

# MINIKOMI

ミニコミ

AUSTRIAN JOURNAL OF JAPANESE STUDIES

特集

SPECIAL ISSUE  
SCHWERPUNKT

90

DEMOCRATIC FUTURES NOW!

今こそ民主的な未来

[ Impressum | Imprint | 奥付 ]



**MINIKOMI: AUSTRIAN JOURNAL OF JAPANESE STUDIES**

URL: <https://journals.univie.ac.at/index.php/aaj>

ISSN (print): 2706-7424 | ISSN (online): 2706-7432

Publischer | Medieninhaber: Akademischer Arbeitskreis Japan (ZVR 168875489)

Print | Hersteller: Riegl-Ges.m.b.H, Neustiftgasse 12, 1070 Wien, Österreich

Number | Nummer: 90

Issue Editor | Ausgaben-Redaktion: Andreas Eder-Ramsauer & Anna Linder

doi range: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-00 ~15

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**AKADEMISCHER ARBEITSKREIS JAPAN**

ÖSTERREICHISCHE JAPANGESSELLSCHAFT FÜR WISSENSCHAFT UND KUNST  
AUSTRIAN JAPAN-SOCIETY FOR SCIENCE AND ART  
奥日学術交流会

Akademischer Arbeitskreis Japan - AAJ (ZVR 168875489)

Vereinszweck: Pflege und Förderung der Japanforschung sowie deren Publikation

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## Introduction to the Special Issue: Democratic Futures Now!

A translation project as part of the Annual Conference of the German Association of Japanese Studies (VSJF), 7.11.-9.11.2025, University of Vienna

Andreas Eder-Ramsauer (University of Vienna)

Eder-Ramsauer, Andreas. 2025. "Introduction to the Special Issue: Democratic Futures Now!", *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 4-10. DOI: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-01.

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This special issue is the outcome of one-and-a-half years of conceptualizing and planning an academic conference, a translation class taught together with an exceptional colleague (see the introduction to this issue by Anna Linder) and tremendous students, and the generosity and solidarity of many colleagues and friends over the last two years.<sup>1</sup> After the decision was made to organize the annual conference of the German Association of Japanese Studies (VSJF) in Vienna in 2025, a keystone decision was to combine the conference theme "(Un)Democratic Futures: Japan and the Global Trajectories towards an (Un)Equal World", with a practice befitting the underlying reasoning of the conference. Following an understanding of the global political conjuncture as anti-democratic in its tendencies and severely threatened by a looming planetary collapse, a limitation to the study of Japan and the presentation of results in Vienna became undesirable. Rather, the attempt to focus on community building through generosity, solidarity<sup>2</sup>, and multi-level exchange of pro-democratic ideas between scholars in Japan and in Europe was to be at the center. Thus, an active, constructive, and optimistic—as opposed to defeatist—engagement with "the future" is the ethos of every decision, every contribution, and summarized in the rallying cry "Democratic Futures Now!".

The introduction to the special issue develops first the rallying cry just mentioned above. How do these somewhat contradictory and normatively laden words fit in with our political moment? Second, thoughts are developed on how this collection of translations, as well as conference organizing more generally offer potential for "democratic practice" beyond steps in individual career paths following the "publish or perish" paradigm. Lastly, as is customary for any introduction, an overview of the collected texts ensues.

### Are we all doomed? Democratic Futures Now!

Pessimism, nostalgia, and disorientation are widespread in the political realm of today. In a sense, the conceptualization of the conference, to which this special issue belongs, is a conscious act of defiance to such a sentiment. Against a prevalent crisis of political imagination (Gebh 2025), "Democratic Futures Now!" demands an opening up of and engagement with explicitly democratic—hence aimed at egalitarian and both individually and collectively emancipatory—futures. It is widely observed, how "social and political movements today [both left and right] [...] look back to other, earlier epochs and wish they were back there again, to recover what's been lost" (Fraser 2024). In this process, non-reversible changes, both ideationally and technologically, as well

as achieved progress are rarely engaged with in a constructive fashion. More generally, the “the people” have been left out of “the future”, as has been observed by Jonathan White. As he convincingly has laid out, while the future long had been a place of ideals and “-isms”, it was turned into a place of calculation best placed in the hands of experts by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cutting out democratic participation in the creation of an open future (White 2024: 7). An extreme version of such tendencies can be found in Silicon Valley’s “end time fascism” of today (Klein, Taylor 2025). While the fascism of Mussolini had some futurist, utopian elements, the fascism of the “contemporary far-right movements lack any credible vision for a hopeful future. The average voter is offered only remixes of a bygone past, alongside the sadistic pleasures of dominance over an ever-expanding assemblage of dehumanized others.” (Klein, Taylor 2025). As Klein and Taylor propose,

“End times fascism is a darkly festive fatalism – a final refuge for those who find it easier to celebrate destruction than imagine living without supremacy” (Klein, Taylor 2025).

One could counter that the crisis of political imagination befalls political parties alone (crisis of representation), while academia and wider civil society offer ample supply for democratic imaginaries of and practices for the future. I will not claim that this is completely false. However, in the nexus of the now-focus brought about by the urgency of the climate crisis, increasingly individualized and precarious work relations, as well as lack of political organization, this surely is not completely true, either.

From Francis Fukuyama’s notion of the end of history to Mark Fisher’s (2009) observation of hegemonic “capitalist realism”<sup>3</sup>, or the focus on the immediate now of Extinction Rebellion, a (democratic) future is either forever in the hands of technocratic governance, brought down by the intensified struggle for individual

gain, or can only come after the survival of the planet is temporarily ensured. It is my conviction, however, that the interlocking of an environmental and political crisis of democracy can only be solved by thinking and tackling them together. As Jonathan White (2024) has argued, at its core, democratic politics cannot function as a mere defense mechanism or as a tool to manage decline, collapse, or extinction.

There are, however, ways to think ahead that need more attention than a state of constant panic and crisis aversion allows. Conceptions of political futures as undetermined and open for shaping, lie in many theorists’ works, from Machiavelli to Ernesto Laclau (Knott 2024: 9). Who says the dominant conceptualization of a foreclosed future cannot be reversed? The call to arms for this conference “Democratic Futures Now!”, in short, demands the aim to imagine and work towards these futures, and not be paralyzed by disruptions to elite trust in a declining economy and collapsing environment. Politically, the shift must lie to surpass the “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2011) of today—an optimism that falsely promises us affective fulfillment in the now without any lasting and significant changes. A toxic spiral dominating our approach to politics, fittingly described by Anton Jäger as “hyperpolitics” (2022). Everything is political, everywhere is politics, but other than emotional outbursts, nothing seems feasible. While this conference calls for an opening up of the future, the past has shown how dangerous the dogmatic pursuit of an idealized future can be:

“If the open future has always been central to the idea of democracy, the experience of fascism showed how an exaggerated embrace of it – sparked partly by the sense it was under threat – could tip into a movement that cancelled democratic ideals” (White 2024: 86-87)

Thus, the insistence on “democratic” futures is understood as emphasizing

the necessity to never aim to foreclose its openness.

In summation, the future, so long held as decided, or given up on, needs to be reopened. In contrast to the image of democracy as “doomed”, the Annual Conference of the German Association of Japanese Studies 2025 aims to identify feasible, better, more democratic futures. Not only because they are feasible, but because they are necessary to ensure a just adaptation to, or an overcoming of, the planetary crisis of today.

### **Translation and Conference Organizing as Transnational Community Building**

From the above, I want to explain, why the project of the Annual Conference of the German Association of Japanese Studies and this special issue gave me a sense of the ethos I laid out. I want to begin with the conference, as such.

Academic conferences have come under serious disrepute. This is especially true for area studies, where host universities of researchers and analyzed areas are potentially far apart. The value of flying colleagues across the globe, polluting the environment, and spending scarce public/university resources has become harder and harder to justify in a time when online and hybrid formats have become easily possible and universities suffer under increasing financial pressures.<sup>4</sup> However, a major reason to emphasize the importance of academic conferences is community building. If democracy is under threat due to post-truth epistemologies becoming actively propagated and the increase of anti-science attitudes, then creating, enlarging, and sustaining a scientific community (including scholars, students, and administrators alike) which stands against such trends is needed. The alternative might be “weakly tied and low-trust communication networks”,<sup>5</sup> which are certainly less likely to withstand outward pressure. While online conferences, at best, connect presenting speakers with the organizers, larger in-person conferences allow the potential for wider networks to develop and a

plethora of successful future projects to spawn. Even fee-charging conferences like ours can strive to open up participation to wider audiences and stagger prices in a way to foster solidarity. The VSJF’s decision to do so since last year was certainly a step in the right direction. Due to successful third-party funding, this year’s conference allows free participation for students and further steps could be taken in the future. Admittedly, the described might be an idealized version of what happens at a conference, but the goal to create the opportunities for something ideal is surely not misdirected. Let us move on to the translation project and the texts collected in this special issue.

The rationale of translating previously published texts by invited speakers of the conference was twofold. One, it was a matter of opportunity. Translation used to be a slow process, one that urgencies of the *now* often did not allow us to endure. Technological advances in generative artificial intelligence, for all their many dangers and pitfalls, offer us the potential to make this process quicker and take up fewer resources in our busy research schedules. Through the incorporation of students into this process (see the introduction by Anna Linder in this issue), translation can become a pedagogical tool to spread language skills, technical skills, and foster deep engagement with the ideas of others. Practices such as these, to my mind, qualify as democratic academic practice. They do not center solely on the individual genius, something academia and university administrators arguably focus on,<sup>6</sup> but cooperation and collective practice, mutual amplification of voice, and exchange of ideas in a deeper form than just semi-listening to the twentieth presentation on a long conference day. Two, it was a matter of necessity. Translations are, in a sense, the deep valuation of the work of somebody else and the desire to share this work with a wider audience. As area studies specialists, this motivates many of us. With the goal in mind to create a community between democratic think-

ers in Europe and Japan, there further is a significant language barrier. How are invited speakers and conference participants to engage fully with each other? If some of their work is inaccessible to those not speaking Japanese or German? It is our hope that this open access special issue allows all interested parties to engage more deeply with others' work and therefore make the conference itself a more fruitful event.

### Short overview

The first part of this special issue features six translations of previously published works in Japanese language that have been translated by students of the University of Vienna. Texts have been published in varying years, but regardless of their respective age, their originality and relevance remain.

Uno Shigeki's paper "Zwischen Sozialwissenschaft und Kritik: Zusammenhang des Wissens im Nachkriegs-Japan" ("社会科学と批評の間-戦後日本における知の連関") investigates the tension and mutual influence of the social sciences and (literary) critique as two distinct, highly important spheres of thought creation in Japan. It opens this issue by taking a macro perspective on what comes after. As Uno lays out, while the social sciences in Japan have been shaped by a critical engagement with and against Marxism, (literary) critique follows a lineage of affective experience and refutation of post-Meiji institutions. The text was originally published as part of Uno's 2023 book *Nihon no hoshu to riberaru: Shikō no zahyōjiku o tatenaosu* and has been expertly translated by Kobayashi Kanau, a PhD student of philosophy at the University of Vienna. It offers a good entry point for reflecting on the places where (un)democratic futures take ideational lift-off (in German language).

The next contribution, Yamamoto Kei's "Envy, Justice, and Democracy" ("嫉妬・正義・民主主義"), deals with the political relevance of the emotion of envy (*shitto*) in democratic politics. Originally published in the philosophical journal

*nyx*, Yamamoto's 2024 book *Shitto-ron* (On Envy), which expanded on these early studies, has found much public acclaim since its publication. In the article, Yamamoto introduces discussions of envy, both negatively and positively, by political theorists outside and inside Japan—from Francis Bacon to Fukuzawa Yukichi. The paper offers critical reflection on an outright demonization of envy, pinpointing its democratic content, as we can arguably only be envious towards someone we see as our equal. The text was translated by Robin Herzeg, Matsumoto Momo, and Manuel Steiner, three promising undergraduate students of Japanese Studies at the University of Vienna. In the populist moment we are experiencing, such deliberations are crucial to reflect on assumptions and mechanics to "defend" democracy.

Subsequently, Takeda Hiroko's "Biopolitics and necropolitics during the pandemic from a gender perspective: The case of contemporary Japan" ("ジェンダーからパンデミック下の生政治・死政治を考える: 現代日本の場合") looks back at the Corona pandemic and the horrendous sudden rise in suicides by women in Japan during this moment of crisis. Drawing on Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe, Takeda analyzes the Japanese states treatment of women through the lens of necropolitics and critically reflects on the status of women under neoliberal capitalism in Japan as "abandoned people" (*kimin*). The paper was previously published in the *Annals of the Japanese Political Science Association* (*Nenpō seijigaku*) in 2022 and was now translated into English by Klemens Bardakji and Simon Kaiser, two more of our great undergraduate students. The text highlights the dramatic urgency for democratic imaginaries of the future to address gender issues. The following two texts only reinforce this.

First, Suzuki Ayaka's paper "An Examination of the Concept of 'Honorary Male': Why are Female Leaders Criticized?" ("「名誉男性」概念をめぐる考察: 女性リーダー批判の背景をさぐる") deals with the term "honorary male" (*meiyo dansei*), to ex-



plore the positionality of elite women in Japanese society. The election of Takaichi Sanae to LDP president has given specific relevance to this topic. Starting from the low ranking of Japan in the International Gender Gap Report, Suzuki expertly discusses the critique brought forth against those who succeeded in these difficult circumstances by, as the critique against them goes, emulating male practices. The translation of the 2024 publication from the *Tsukuba Journal of Sociology* (*Shakaigaku jōnarū*) by a team consisting of Julin Wollinger (PhD candidate), Nina Urban (MA student), and the two undergraduate students Johanna Wieser and Audrey Chau of the Japanese Studies department of the University of Vienna, exemplifies the need to discuss the radicality of changes needed to bring about significant emancipatory and egalitarian change.

Next, Shimizu Akiko's "Buried Thorns: For a Queer Politics of a Potentially Invisible Multiplicity" ("埋没した棘: 現れないかもしれない複数性のクィア・ポリティクスのために") builds on Judith Butler's *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) to analyze debates around transgender people in Japan. Her highly complex intervention, tackled with great success by Melanie Bieber and Nathalie Winsauer, demonstrates how the desire by mainstream society to hide differences and make them undetectable puts a tremendous burden on the individual. A democratic society of the future ought to be able to live with the radical acceptance of existing difference, one can draw from this text. The text was previously published in the theory journal *Shisō*.

Following, Nakano Yoshihiro's "The Regionalism of Tamanoi Yoshirō: Its Timeliness and Potential for the Anthropocene" ("玉野井芳郎の地域主義: 人新世におけるその現代性と可能性") introduces the theory of regionalism (*chi'iki shugi*) by Tamanoi Yoshirō in the wider debate on the Anthropocene and post-development theory. The text has been updated by Nakano from a talk given in 2019 at the Nihon Heiwa Gakkai and was expert-

ly translated by Daniel Taubinger and Georg Langeder, two highly skillful undergraduate students. Nakano's complex discussion of Tamanoi's work in the 1970s manages to utilize his insights for today's deliberations on human-planet relations and take his ideas a step further.

The last text in English language comes from Matsuoka Misato. "The US-Japan Alliance in the Post-COVID Era – Intensifying US-China Rivalry and the Wavering Deterrence of US Forces" ("ポストコロナ時代の日米同盟: 先鋭化する米中対立、揺らぐ米軍の抑止力松岡美里 国際関係理論、安全保障研究") offers an examination of international relations post-pandemic from a Japanese perspective. The think-piece first published on the website *Synodos*<sup>7</sup> was updated for this issue and reflects on the stability and longevity of the US-Japan military alliance, as the backbone of a conservative security paradigm. It was translated by the two talented graduate students, Rabia Devici and Katja Palasze-wski and offers an additional perspective into considering how imaginaries for a democratic future are bound by geopolitical tensions and never fully stable networks of cooperation.

