most radical carriers of fascism, he also applied the term to a wider array of social actors, suggesting that fascism could garner support from mainstream politics. Fascism included "anti-democratic," "national," and statist ideas and was animated by "various groups" that, "in spite of their occasional repudiation of the title, can reasonably be called Fascists."[24] Yoshino pointed to three groups. The first were the "proletarians of the right" who spearheaded the theoretical and practical development of a socialism with Japanese characteristics: national socialism (*kokkashakaishugi*). The concept was coined in the mid-1920s by the thinker Takabatake Motoyuki, but it was his successors, especially Akamatsu Katsumarō and Tsukui Tatsuo, former Marxists like Takabatake, who attempted to convert his ideas into practice by forming a political party through a (botched) alliance of right-wing social democrats, ex-communists, and peasant parties. Yoshino noted the resemblance in name to Hitler's National Socialism, adding that its "undemocratic program" was typical of the "left-wing" predilection for "direct action." The second were the military, which, he remarked, had in recent years launched an offensive against party politics under the pretense that the incapacity of politicians to provide adequate backing to the army's and navy's needs threatened Japan's national survival. In the minds of many officers, the logic was that the "only way to prevent politics from controlling the Army, and thus imperiling the national safety, was for the Army to influence, if not control, politics," a vision for which they received the support of crucial political personalities such as Adachi Kenzō, who had occupied the positions of Communications and Interior ministers, and who, in 1932, formed the National Alliance with fellow fascist

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sympathizer Nakano Seigō.[25] Third were the "right-wing" (*uyoku*) organizations, such as the Amur River Society (Kokuryūkai) and the Greater Japan Production Party (Dai Nihon Seisantō), which stressed the spiritual values of Japan as a remedy to Western individualism and materialism.[26]

Yoshino made another, comparative, observation. He argued not only that Japan had its share of fascist groupings but also that the country's larger political condition was altogether similar to that of Italy ten years earlier. In both countries there reverberated a rhetoric of "patriotism": "As Mussolini invokes the glories of Rome, so his Japanese counterparts invoke the glories of Yamato; as he praises the sterner ways of the Roman past, so they laud the sterner ways of Old Japan; as he denounces the imported systems of Northern Europe, so they denounce the imported systems of the West."[27] Yoshino believed that four factors were necessary for the success of fascism: proletarian backing, military backing, a crisis in national affairs, and sufficient "national emotion." Strikingly, however, only three of these factors existed in Italy, whereas "in Japan today we have all four." Yoshino did not elaborate on this distinction, but it is safe to assume that the fourth element was the military, which had not played a major role in Italian Fascism's rise to power. In other words, Japan was more prone for fascism in 1932 than Italy had been in 1922. "Hence our fascist movement," Yoshino bemoaned, "or rather movements—for up to the present they are not entirely correlated—constitute an extremely powerful force, and one which, in the opinion of many, may ultimately succeed in bringing about a fundamental change of régime."[28]

Although this was another example of Yoshino's attempt to extrapolate fascism from its Italian context, it was an assessment with no ambition to construct a theory of fascism. He occupied an intermediate position between the older, 1920s view of fascism as reactionary politics and the sociological interpretations that were put forth by a younger generation in the 1930s. It was the critic and public intellectual Hasegawa Nyozekan who made the most radical liberal assessment of fascism in Japan. Hasegawa's reflections on the subject appeared in 1932, collected in *A Critique of Japanese Fascism* (*Nihon Fashizumu hihan*).[29] He argued that, to seize power, fascism did not need to overthrow the existing institutions, as Yoshino had maintained, but could grow "legally" within a political system: fascist essence could coexist with democratic forms.

Because fascism mutated in time and space, for Hasegawa a theory of fascism had to account for its change, both domestic and international. Although he was no Marxist, he detected the roots of fascism's dynamism in socioeconomic factors, grounding his theory on the assumption that capitalism caused the kind of class conflict of which fascism was an expression. The central problem, he argued, was that, because both Italy and Japan were "late developers," their capitalism was "halfway" (*chūtohanpa*) and, as a consequence, also their bourgeoisie

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was immature. Sensing its own fragility, the bourgeoisie strove to keep the left-wing parties out of parliament, leaving the socialists with no other solution than a violent overthrow of bourgeois democracy. Calls for social revolution, however, alienated the petty bourgeoisie from the proletariat, precipitating the two classes into a bitter class conflict. In the desperate attempt to avoid its proletarianization, the petty bourgeoisie, in fighting for a political space of its own, found that fascism best expressed its ambitions and grievances. Fascism, Hasegawa argued, arose out of a "standstill" in class conflict as the "instinctive, primitive, and infantile" manifestation of the "unenlightened" petty bourgeoisie.[30] Yet, even as he singled out the petty bourgeoisie as the carrier of fascist ideology, Hasegawa believed that this class would act differently in different countries and, as a consequence, generate different fascist formations.

Hence, Hasegawa redefined the notion of fascism by displacing Italy as its archetype. While he conceded that Mussolini's rise at the head of a large, petty-bourgeois, fascist movement constituted "primitive" fascism (*genshiteki*), he suggested that another road was possible whereby an interclass amalgamation between the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie could lead to fascism through the already existing parliamentarian institutions—what he called "cool fascism." What distinguished Italy was that a large, organized, Left served as a concrete enemy for the petty bourgeoisie, which, in opposition, organized itself around fascism. In Japan, however, the socialist movement had "stalled in a position of extreme powerlessness," leaving the petty bourgeoisie without a clearly defined social enemy.[31] Thus the petty bourgeoisie and its ideology were absorbed into the "two great [bourgeois] parties," the Minseitō and the Seiyūkai, which, despite their weakness, dominated politics to such an extent that "third forces" were unable to challenge them.[32] Yet this co-opting of the petty bourgeois came at a price: the embrace of fascism by the bourgeoisie. "Eventually," Hasegawa argued, "bourgeois democracy has overcome the confrontation with the petty bourgeoisie, but it was a conditional overcoming."[33] For if the petty bourgeoisie ended up playing to the interests of the bourgeoisie, bourgeois politics in turn would absorb the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie—that is, fascism.

Hasegawa expanded this point into the foundation for a general theory of fascism, suggesting that "legal fascism" (*gōhōteki fashizumu*) was at work not only in Japan but also across the world. In short, he stood Yoshino's comparison on its head, regarding Fascist Italy, not Imperial Japan, as a peculiar manifestation of fascism. Outside of Italy, he argued, "if we look at the modern world, we cannot see one example of a capitalist state whose power [*seiken*] is based upon the violence and ideology of the middle class."[34] In most other countries fascism became a "prop for the big bourgeoisie."[35] For Hasegawa, this phenomenon was visible in England, where Oswald Mosley's fascist party was operating inside parliament;

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in Germany, where Hitler's future depended on his willingness to assume a bourgeois strategy and make his movement into a proper political party; and even in Italy, where Hasegawa observed a "transformed fascism" (*henshitsu fashizumu*) whose petty bourgeois origin had evolved into representing the interests of the bourgeoisie.[36]

Hasegawa departed from Yoshino in that he outlined a theory in which fascism was not merely a political struggle between democratic and antidemocratic forces but the result of social conflict. And yet both agreed on one fundamental point. They located the nature of fascism outside the philosophical tradition of liberalism and its social representative, the bourgeoisie. Yoshino may have blamed the political leadership for its corruption and its lack of democratic sentiment and Hasegawa singled out the bourgeoisie for its porosity to fascist ideology, but neither implicated this class as having played a decisive role in the rise of fascism. They regarded the petty bourgeoisie, the military, the proletarian movement—all those classes and groups that they surmised to be untouched by liberalism—as the true carriers and implementers of fascism. Yoshino excluded the ruling classes a priori; Hasegawa excused the bourgeoisie's role by arguing that it was weak and incomplete. Both of them foreshadowed postwar liberal interpretations of fascism, exemplified in Maruyama Masao's work on fascism, which emphasized the backward character of fascism and absolved the most "progressive" class, the bourgeoisie, from responsibility.[37]

The task of elaborating the link between the bourgeoisie, capitalism, and fascism was left to Marxists. By the 1930s, intellectuals associated with the Japanese Communist Party had largely accepted the official Comintern thesis on fascism. Espoused in Japan by two never identified Soviet scholars, Tanin and Yohan, this view reduced fascism to the violent dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, even if it included the monarchy and the social democrats as its willing supporters (notoriously, the latter were termed "social fascists"). This dogmatic thesis was challenged by the philosopher and cultural critic Tosaka Jun in a series of writings in the early 1930s, but especially in "The Japanese Ideology" (*Nihon ideorogiiron*). Tosaka expanded the existing understanding of fascism in two ways. First, he challenged the Comintern thesis by showing that fascism ruled, not just through dictatorial repression, but also by generating consent. Echoing his Italian contemporary, Antonio Gramsci, Tosaka argued that the power of fascism resided in its capacity to produce "hegemony" by making the nation central to people's common sense (*jōshiki*). Second, he complicated Hasegawa Nyozekan's thesis about "cool fascism."[38] For Tosaka, fascism went beyond the economic and political domains. Fascism did not only take over political institutions in a barely perceptible manner; its capacity to work at the level of people's common sense also meant that it

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crept into a nation's culture. In this sense, the sophistication of Tosaka's analysis lies in his explanation of the insidiousness of fascism.[39]

Because Tosaka assumed that fascism was globally consistent but locally diverse, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were important points of reference. He argued that it was crucial to recognize the conjuncture—"the general international situation"—of fascism in the early 1930s. Hitler consolidated his power, Mussolini interfered in Austria, Roosevelt built America's own "national industrial rationalization" (*sangyō kokka tōsei*), and the Japanese military set up Manchukuo for the same purpose. Japan's "nationalist movements" (*kokusui undō*) mirrored the Italian Fascists and the German Nazis. Yet if Japanese fascism—what he variously called "Japanese ideology" (*Nihon ideorogiiron*) or Japanism (*nihonshugi*)—was an inflection of a worldwide phenomenon, it also represented the messy combination of several domestic fascisms. Although they had different characteristics and called themselves by various names, such as Pan-Asianists, advocates of the "kingly way" (*ōdō*), or national socialists, for Tosaka they were all constituent parts of *nihonshugi*. These right-wing movements, then, were complemented by other "technicians" of fascism: the military (especially the officer corps), the bureaucrats, and intellectuals like the philosopher and historian Watsuji Tetsurō. All these streams gave Japanese fascism an ambiguous quality. On one side, their "random" (*manzen*) character and lack of ideological coherence made it difficult to form a united political force. On the other, their obsession with that empty and "harrowing principle, 'Japan,'" had an enormous advantage: because it could be arbitrarily filled with abstract and spiritual meaning through the symbols and myths of the nation, *nihonshugi* wielded a formidable populist appeal, and not just among the masses. "Indeed, in the last two or three years," Tosaka wrote, "the Japanese ideology has been produced in great quantities and has begun to pervade the press, as well as the fields of literature and science."[40]

For Tosaka, the spread of fascism would not have been possible without the complicity of liberalism. Challenging the assumption that liberalism presented a self-contained theoretical body that distinguished it from fascism, Tosaka argued that the two ideologies overlapped in a discourse on the nation. Liberalism had two fundamental problems. First, in Japan it had never been more than "passive." With the exception of thinkers like Yoshino Sakuzō, Hasegawa Nyozekan, and Kawai Eijirō, political liberalism had few outspoken adherents, even though journalism had made some of its principles into the "common sense" of the petty bourgeoisie. But in this form it was a "moody liberalism" (*kibunteki jiyūshugi*) that, when entering into crisis, swung toward fascism. Second, when liberalism failed to solve materially the social contradictions of capitalism, it reached for an "idealist" (*kannenteki*) solution based on national ethics, spirituality, and national history:

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in the effort to maintain the social status quo, the ruling classes exhorted the people to unity and harmony by appealing to their sense of Japaneseness. Liberalism, therefore, was "unarranged [*zatta*] thought" with almost no theoretical resistance to *nihonshugi*. "That liberals and liberalism do not walk over to *nihonshugi* is not because of their logical reasoning [*ronriteki konkyo*] but because of their mood; that they do not walk over to materialism is because of their logic."[41]