The second part of the special issue collects texts previously published in either German or English. Thanks to the generous funding of this project by the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies of the University of Vienna, it was possible to pay for the translation of the following texts by Kobayashi Kanau, a PhD candidate at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. With the exception of the last text, which was translated and published by Park Seung-Joon of Kwansai Gakuin University prior to this project and is now reprinted here with his permission, all texts are published in Japanese language for the first time.

Veith Selk's text "民主主義への不快感" ("Demokratische Malaise", *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*) offers an excellent portrayal of how the democratic malaise<sup>8</sup> of today is characterized by a loss of mass appeal for democracy and the difficulties



of democratic theory to engage with underlying disappointments. He concludes with a convincing call to reduce inequality and tackle elite cohesion. More clearly emphasizing democracy's ideals and norms and making sure this translates to lived experience is indispensable to create grounds for imaginaries of democratic futures to take hold.

The second text by Viktoria Huegel, “民主的な権威理論に向けて” (“Toward a theory of democratic authority”), similarly tackles problems in contemporary democratic theory. By distinguishing between authoritarian and authoritative rule, she emphasizes the need for a relational understanding of authority, as only the latter is compatible with the democratic principle of resistibility befitting an ever open democratic future. Her text expertly avoids romanticization of democratic equality and highlights the necessary and provocative question of how obedience and democracy fit together.

Next, Karsten Schubert's text “干渉されずにいること: アイデンティティ・ポリティクス批判における消極的自由と社会的自由の混同” (“In Ruhe gelassen werden Das Zusammenspiel von negativer und sozialer Freiheit in der Kritik an Identitätspolitik”) develops a fascinating discussion of competing forms of freedom, characterizing the debates on “identity politics”. He provides a convincing analysis of how current anti-identity politics debates are mostly characterized by a rejection of conceptions of society as structured by inequalities of power and a retreat towards conceptions of freedom as simply being “left alone”.

Following, Gabriele Michalitsch's text “ガヴァンメンタリティーの秘密—男性中心主義的なエコノミー概念と再生産の抑圧” (“Das Geheimnis der Gouvernamentalität: Der maskulinistische Ökonomie-Begriff und die verdrängte Reproduktion”) engages critically with the often overlooked exclusion of the gendered nature of capi-

talist reproduction as part of neoliberal and capitalist governmentality. In this regard the text fits well with Takeda Hiroko's analysis of necropolitics in Japan. Although the text was published in 2013 in the journal *Femina politica: Zeitschrift für feministische Politik-Wissenschaft*, its relevance has not wavered.

Jan Groos<sup>9</sup> proposes an alternative to problems laid out in the previous texts in his essay “私が計画経済について知っている二、三のこと” (“Zwei oder drei Dinge, die ich über die Freie Planwirtschaft weiß”). This thought piece offers clear alternatives to the *now* in a short and precise manner. In an accessible fashion, he thinks the political and environmental crisis of today in tandem to propose a “free planned economy” as a democratic future to aim at.

Lastly, Andreas Eder-Ramsauer's 2022 article “Yamamoto Tarō and Reiwa Shinsengumi: Love, Populism, and Radical Democracy for a Neoliberal Japan” provides insights into an attempt to create an imaginary for a democratic future by the Japanese populist political party Reiwa Shinsengumi. Originally published in the Journal for the Study of Radicalism, the text analyses promises and difficulties to demand and practice a “friendly society”, as proposed by the party. How future-oriented is a refutation of the *now* often found in populism and a reengagement with the past? Can a vague goal, such as a “friendly society” create enough affective investment to sustain an egalitarian movement? Future work must engage with such questions to understand success and failure of progressive parties.

In summary, all texts engage very productively with theory and empirics to enrich discussions of a desirable democracy to come. They act both as preparation for and reflection on the Annual Conference of the German Association of Japanese Studies 2025. In this vein: “Democratic Futures Now!”

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> I want to thank the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies of the University of Vienna for the financial support of this special issue.
- <sup>2</sup> Solidarity is understood as an “extension of the self being in formations with others” (Quan 2024: 166). Hence, the extension of meaningful relations to many others was a goal of this endeavor.
- <sup>3</sup> “Capitalist realism” lays out the observation that we find it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, and became specific relevance after the world financial crisis of 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/highereducation/2023/08/04/we-need-to-talk-about-conferences/>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2023/03/do-conferences-still-matter-yes-yes-they-do/>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://jacobin.com/2022/05/scientific-discovery-competition-capitalism-genius-exploitation>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://synodos.jp/opinion/international/23646/>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/demokratie-in-gefahr-2024/549905/demokratische-malaise/>
- <sup>9</sup> His podcast „Future Histories“ (<https://www.futurehistories.today/>) offers many meaningful and engaging discussions on desirable futures and his credo of “opening up the future” has been very influential for this project.

# **Introduction II – An experiment of didactics: Translating politics – AI-assisted translating of political research**

Anna Linder (University of Vienna)

Linder, Anna. 2025. "Introduction II – An experiment of didactics: Translating politics – AI-assisted translating of political research", *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 11-16. DOI: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-02.

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The decision to involve students from the Institute of Japanese Studies in the translation and publication work made it possible to publish this special edition on the VSJF 2025. This objective was accomplished by offering a course entitled 'Translating Politics – AI-Assisted Translation of Political Research' during the winter semester of 2024/2025, designated as a 5-ECTS module. However, given that the texts to be translated were specialised political science texts, which consists a type of text that students typically encounter only late in the bachelor's programme, we endeavoured to make the project as accessible as possible to as many students as possible. To achieve this goal, we first had to consider how to design a course that would be open, interesting and educational for students with varying Japanese language proficiency.

My previous work indicated that artificial intelligence has the potential to transform the field of translation didactics. Therefore, it seemed a logical progression to initiate the study precisely at this point: students were given the opportunity to use AI as a tool for translating subject-specific Japanese texts. The objective of this approach was twofold: firstly, develop a better understanding of the capabilities and limitations of various tools, and secondly, to encourage an open dialogue about AI assistance in translating. However, the challenge in implementing this approach arose from the lack of publications

addressing didactic considerations in the context of AI as a translation tool. Consequently, there were no existing guidelines that could serve as a reference point for our efforts. This led to the decision to develop our own concept. The following section describes the development process as well as the collaboration and testing process with the students.<sup>1</sup>

## **Conceptualising the course**

With the exception of a few courses at the Institute of Translation Studies, this course was unquestionably among the first at the University of Vienna to address the topic of translation supported by artificial intelligence. The experimental nature of this course was communicated to the students during the initial teaching unit:

The aim was to experiment with various translation tools, to engage in a transparent discourse about their functionality, their respective strengths and weaknesses, and draw conclusions about possible didactic approaches for future academic settings. These conclusions were derived on the basis of empirical observations made by the students themselves.

The sixteen students who participated in the course had varying levels of Japanese proficiency, ranging from third semester bachelor's students to master's students. They were able to choose the AI tool to use independently and experiment with it. However, they had to carefully docu-

ment their work steps, input prompts and formatting in the text in order to clarify and explain the AI-supported translation process. The overall goal of the project was to attain the optimum translation possible from Japanese to English. The British Institute of Translation and Interpreting (2023)<sup>2</sup> has delineated the 'ingredients' for a successful translation as follows:

1. Fitness for purpose: The Japanese texts were composed for a specialised audience; therefore, the English translation should also be written in a language appropriate to the target audience.
2. Linguistic accuracy: It is imperative that sentences are translated from Japanese into English in a manner that preserves their original meaning.
3. Excellent writing: The target language must be articulated with such a high level of proficiency that native speakers are not given the impression that the text is a translation.
4. Cultural awareness: As is the case with 'linguistic accuracy', the cultural characteristics of both the source and target languages must be considered.
5. Subject expertise: A certain degree of specialised knowledge must be acquired to understand the technical terms characteristic of the respective field.
6. Quality assurance: A thorough review by the translators and subsequently by the editors is imperative.

Students participating the course were repeatedly informed that AI should be regarded exclusively as a translation tool. It was therefore essential that they had a sound and comprehensive knowledge of the Japanese language to accurately evaluate the quality of the AI's translation. AI-based translation tools such as DeepL have proven to be highly efficient and to deliver translations of a very good quality. However, these translations must be checked by someone with a high level of proficiency in Japanese, as AI tools often still have difficulties with more complex grammatical structures, context-based expression, and specific typographies.

For this course, Japanese language skills at the JLPT N3 level were recommended, but students who had not yet reached this level were also allowed to participate. Since the translation of each text was carried out in groups, care was taken to ensure that a wide range of language skills was represented in each group. This approach was chosen to encourage collaborative learning, with more advanced students providing assistance to their less experienced peers in the translation process. This approach proved to be highly effective; when asked, especially less advanced students confirmed that they had benefited greatly from working with their *senpai*.

The course commenced with a basic introduction to the concept of artificial intelligence, along with an examination of regulatory aspects that are particularly relevant in the university environment and the translation process applied to specialist texts. In this context, it is necessary to consider not only the provisions set out in the AI-Act of the European Union, but also the imperative of adhering to the principles of good scientific practice, the copyright provisions and the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation. At the time of publication of this work, national regulations specifically relating to the use of artificial intelligence are not yet in place in Austria.

The following six AI tools were presented to the students as translation tools: DeepL, Google Translate, ChatGPT, Gemini, Yandex and Babelfish. The students were granted autonomy in their selection of tools, with the objective of ascertaining the most efficient utilisation for their respective translation processes. Furthermore, students were free to use their own proprietary tools, such as Yomitan, and were encouraged to experiment with a range of tools, not merely a single one. Nine students selected the translation service DeepL, seven opted for Open AI's generative AI ChatGPT, three utilised Google's translation service Google Translate, and two used Google's generative AI Gemini.

In addition, three students attempted to refine their linguistic expression through the utilisation of DeepL Write, a tool designed to assist with writing and proofreading. The students documented their work steps in translation and prompt logs. The subsequent section provides a brief overview of the utilisation of the various tools and the challenges the students encountered, drawing on these logs<sup>3</sup>.

### DeepL

The translation service DeepL has been found to produce literal translations, though it has not always been clear to the students whether a literal translation could always be considered ‘successful’. Unlike ChatGPT and Gemini, DeepL does not provide supplementary information regarding the translations and does not embed the translations in a context. Consequently, the tool is devoid of ‘ulterior motives’ insofar as such a designation can be applied to artificial intelligence – when translating, and endeavours to maintain fidelity to the text. DeepL is also equipped with a glossary function, which enables the user to access individual vocabulary words and to select synonyms for translation. This feature was found to be of practical use by the students. However, the students also identified certain issues, including the placement of punctuation marks. Incorrect punctuation, such as a full stop or comma, can result in ‘confusion’ for DeepL, leading to inaccurate or significantly different translations. Unnoticed space marks, that occasionally appeared in the original Japanese text between Chinese characters, separating words, also resulted in translations that were difficult to comprehend. In addition, DeepL demonstrated an inability to adequately process complex Japanese sentences, including nested structures, specific grammatical constructs such as *~da sō da ~だそうだ* [expression of hearsay; i.e. ‘it is probably the case that...’] or *arui wa あるいは* [maybe, perhaps, or possibly]<sup>4</sup>, and the nuance of Japanese proper names. This led to errors in translation, including for example the addition of words to the original text. The

students resolved these issues by utilising DeepL for sentence-by-sentence translation, instead of paragraph-by-paragraph translation. Alternatively, they used a manual method involving the decomposition of complex sentence structures into their constituent components, subsequently assembling the translated sentence elements themselves. Despite the aforementioned issues, DeepL was rated as both helpful and efficient in its general functionality.

Opinions on DeepL Write were more equivocal: while it was regarded as a pragmatic instrument for improving academic English phrasing, the students found its output too divergent from the source text, raising concerns about its reliability in the translation process<sup>5</sup>.

### ChatGPT

OpenAI’s generative AI ChatGPT was not primarily developed as a translation tool; consequently, this application is significantly divergent from that of DeepL. The students had to use prompts to elicit the translation from Japanese into English from the AI, whereas the complexity of these prompts did not appear to exert a significant effect on the quality of the translation. However, the majority of the students using ChatGPT indicated that they were dealing with a scientific text and therefore expected the AI to translate in a scientific manner. As a result, the translations generated by ChatGPT were more expansive and less literal than those produced by DeepL.

Furthermore, it was evident that ChatGPT provided supplementary information about the Japanese texts without explicit instruction, and its responses exhibited a discernible bias towards certain topics, which manifested itself in a tendency to present translations in a specific perspective or ‘hallucinating’ parts of sentences and words with accompanying justifications, even in the absence of explicit student requests.

ChatGPT also encountered difficulties translating complex, nested sentences. For instance, relative clauses were not



always correctly assigned to their corresponding nouns. Occasionally, the system incorporated extraneous details, misinterpreted Chinese character constructions and translated active constructions as passive. This problem was evident, for example, in the comments of Japanese authors, who used first-person pronouns to articulate their experiences, reflections, and concepts. However, ChatGPT opted for a passive translation of these statements<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, ChatGPT was also capable of automatically replacing incorrect Chinese characters in the given Japanese texts, for instance, when they were recognised and transcribed incorrectly by the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) process, they were still translated correctly, which was perceived to be a labour-saving measure. In general, the students who employed ChatGPT for translation purposes reported a positive experience. The following comment illustrates this response: 'ChatGPT [is] generally more efficient and helpful when translating than DeepL'<sup>7</sup>. It is essential, however, to recognize the role of personal preferences in the assessment of technological effectiveness.

### **Gemini and Google Translate**

In comparison with DeepL and ChatGPT, Google services (namely Gemini and Google Translate) were not particularly popular among students participating in the course. In fact, these services were used only minimally. Google Translate was used solely as a supplement to other AI tools, for instance to verify the translation received. However, students working with Gemini demonstrated a particularly strong aptitude for Google's generative AI. Analogous observations were made when using Gemini, akin to those previously reported in the context of ChatGPT. One student, for example, consistently used the same prompt when translating ('Please translate this into English.'), yet received varied translations for a single sentence, accompanied by supplementary information, explanations of concepts from the original Japanese text, or summaries of the content of certain sections of the text.

The methodology used by Gemini to determine the inclusion of additional information and its accuracy was unclear. For instance, the student expressed dissatisfaction with the explanation provided by Gemini with regard to grammatical constructions.

It was also emphasised that Gemini translates more freely than DeepL, but, like ChatGPT, at least attempts to retain the meaning of a statement. Furthermore, Gemini appears to demonstrate a certain preference for converting extensive Japanese sentences into more concise English ones. This ability has proven advantageous in certain contexts, though it has also been noted that it can, on occasion, impede rather than facilitate translation<sup>8</sup>.

### **Assisting AI with translating**

All students were cognizant of the necessity to manually revise and refine the AI-generated translations themselves, in order to ensure the utmost accuracy by using their individual Japanese language proficiency and referring to non-AI-based online dictionaries. As previously stated, translation was carried out collaboratively, with the cooperation between students of varying proficiency levels proving to be particularly beneficial for the less proficient students regarding their language learning skills. The more proficient students also derived benefit from the arrangements, as they were subsequently able to fulfil a control function, for example, by verifying their individual translation skills.

The 'support measures', many of which were discussed in the previous sections, were intended to help make the different AI translating more accurate. These measures included breaking down complex sentences and sentence structures, dividing long sentences into several shorter units, isolating specific expressions for individual translation, and using proper names (e.g. on official Japanese government websites, in Japanese legal texts, or on Wikipedia).