When capitalism entered a crisis, Tosaka continued, liberalism and fascism converged, because both sought spiritual (or culturalist) solutions to material (or social) problems. The result was a hybrid, *nihonshugi*. Contrary to Hasegawa's point that the established political parties had fallen under the onslaught of the Right and militarists, Tosaka argued that the bourgeois forces had transformed themselves from within, all the while maintaining intact Japan's parliamentary forms. It was a "constitutional fascism" (*rikkenteki fashizumu*) that "perplexes people with its liberal mimicry . . . it is a great mistake to think that fascism only assumes the political forms of a dictatorship."[42] Although the ideological impetus of fascism came from right-wing and military circles, the liberal role was to harmonize the conflicts among those groups over what was the proper nature of Japan's body politic. The most emblematic example of this coexistence, Tosaka continued, was the "movement to clarify the national polity [*kokutai*]" (*Kokutai meichō undō*, 1935), which attempted to put an end to the disputes over the position of the emperor by declaring him above the constitution. Liberal (high) culture helped to structure the various myths and symbols of fascism, to make them respectable by grounding them in national history; fascist populism, thanks to its social rootedness, contributed to popularize the spiritualist solution that liberalism advocated in its quest to maintain the status quo. In this way, the politics and language of *nihonshugi* came to be articulated in a discourse on the emperor (*kōdōshugi*).[43] In short, the relationship between liberalism and fascism was not so much opportunistic as symbiotic.

Hasegawa's and Tosaka's writings were, perhaps, the two most sophisticated and insightful in a vast debate on fascism. For both, the methodological starting point was a comparative analysis that frequently referred to commonalities with Italy and Germany. Yet Hasegawa, and more so Tosaka, also felt constrained by the Italian model of fascism because it did not help to understand why, in Japan, fascism was able to coexist with parliamentarian institutions and liberal ideology. Hasegawa employed his comparative analysis to draw out patterns peculiar to Japan, but Tosaka was not satisfied with this conclusion. By tying fascism to capitalist crisis, he pushed the comparison into a theory of global fascism, connecting fascism in Japan with its manifestations elsewhere. "Japanism is a Japanese variety [*isshu*] of fascism. Unless it is regarded in this

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way, it is not possible to understand it comprehensively as a link [*ikkan*] of an international phenomenon."[44]

## Fascism under Fire

It was this connection with Fascist Italy and, after 1933, with Nazi Germany, that those whom Yoshino, Hasegawa, and Tosaka singled out as fascists—or fellow travelers of fascism—worked hard to sever. In the first half of the 1930s everyone saw the signs of fascism; yet no one identified with it. The controversy that swirled around Baron Hiranuma Kiichirō was a case in point. Hiranuma had been a high-ranking bureaucrat in the Ministry of Justice, where he established a reputation for his anticommunism, a disposition that he backed up by strengthening the Special Higher Police. After being elevated to the peerage, he turned to politics and became a leading spokesman of the Right. He had founded the National Foundation Society (Kokuhonsha), a group that included military and industrial elites as well as high-level civil servants, and that rejected foreign ideologies, calling instead for a politics based on Japan's "national polity" (*kokutai*). This pedigree explains why the press singled him out as a fascist. In June 1932, Hiranuma felt compelled to reply to the latest accusation launched at him by the Marxist economist Ishihama Tomoyuki. Issuing a public announcement in the periodical *Kaizō*, Hiranuma declared that his "reformist movement" (*kakushin undō*) shared nothing with that of Mussolini: "Our nation is the nation of one sovereign and all the people [*ikkun banmin*], which means that all the people assist the nation with the imperial family at its center, paying their duty to achieve the supreme goal of the state, loving the life of the Japanese people [*Yamato minzoku*] and, especially, loving the great life of the state, for whose eternal, great life they are prepared to sacrifice their own lives." Incredibly, for Hiranuma, these values had nothing in common with those of fascism, which "arose from the national sentiment [*kokujō*] of a foreign country."[45] But, as Hiranuma's exculpation reveals—and as Tosaka had recognized—the logic of fascism was such that it eschewed global comparisons and links by concealing itself in the existing political process and nationalism.

The more fascism was discussed as a universal concept, the more Japanese fascists rejected it by retreating into national particularism. The nationalistic Right was in the throes of what has been called a "revolt against the West"—the notion that Japan had been contaminated by foreign ideas and habits and needed to restore its true national spirit.[46] The fixation with national uniqueness permeated all fields. From economics to politics and culture, intellectuals and activists on the Right assumed that there was a distinct Japanese way of solving the problems of modernity. This position also shaped their debates on fascism. Fascism, too,

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"Fassho Show," with a pun on the word *fassho* (fascism), immediately reminiscent of *fasshon* (fashion). The models include Baron Hiranuma Kiichirō, sitting on a deck chair; General Ugaki Kazushige, who was seen as close to rebellious elements in the army; and, creeping onto the platform, the then prime minister, Saitō Makoto.

*(Image courtesy of* Yomiuri shinbun*, June 11, 1934.)*

being foreign, they denied its applicability to Japan. In this sense, Japanese fascism had its enemies not just in liberalism and socialism, as Tosaka argued, but also constructed a fictitious one in Italian Fascism.

Ironically, when fascism flourished, it was difficult to be a fascist. That an association with fascism could hardly yield political dividends is evident from the few Japanese who identified with this ideology. When Shimoi Harukichi returned to Japan in early 1933, his first impulse was to pursue his activities in Japan under the flag of Italian Fascism. As he boasted to a journalist upon his arrival, "having been an adviser to the Japanese Embassy in Rome, our government will now want to ask me, an expert on Italy [*Itaria tsū*], about conditions there."[47] Within six weeks of his arrival, he published four volumes on Fascist corporatism.[48] But he miscalculated. Just as official Japan shunned the favors of someone who had become a domestic nuisance, or a learned public preferred academic studies on corporatism, so the Right had misgivings about Shimoi's conviction that Fascist Italy's national spirit mirrored that of Imperial Japan. The strategy Shimoi had devised in the 1920s no longer worked.

Although he remained attached to Fascism, even Shimoi realized that it was advantageous to revise his reputation as Mussolini's best Japanese friend. Toning down his outspoken fondness for Fascism, he embraced the language and tactics characteristic of the Japanese Right. For example, he urged Japanese to form a "greater union [*dai kessoku*] for the upcoming Shōwa Restoration."[49] In this effort, Shimoi began to navigate the precarious waters of the Japanese Right. Cap-

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italizing on his past as an educator, he reached out to teachers of the military, such as Banzai Ichirō, who between 1926 and 1932 was an instructor at the General Staff College, later a member of the Army General Staff, then a functionary for the Education Inspector General, or Ushijima Mitsune, head of the Education Section at the Army Engineer School.[50] He flirted with agrarianism (*nōhonshugi*), an ideology that championed rural communalism as an antidote to both capitalism and communism.[51] Although his exact involvement in agrarianist movements is difficult to establish, he served as the director of the agrarian sheet *Agriculture and Forestry Newspaper* (*Nōrin shinbun*) for which he traveled throughout Japan and its empire (on at least one occasion, he visited Korea and Manchuria). Interspersed with these endeavors were contacts with the ever more rabidly nationalistic Tokutomi Sohō, as well as a friendship with the doyens of the radical Right, Tōyama Mitsuru and Uchida Ryōhei.

Shimoi's attempt to promote fascism by infiltrating homegrown associations is best visible in his collaboration with the sect Ōmoto. Founded in 1892, this "new religion" was related to Shinto practices and was originally dedicated to "improving the world" through spiritual teachings.[52] In the 1930s, under the leadership of Deguchi Onisaburō, Ōmoto embarked on a secular project to reform Japan along right-wing lines, becoming one of the largest associations of its kind. The imposing size of the sect—in 1935 it had 1,990 local branches, 9,000 missionaries, and a membership of one to three million—attracted to its midst various right-wing exponents, including Tōyama Mitsuru and Uchida Ryōhei. As shown by Nancy K. Stalker, the sect's success owed much to Deguchi's "charismatic leadership" and his skilled use of modern mass media.[53] That a so-called new religion was entrusted to a charismatic leader was nothing new, but Deguchi departed from his predecessors by using print media, exhibitions, and film to spread the organization's message. Most crucially for the sect's right-wing activities, in 1933 Deguchi founded a political wing, the Shōwa Shinseikai (Shōwa Holy Association). The organization was launched with great fanfare the following year at a ceremony held at the renowned Kudan Army Hall in central Tokyo, and which saw the attendance of right-wing leaders, but also official authorities such as the home minister, the ministers of education, agriculture, and forestry, as well as fourteen Diet members, the speaker of the House of Representatives, major military figures, and academics. Clearly, the aim was to create a major force capable of absorbing the many strands of the Right.[54]

During the two years of its existence Shimoi was the Shinseikai's "chief of staff" (*sanbōchō*), a position that he used to introduce Italian Fascist practices to the movement, even though he refrained from openly declaring them as such. Shimoi's Fascist skills were ideally suited to transform Ōmoto into a political organization with a mass base. He was the association's public voice and promoted it by

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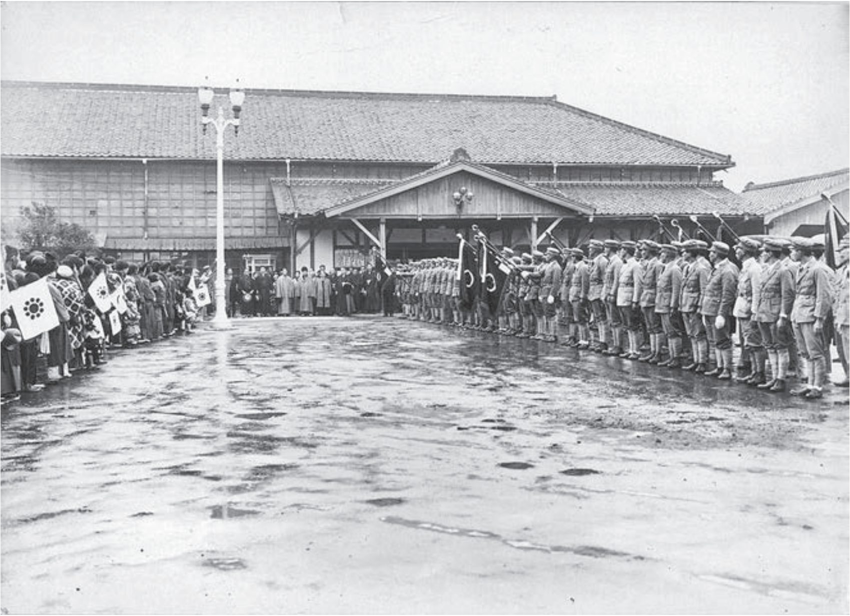

Members of the Shōwa Shinseikai in paramilitary formation, ca. 1933. Reviewing them, at the far end, are Deguchi Onisaburō and, standing on his right, Shimoi Harukichi.

*(Photo courtesy of Kuribayashi Machiko, Tokyo.)*

producing films and accompanying Deguchi from Hokkaidō to Taipei.[55] He adjusted Fascist choreography to the Shinseikai. During the Ōmoto trial, the prosecutor asked a defendant whether it was true that, "when they visited their branches a flag bearer would be at the head of the march holding the leader's flag," and whether it was really the case that "Shinseikai members would lead or follow Deguchi's car as escorts." The defendant answered that "yes, those were Shimoi's instructions," adding that he himself had "marched before and behind" Deguchi's car, having been told by Shimoi not "to worry—I did the same in Italy."[56] Italian Fascist undertones are evident in the military drills, as well as in the vocabulary Shimoi employed. Speaking of the mission of the Shōwa Shinseikai, Shimoi declared that a small number of people could formulate the policies to reform the state, but that, to achieve the ultimate goal of a "union" (*kessoku*, that is, a *fascio*) it was necessary to mobilize all "the people" (*kokumin*) to forge order, discipline, and righteousness. The Shōwa Shinseikai, he argued, "is a movement that strives to achieve the great unity of the nation [*kokumin no daidō danketsu*] . . . and justice [*seigi*]."[57]