In addition, it was necessary to substitute certain words in the text, so that the AI could translate it. To illustrate, in one

instance, ChatGPT refused to translate the word ‘penis’; in this case, the student replaced it with an ‘X’, and the sentence was translated without difficulty<sup>9</sup>. In some cases, novel prompts had to be devised in order to translate particular sections of a sentence, such as the indication, that at a given juncture was a literal quotation from an English-language work that had been rendered into Japanese<sup>10</sup>.

The adaptations made to the source texts in order to facilitate translation into English underscore this necessity for a comprehensive understanding of the Japanese language when using AI-assisted translating processes. While AI tools have proven effective in facilitating seamless ‘holiday communication’, certain text types, such as specialist texts, remain challenging for AI to translate satisfactorily. In this regard, the prevailing opinion among the students is not surprising: while there is a broad consensus that AI has the potential to be a beneficial instrument, it can, on occasion, result in frustration.

## Concluding

In my opinion, it is important to encourage an open and constructive dialogue on the potential benefits and inherent limitations of artificial intelligence in the

domain of language and translation. Implementing this approach has led to particularly remarkable results for students. Furthermore, an open discourse can serve counteract concerns that there is no longer a necessity to learn foreign languages because ‘AI will do it anyway’. Only a deep understanding of a certain language and its linguistic peculiarities, as well as its embedding in cultural contexts, can guarantee a responsible approach to AI in translation. One of the students I taught in another course on the subject of AI as a tool in research and translation (in the summer semester of 2025) summarised the following conclusion: human thinking remains the fundamental aspect of any consideration regarding AI.

Artificial intelligence is a practical tool and must be understood as such. It can assist in the facilitation of processes, the generation of ideas and the identification of alternatives. However, it must be acknowledged that AI cannot substitute human cognitive input. In the future, there will be a growing need for didactic approaches and teaching formats will increase in order to facilitate the integration of AI as a tool. This is because AI will continue to exist, but it is unlikely to replace cognitive processes or the act of acquiring knowledge.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The present article has been edited with the assistance of the translation service DeepL and the writing tool DeepL Write.

<sup>2</sup> Popplewell, Matthew. 2003. “6 Ingredients of a Good Translation”, *Institute of Translation and Interpreting*. [https://www-iti-org-uk.translate.google/resource/6-ingredients-of-a-good-translation.html?\\_x\\_tr\\_sl=en&\\_x\\_tr\\_tl=de&\\_x\\_tr\\_hl=de&\\_x\\_tr\\_pto=rq#:~:text=2.,Linguistic%20accuracy,language%20and%20the%20target%20language](https://www-iti-org-uk.translate.google/resource/6-ingredients-of-a-good-translation.html?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=de&_x_tr_hl=de&_x_tr_pto=rq#:~:text=2.,Linguistic%20accuracy,language%20and%20the%20target%20language). (July 2025)

<sup>3</sup> The status of this information, as well as the students’ experience of the functions of the respective AI tools, relate to the period from 1 October 2024 to 28 February 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Wollinger, Julian. Protocol from Milestone 1, p. 21, 23.

<sup>5</sup> However, the editors of this *MINIKOMI* edition employed the DeepL Write tool to refine the translations and enhance the English wording.

<sup>6</sup> Herzeg, Robin. Protocol from Milestone 2, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Steiner, Manuel. Protocol from Milestone 2, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Urban, Nina. Protocol from Milestone 1, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Biebl, Melania. Protocol from Milestone 2, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Herzeg, Robin. Protocol from Milestone 2, p. 2, 3.

<sup>11</sup> All English translations by Anna Linder. ChatGPT was utilised as a translation aid.



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## Bonus section: AI reflecting on AI: A collection of haiku 俳句

In one unit of the course, students were asked to reflect on their experiences with AI-assisted translation. The students were instructed to come up with three words and submit them to a generative AI model of their choice (in this case, all students chose ChatGPT). Subsequently, they had to ask the AI to compose an original *haiku* poem – a traditional Japanese poem consisting of three lines and 17 syllables – using the given set of keywords. Adherence to the 5-7-5 verse meter, a characteristic feature of the *haiku* form, was also imperative. The majority of these *haiku* were generated in German, the original form of which is presented here alongside the English translation, with an attempt to maintain the verse meter<sup>11</sup>. The *haiku* generated by the AI are by no means the most accomplished lyrical compositions, yet they undeniably prove to be entertaining.

### Haiku #1 by the group ‘Takeda’

Fehler türmen sich,  
Tools stützen, doch zwingen ein –  
Handarbeit bleibt Pflicht.

Mistakes pile up high,  
tools support but still constrain –  
hands must do the rest.

### Haiku #2 by the group ‘Suzuki’

Im Kreis der Geduld,  
frustrierte Schritte zählen,  
ein Detail glimmt hell.

Circle of patience –  
each frustrated step is tracked,  
one bright detail glows.

### Haiku #3 by the group ‘Yamamoto’

Kontext wird gesucht,  
die Schritte sind langwierig,  
Nachbearbeitung.

Searching for context,  
every step slow and tedious –  
then, refinement starts.

### Haiku #4 by the group ‘Nakano’

Hölzerne Worte,  
repetitiv, doch mit Sinn,  
durchwachsen blüht's still.

Wooden words echo,  
same lines, yet meaning breaks through –  
growth blooms in between.

### Haiku #5 and #6 by the group ‘Matsuoka’ (both originally generated in English)

Greetings softly shared  
Translation bridges the gap  
A kind offer: help.

Refine each nuance,  
clarity blooms in the text,  
compare paths to truth.

### Haiku #7 by the group ‘Suzuki’ (originally generated in Japanese)

Zasetsu shite 挫折して  
Gaman no ita ga 我慢の糸が  
Naiyō mitsu 内容満つ

Faced with a defeat,  
thread of patience stretched so thin –  
now it holds meaning.

### Haiku #8 by Anna Linder

Leerzeichen verrutscht,  
Frustration zieht Kreise,  
DeepL hilft doch oft.

A shifted space mark –  
frustration spreads in circles,  
DeepL lends a hand.

# Zwischen Sozialwissenschaft und Kritik

## – Zusammenhang des Wissens im NachkriegsJapan

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Translation by Kobayashi Kanau

Uno, Shigeki. 2025. "Zwischen Sozialwissenschaft und Kritik – Zusammenhang des Wissens im NachkriegsJapan", *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 17-26. DOI: 10.25365/aj-2025-90-03.

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Menschliches Wissen entsteht und entwickelt sich im Geist jedes Einzelnen. Auf gesellschaftlicher Ebene betrachtet ist menschliches Wissen jedoch etwas, das auf Institutionalisierung angelegt ist und erhält seine Dauer erst durch die Verbindung mit bestimmten sozialen Gruppen. Selbstverständlich gibt es je nach Epoche und Gesellschaft Unterschiede, auf welcher Form das Wissen institutionalisiert wird. Auch im NachkriegsJapan lassen sich mehrere „Wissensformen“ (*chi no katachi*) erkennen. Dennoch dürfte es nur wenige geben, die bestreiten würden, dass die Sozialwissenschaft und die (literarische) Kritik (*hihyō*) dabei eine äußerst wichtige Rolle gespielt haben.

Die Fragen, was genau unter Sozialwissenschaft und Kritik zu verstehen ist und von welchen Persönlichkeiten diese Aufgaben wahrgenommen wurden, sollen im Laufe der Arbeit noch näher erörtert werden. An dieser Stelle möchte ich zunächst nur auf Folgendes hinweisen. Es ist nicht nur in Japan, sondern in vielen modernen Gesellschaften der Fall, dass die Sozialwissenschaften als eine „Wissensform“ in der Gesellschaft, insbesondere in Verbindung mit den Institutionen der Universitäten, eine bedeutende Stellung eingenommen haben. Dahingegen könnte das Phänomen, dass die Kritik unabhängig von den Sozialwissenschaften einen ebenso großen Einfluss hatte, eher als ein spezifisch japanisches angesehen werden. Darüber hinaus war es zweifellos eines der charakteristischen Merkmale der japanischen Wissenskultur in der Nachkriegszeit, dass

zwischen den Sozialwissenschaften und der Kritik zumindest für einige Zeit eine enge Verbindung bestand, die sich mit einer einzigartigen Dynamik entwickelte. Der vorliegende Beitrag ist ein Versuch (Essay), die gegenwärtige Situation und die Herausforderungen für diese beiden Disziplinen aufzuzeigen, indem die Bedeutung dieser Beziehung erneut untersucht wird.

### 1. Die Sozialwissenschaft

Wenden wir uns zunächst der Sozialwissenschaft zu. Was die Sozialwissenschaft im NachkriegsJapan bedeutete, ist alles andere als eindeutig. Dennoch soll hier ein vorläufiger Versuch der Kontextualisierung unternommen werden, indem ich mich auf *Sengo Nihon no shisō* (Das Denken im NachkriegsJapan) <sup>1</sup> von Kuno Shū, Tsurumi Shunsuke und Fujita Shōzō (1995) beziehe. Als „sozialwissenschaftliches Denken“ wurden in diesem Buch vor allem die Politikwissenschaft von Maruyama Masao, die Wirtschaftswissenschaft von Ōtsuka Hisao und Uchida Yoshihiko sowie die Rechtswissenschaft von Kawashima Takeyoshi genannt. Diese Wissenschaftler, die oft als „Modernisten“ (*kindaishugī*), „Zivilgesellschaftsfaktion“ (*shiminshakai-ha*) oder „Nachkriegsaufklärer“ (*senjo keimō*) bezeichnet wurden, waren einzeln betrachtet in sehr unterschiedlichen Feldern tätig. Als Gruppe betrachtet, weisen sie dennoch einige Gemeinsamkeiten auf.

Es ist hier nicht möglich, diese Gemeinsamkeiten im Detail zu erörtern,

aber es steht außer Zweifel, dass ihr Ursprung in der sogenannten „Kōza Schule“ (*kōza-ha*) innerhalb der „japanischen Kapitalismusdebatte“ (*Nihon shihonshugi ronsō*) liegt. Bei dieser Debatte handelte es sich um eine Auseinandersetzung zwischen marxistischen Ökonomen und Historikern in den frühen Shōwa-Jahren, in der über das Wesen des japanischen Kapitalismus‘ oder die Bedeutung der Meiji-Restauration diskutiert wurde. Die „Kōza Schule“ bezeichnete dabei eine Gruppe, die sich auf die *Vorlesungen über die Entwicklungsgeschichte des japanischen Kapitalismus* (*Nihonshihonshugihattatsushikōza*, 1932-1933 von Iwanami Shoten verlegt) stützte. Ihre Position zeichnete sich durch die Charakterisierung der Situation in Japan als „halb-feudalistisch“ aus und betonte dabei die spezifischen strukturellen Ungleichheiten innerhalb dieses Systems. Die andere Seite der Debatte, die Arbeiter- und Bauernfraktion (*rōnō-ha*), ging davon aus, dass Japan bereits in die kapitalistische Phase eingetreten war, und strebte als nächste Aufgabe die sozialistische Revolution an. Im Gegensatz dazu argumentierte die Kōza Schule zunächst für die Notwendigkeit der bürgerlich-demokratischen Revolution vor der sozialistischen Revolution, da sich die japanische Gesellschaft noch in einer halbfeudalen Ordnung befände. Die Debatte selbst wurde im Zuge der zunehmenden Militarisierung ab etwa 1937 unterdrückt und kam schließlich zum Erliegen. Die Kontrahenten dieser Debatte traten jedoch nach den langen Kriegswirren wieder in Erscheinung, und ihre Arbeiten bildeten den Ausgangspunkt für die Sozialwissenschaften der Nachkriegszeit. Insbesondere die Arbeiten der Kōza Schule, die sich mit den feudalen Elementen in der japanischen Gesellschaft befassten, hatten großen Einfluss auf die hier zu betrachtenden Forschungen von Maruyama und Ōtsuka.

Dies bedeutet jedoch nicht, dass die Probleme und Methoden von Maruyama und Ōtsuka mit denen der Kōza Schule

identisch waren. Während die Kōza Schule streng marxistisch ausgeprägt war und ihre Debatten im Rahmen von Marx‘ *Das Kapital* führten, entwickelten Maruyama und andere ihre Argumente frei vom marxistischen Rahmen – oder sogar in einer kritischen Haltung dazu. Es ist kein Zufall, dass Karl Marx und Max Weber für sie einflussreiche theoretische Vorbilder darstellten. Zwar übernahmen Maruyama und die anderen die Problemstellung des halbfeudalen Systems von der Kōza Schule, betrachteten dieses jedoch nicht als Klassen- oder Reproduktionsstruktur. Vielmehr wurde versucht, dies auf der Ebene der Ideologie und der alltäglichen Praxis zu erfassen. Das heißt, die feudalen Elemente in der japanischen Gesellschaft wurden vor allem als eine Frage des Ethos (Lebensweise, Lebensethik) und des Subjekts angesehen. Diese intellektuelle Arbeit diente dazu, Marx mit Hilfe von Weber und Smith zu relativieren. Mit anderen Worten konzentrierten sie sich eher auf den Überbau als auf die Basis bzw. sie analysierten die Autonomie des Überbaus, der nicht vollständig von der Basis bestimmt sei. Ihr Problembewusstsein wurde auch von Herbert Norman beeinflusst, bekannt durch sein Werk *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State* (1940).

Präziser formuliert gab es somit zwei Arten von Sozialwissenschaften im Nachkriegsjapan: die Sozialwissenschaft der Marxisten und die Sozialwissenschaft der Nichtmarxisten wie von Maruyama und anderen. Zu ersteren zählten etwa die Mitglieder der Gesellschaft demokratischer Wissenschaftler (*Minshu kagakusha kyōkai*), die in dem bereits erwähnten Buch von Kuno (et al.) als die „Denkbewegung des Anti-Establishments“ bezeichnet werden. Auch die Gruppe um Uno Kōzō, die ausgehend von Marx *Das Kapital* ein auf der Dreistufentheorie basierendes System konstruierte, die aus Prinzipien, Entwicklungsstufen und Gegenwartsdiagnosen besteht. In der vorliegenden Arbeit, die eine erneute Untersuchung der „Wissensform“ im Nachkriegsjapan zum Ziel hat, geht es je-

doch vor allem um die Sozialwissenschaft im letztgenannten Sinne. Für die japanische Gesellschaft, die aus den Trümmern der Niederlage einen Neuanfang anstrebte, bestand die wichtigste intellektuelle Aufgabe darin, die Bedeutung der Kriegserfahrungen zu hinterfragen und zu überlegen, wie eine neue Gesellschaft errichtet werden sollte. Als Antwort auf diese Aufgabe erschien vielen Maruyama Masaos sensationeller Artikel „Logik und Psychologie des Ultrationalismus“ (*Sekai*, Mai 1946). Auch wenn Takeuchi Hiroshi in seinem kürzlich erschienenen Buch versucht, den Impuls von Maruyamas Artikel zu relativieren,<sup>2</sup> war dessen Einfluss zumindest auf die Studierenden, die damals noch einen sehr besonderen Status hatten, unermesslich. Ōtsuka Hisao, Uchida Yoshihiko, Kawashima Takeyoshi und andere teilten nicht nur Maruyamas Problembewusstsein, sondern hatten auch die universitäre Institution als ihre wichtigste intellektuelle Basis gemeinsam. Es sollte unbestritten sein ihre intellektuelle Arbeit als eine der einflussreichsten „*Gestalt des Wissens*“ im Nachkriegs-Japan zu betrachten.