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Shimoi's efforts, however, came to little. Members of the Shinseikai were suspicious of Fascism and Nazism, and it is likely that their mistrust extended to Shimoi. Even though he was careful to avoid overt references to Italian Fascism, he was at pains to shed his reputation as a staunch sympathizer of Mussolini. Some members of the Shinseikai even openly attacked Fascism. One contributor to a Shinseikai publication put it bluntly, charging that, for all its nationalistic boasting, Italian Fascism had failed to come to terms with finance capitalism—indeed, Fascism was but the "naked figure of capitalism."[58] Even more detrimental to his plans was the official repression of the sect. In 1935, alerted by the Shinseikai's size and its subversive potential, government authorities crushed Ōmoto altogether, arresting its key leaders, including Deguchi. Despite his high-level position, Shimoi was able to avoid incarceration, perhaps because, like his associate Uchida Ryōhei, he turned his back on Ōmoto.[59] Still, his cooperation with Deguchi and the Shinseikai demonstrates how difficult it was to be a Fascist at the time of fascism.

Just how controversial the concept of fascism had become emerged in 1932, when a prominent writer of popular fiction publicly embraced the term. Early that year, Naoki Sanjūgo, the young critic and novelist after whom one of Japan's most prestigious literary awards is named, stirred the literary world when he announced that, "from 1932 until 1933, I will be a fascist."[60] He was seconded by a number of other writers of popular fiction, many specializing in historical samurai fiction—they thus earned the sobriquet "literary warriors" (*bunshi*)—and that included Yoshikawa Eiji, author of the epic samurai novel *Musashi*; Mikami Otokichi; writer and editor Kikuchi Kan; and the poet Satō Haruo.[61] Other aspiring writers jumped on the bandwagon, founding the short-lived Japanese Fascist League (Nihon Fassho Renmei), a literary group with its own publication.[62]

How did Naoki come to this declaration? Naoki was a writer of popular fiction (*taishū bungaku*) who opposed the influential literary movement known as "proletarian literature." Associated with the socialist or communist Left, proletarian writers and critics such as Kobayashi Takiji, Nakano Shigeharu, and Aono Suekichi published works for social purposes, generally emphasizing the conditions of the working class. Naoki and other young writers invoked "fascism" to provoke this literary current: they found in fascism's nationalism and anti-Marxism a possibility of breaking away from proletarian aesthetics. The tone of the fascist declaration was deliberately polemical. "One, two, three . . . here begins my struggle against the Left. Come on! If you come close I'll cut you down! How does it feel? Scary . . . ?"[63] Naoki's own political stance was ambiguous. Clearly, he intended his assertions to be inflammatory. But it also became known that he sought to forge connections with army officials.[64]

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Regardless of Naoki's true intentions, his declaration sparked a public debate on fascist literature (*bungei*) that involved some of Japan's most prominent writers and intellectuals. *Shinchō*, a leading journal of contemporary affairs and culture, held a number of roundtables (*zadankai*), inviting participants to comment on the question raised by Naoki, namely whether fascist literature was possible—or desirable—in Japan.[65] Most participants in the debate considered fascism a real political problem but doubted that it could generate its own literature. The literary and social critic Nii Itaru attacked Iwasaki Junko, a translator of modern Italian literature and cofounder of the Japanese Fascist League, on the grounds that even Italian Fascism had failed to create a distinctive form of literature. In Japan, Nii argued, fascism showed no sign of having its own "theory of literature." It was a mere fad, and a rather different one from the Marxist trend that had gripped Japan a decade earlier. In the 1920s it was possible to delineate a broad movement of "Marx-boys and Engels-girls," while to date there was no sign of "Fascist [*fassho*] boys or girls."[66] Maedakō Hiroichirō, the Marxist critic who in 1928 had composed a satirical play on Mussolini, also remarked that in those days "most artists [*bundanjin*] throw this curious [*myōna*] word at other people, or have it thrown at them by other people." But, he bemoaned, the tone was that of gossip, not of a serious discussion on the essence of fascism, an assessment that was echoed by his fellow critic Ōya Sōichi.[67]

The controversy sparked by Naoki revealed not only the polemical qualities of the concept of fascism, but also the fact that many writers were searching for an aesthetics that articulated a new nationalism without sounding foreign or, more precisely, fascist. When Naoki retracted the declaration at a roundtable in 1934, he argued that fascism, because it was a "transitional force characteristic of the crisis of old politics," could not generate its own literature. Rather, it was from Japan's "national essence" (*kokusui*) or from the "ancestral land" (*sokoku*) that a "national work" (*minzokuteki sakuhin*) would be born. Hayashi Fusao, a writer and critic who had recently renounced Marxism, joined him, asserting that he, too, felt the "desire to re-examine Japan, but this had nothing to do with fascist literature"; another participant in the discussion put it most explicitly when he argued that this new national work had to arise spontaneously out of the "patriotic spirit."[68] As argued by Alan Tansman, fascist aesthetics in Japan had to be felt, not theorized and articulated by a self-styled avant-garde.[69]

## Fascists against Fascism

As they faced fascism, right-wing ideologues also confronted a dilemma. On one side, they believed in the peculiar national spirit that had the emperor at its cen-

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ter. No other country, the argument ran, could boast a link of blood to the imperial family. On the other side, they realized that it was difficult to sustain unequivocal distinctions between how they understood the "national polity" (*kokutai*) and how Fascists and Nazis asserted the essence of Italian and German nationalism. They conceded that fascism was an improvement over socialism and liberalism but hesitated to embrace the idea that this modern ideology could rival the timeless essence of the *kokutai*.

Rather than simply disavowing fascism, however, many right-wing intellectuals sought ways to come to terms with the fascist worldview. Their core preoccupation was not so much with Fascism or Nazism, despite finding much to fault in these ideologies, but with the idea that fascism was universal, and therefore potentially also Japanese. Their debates resulted in what can be called a fascist critique of fascism: an admission of commensurability with Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany but qualified by the assertion that Japan's way to a new order was superior. As Naoki Sakai has claimed, the "Japanese fascist formation was at the same time obsessively exclusionary and open, particularistic in respect to the national spirit but universalistic in integrating groups of different ethnic, regional, gender, and class origins."[70] Italian Fascism, and German Nazism too, could be subsumed. In fact, the right-wing debates on fascism do not just reveal uneasiness with an ideology that uncomfortably mirrored their own; there was also plenty of intellectual fervor invested in the formulation of strategies to assimilate fascism. Indeed, the discourse and policies of the new order that characterized the mid- and late 1930s were articulated in relation to fascism. By 1937, these attempts led the Japanese Right to substitute for the global meaning of fascism what they saw as a truly universal concept—"Japan" and its *kokutai*.

The impulse to separate fascism from Japan while recognizing it as an ideology of historical significance led Japanese intellectuals to formulate a number of responses. The moral philosopher Sugimori Kōjirō (1881–1961) stands out for his attempt to reconcile fascism and liberalism. A graduate of Waseda University, Sugimori had studied abroad, financed by the Ministry of Education, spending the six years (1913–1919) in Germany and England. There he developed an antipositivist bent, expressed in his 1918 book *The Principles of the Moral Empire*. After the Great War, he surmised, the world would relinquish the materialism that had caused the conflict and, instead, embrace an ethical and religious spirit. "Moral and theological reforms" would restore the "individual as the center of the Whole" and promote social harmony.[71] Yet, as he confronted the social conflict of the 1920s, Sugimori lost his faith that transcendental change could be achieved through a moral transformation of the individual alone. It was necessary, he found, to draw on the force of the state to harmonize the struggle between labor and capital. With these concerns in mind, he turned to the study of fascism.

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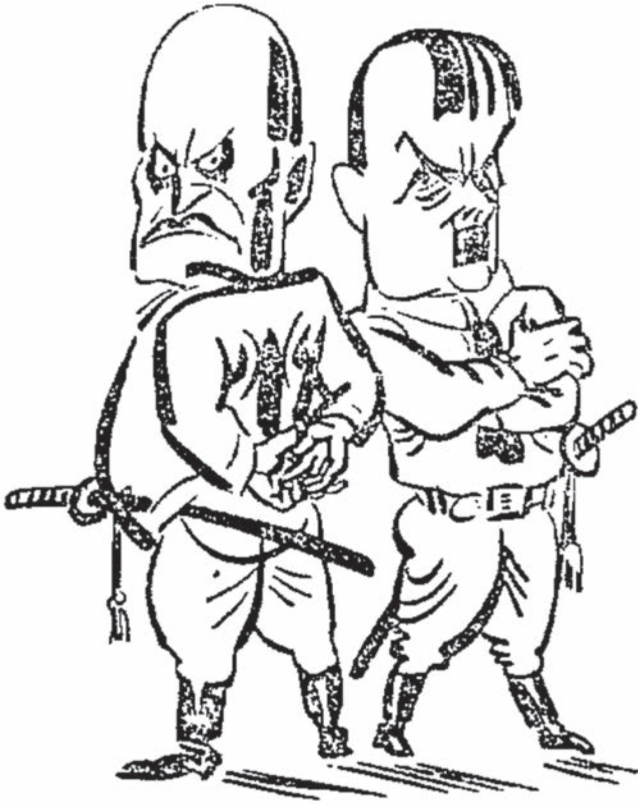

A Japanese Mussolini or Hitler? Maybe not.

*(Photo courtesy of* Yomiuri shinbun*, April 20, 1933.)*

In 1933, Sugimori published a two-part critique of fascism in the journal *Shakai seisaku jihō* (Social Policy Report), the mouthpiece of the Concordia Association (Kyōchōkai), a half-private, half-official association that aimed to devise policies to harmonize relations between labor and capital. Sugimori understood fascism in three ways—as "reinforced [*saikyōka*] nationalism," "controlled [*tōsei*] economy," and "dictatorship." He admired the kind of nationalism championed by Mussolini because, to his mind, it presented a remarkable innovative improvement over the nationalism that was common before World War I. As developments in Italy demonstrated, this new nationalism had succeeded in mobilizing the people and fomenting "a decisive action" against communism.[72]

While he heralded Italian Fascism as a bold experiment in national rejuvenation, Sugimori did not believe, as was widely claimed by Mussolini's regime and its supporters, that Fascism constituted a third way between communism and

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liberalism. As he saw it, Fascism merely crushed liberalism through its wielding of state power. Probably in response to Mussolini's assertion that the state was everything, Sugimori mounted a philosophical defense of the individual. "The assumption," Sugimori wrote, "that human beings have no personal interests [*shieki*] or should have none, and that instead, a higher economic organization towers over them, is a vacuous construction. Personal interest ought to be recognized." Fascism, through its politics of spectacle and coercion, denied the individual his place in state and society. In Japan, by contrast, a peculiar relationship between the individual and the state had developed in the form of the national polity. The bond between the emperor and his subjects was benevolent, voluntary, and did not require an excessive use of violence. The state and the individual coexisted in harmony. He concluded that "fascism, in the case of Italy, is incomplete . . . a simplistic totalitarianism, no more than an illusion based on a deficient consciousness."[73]

The implication of this argument was that Japan—not Fascist Italy—represented the real model of a third way. Sugimori argued that Japanese ought to consolidate their polity by drawing eclectically from fascism to "amend" it. As liberalism stressed individualism, so fascism emphasized "communalism"; liberalism was reformist, fascism somewhat revolutionary; liberalism represented the bourgeoisie, fascism the proletariat. "For what we have in common [with Italy], we need to embrace totalitarian, communalist, dictatorial methods; for what concerns our own peculiarities, [we need] the method of liberalism. This will be a way to rejuvenate liberalism, while at the same time a method to adopt fascism."[74] The Japanese *kokutai*, it seemed to Sugimori, could achieve the necessary balance between fascism and other ideologies.