## 2. Kritik

Als eine der weiteren einflussreichen „*Gestalt des Wissens*“ im Nachkriegs-Japan möchte ich als nächstes auf die (Literatur-)Kritik eingehen. Was unter Kritik (*hihyō*) zu verstehen ist, ist wiederum umstritten, aber um ein Beispiel zu nennen, so schreibt Karatani Kōjin in der Einleitung zur *Kritik des modernen Japan* (von Karatani Kōjin, Asada Akira, Hasumi Shigehiko und Miura Masashi) folgendes: „Mit dem Begriff ‚Kritik‘ meine ich mehr als Literaturkritik im engeren Sinne, nämlich so etwas wie die intellektuelle Essenz des modernen Japan.“<sup>3</sup> Tatsächlich werden allein im Teil zur Shōwa-Zeit dieses Buches folgende Personen genannt: Nakano Shigeharu, Miyamoto Kenji, Kobayashi Hideo, Fukumoto Kazuo, Tosaka Jun, Nakai Shōichi, Yasuda Yōjirō, Sakaguchi Ango, Takeda Yasumichi, Takeuchi Yoshi, Hirano Ken, Hanada Seiki, Nakamura Mitsuo, Yoshimoto

Taka'aki, Etō Jun und weitere. Bedenkt man die Tragweite und den Einfluss der intellektuellen Arbeit aller Genannte, so erscheint die Behauptung, die „Kritik“ sei die „intellektuelle Essenz des modernen Japans“, als nicht übertrieben.

In der Tat ist es andeutungsvoll, dass die moderne japanische Literatur mit Tsubouchi Shōyōs *Shōsetsu Shinzui* (Das Wesen des Romans) (1885) ihren Anfang fand. Bekanntlich stellte Tsubouchi in diesem Buch die Idee des modernen westlichen Romans vor und legte damit den Grundstein für die nachfolgende Literaturkritik in Japan. Nach der Veröffentlichung von *Shōsetsu Shinzui* schrieb Tsubouchi den Roman *Tōsei shōsei kishitsu* (Der Charakter der heutigen Studenten) auf der Grundlage der davor dargelegten Idee eines Romans. Dies deutet darauf hin, dass zu Beginn der modernen japanischen Literatur die Kritik dem Roman vorausging. Man könnte sogar sagen, dass die moderne japanische Literatur mit der Kritik begonnen hat. Obwohl die Geschichte der Literatur im Allgemeinen parallel zur Geschichte der Kritik verläuft, kann man im Falle des modernen Japans sagen, dass die Kritik eine besonders wichtige Rolle gespielt hat.

Darüber hinaus soll darauf aufmerksam gemacht werden, dass die Literatur in der japanischen Denktradition seit jeher einen sehr hohen Stellenwert hatte. So schreibt Kato Shūichi in seinem *Nihon bungakushi josetsu* (Einführung in die japanische Literatur) wie folgt: „Die Literatur hat in Japan zumindest bis zu einem gewissen Grad die Rolle der Philosophie im Westen übernommen (als zentrales Ausdrucksmittel des Denkens) und gleichzeitig unvergleichlich größeren Einfluss auf die Kunst ausgeübt als im Westen. So wie die mittelalterliche Theologie die Kunst zu ihrer Dienerin gemacht hat, so hat die Literatur die Musik zu ihrer Dienerin gemacht. In Japan repräsentiert die Literaturgeschichte in hohem Maße die Geschichte des japanischen Denkens und der Sinnlichkeit.“<sup>4</sup> Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint der

folgende Hinweis von Ōsawa Masachi nicht überraschend:

„In der Tat waren es nicht Philosophen oder andere Akademiker, die in der modernen Geschichte Japans als die zentralen Träger des Denkens galten, sondern Literaturwissenschaftler und Literaturkritiker. Bedeutet das, dass es in der japanischen Moderne vor allem Literaturwissenschaftler und Literaturkritiker waren, die über den Rahmen eines spezifischen Fachwissens hinaus die breite Öffentlichkeit mit Ideen versorgten und ihr Wissen anregten?“<sup>5</sup>

Die bedeutende Rolle der Literaturkritik hat sich auch in der Nachkriegsgesellschaft nicht verändert. In der Literaturkritik im Nachkriegs-Japan spielte neben der seit der Vorkriegszeit bestehenden proletarischen Literatur, der Modernismuskritik und der Strömung um Kobayashi Hideo auch die 1946 gegründete Literaturzeitschrift *Kindai Bungaku* (Moderne Literatur) – mit Haniya Yutaka, Yamamuro Shizuka, Honda Shūgo, Sasaki Motokazu, Hirano Ken, Ara Masato und Odagiri Hideo als Mitwirkende – eine große Rolle. Auch in dem oben genannten Buch von Kuno und anderen wird die Gruppe von *Kindai Bungaku* als erster Bezugspunkt genommen, um einen Überblick über die gesamte Ideengeschichte der Nachkriegszeit zu geben. In Bezug auf *Kindai Bungaku* kommentierte Tsurumi Shunsuke wie folgt:

„Viele der repräsentativen Debatten der Nachkriegszeit wurden zuerst in *Kindai Bungaku* aufgegriffen, wo auch die Schienen für die Debatten gelegt wurden. (...) Mehr als viele andere Gruppen galt sie als zentraler Impulsgeber für die Ideengeschichte der Nachkriegszeit.“<sup>6</sup>

Genauer gesagt ging es um die Themen Subjektivität, Generationenunterschiede, Kriegsverantwortung, (ideologische) Konversion (*tenkō*), Politik und Literatur, den ideologischen Überbau, Intellektuelle, Organisation und Individuum sowie den Geist der Moderne. Mit Sicherheit

lässt sich sagen, dass diese Themen die später wichtigen Streitpunkte umfassten.

Auch nach *Kindai Bungaku* folgten Literaturkritiker wie Etō Jun, Yoshimoto Taka'aki, Isoda Kōichi und Karatani Kōjin, die nicht nur eine Kritik literarischer Werke, sondern auch eine umfassende Kritik der modernen Gesellschaft entwickelten. Aus dieser Perspektive steht außer Frage, dass die Literaturkritik in der Nachkriegszeit Japans eine ebenso einflussreiche „Wissensform“ war wie die Sozialwissenschaften.

### 3. Maruyama Masaos *Denken in Japan*

Nach der Feststellung der oben genannten Punkte kommen wir nun endlich zur Beziehung zwischen Sozialwissenschaften und Kritik. Besonders aufschlussreich ist hier Maruyama Masaos Werk *Nihon no Shisō* (Denken in Japan) insbesondere der erste Aufsatz „Denken in Japan“ und der zweite Aufsatz „Das Denken und die Literatur im modernen Japan“. Im Folgenden möchte ich mich der Problematik nähern, indem ich seine Argumentation vorstelle.

Zunächst zum Aufsatz „Denken in Japan“. In diesem Aufsatz weist Maruyama darauf hin, dass die japanische Geschichte an einer „Koordinatenachse des Denkens“ mangelte, die für die Einordnung und Bewertung unterschiedlicher Denkrichtungen notwendig ist. Die Ursachen hierfür analysiert Maruyama anhand der Rezeptionsmuster fremden Denkens in Japan. Für den vorliegenden Beitrag ist jedoch der am Ende des Aufsatzes aufgezeigte Gegensatz zwischen dem „Theorieglauben“ (*riron shinkō*) und dem „Gefühlsglauben“ (*jikkan shinkō*) von Bedeutung. Maruyama zufolge hat das moderne Japan in allen Bereichen, wie Politik, Recht, Wirtschaft und Bildung, europäische „Institutionen“ importiert. Dies habe jedoch nicht dazu geführt, dass die importierten „Institutionen“ vor dem Hintergrund eigener Realität reflektiert und zu etwas Eigenem gemacht wurden. Vielmehr wurde ein „Götzendienst der Institutionen“ produziert, in dem die Institutionen als fertiges Produkt ange-



nommen und verehrt wurden. Aus der Ablehnung dieser importierten „Institutionen“ entstand auf der anderen Seite ein „Gefühlsglaube“, der sich eng an das eigene Lebensgefühl anlehnte, ohne dies zu einem normativen Bewusstsein zu erheben. Beides existierte in der Geistesstruktur der Japaner:innen nebeneinander, ohne sich zu vermischen. Außerdem entwickelte sich ein „Theorieglaube“, der die eigentlich fiktiven Theorien ohne ständige Überprüfung als Realität annahm, was ebenfalls dem „Götzendienst der Institutionen“ entsprach.

Maruyama weist dabei auf den Gegensatz zwischen diesen beiden Denkweisen hin und zeigt, dass die japanischen Sozialwissenschaften eher dem „Theorieglauben“, die Kritik dagegen eher dem „Gefühlsglauben“ zuneigten. Was zunächst die Sozialwissenschaften betrifft, so verweist Maruyama auf den überragenden Einfluss des Marxismus im modernen Japan. Einerseits vermittelte der Marxismus im nichtchristlich geprägten Japan die Einsicht, dass Denken nicht bloß eine Schreibtischtätigkeit oder ein intellektueller Zeitvertreib sei, sondern eine Aufgabe, der man sich mit der ganzen Persönlichkeit stellen müsse – eine Erfahrung, die viele junge Intellektuelle tief erschütterte. Zugleich zeigte der Marxismus jedoch eine Tendenz zum Theoretizismus, der nicht selten in formalistische Abstraktionen verfiel und die gesellschaftliche Realität aus dem Blick verlor. Diese Eigenart des Marxismus, der zeitweise nahezu allein die Sozialwissenschaften repräsentierte, prägte den Charakter der japanischen Sozialwissenschaften nachhaltig.

Maruyama führte weiter aus, dass die Tradition der modernen japanischen Literatur als „Ich-Romane“ einen gegensätzlichen Charakter zu den Sozialwissenschaften angenommen hatte. Er argumentierte, dass die moderne japanische Literatur aufgrund ihrer Ablehnung importierter „Institutionen“ die Realität in einer engen, alltäglichen Gefühlswelt suchte und dabei gesellschaftliche Probleme vernachlässigte. Dieser „Theorieglaube“ und der „Gefühlsglaube“

konnten manchmal sogar in ein und derselben Person nebeneinander existieren. In jedem Fall bildeten beide zusammen einen unfruchtbaren Teufelskreis, der nach Maruyama als das größte Problem des modernen japanischen Denkens angesehen werden konnte.

Um dieses Problembewusstsein zu vertiefen, diskutierte Maruyama im Aufsatz „Das Denken und die Literatur im modernen Japan“ die Beziehungen zwischen Politik, Wissenschaft und Literatur um das Jahr 1935. Er gelangte zu dem Schluss, dass es weder einen gemeinsamen Nenner zwischen Philosophie, Wissenschaft und Literatur noch eine kulturelle Solidarität zur Verteidigung der intellektuellen Freiheit und Universalität gegeben hatte. Daraus folgte, dass sowohl die Sozialwissenschaft als auch die Literatur auf je eigene Weise dem Militarismus unterworfen waren.

Um es kurz zu fassen, Maruyamas Interesse galt der Tatsache, dass in der modernen japanischen Gesellschaft, oder genauer gesagt in der frühen Shōwa-Zeit, keine wirksame Beziehung zwischen den Sozialwissenschaften und der Literatur hergestellt werden konnte. Umgekehrt wollte er damit sagen, dass eine wirksame Beziehung zwischen beiden Bereichen hergestellt werden sollte und dass dies auch möglich sei. So ist etwa bekannt, dass Maruyama nach dem Krieg enge Verbindungen zu Takeuchi Yoshio und Takeda Taijun unterhielt.

Wenn das Schicksal des modernen Japan in der Spaltung zwischen den von außen importierten „Institutionen“ und der davon weit entfernten, alltäglichen „Gefühlswelt“ lag, dann sollte es genau die intellektuelle Aufgabe sein, zwischen beiden zu stehen und eine Brücke zu schlagen. Maruyama zufolge bezog die moderne japanische Literatur ihre Energie aus der engagierten Suche nach der Realität des Selbst zwischen „bürokratischer Institutionalisierung“ und „Familiengemeinschaften“ (*ie*). Demgegenüber bezog die Sozialwissenschaften aus dem Bestreben, die soziale Wirklichkeit in ihrer Gesamtheit zu erfassen, und seiner Ver-

bindung mit der persönlichen gedanklichen Auseinandersetzung zu verstehen, ihre Aufgabe. Wenn dem so ist, dann besteht die Aufgabe der Literatur darin, eng mit den alltäglichen Empfindungen verbunden zu bleiben und gleichzeitig einen Denkhorizont zu erreichen, der darüber hinausgeht, während die Aufgabe der Sozialwissenschaften darin besteht, den akademischen und wissenschaftlichen Charakter der Theorie zu bewahren, sich aber ständig der Überprüfung durch die Realität zu stellen und sich nicht vom Alltag zu lösen. Maruyamas Hoffnung war, dass die beiden Wissensformen nicht in „Gefühls-“ und „Theorieglauben“ verfallen, sondern die verschiedenen Institutionen der Gesellschaft mit der Persönlichkeit oder dem Alltag des Einzelnen verbinden würden.

Bemerkenswert an diesen beiden Artikeln ist, dass Maruyama darin sehr häufig den Schriftsteller und Literaturkritiker Kobayashi Hideo erwähnte. Angesichts der Häufigkeit dieser Referenzen besteht kein Zweifel daran, dass Maruyama Kobayashi sehr präsent hatte, als er „Denken in Japan“ verfasste. Die Frage ist jedoch, wie er ihn rezipierte. Einerseits erwähnte Maruyama Kobayashis Argumente in einem kritischen Kontext. Dabei ging er sehr vorsichtig vor und vermied jede direkte Kritik. Betrachtet man jedoch den Kontext, wird die kritische Absicht deutlich. Ein Beispiel: In der Diskussion um den „Gefühlsglauben“ wies Maruyama auf die Tendenz hin, nur die wissenschaftliche Welt oder die alltägliche Gefühlswelt als wahr anzusehen und beide in zwei Pole zu spalten. Dort fügte er folgendes Zitat Kobayashis ein: „Letztendlich läuft es auf die Frage hinaus, ob  $2 \times 2 = 4$  ist oder ob es eine Frage des Stils ist!“ (Hideo Kobayashi, *Brief an X*)<sup>7</sup>. In seiner Auseinandersetzung mit dem fehlenden Bündnis zwischen Politik, Wissenschaft und Literatur im Vorkriegs-Japan vermied er zwar, Kobayashi vorschnell mit einem „Literaten“ gleichzusetzen, der sich gegen den politischen und wissenschaftlichen Tautologismus des Marxismus gewandt hatte. Dennoch

schien er zu der Einschätzung zu gelangen, dass Kobayashi aufgrund eines Antipolitismus letztendlich doch in die Politik verwickelt wurde.<sup>8</sup>

Während also Maruyama den massiven Einfluss des Marxismus auf das japanische Denken würdigte, verheimlichte nicht seine Sympathie für Kobayashi, der sich diesem Einfluss entschieden widersetzte. Maruyama zitierte im positiven Sinne Kobayashis Aussage, dass „die japanische Literatur erst seit der Einführung der marxistischen Literatur begonnen habe sich ernsthaft mit logisch strukturiertem Denken auseinanderzusetzen“<sup>9</sup>. Maruyama sah Kobayashi wohl als einen Menschen, der den Impuls des Marxismus deutlich spürte, sich ihm aber widersetzte und so seine eigene intellektuelle Tätigkeit entwickelte. Wie bereits erwähnt war es Maruyama selbst, der so stark vom Marxismus beeinflusst war, sich aber klar von ihm abgrenzte und in der Auseinandersetzung mit ihm seine eigene Gedankenwelt entfaltete. In dieser Hinsicht lässt sich sagen, dass Kobayashi mit derselben Herausforderung zu kämpfen hatte wie Maruyama, und in diesem Sinne ist es nicht verwunderlich, dass Maruyamas Stellungnahme zu Kobayashi so uneindeutig ausfiel. Kobayashi stellte sich der *gleichen Aufgabe* wie Maruyama und kam zu einem *anderen Schluss*. Maruyama wollte die Wissenschaftlichkeit der Sozialwissenschaften bewahren und daher den Marxismus in diesem Rahmen würdigen. Um dessen Grenzen zu überwinden, suchte er die Zusammenarbeit mit der Literatur. Kobayashi hingegen schloss sich durch seine Kritik am Marxismus eher in der Welt der Literatur ein und schnitt damit letztlich die Möglichkeit einer Zusammenarbeit zwischen Sozialwissenschaften und Literatur ab. So sah es zumindest Maruyama. Für Maruyama war Kobayashi zwar ein würdiger Gegner, dennoch jemand, den es zu überwinden galt. Hier zeigt sich die Diskrepanz zwischen Maruyama, der als Sozialwissenschaftler die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Sozialwissenschaften und Literaturkritik aus einer sozialwis-



senschaftlichen Perspektive betrachtete, und Kobayashi, der als Literaturkritiker die Notwendigkeit einer solchen Zusammenarbeit nicht erkannte.