Many right-wing thinkers and activists were less sanguine about the possibility of dealing with fascism on an ad hoc basis. Defining the *kokutai* based on a distinction from fascism troubled them. As far as they were concerned, the superiority of the Japanese way was such that it did not just build on fascism but effectively superseded this foreign ideology. Validating the relationship between the Japanese people and the emperor meant to recognize that what fascism preached—the forging of national communities by bringing the people and the state together—had been part of Japan's national culture since antiquity. But because fascism unsettled long-held assumptions about the *kokutai*, the correct answer to the problem of fascism, they contended, had to come from within the Japanese tradition. There was little agreement, however, on what constituted this tradition. While all right-wingers shared a vague idea of revitalizing the nation by restoring power to the emperor, they fought bitterly over the means to achieve this goal.

Japan's right-wing movement eschews easy generalizations. It was vast in size—according to one account, some 750 groups were operating in Japan and

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its empire by 1936.[75] The groups could be either military or civilian, or a mixture, and differing constituencies often led to factionalism.[76] Ideologically, thinkers theorized about different avenues toward reform. Agrarianists (*nōhonshugisha*) championed farmers and the countryside; Japanists (*nihonshugisha*) called for a general spiritual revolution from below, at the hands of impassioned patriots; national socialists (*kokkashakaishugisha*) advocated state reform from above as the first step toward national reform.[77] In these disputes, fascism played an important role. Representing a foreign force of national revival, it helped to integrate the various currents of the Japanese Right, demonstrating that, ultimately, for rightists the problem was not fascism but their own political identity.

The centrality of fascism to the redefinition of the Japanese Right from the early to the mid-1930s can be seen in the theoretical debates between the Japanists and the national socialists.[78] From the late 1920s, these currents expressed a mixture of condemnation and admiration for Italian Fascism, as is evident from the writings of their exponents, Kita Reikichi, a leader in the Japanist camp and the brother of the more famous activist Kita Ikki, as well as Takabatake Motoyuki, the theorist and founder of national socialism.[79] In line with the mainstream view of the 1920s, they dismissed fascism as an Italian form of nationalism, serving primarily the necessities of Italy. Both mistrusted the general Japanese enthusiasm for Mussolini that had erupted in 1928. Kita argued that, only in the case that a domestic reformist movement failed to happen, "contrary to our liking we will have to long for the miraculous appearance of a Japanese Mussolini." That same year, Takabatake published a collection of essays in which he attacked Mussolini and Italian Fascism. He thundered that Fascism was "non-thought thought" (*mushisō no shisō*) because its claim to have overcome capitalism was a fraud: its economic policies were the result of a compromise that pleased the "capitalist class."[80] If there was a "thought" animating Mussolini, it was limited to an obsession with action.

It is striking that the rhetoric of the radical Right could be the most outspokenly denunciatory of fascism throughout the ideological spectrum. The derogatory use of the term "fascism" is evident in the way national socialists and Japanists condemned each other. In their polemics they frequently associated their rival with a particularly distasteful facet of Italian fascism. Takabatake accused the Japanist legal scholar Ninagawa Arata of single-mindedly heralding Mussolini's "heroism" (*eiyūshugi*), while remaining silent on his unconvincing industrial policies.[81] Just like the Duce, Takabatake continued, Japanists spoke the rhetoric of patriotism but in reality were little more than "the running dogs of the power of the established class, their puppets."[82] For their part, Japanists attacked the national socialists for being socialists in disguise. For Kita Reikichi, "if communism is the tiger in front of the gate, national socialism is the wolf inside the

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yard."[83] Mimicking Italian Fascism, which, in Kita's view, contained strong socialist elements, the state socialists had created "an original form of Japanese fascism"—in reality little more than "made-in-Japan [*wasei*] Bolshevism."[84]

Yet Japanists and national socialists were attracted to a specific goal of Fascism, that of forging a strong national community by reconnecting the people and the state. Both concurred in praising Fascist "rule" (*shihai*). As someone who believed in the necessity for the people to self-mobilize for the nation, Kita spoke fondly of Mussolini for having instilled this idea in Italians. As a result, he claimed that Italians had replaced "inefficiency, selfishness, and disorder with efficiency, discipline, and law and order."[85] By contrast, Takabatake expressed interest in the way Mussolini had revitalized the role of the state. Takabatake mistrusted individuals, arguing that the state was a prerequisite for taming their natural selfishness. In this regard, he concluded that, when it came to the "subject of rule [*shihai no shutai*], it is easier for a small number of able men to improve efficiency."[86] For Takabatake, an efficient state would engineer the spontaneous support of the people because it healed the social wounds caused by capitalism.

Kita and Takabatake were not alone in applauding fascism's merits as a community-building ideology. A large number of Japanist and national socialist ideologues became aware that they shared with fascism the goal of molding the people and the state into an organic totality. In 1927 Mussolini sloganeered that in his regime "everything [was] in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state," later referring to these principles as "totalitarianism." The term was to have a long and often controversial life, being picked up by postwar political scientists as well as historians to describe a range of political systems that were not of the liberal capitalist kind, especially those of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.[87] Yet, as Fuke Takahiro has shown, there was a Japanese precedent for "totalitarianism."[88] In 1918 the philosopher and naval officer Kanokogi Kazunobu used the term *zentaishugi* to define a "transcendental state" that was premised on Japan's "unbroken line of imperial succession for ages eternal" (*bansei ikkei*) and, ultimately, represented by the union of the emperor and his subjects. Like Mussolini's *stato totalitario*, so Kanokogi's *zentaishugi* had positive connotations in that it referred not so much to the atomization of the individual in the face of a repressive state, the characteristic ascribed to totalitarianism by postwar theorists, but, to the contrary, to a harmonious union of the nation with the state.[89]

Kanokogi's idea of "totality" was revived in the 1930s, both by himself and by fellow right-wing ideologues, at about the same time that Mussolini developed his brand of totalitarianism. Japanists and national socialists recognized the commonalities, even if often with reservations. Nakatani Takeyo, a political scientist educated at Tokyo Imperial University, Japanist activist, and disciple of Kanokogi, acclaimed the reforms enacted by the Fascist minister for education, the