#### **4 Yoshimoto Taka'akis Kritik an Maruyama**

Das heikle Verhältnis zwischen Sozialwissenschaften und Kritik, wie es auch zwischen Maruyama und Kobayashi zu spüren war, wird noch deutlicher durch Yoshimoto Taka'akis (1924-2012) Kritik an Maruyama (1914-1996). Einige Punkte dieser Kritik werden hier etwas genauer in den Blick genommen. Vor allem die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Nachkriegs- und Vorkriegsgeneration, die Kritik an den von der Masse losgelösten Intellektuellen und die Fiktionalität des Modells „Westeuropa“ werden breit diskutiert. Yoshimotos Diskussion scheint jedoch noch viele andere Aspekte zu enthalten, die sich nicht in den genannten Punkten erschöpfen lassen.

Zunächst sei auf den folgenden viel zitierten Satz hingewiesen: „Hier steht das Bild eines Menschen, der für einen Denker allzu ausgemergelt ist, nur aus Sehnen und Knochen zu bestehen scheint.“<sup>10</sup> Dies wird allgemein als Kritik Yoshimotos verstanden, Maruyama fühle sich als Sozialwissenschaftler auch als Kritiker. Gleich im darauffolgenden Satz schreibt Yoshimoto: „Hier steht das Bild eines Menschen, der ein zu lebhaftes Problembewusstsein hat, um als Wissenschaftler zu gelten.“ Liest man beide Sätze zusammen, so lässt sich sagen, dass Yoshimoto durchaus anerkannte, dass Maruyama auch in der Position eines Wissenschaftlers sich nicht nur auf die Wissenschaft im engeren Sinne beschränkte, sondern versuchte, sich mit der gesellschaftlichen Realität auseinanderzusetzen.

Des Weiteren räumt Yoshimoto ein, dass Maruyama „mehr als ein hochbegabter Wissenschaftler“ war, und erklärte, dass „es seine Kriegserfahrungen waren, die Maruyama zu mehr als einem Wissenschaftler machten“ (Hervorhebung im Original).<sup>11</sup> Yoshimoto fokussierte seine Aufmerksamkeit darauf, dass Maruyama,

der bis dahin in der äußerst speziellen Umgebung der Universität die Welt des „Denkens“ bewohnt hatte, dann aber als einfacher Soldat in den Krieg zog und dort mit Menschen aus der Masse der Bevölkerung, dem „gewöhnlichen Menschen“ (*seikatsusha*) in Kontakt kam, mit denen er zuvor nie zu tun gehabt hatte. Damit endet jedoch Yoshimotos positive Einschätzung Maruyamas. Yoshimotos Ansicht nach hatte Maruyama die „Masse“ (*taishū*) entschieden falsch interpretiert. Dies werde durch seine Interpretation der Gräueltaten der einfachen japanischen Soldaten offensichtlich. Maruyama führte diese Gräueltaten auf die Ideologie des Kaiser systems zurück. Er behauptete, dass die einfachen Soldaten sich mit den Werten des Kaisers identifizierten und deshalb Gräueltaten begangen hätten. Aus Yoshimotos Sicht stellte dies jedoch eine zu starke ideologische Vereinfachung der „Masse“ dar. Menschen würden niemals durch eine solche Ideologie zu Grausamkeiten getrieben. Yoshimoto wies darauf hin, dass Maruyama die wahre Natur der „Masse“ entscheidend falsch interpretiert hatte. Nach Kriegsende war diese weder in einen entschlossenen Widerstand gegen die Besatzungsmacht getreten noch eine Revolution angezettelt, sondern sich vielmehr darum bemüht, ihr Leben zu erhalten.

Yoshimoto entdeckte darüber hinaus ein Vorurteil hinter Maruyamas Fehlinterpretation. Er versuchte, dies anhand einer Analyse von Maruyamas Hauptwerk *Nihon Seiji Shisōshi Kenkyū* (Geschichte des politischen Denkens in Japan) aufzuzeigen. Yoshimotos größte Kritik an Maruyamas *Geschichte des politischen Denkens in Japan* betraf seinen Umgang mit Ogyū Sorai. Maruyama deutete den Wandel des Konfuzianismus in der Edo-Zeit bekanntlich als die Trennung von Natur und Handeln in der japanischen Denkgeschichte und erkannte bei Ogyū Sorai einen Ausgangspunkt für politisches Handeln. Maruyamas Verständnis, das fast so wirkte, als würde er in Ogyūs „institutionellem Handeln durch die Heiligen“ Carl Schmitts „Entscheidung aus

dem Nichts" hineinlesen, wurde zwar oft kritisiert, bildete aber auch den größten Reiz dieses Buches. Yoshimoto hält eine solche Interpretation jedoch für etwas übertrieben. Denn in Yoshimotos Augen erscheint eine solche Interpretation Maruyamas allzu sehr von einer „politikwissenschaftlichen“ Perspektive geprägt.

Während Maruyama die Veränderungen des Konfuzianismus in der Edo-Zeit als einen Prozess der Trennung von Natur und menschlichem Handeln betrachtete, versteht Yoshimoto diese Entwicklungen vielmehr so, dass die Konfuzianer der Edo-Zeit nicht nur als Überträger oder Bewahrer der wissenschaftlichen Tradition agierten, sondern als eigenständige Denker auftraten, die in gesellschaftliche Prozesse eingriffen. Mit anderen Worten: Die Lehre des Konfuzianismus wurde nicht einfach zu „Wissen“, sondern zu einer „Philosophie“ für die Menschen, die in der Edo-Gesellschaft lebten.

Waren Yamaga Sokō und Itō Jinsai die Träger dieser Veränderung, dann war Ogyū eine Person, die sich strikt an den Konfuzianismus als „Wissenschaft der Institutionen“ hielt. Jedenfalls sah das Yoshimoto so. Warum also legte Maruyama so viel Wert auf Ogyū? Warum hatte er in Ogyū die „Entstehung der Politikwissenschaft“ erkannt und war davon begeistert? Yoshimoto konnte Maruyamas Begeisterung nicht nachvollziehen. Wenn das Wesen der Literatur im „Wissen“ aus der Zurückgezogenheit bestehen soll, dann ist die Politikwissenschaft eine „Wissenschaft der Institutionen“. Wenn die Politikwissenschaft ihre Wirksamkeit entfalten will, muss sie zwangsläufig die Perspektive des „Systems“ und der „Ordnung“ einnehmen. Das gelte selbst für eine antisystemische Politikwissenschaft. Yoshimoto argumentierte:

„Als den eigenen wissenschaftlichen Gegenstand die ‚Politikwissenschaft‘ auszuwählen, bedeutete in unserem Land, dass man sich für eine Situation der ‚denkerischen Aufenthalts in einer Herberge‘ (*shisō-tekina* „*ryōshuku*“ *no kyōgū*) entschied.“<sup>12</sup>: „Wenn das Leben einer realen Gesellschaft unter einer

herrschenden Ordnung stattfindet, hätte es nach der japanischen Naturphilosophie niemals eine solche Denkweise gegeben. Denn so wurden die dieser Ordnung zugrunde liegenden Probleme vom realen Handeln getrennt und zu einer Wissenschaft vervollständigt.“<sup>13</sup>

Aus der Perspektive der Literatur lässt sich hier eine scharfe Kritik an den Sozialwissenschaften, insbesondere an der Politikwissenschaft, erkennen. Maruyama, der eine Brücke zwischen den Sozialwissenschaften und der Literatur schlagen und eine fruchtbare Beziehung zwischen beiden anstreben wollte, hatte einst den Literaturkritiker Kobayashi Hideo kritisiert. Nun stand Maruyama seinerseits in der Kritik des Literaturkritikers Yoshimoto. Hier zeigt sich erneut die problematische Beziehung zwischen den Sozialwissenschaften und der Kritik. Die Annäherung der Sozialwissenschaften an die Kritik wurde also erneut vonseiten der Kritik abgelehnt.

## 5. Fazit

Fassen wir die obige Diskussion zusammen. Die Sozialwissenschaften und die Kritik, die die zentralen „Wissensformen“ im Nachkriegs-Japan darstellten, stammen aus sehr unterschiedlichen intellektuellen Traditionen. In Japan entwickelten sich die Sozialwissenschaften unter dem dominanten Einfluss des Marxismus. Wichtig ist allerdings, dass die japanischen Sozialwissenschaften, wie sie durch die Arbeit von Maruyama und Ōtsuka im Nachkriegs-Japan repräsentiert werden, keine einfache Übernahme, der aus dem Ausland importierten, Marxismen darstellten. Vielmehr entwickelten sie sich – unter Würdigung des Marxismus – als intellektuelle Tätigkeit, die sich ihm direkt entgegenstellte. Diese eigentümliche Spannung zum Marxismus stellte also die treibende Kraft der japanischen Sozialwissenschaften dar. Im Gegensatz dazu hatten Literatur und Kritik in der japanischen Geistesgeschichte von jeher eine privilegierte Stellung inne. Sie gewannen ihre spezifische Bedeutung

durch die Ablehnung der zahlreichen „Institutionen“, die seit der Meiji-Zeit aus dem Westen eingepflanzt wurden, und durch die daraus resultierende Hinwendung zu im alltäglichen Erleben verankerten Denkweisen (*nichijō-teki jikkan*). Dennoch war der Impuls des Marxismus (einschließlich der Gegenbewegung) auch auf Literatur und Kritik groß, was sich deutlich bei Kobayashi zeigt, der die Grundlage für die moderne japanische Kultur der Kritik etablierte.

Aus dieser Perspektive lässt sich zusammenfassen, dass die „*Gestalt des Wissens*“ im Nachkriegsjapan zumindest bis zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt durch die folgende Struktur geprägt war: An dem einen Pol stand der Marxismus, der der traditionellen geistigen Landschaft Japans völlig fremd war, am anderen Pol eine Welt alltäglicher Erfahrungen, die eng mit dem täglichen Leben verwoben war. Zwischen diesen beiden Extremen entwickelten sich die Praxis der Sozialwissenschaften und diejenige der Kritik (oder der Literatur). Die Sozialwissenschaften hielten einerseits ein Spannungsverhältnis zum Marxismus aufrecht und traten andererseits in ein Gegenverhältnis zur Kritik und zur Literatur. Diese wiederum erlangten durch den Impuls des Marxismus eine höhere Logik, behielten im Vergleich zu den Sozialwissenschaften aber eine tiefere Verbindung zum alltäglichen Erleben bei. In der japanischen Nachkriegsgesellschaft waren also die Sozialwissenschaften und die Kritik zwei Säulen, die zwischen Institution und Gefühl vermittelten und eine verbindende intellektuelle Rolle spielten.

Allerdings trifft es auch zu, dass sowohl die Sozialwissenschaften als auch die Kritik – um es mit Maruyamas Worten zu formulieren – entweder zum „Theorieglauben“ oder zum „Gefühlsglauben“ neigten. Maruyama zufolge bestand genau darin das größte Problem des modernen japanischen Denkens und er befürchtete eine Spaltung zwischen Sozialwissenschaften und Kritik (bzw. Literatur). Denn laut Maruyama war genau diese Trennung einer der Gründe, warum

die intellektuelle Welt im Vorkriegsjapan nicht genügend Widerstand gegen die Militarisierung erbringen konnte. Yoshimoto meint, es sei Maruyamas Kriegserfahrung, die ihn zu „mehr als nur einem Wissenschaftler“ gemacht hatte. Durch seine eigene Kriegserfahrung hat Maruyama seine intellektuelle Aufgabe in der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Politik, Wissenschaft und Literatur erkannt.

Dennoch fällt es schwer zu behaupten, dass sich die Beziehung zwischen Sozialwissenschaften und Kritik seither genauso entwickelt hat, wie Maruyama es gewünscht hätte. Wie in Yoshimotos Kritik an Maruyama angemerkt, ist es zweifellos so, dass sich die Tätigkeit der Sozialwissenschaften und ihre Problemstellungen nicht umfänglich im Alltagsleben der japanischen Gesellschaft etablieren konnten. Es kann wohl auch daran liegen, dass die wissenschaftliche Tätigkeit im Allgemeinen nur schwer mit den tatsächlich vorherrschenden gesellschaftlichen Gefühlen vereinbar ist. Wissenschaft kann wohl erst dann ihre kritische Stellung sichern, wenn sie einen gewissen Abstand zur Gesellschaft aufrechterhält.

Gleichwohl gilt: Wenn die intellektuelle Praxis der Sozialwissenschaften sich im Spannungsfeld zwischen wissenschaftlicher Strenge und alltäglicher Erfahrung entfaltet, so ist eine allzu große Entfernung durch Abstraktion der Realität weder für die Sozialwissenschaften noch für die japanische Gesellschaft von Vorteil. Gewiss übernahm in der Nachkriegszeit die Kritik in gewissem Maße die Funktion der Sozialwissenschaften, indem sie stellvertretend politische und gesellschaftliche Kritik formulierte. Doch inzwischen ist auch diese Tradition der Kritik im Schwinden begriffen. So hat der Kritiker Karatani Kōjin in einer seiner jüngsten Veröffentlichungen selbst konstatiert, dass die moderne Literatur in der japanischen Gesellschaft ihr Ende gefunden habe<sup>14</sup> – ein Befund, der zugleich auch das Ende der Kritik bedeutet.

Damit steht vermutlich die Tatsache im Zusammenhang, dass der intellektuel-

le Einfluss des Marxismus, der einen Pol der Wissensstruktur des modernen Japan bildete, letztendlich ganz verschwunden ist. Sollte die Spannung zum Marxismus für die Sozialwissenschaften und die Kritik von großer Bedeutung gewesen sein, so können die Sozialwissenschaften und die Kritik der Auswirkung dieses Verschwindens des Marxismus nicht entkommen.

Wie aber wird sich künftig die *Gestalt des Wissens* in Japan entwickeln? Eine Wiederbelebung jenes von Maruyama entworfenen Gefüges aus Marxismus – Sozialwissenschaften – Kritik (oder

Literatur) dürfte kaum möglich sein. Doch lässt sich ohne die Herausbildung neuer Wissenszusammenhänge und der darauf gründenden intellektuellen Spannungsverhältnisse überhaupt eine Wiedergewinnung der geistigen Welt denken? Wenn Maruyamas Diagnose einer Spaltung zwischen „Theoriegläubigkeit“ und „Gefühlsglauben“ (samt deren verdeckter Verflechtungen) nicht als überwunden gelten kann, so wäre es gewiss nicht sinnlos, die Wissensgeschichte des Nachkriegsjapan erneut in den Blick zu nehmen.

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## Endnoten

<sup>1</sup> Shū Kuno/ Shunsuke Tsurumi/ Shōzō Fujita: *Sengo Nihon no Shisō* [Das Denken im Nachkriegsjapan], Iwanami Shoten, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Takeuchi, Hiroshi: *Maruyama Masao no Jidai – Daigaku, Chisikijin, Journalism* [Die Zeit von Maruyama Masao, Universität, Intellektuelle, Journalismus], Chūkō Shinsho, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Karatani, Kōjin (Hrg.): *Kindai Nihon no Hihyō. Showa Hen. Jou – Ge.* [Kritik des modernen Japan. Shōwa-Zeit. Teil 1 und 2], Fukutake Shoten, 1990–1991, S. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Kato, Shūichi: *Nihon bungakushi josetsu. Joukan* [Einführung in die japanische Literatur. Teil 1], Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 1999, S. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ōsawa, Masachi: *Shisō no Chemistry* [Chemie des Denkens], Kinokuniya Shoten, 2005, S. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Tsurumi et. al.: *Sengo Nihon no Shisō*, S. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Masao Maruyama: *Nihon no Shiso* [Denken in Japan], Iwanami Shoten, 1961, S. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Ebd., S. 119ff.

<sup>9</sup> Ebd., S. 79.

<sup>10</sup> Yoshimoto, Taka'aki: *Yanagida Kunio Ron • Maruyama Masao Ron* [Essay über Kunio Yanagida und Masao Maruyama], Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 2001, S. 239.

<sup>11</sup> Ebd., S. 247.

<sup>12</sup> Ebd., S. 298.

<sup>13</sup> Ebd., S. 298f.

<sup>14</sup> Vgl. Kōjin Karatani: *Kindai Bungaku no Owari* [Das Ende der modernen Literatur], Inscript, 2005.

# Envy, Justice, and Democracy

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Yamamoto, Kei. 2025. "Envy, Justice, and Democracy", *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 27-35. DOI: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-04.

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"For envy is a gadding passion,  
and walketh the streets,  
and doth not keep home"  
(Sir Francis Bacon)

## 1. Introduction

This paper is framed within the broader context of the analytic-continental divide in political philosophy, a topic that has recently gained unexpected amounts of attention (Chin/Thomassen 2016). On the one hand, the questions posed, methodological discussions put forth, and arguments made in John Rawls' "A Theory of Justice", a seminal work in the analytic current of political philosophy, challenged conventional debates in mainstream conceptualizations of political thought and political philosophy (continental or not), especially in Japan. Rawls' work prompted methodological self-reflection within political science and a large-scale repositioning with or against the analytic tradition<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, in continental political philosophy, there has been a growing interest toward a political science that considers the role of feelings and emotions and critically engages with the rationalist paradigm. Notably, there is Chantal Mouffe's critique of deliberative democracy based on the political significance of passion, Martha Nussbaum's more recent discussion on the role of emotions in politics (Nussbaum 2013), as well as Yannis Stavrakakis' attempt to introduce the concept of *jouissance* (enjoyment) into political theory from a standpoint of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Stavrakakis 2011). Currently, efforts to re-evaluate the

relationship between the two (or possibly more) independently developed schools of thought and to establish a framework for dialogue between them are only in their initial stages.

Between these two traditions, so to speak, the question of "envy"<sup>2</sup> appears vaguely as a middle ground. Hence, this essay is not only an attempt to examine a concrete dimension of the "politics of emotion," which has often been discussed in very general terms, but it is also a suitable topic for both analytic and continental political philosophy, to make them sit down at the same table, so to speak. In addition, this emotion might have decisive implications for the consideration of our current democratic moment, and the recent dominance of populism in Europe and the United States may be examined differently if we can gain a new perspective on this issue. Further, the emotion of envy has not yet garnered an extensive amount of attention within the field of political science. In fact, the situation has not changed much since the time Helmut Schoeck remarked in his extensive book on envy that „[i]t is most curious to note that at the beginning of this century, authors began to show an increasing tendency, above all in the social sciences and moral philosophy, to repress the concept of envy" (Schoeck 1987, 12). Or, in the words of Joan Copjec, "social and political theorists [...] have given no serious consideration to this vice and its injurious contributions to social relations" (Copjec 2002, 162). The significant exception to this fallacy, on which Copjec is also building, is John Rawls. This pa-



per aims to examine Rawls' arguments on envy, testing them against critiques stemming primarily from outside the analytic tradition, and to explore points of friction between these arguments. Given its ambiguity, the role played by this emotion in a democratic society is also to be examined.

## 2. On Envy

To initiate the discussion, I will refer to a range of arguments on envy to outline the contours of this unique emotion. In Book II Chapter 10 of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle states the following:

"[W]e feel it towards our equals; not with the idea of getting something for ourselves, but because the other people have it. We shall feel it, if we have, or think we have, equals; and by 'equals' I mean equals in birth, relationship, age, disposition, distinction, or wealth". (Aristotle 2018, 75<sup>3</sup>)

Aristotle then categorically discusses those who become "targets of envy", his main point being that envy arises first and foremost between individuals that are *comparable* against each other. People may tend, for example, to envy their neighbour receiving a slightly more favourable treatment, but fewer may harbour envy toward holders of extreme wealth such as Donald Trump or Bill Gates.

Aristotle then clearly distinguishes envy from the feeling of indignation. While indignation can be understood as "distress caused by witnessing the unjust good fortune of others," envy is characterized as follows:

"... a disturbing pain excited by the prosperity of others. But it is excited not by the prosperity of the undeserving, but by that of people who are like us or equal with us." (Aristotle 2018, 73)

This distinction will be essential in the subsequent discussion. There is no doubt that comparability constitutes a very fundamental trait in what defines envy.

Incidentally, this emotion is typically characterised in an overwhelmingly negative manner, as evidenced by the seminal example provided by Kant. For him, envy is "a propensity to view the well-being of others with distress, even though it does not detract from one's own" (Kant 2017, 567). John Stuart Mill further characterizes envy as "that most anti-social and odious of all passions" (Mill 2020, 63). Likewise, Fukuzawa Yukichi (said to have been influenced by Mill) also harshly condemns it in chapter thirteen of *An Encouragement of Learning*, stating that "Among the many vices of humanity, none is more harmful to social relations than envy".

Exempting envy, Fukuzawa argues that even what could traditionally be considered a vice, depending on its intensity and direction of influence, can transform into a virtue. Examples include greed (*donrin*) turning to thrift (*sekken*) or slander (*hibō*) to disproof (*benbaku*). Only envy does not conform to this principle of duality. It is a genuine vice, nothing less than the "mother of all evils" and "the greatest misfortune of mankind":

Envy stands as the sole vice that is wholly and inherently malevolent, possessing a fundamentally unethical nature irrespective of circumstance, place, or direction. Envy is something that works in the shadows, it does not actively pursue anything, but instead harbours resentment due to the circumstances of others. It does not look inward but demands much from others, and the means of satisfying this discontent lies not in benefiting itself, but in causing harm to others (Fukuzawa 1942, 116).

The reason Fukuzawa detests envy to such an extent is that he sees it not only as harming others but "undermining the well-being of society as a whole". In the context of seeking Japan's ideological independence and self-respect among movements during a period of confrontation with the West, elimination of such a destabilising factor was most likely

a pressing concern for Fukuzawa. On Fukuzawa's theory of envy, Karube states that "among all seventeen chapters of *An Encouragement of Learning*, it is rare to find such a thorough critique directed at a single subject. Chapter thirteen may very well be the only one to go this far" (Karube 2011, 147). This assessment illustrates the striking negativity of Fukuzawa's viewpoint.

Regardless, arguments attributing some positive aspects to envy do exist. Take for example the work of Francis Bacon. Of those who may be subject to envy, Bacon writes that "envy is ever joined with the comparing of a man's self; and where there is no comparison, there is no envy [...]" (Bacon, 2014, 31), expressing, as we can see, the same viewpoint as that of Aristoteles. He most certainly condemns envy as "the vilest affection, and the most depraved; [...] envy worketh subtilly, and in the dark, and to the prejudice of good things, such as is the wheat" (Bacon 2014:34). Nevertheless, there is a subtle kind of utility found within Bacon's argument, one which he labels "public envy":

There is yet some good in public envy, whereas in private, there is none. For public envy, is as an ostracism, that eclipseth men, when they grow too great. And therefore it is a bridle also to great ones, to keep them within bounds. (Bacon 2014, 33).

According to Bacon, public envy spreads like an infection, and once it befalls individuals of the public, for example, "principal officers or ministers", it "turneth them into an ill odor", even if they had previously behaved virtuously (Bacon 2014, 33). However, the reason that this sort of public envy can be considered beneficial in some way likely lies in its resulting ability to deter excessive inequality. It is also noteworthy that the concept of ostracism is cited here, which refers to a democratic practice to prevent potential tyrants from rising to power in ancient Athens.

Finally, it would be remiss not to acknowledge Freud's contribution on this

matter. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud cites the example of "the troop of women and girls, all of them in love in an enthusiastically sentimental way, who crowd round a singer or pianist after his performance." According to Freud, while each of them yearns to approach the performer first and foremost for themselves, they will eventually unite as a group and happily share the star's presence equally among everyone. Freud generalizes this empirical fact in the following way:

"What appears later on in society in the shape of *Gemeingeist*, *esprit de corps*, 'group spirit', etc., does not belie its derivation from what was originally envy. No one must want to put himself forward, everyone must be the same and have the same. Social justice means that we deny ourselves many things so that others may have to do without them as well, or, what is the same thing, may not be able to ask for them." (Freud 2018, 43)

At play here is a deep, dark feeling that states "[i]f one cannot be the favourite, in any case, nobody else shall be the favourite." (Freud 2018, 43), which explicitly goes against a simplistic understanding of fairness. This contribution by Freud stating that our idea of social justice and equality is based on envy is an unsettling prospect for our largely justice-centred understanding of contemporary political philosophy.

The concept of envy has drawn the interest of many philosophers and thinkers. John Rawls, a central figure in the analytic tradition of political philosophy is no exception to this. The next section will examine Rawls' theory of justice in detail, observing his efforts to disarm the emotion of envy in his construction of justice.

### 3. Rawls' Theory of Envy

While Rawls' *Theory of Justice* does not feature envy as prominently compared to concepts like the original position, the veil of ignorance, or the theory of reflective equilibrium, he still dedicates



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two entire sections to the subject: Section 80: *The Problem of Envy* and Section 81: *Envy and Equality*.

The following section will examine the way in which envy is incorporated into Rawls' vision of a just society, and whether the framework of justice can effectively limit its destructive nature.

Firstly, the underlying assumptions made by Rawls must be considered. In his conception of justice, individuals in their original position are assumed to be consistently rational and unaffected by certain psychological tendencies. Thus, during the initial phase of the book he excludes the idea of envy from his argument, stating: "The special assumption I make is that a rational individual does not suffer from envy" (Rawls 1999, 124). He follows that under this condition, whoever finds themselves in their original position can be assumed to always opt for principles of justice.

In the third part of the book, Rawls then revisits this point. He verifies his previously established framework by applying it onto real-world human experiences. He concludes that it is undesirable to let an emotion such as envy, which in his eyes is "to be feared and avoided", interfere with deciding the principles of justice. Nevertheless, he admits that "these inclinations do exist and, in some way, they must be reckoned with" (Rawls 1999, 465). Accordingly, Rawls' point of interest is whether the psychological phenomenon of envy can be accommodated by his theory, and whether it poses a significant threat to the principles of justice (mostly the difference principle in this case).

In Section 80, "The Problem of Envy," Rawls defines envy as follows:

We may think of envy as the propensity to view with hostility the greater good of others even though their being more fortunate than we are does not detract from our advantages. We envy people whose situation is superior to ours [...] and we are willing to deprive them of their greater benefits even if it's necessary to give up something ourselves. (Rawls 1999, 466<sup>4</sup>)

However, Rawls acknowledges the existence of instances where envy is not necessarily irrational. While it is a vice in the truest sense, he concedes that "sometimes the circumstances evoking envy are so compelling that, given human beings as they are, no one can reasonably be asked to overcome his rancorous feelings. [...] For those suffering this hurt, envious feelings are not irrational" (Rawls 1999, 468). In instances where "a person's lesser position [...] may be so great as to wound his self-respect", envy can be an inevitable response. Rawls refers to this condition as "excusable envy." Rawls' primary concern is whether a society governed by the principles of justice will generate an excessive amount of excusable envy. The later section will delve deeper into his argument.

In Section 81, "Envy and Equality," Rawls identifies three conditions that "encourage hostile outbreaks of envy." The first condition states that "the least favored tend to be more envious of the better situation of the more favored, the less secure their self-respect and the greater the feeling that they cannot improve their prospects are" (Rawls 1999, 469). The second condition refers to the existence of certain factors that cause a lack of self-respect or confidence to be experienced as painful or humiliating (such as social structures or lifestyles that make the discrepancy between oneself and others feel painful). The third condition constitutes a belief that "[t]o alleviate their feelings of anguish and inferiority, [...] they have no choice but to impose a loss on those better placed even at some cost to themselves". When these three conditions coincide, hostile envy becomes excusable, even in circumstances involving the disruption of the prevailing social order.

The aim of Rawls' argument is to demonstrate that the just society he envisions alleviates these conditions: First, the conception of justice (equal dignity and fundamental rights) supports the self-esteem of citizens. Because "[m]embers of the community share a common

sense of justice and are firmly bound by the bonds of civic friendship" (Rawls 1999, 470), even if somebody were to be less fortunate, they would have no basis to consider themselves inferior. Second, in a well-ordered society, wealth disparities do not become excessive. A well-ordered society will "diminish the number of occasions when the less favoured are likely to experience their situation as impoverished and humiliating. Even if they have some liability to envy, it may never be strongly evoked." (Rawls 1999, 471). Finally, Rawls continues by asserting rather straightforwardly that his envisioned society offers constructive ways of improving one's circumstances. Thus, he gives the following verdict:

I conclude, then, that the principles of justice are not likely to arouse excusable general envy (nor particular envy either) to a troublesome extent. By this test, the conception of justice again seems relatively stable. (Rawls 1999, 471)

However, the question remains as to whether this truly ensures the establishment of justice and its safeguarding from envy. Rawls somewhat abruptly stops his discussion of the subject, acknowledging that he has "not explained it thoroughly." One cannot help but sense a hint of insecurity lingering within this conclusion.

#### 4. Rawls' Critics

As discussed in the previous section, Rawls argues that his conception of a just society is immune to the corrosive effects of envy. However, it is important to acknowledge the noteworthy criticism that has been directed towards this argument. This section will focus on critiques stemming from what can be collectively understood as the continental school of philosophy<sup>5</sup>. These criticisms, although possibly perceived as 'extrinsic' by Rawlsian proponents, might at times sharply reveal the limitations of his argument. Even if so, it would be too early to conclude that no productive dialogue is possible.