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philosopher Giovanni Gentile. In his view, Gentile had successfully remodeled Italian schools in such a way that children's minds were developed not only through "abstract knowledge" but also through "real action" (*jissai no kōdō*). Under such impulses, he believed, children's "personalities" were forged and their "moral character" tempered.[90] Fascist education was "thoroughly nationalistic and Italian culture-centered," one that "our own educators must take into consideration."[91] Education was an integral part of what he called the "fascist view of the state" (*kokka kan*), which fostered "action-centered nationalism" and, ultimately, rebuilt the "totality" (*zentai*) of the nation. This undertaking characterized both Italian and German fascisms, so that, he advised, "it is clear what the essence and direction of Japanese fascism ought to be."[92]

Totalitarianism was also central to the logic that led national socialists to mitigate their severe stance on fascism. After the death of Takabatake in 1928, their new leaders, especially Tsukui Tatsuo (1901–1989) and the ex-communist Akamatsu Katsumarō, began to stress the need to incorporate a broad, popular movement into their plans for state reform. This about-face on the role of mobilizing the masses led to a reevaluation of Italian Fascism. Tsukui backtracked on the assertion of his mentor, Takabatake, that Fascism was "non-thought thought," asserting that Fascism possessed "a highly suggestive theoretical content": it opposed Western liberalism and individualism with "totalitarianism" (*zentaishugi*). Citing the legal innovations carried out by Alfredo Rocco, the theorist of Italian corporatism, Tsukui examined the Fascist attempt to unite Italians and their state. The Italian experiment, however, had a flaw. Because it was carried out from above without involving the people, the Italian version was "totalitariansim of the Fascist Party"—that is, it was fabricated and rhetorical. Unlike this Italian artifice, Japanese totalitarianism would be organic, because the people and state had been linked for three thousand years in "will" and "blood." "In the case of Japan and the Japanese, totalitarianism is for the first time not just reckless talk but an embodiment of reality."[93]

It is possible to make two observations about the debate between Japanists and national socialists. First, as they evaluated the qualities of Japan's ideology in relation to Fascism, they came to a rapprochement. To be sure, they would not coalesce into a united front of the Right, as personal and ideological animosities lingered. But they did reach an unspoken compromise on the quest for a politics of totality. They agreed that what Japan needed was a way to strengthen the country by bringing the people and the state together, and, they concurred, this operation required simultaneously a mobilization from below and a reorganization of the institutions. Second, while they recognized the commonality of interest with Fascism, they were immovable on the superiority of the Japanese way and therefore proceeded to formulate Japan's totality in a political language that was

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unaffected by foreign thought. The rhetoric they advanced was that of the "imperial rule" (*kō*). This concept was conveniently vague. It spoke to those who emphasized that rule (*shihai*) was about forging a new subjectivity through a spiritual link between the emperor and his subjects but also to those who saw it as a problem of sovereignty, at the heart of which lay the question of how the state mediated the emperor's will. Not surprisingly, terms invoking the "imperial" proliferated in the right-wing language of the 1930s. This mood beame clear to Nakatani Takeyo when, in 1932, he published an article in which he reviewed recent debates on "reformist" thought. "In the end," he wrote, "one cannot avoid arriving at the holy ground of the imperial way"; the trend of times was "from fascism to the imperial way [*kōdōshugi*]."[94] As Tosaka Jun perceptively remarked in those years, the imperial way was nothing but a travesty of Japanese fascism.[95]

The significance of the right-wing discourse on fascism lies in what it reveals about the quest for Japanese political reform provoked by a clash of two ideologies that were at the same time conflicting and overlapping. Japanese ideologues accepted the premises of their European counterparts—that Fascism and Nazism were a push beyond liberalism and communism—but refused to recognize any fundamental connection to them. In other words, they were animated more by the desire to fight the fascist link than by fascism per se. Negating the concept but not its ideological elements, they articulated a fascist critique of fascism whose key claim to authority rested on the centrality of the emperor and the national polity (*kokutai*) in Japanese political life.

The sediments of right-wing antifascism settled in one of the decade's most defining documents, the *Cardinal Principles of Our National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongi*). Published in 1937 by the Ministry of Education, the pamphlet strove to establish the orthodoxy of the term *kokutai* by reconciling the decade-long disputes over its true meaning. The literary scholar Alan Tansman has rightly pointed to the tract's aesthetically charged language that "br[ought] readers to a sublime, fascist moment in which they might feel themselves to be one with their emperor and their brethren."[96] These aesthetics gave the text rhetorical consistency. Yet, in the context of the debates on fascism, it also becomes apparent that the *Cardinal Principles* reproduced the ideological conflicts over the *kokutai*. Its grandiloquent, religious overtones barely concealed its nature as a compromise—a number of intellectuals and bureaucrats had participated in its compilation—or the ongoing tensions over the association with fascism. Even though the authors of the tract recognized the emergence of "totalitarianism," "Fascism," and "Nazism" as proof that "the deadlock of individualism has led alike to a season of ideological and social confusion and crisis," it nonetheless relegated them to the category of Western ideologies and, as such, incompatible with Japan. Elsewhere, the text reneged on the disavowal of fascism. Invoking Japan's capacity to synthesize foreign

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elements, it expressed the confidence that also fascism, the latest emanation of Western thought, would be assimilated and "refined" in Japan. In yet another passage, the authors stated they believed that fascism could be selectively managed. To find a way out of the evils caused by individualism, they argued, it would not do either to reject Western ideas wholesale or to "mechanically exclude Occidental cultures."[97]

Fascism, in other words, was in one way or another comparable—but not compatible—with the *kokutai*, even though this was never meant to be more than tacitly understood. Nowhere was this state of affairs expressed more vividly than in a fictional dialogue imagined by the right-wing journalist and writer Murobuse Kōshin.

> A: I said that Fascism is not for export—these are not my words, but Mussolini's.
>
> B: Does that mean it cannot be applied to Japan?
>
> A: I'm not saying that it can be applied, or that it cannot be applied.
>
> B: So, neither?
>
> A: That both are correct is closer to what I'm thinking.
>
> B: What does that mean?
>
> A: It comes down to how fascism emerges—it doesn't really matter what you call it.
>
> B: So?
>
> A: So it's fine to call it fascism; it's also fine not to call it that. Perhaps it's better not to call it that. In that sense, let me announce that I'm not a fascist.[98]

The uneasy relationship between fascism and imperial politics generated a fake confusion that, in turn, dissimulated the fascist link.

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