The first point of critique to be addressed is, in a sense, a classical one, namely the question of Rawls' assumption of the original position. For example, Renata Salecl raises concerns about Rawls's exclusion of envy from the original position. According to her:

"Rawls's claim that envy must be excluded from the original position is therefore deeply symptomatic. Rawls justifies this exclusion, first, by the fact that if envy were admitted into the original position, it would allow for the choice of a system which would not be beneficial to all parties and, second, by the fact that a system defined by justice is very unlikely to generate strong feelings of envy. Rawls presupposes that we can regulate envy (admit it or not), and that it depends on the system (there is less envy in a just system). However, in the dialectic of desire, in as much as it is intersubjective, envy is always at work." (Salecl 1994, 88)

Salecl bases her argument on the psychoanalytic mechanism of "desire," arguing that no subject can make purely rational choices independent of their relationship with others. Rather, she posits that: "the subject desires an object insofar as it is the object of the other's desire. As Lacan puts it, desire is always the desire of the other" (Salecl 1994, 88). However, this critique may mean little for those who do not share the psychoanalytic framework. Furthermore, Rawls' methodological structure — wherein ideal theory is developed in the first part and non-ideal conditions are addressed later—makes it unlikely that such critiques of the original position would destabilize his overall argument<sup>6</sup>.

A more compelling critique, however, questions Rawls' understanding of the nature of envy itself. He claims that "excusable envy" would diminish in his idea of a just society, yet this assumption is far from self-evident. Consider the case of social hierarchies. In the event that individuals are unable to attribute their lower status to systemic injustice or others' wrongdoing — due to the social order be-

ing perceived as just — it is important to consider where such dissatisfaction can be directed. Kozakai refers to this predicament as "the hell of justice":

"If one's lower status or salary compared to a colleague hired at the same time can be attributed to an unfair evaluation by a spiteful supervisor, one's self-esteem remains intact. It is precisely the belief that hierarchical criteria are unjust that spares individuals from feelings of inferiority. Contrary to Rawls's optimism, a just society could be the most terrifying scenario. A society where the principles of social order are fully transparent may not be a utopia but a living hell for human beings." (Kozakai 2008, 246)

Similarly, Slavoj Žižek critiques Rawls' argument by arguing that such a society would inevitably generate conditions for the eruption of resentment:

"What Rawls doesn't see is how such a society would create the conditions for an uncontrolled explosion of resentment: in it, I would know that my inferior status is fully justified and would be deprived of blaming my failure on social injustice." (Žižek 2006, 36)<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, the very success of Rawls' proposal might foreshadow the emergence of unintended and deeply problematic outcomes, which Rawls himself did not anticipate<sup>8</sup>.

This critique stems from the idea that a reduction in disparity does not necessarily lead to a reduction in the factors that cause envy. As previously stated, disparities in Rawls' just society are considered not to become excessive by default. However, the question remains as to whether the reduction of disparities would instead provoke a more intense form of envy. As Aristotle observes, when envy arises between those who are comparable, when differences become smaller, and the other person becomes more accessible, then will those once unbridgeable differences not appear increasingly intolerable? The reduction of disparities does not always lead to a decrease in envy<sup>9</sup>. According to

Rawls' classification, such envy would be deemed "inexcusable", thereby classifying the critique as extrinsic. Still, this intensely negative emotion, whether it is reasonable or not, unmistakably points to a weak link in Rawls' conceptual framework. "Envy threatens the separation of the citizen and the empirical subject; Rawls' doctrine appears exorbitant or unstable" (Dupuy 1993, 285).

## 5. Envy and Democracy

The critique directed at *A Theory of Justice* in the previous section can be summarized as follows: while Rawls views envy as dangerous, he has not sufficiently accounted for its somewhat unrefined nature. Envy does not simply vanish with the elimination of disparities. Nozick referred to its intractability as the "principle of the conservation of envy" (Nozick 1974, 245). Now, while envy has practically been made intractable in Rawls' just society, the question of whether it is entirely harmful to a democratic society and whether it would be preferable for it not to exist, is not so easily answered. For the last section of this paper, the relationship between envy and democracy will be considered.

To more thoroughly examine the equivocal nature of envy in democratic societies, it is necessary to turn to the insights of Tocqueville. It is well known that Tocqueville, in his study of American society, identified "equality of condition" as a fundamental fact. However, this movement toward equality was not just a reality limited to America. According to Tocqueville, it was also part of Europe's democratization process over the past 700 years. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe understood this chain of equalization, or more precisely the democratic revolution as something that "designates the end of a society of a hierarchic and inegalitarian type, ruled by a theological-political logic in which the social order had its foundation in divine will" Laclau/Mouffe 2001, 155).

Just as discontent with political inequality during the French Revolution ig-

nited criticisms of economic inequality, the democratic revolution is understood as a series of processes creating a more egalitarian society through the absorption of various demands and their transformation into a chain of equivalence. As Uno Shigeki points out, the role of "imagination" in this process is crucial. In other words, in societies prior to equalization, people did not see their superiors as objects of comparison. In such a society, no special justification is required for a state of inequality, nor is it likely to produce a feeling of envy towards one's superiors. However, once this "imagination that deems others as being equal to oneself" (Uno 2007, 62) is unleashed, people begin to experience dissatisfaction with political, economic, and other forms of inequality. This dissatisfaction is evident regardless of whether individuals recognise that superiors are human beings just like them or not. At this point, inequality will appear as something devoid of any legitimacy. Moreover, it's precisely because "special reasons are required to make inequality justifiable" (Uno 2007, 60), that makes it a distinct characteristic of a democratic society.

Uno refers to such individuals, endowed with new imaginative capacities, as "homo democraticus". However, they simultaneously embody what amounts to a "homo invidiosus", an "envious human". As previously noted, envy arises among equals, yet it must be pointed out that this requires a minimal difference to be present. In essence, envy is a sentiment that thrives on a delicate balance between equality and difference<sup>10</sup>. Assuming the notions of equality and difference to be fundamental components of democratic ideology, it can be deduced that envy is an inevitable aspect of a democratic society. Conversely, a society devoid of envy would either be completely homogenous without any differences between individuals, or a pre-modern one based on absolute differences disallowing any form of comparison whatsoever. It is therefore not possible to conclude the discussion in the manner proposed by Rawls, name-

ly by uncritically embracing the absence of envy as a positive phenomenon. Instead, we must consider envy as both a condition and a consequence to democracy. Thus, whether desired or not, envy may be seen as an unavoidable form of "democratic ethos" or "democratic passion" in a descriptive, rather than normative, sense<sup>11</sup>.

To conclude, this paper has provided an overview of the special properties of envy and examined how Rawls, as a central figure in analytic political philosophy, treats this emotion in relation to his conception of justice. According to Rawls, in a just and well-ordered society, individuals are not assumed to be excessively plagued by envy. This perspective has been subject to severe criticism both from within and outside the analytic tradition. In contrast, this analysis has been focusing more on critiques from non-analytic perspectives. What those have pointed out is that contrary to Rawls' diagnosis, a just society might not only be unable to suppress envy, but might, if anything, cause it to erupt. Finally, using Tocqueville's analysis as a reference, we have demonstrated that envy is unavoidable in a democratic society. The crucial point is the need to reframe this emotion as a democratic passion.

Now then, how meaningful can such a discussion really be? Will one simply shrug their shoulders again, claiming that I have failed to grasp Rawls's intentions properly? And yet, was it not Rawls himself who was particularly sensitive to such psychological and psychoanalytic criticisms? This is evident from the fact that, at the conclusion of his reflections on envy, he turns to consider Freud's arguments. Indeed, this passage is one of the few places in this extensive work where Rawls explicitly refers to Freud.

According to Rawls, Freud's claim that a sense of justice originates in envy is nothing more than a weakly grounded assertion. It is at least equally plausible, he argues, to trace the sense of justice back to the moral sentiment of "indignation." In order to adjudicate between these pos-



sibilities, however, one must carefully examine people's understanding of conceptions of justice and of the social circumstances in which they live.

Still, Rawls's rebuttal here is not decisive enough to entirely refute Freud's position, and the question of whether justice is, in the final analysis, nothing more than a mask for envy remains unresolved. That said, for Rawls it was necessary to respond to Freud directly and rigorously—not because Freud's argument could

be dismissed as merely external or irrelevant, but rather because, as Copjec has put it, "Freud's critique stands squarely before the theory of justice as fairness, exposing the fact that this very theory is already contaminated by envy from the outset" (Copjec 2002: 236). It seems to me that in Rawls's posture here lies an important clue for how contemporary analytic political philosophy and continental political philosophy might engage with one another.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For an overview on historic development and methodological characteristics of the analytic current, see Inoue / Tamura (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: In the original Japanese version, besides the term *shitto* 嫉妬, other words such as *netami* 妬み, *enbō* 怨望 or *senbō* 羨望 are all used interchangeably to refer to the English "envy" by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: For works such as this one, where the author cites the Japanese translation of a certain source from another language, a corresponding English version is provided.

<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Rawls explicitly acknowledges that his understanding of envy is derived from Kant's definition.

<sup>5</sup> The most representative critique from the analytic tradition of political philosophy is undoubtedly that of Nozick. For a counter-critique of Nozick's argument, see Young (1987). Young persuasively argues that the egalitarian position does not originate from envy.

<sup>6</sup> A critique that problematizes Rawls' exclusion of envy from the original position in a more intrinsic manner is presented by Tomlin (2008). Tomlin argues that the propensity for envy constitutes a "general fact" that should be acknowledged in the original position and, as such, influences the selection of the two principles of justice.

<sup>7</sup> Žižek further states, "What Rawls proposes is a terrifying social model in which hierarchy is legitimized as a natural characteristic. It lacks the simple lesson contained in the story of a Slovenian peasant, who was told by a benevolent witch: 'I will grant you any wish but be warned that your neighbor will receive twice as much.' The peasant thought for a moment, then gave a cunning smile and said to the witch: 'Take one of my eyes.'" (Žižek 2006, 68-69).

<sup>8</sup> A similar perspective is offered by Dupuy (1993): "From another standpoint, this [Rawlsian] society is one in which inequalities—because they corre-

late with differences in talent, ability, and inherent qualities—become even more conspicuous. Those at the lower end of the hierarchy cannot attribute their disadvantaged status to others. Moreover, they are, in principle, expected to be grateful that their condition is not even worse and to express gratitude to their more privileged compatriots."

<sup>9</sup> A more internally focused critique of this issue is provided by Aaron Ben-Ze'ev (1992). Drawing on the example of Israeli kibbutzim, Ben-Ze'ev argues that as inequality decreases, envy increases—a phenomenon he terms "neighbor-ly envy" rather than "neighborly love".

<sup>10</sup> This observation I owe to the insights of Keisuke Sakakura of Keio University's Graduate School of Law.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey E. Green (2013) argues that reasonable envy plays a crucial role even in the implementation of Rawlsian justice and rightly points out that contemporary liberal political philosophy has failed to adequately address this emotion. However, as many scholars have predicted, excessive envy poses a serious threat to the maintenance of democratic society. It is therefore necessary to develop mechanisms to mitigate extreme envy in ways distinct from those proposed by Rawls. For example, Kierkegaard refers to the practice of ostracism in ancient Greece as follows: "In Greece, for example, the form resentment took was ostracism, a self-defensive effort, as it were, on the part of the masses to preserve their equilibrium in face of the outstanding qualities of the eminent" (Kierkegaard 1962, 21). According to this interpretation, ostracism served as "the negative mark of greatness." At the same time, however, it can also be seen as a mechanism for suppressing the excessive manifestation of envy.

# Biopolitics and necropolitics during the pandemic from a gender perspective: The case of contemporary Japan

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Takeda, Hiroko. 2025. "Biopolitics and necropolitics during the pandemic from a gender perspective: The case of contemporary Japan", *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 36-47.  
DOI: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-05.

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If the final victor in the struggle for world domination is unable to "annex the stars," he would have no choice but to destroy himself in order to start an endless process anew.  
(Arendt 2017:48)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In September 2020, the "Research group on the impacts and challenges affecting women during the COVID-19 pandemic" was established within the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office of Japan. The study group, which focused on the impact of the pandemic on women, was set up to share information based on thorough research and investigation. Through the release of emergency recommendations and a final report, it concretely proposed comprehensive measures that included not only policies related to employment, health, and safety, but also the implementation of gender equality in decision-making spaces. The political significance of this action needs to be emphasised. The "Society for research on the impacts and challenges affecting women during the COVID-19 pandemic" played an important role in incorporating a gender perspective into the political process of Japan's COVID-19 countermeasures.

Based on the results of such political practices, this paper aims to examine the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on many women in

Japan on a structural level, specifically due to problems related to the governance systems of the capitalist economy and the state that manages it. The fact that women's hardships became more clearly recognized through the crisis of the pandemic suggests that Japan's governance structure, as it exists in its stage as an advanced capitalist society, inherently requires the existence of so-called "abandoned people" (*kimin*). This does not merely mean that the "abandoned people" were made visible, but also that the risk of a broader range of people falling into an "abandoned" state has increased. To put it differently, the hardships and difficulties experienced by women in Japan during the pandemic cannot be dismissed as merely incidental but may instead be a violent consequence of the operation of the current neoliberal governance system, which functions through the power structures of gender hierarchies. If this suspicion proves valid, then beyond the solution proposed in the final report of the aforementioned research group—namely, the realization of a gender-equal and gender-inclusive society under ordinary circumstances—it will be essential to confront directly both the inherent violence of the neoliberal capitalist economic system and the state governance structures that sustain it. Without addressing these fundamental issues, it will be im-



possible to prevent a recurrence of situations in which many women face severe hardships and even lose their lives in times of crisis.

The present study reconsiders Japan's contemporary governance system through an inquiry into its underlying logic, with particular attention to its implications for women and the conditions that have driven many into states of "abandonment." To this end, it engages with the concept of governmentality—conceived as a mode of governance that ensures the smooth functioning of capitalist economies by operating on both individuals and populations. At the same time, it draws on Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, thereby opening perspectives that previous analyses of governmentality have largely overlooked and expanding the terms of the debate.

### **The configuration/reconfiguration of Biopolitics and Necropolitics and the historical development of Capitalism**

The idea according to which life in a democracy is fundamentally peaceful, policed and violence-free (including in the form of war and devastation) does not stand up to the slightest scrutiny. (Mbembe 2019:16)

In his later years, Michel Foucault coined the term "governmentality" to discuss governance practices that regulate the human body or attend to the survival conditions and living situations of humans as a biological "species", supporting citizens in leading healthy and fulfilling lives within the environment of a liberal capitalist society. In Foucault's own words, the power of governmentality is "the power to 'let live' and 'let die'" (Foucault 2003:241). As seen in instances of racial discrimination, scientific discourses—such as biological or medical discourses—have been mobilised to identify certain groups, associated with human attributes or characteristics considered as "negative", as populations to be excluded and positioned as entities to be "left to die". It is not difficult to find such

cases in modern history.

Focusing on the elements of "death" inherent in such "biopolitics", several scholars, including Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 1998) and Roberto Esposito (Esposito 2008; Esposito 2009), have attempted to continue discussions of "governmentality". In recent years, especially, Achille Mbembe from Cameroon has attempted to boldly reform discussions on "governmentality" from the perspective of "necropolitics", considering the history of racism, the capitalist economy as a world system, and imperialism (Mbembe 2019).

Mbembe's discussion of "necropolitics" reveals a significant blind spot in the discourse on "governmentality" up until now. In this context, the key point was to broaden the previous discussions of "governmentality", which were primarily centred on the allocation and management of populations within national territories, to a geopolitical perspective. Specifically, Mbembe points out that the period in which democratic politics were rapidly advancing in Western Countries was also the era of imperialism during which the colonial competition between major powers was being carried out and slavery was functioning as a legitimate system of production. In other words, this means, that the governance practices of "biopolitics", which ensure that people lead healthy and happy lives, were only made possible by the existence of an outside — either areas outside of the nation-state that were subject to long-term armed conflict or groups of slaves excluded from the category of "human" by being seen as means of production to be traded on markets often literally "used" as disposable commodities.

Mbembe describes these two different sides of modern democracy as "two bodies". Namely, on the one hand, there is the "solar body", which refers to the situation in Western European countries, and on the other hand, there is the "nocturnal body" which refers to colonies that were originally penal colonies and plantations where slaves were exploited as a means of production (ibid.:22-23). In places corre-

sponding to the “nocturnal body”, different laws and principles were applied and experimental methods and technologies for large-scale plunder and mass killings were used. As a result, in areas subject to slave trade and colonisation, substantial population decline occurred (ibid.:24). In this way, the development of democracy, plantations, and colonial rule unfolded simultaneously with this process leaving deep trauma in the regions designated as the “nocturnal body”. Yet, this fact was never explicitly acknowledged by the places corresponding to the “solar body”. According to Mbembe, for modern democracy to be maintained and function perfectly, a mythical logic needed to permeate the entire political society. Thus, the violence inherent in the politics of Western countries was continually externalised to plantations and colonies. This externalisation rendered the acts of violence occurring in these external regions invisible within the major powers themselves. This mechanism of externalisation continues to function in modern contexts through systems like detention centres and prisons (ibid.:27) and even under contemporary “necropolitics”, “a large proportion of the population are exposed to survival conditions that confer the status of living corpses” (ibid.:92).

It is particularly interesting to note here, that in developing his discussion on “necropolitics”, Mbembe explicitly revisits Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (2017) (Mbembe 2019:71-72). In Foucault’s final lecture of his 1975-76 lecture series “Society must be defended” (Foucault 2003), Foucault himself identifies racism, in a manner strongly reminiscent of Arendt, as the logic mobilised when the people are put on either the side of “life” or “death”. Moreover, the structure of the lecture itself can be read as reflecting the arguments developed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Therefore, Mbembe’s reference to Arendt’s text is not only a natural procedure for advancing the argument, but at the same time, by tracing back to Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, it becomes possible to organically

relate the expanded scope of “governmentality”—broadened through the concept of “necropolitics”—to the issues of the capitalist economy as a world system.

As is well known, Arendt referred to Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Accumulation of Capital* to argue that the driving force behind imperialist policies was the characteristic of capitalist economies to require an “outside” for the realisation of surplus value. Arendt explains this mechanism as follows:

The adjustment of supply and demand within the borders of a single country was possible only as long as the capitalist system had not yet come to dominate all social strata of the population, that is, before the capitalist system had fully realized its entire productive capacity. Only when capitalism had permeated all structures of a nation’s economic and social life, and when all social strata of the population had been integrated into the system of production and consumption dictated by capitalism, did it become clear that “from the very beginning, capitalist production, in its modes of operation and laws of motion, had taken into account the entire planet as a reservoir of productive capacity,” and that the accumulation process, which would inevitably lead to the collapse of the entire system if it were to stop, constantly required new territories that had not yet been absorbed into capitalism—territories that could be further capitalized for raw materials, commodity markets, and labor markets. (Arendt 2017:50-51)<sup>2</sup>

When “primitive accumulation” within their own borders became impossible, leading European capitalism into a crisis, it embarked on imperialist policies as a means to continue capital accumulation and thereby avoid the “ruin of the entire nation.” Arendt explained this process by stating, “Unless pure economic laws were broken through political actions, the collapse of the capitalist economy would have been inevitable” (ibid.:51)<sup>2</sup>. As a result, those who were positioned outside the framework of the “people” became subjects of “necropol-

itics." In this sense, "necropolitics" was an essential technology of power for the governance system of the nation-state, whose primary goal was the development of the capitalist economy.

David Harvey already rephrased "primitive accumulation" as "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003), and Nancy Fraser emphasised the need to be aware of capitalism's "back-story" (Fraser and Jaeggi 2018). Such attempts, which reaffirm that violent power was exercised for capital accumulation during the process of development of the capitalist economy, are not limited to discussions of "necropolitics." However, by focusing on "necropolitics," a certain sophistication inherent in governance systems based on "governmentality" becomes clear. Arendt referred to the immigrants coming from the colonies as "human debris" (Arendt 2017:54). Indeed, many of them were marginalised within the nation-state based on race and ethnicity, or they were "separated from the ranks of producers after each crisis that inevitably followed the period of industrial expansion and were trapped in a permanent state of unemployment."<sup>3</sup> (ibid.) In other words, they were the individuals who became the targets of "necropolitics" within the nation-state. As such people went back to the colonies (or were discarded to them) and they came to exercise the technologies of "necropolitics" on those who were considered as "others" in regards of racial categories. In this way, the practitioners and subjects of "necropolitics" constantly change and shift. According to Mbembe, through such dynamics, the "cycle of hatred" expands, and its spread will not cease (Mbembe 2019:39).

Mbembe's discussion of "necropolitics" is primarily based on the academic work of Frantz Fanon and also aims to engage in philosophical speculation as a scientific endeavour. Therefore, the implications of the political economy of "necropolitics" and governance systems, as examined in this section, cannot be said to be a central issue in Mbembe's own concerns. One of the consequences

of this point is that in Mbembe's argument, the "necropolitics" of the imperialist era can be read as a direct predecessor to today's developments. Mbembe acknowledges that the means and tools for exercising "necropolitics" have become more sophisticated due to advances in science and technology, but he does not explicitly discuss the changes brought about by the transformation of the capitalist economy, particularly the expansion of neoliberal influences. In contrast, as discussed by Nicholas Rose and others, the operation of "governmentality" in advanced capitalist societies, where the influence of neoliberalism has permeated, becomes more "sophisticated" in a way that is internalised by individuals, and people are encouraged to act as "productive self" (Rose 1999). How can we understand this process of the enhancement of "governmentality", when we reconsider "governmentality" in light of Mbembe's problematization of it as a technology of power that operates by the "power to kill, to let live and to expose to death" (Mbembe 2019:66)? In the next section, as a preparatory step for examining the development of "necropolitics" in contemporary Japan, I will attempt to trace the influence of politics rooted in neoliberalism on "necropolitics" while taking into account the contemporary Japanese context.

### **Neoliberalism as a "political project" and the development of governmentality**

Recent scholarship on neoliberalism has proposed approaches that frame it primarily as a "political project," seeking to distance this perspective from purely academic debates while simultaneously underscoring the interdependence between the two (Harvey 2005; Mirowski 2013; Brown 2015, 2019; Davies 2017). For example, Mirowski examines how the Mont Pèlerin Society, established by Friedrich von Hayek in 1947, has not only exerted political influence on both levels of international and domestic politics by forming a "Neoliberal Thought Collective" which functions as an internation-

al intellectual network, but also spreads as “everyday neoliberalism” through the promotion of products and books aimed for self-improvement, and examining what is internalized and practiced by people (Mirowski 2013). Despite experiencing the global financial crisis, neoliberalism did not “die” (Crouch 2011) and was able to maintain its influence, not only due to the energetic enlightenment and propaganda activities by the “neoliberal thought collective,” but also because it depended on the “everydayness” of neoliberalism. In other words, neoliberalism as a “political project” is supported by the “advanced” technology of governmental power that encourages to internalise a specific way of thinking and living, and for this reason, Mirowski asserts that “biopolitics exists here and will continue to exist in the future” (Mirowski 2013:148).

It makes sense here to confirm Mirowski's critique, that a gap exists between the elite-level discussion of neoliberalism and the everyday discourse, which was originally intentionally created. Mirowski refers to this phenomenon as the “doctrine of double truth” (ibid.:68), but the problem is that the duality of such discourses often created contradictions between the two versions of neoliberalism. Mirowski in particular points out the “contradiction” that the Mont Pelerin Society was an anti-liberal organization run by hierarchical control, and that in contrast to Hayek's emphasis on “spontaneous order,” the Society was a lobbying organization that sought to implement certain policies and disseminate ideas “from above,” and thus its very mode of action denied the principle of “spontaneous order.”

Wendy Brown's argument intersects with Mirowski's, who contends that neoliberalism as a “political project” involved the exclusion of non-elite individuals from the production of discourse and the unilateral imposition of specific ideas from above, making it, in reality, anti-liberal and authoritarian. Similarly, Brown considers the rise of phenomena such as the exclusion of immigrants, racist rhetoric, and the surge of misogynistic move-

ments in recent years — representative of an anti-democratic, anti-social, and authoritarian assertion of “freedom” — to be the logical consequence of neoliberal reason, referring to it as the “Frankenstein of neoliberalism” (Brown 2018; 2019). The neoliberal argument rejects collective control as inherently leading to totalitarianism. In contrast, Hayek emphasized that “spontaneous order” and the expansion of a protected personal sphere—grounded in market competition as well as in moral traditions of family and community—guarantee a life of freedom, understood as the absence of coercion, without recourse to collective intervention by society or politics. Thus, in neoliberal discourse, the expansion of the private sphere by a depoliticized, anti-regulation state is advocated. However, its practical consequences include the restructuring and adjustment of state institutions to facilitate activities of powerful corporations holding significant capital, as well as the justification of discriminatory rhetoric against racial and sexual minorities under the pretext of protecting private property, family traditions, and privacy. According to Brown, this results in “de-democratizing political culture and undermining the norms of inclusion, plurality, tolerance, and equality.” (Brown 2018: 33). Furthermore, the emphasis on market mechanisms, tradition, and a morality that prioritizes family privacy leads to an understanding that the political community recognized as the “people” is “not constituted by democratic citizenship but owned” (ibid.:34). In such an environment, the urge to prioritise “shrewd” commercial activities that maximise private economic profits, while on the other hand, securing the safety of the “home”, regarded as a place of refuge in a society where competition has become all-encompassing and increasingly perilous, intensifies. Laws and regulations, along with other state institutions, are reformed to support these tendencies and modes of behaviour. According to Brown, the consequences of this series of dynamics is a change in the nature of “freedom”.



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Freedom becomes a weapon against the needful or historically excluded and paradoxically solicits the growth of statist power in the form of paternal protectionism, both economic and securitarian. (Brown 2018:74)

To maximize one's own economic activities and personal freedom, one uses the state's institutions to manage and control others, while simultaneously attacking and excluding them. The technology of such use of power reached by neoliberalism corresponds to the nihilism of an era where normative values lose their foundational meaning and are instrumentalised by turning them into commercial brands or political weapons (Brown 2019: 159–160). Actors in different spheres frequently mobilize the rhetoric of neoliberalism without considering the logical coherence of its outcomes, strategically mixing truth and falsehood in pursuit of political, economic, and private interests. As a result, those designated as "others" in such discourses are marginalized as not in need of protection. At this point, discursive resources usable to recover the "others" from marginalization are non-existent, because the norms of "inclusion, diversity, tolerance, and equality have already been undermined". On the other hand, the demand for "maximisation" acts in a way that expands the range of people that are assigned to the "others". Viewed in this way, it can be argued that within the operations of "governmentality" in an advanced capitalist society where neoliberalism has expanded its influence, the ones becoming the primary target of "necropolitics" are those who are "othered" by the "political project" of neoliberalism. In other words, these are people who do not or cannot become "productive subjects," and among them, there is a relatively high proportion of women and racial minorities who tend to be disadvantaged in the competition of the labour market<sup>4</sup>.

In summary, the analyses of Mirowski and Brown show that the development of neoliberalism as a "political project" is essential for the operation of "govern-

mentality" and that in this process "necropolitics" marginalizes and excludes people within and outside of the nation, who do not or cannot become "productive subjects". In other words, they are progressing in a way that renders them as "disposable". This understanding resonates with Zygmunt Bauman's discussion of "wasted lives" (Bauman 2004), as well as arguments pointing to the rise of the penal state and the advancement of exclusionary societies (Wacquant 2009; Young 1999; 2007).

So then, how is the concept of "governmentality", and especially "necropolitics", developing in Japan in connection with neoliberalism as a "political project"? Before proceeding with this analysis, it is necessary to confirm that, following prior research, the development of neoliberalism in Japan is recognized as having a certain uniqueness when compared to Western contexts underpinning the discussions referenced in this section, such as Mirowski and Brown. The following three points especially merit consideration.

Firstly, in regard to neoliberalism as a "political project", Japan is certainly a latecomer. Not only was there a time lag in its implementation compared to Western countries, but it also exhibited the characteristic of being introduced selectively, with specific targets chosen for its application. For example, in his recent work, Tanaka Takuji points out that the Nakasone administration, which is credited with introducing neoliberal reforms in Japan, implemented policies that deviated from the principles and tenets of neoliberalism, such as maintaining a labour-management cooperation policy and reinforcing the male breadwinner-model through social insurance and tax deductions (Tanaka 2020:168-170). Tanaka's argument describes the background to the fact that the traditional welfare system, which Miyamoto Tarō called "The threefold structure of Japanese-style social security" (Miyamoto 2021), was maintained even after the 1980s and how its instability became visible only in the



process of the late 1990s to the 2000s. The employment system and various regulations were gradually reformed in a process during which “structural reform” was advocated, however the male breadwinner-model has been maintained with some modifications to this day.

Secondly, the way in which neoliberalism was selectively implemented as a “political project” not only indicates that neoliberal reforms were not carried out in a systematic or comprehensive manner, but also that the scope and effects of the reforms were limited. What is interesting when considering this point is likely the inconsistency of the workfare policy in Japan as explained by Miyamoto. The workfare policies, which aim to guide welfare recipients toward employment, can be seen as a flagship policy program of neoliberalism as a “political project”. However, Miyamoto’s assessment is that, in Japan, these policies have “backfired”. The reason for this, Miyamoto explains, is that in Japan’s situation “there was no component corresponding to ‘welfare’” that was considered the target of neoliberal reform, and that “if there is no welfare to cut in the first place, the workfare card cannot be played” (Miyamoto 2021: 109–113). On the other hand, the introduction of the workfare policy was accompanied by the dissemination of strongly normative rhetoric, which called for the necessity of reform, represented by the bashing of welfare recipients led by the ruling party. While rhetoric emphasizing norms is used excessively, the scope of institutional reform is limited. This trend can also be confirmed by comparing food governance reform attempts in the 2000s with the case of the UK. In the case of food governance, which is closely connected to family activities, gender norms strongly linked to the gender-based division of labour were publicly mobilized (Takeda 2011).

Relatedly, the third distinctive point observed in neoliberal reforms as a “political project” in Japan is that, in this process, the “male breadwinner family model”, in which gender norms strongly operate, plays a central role.

As discussed in another paper, in the case of Japan, the advancement of “biopolitics” in the 1950s spread the idea of “family planning” through a national movement as part of corporate welfare, promoting its diffusion among working-class families. This approach positioned individuals as subjects practicing gender roles within the family, and, on top of that, encouraged the entire family to, in a sense, “corporatize”<sup>5</sup> (Takeda, 2005). After the 1990s, as corporate welfare receded and the structure of the family began to fluctuate, efforts were made to address “new social risks” and rhetorical shifts were attempted, promoting women’s employment as an effort to “corporatize” the family (Takeda 2008). However, the institutional design of the “male breadwinner model” was fundamentally maintained (Ōsawa 2013; Tanaka 2017; Miyamoto 2021).

The review of the “male breadwinner model” has repeatedly been pointed out as an essential political issue not only from the perspective of gender equality (Ōsawa 2013; Miura 2018), but also in order to address contemporary hardships in daily life. As will be discussed in the next section, the tendency to advocate the “enterprizing” of the family unit has been carried over into the COVID-19 countermeasures. On the other hand, as has been pointed out by many scholars, the labour market and welfare state system in modern and contemporary Japan have been organized on the basis of the “male breadwinner model” and because of this, those who do not belong to it, particularly women, have long faced economic and social difficulties. This trend has continued to the present day. For example, in a paper analysing welfare policies under the Abe administration, Ōsawa Mari points out a dysfunction in the tax and social security system when comparing single-mother households and single-income households (both with two children) that fall outside the “male breadwinner model”. She observed that the “net burden rate” is particularly heavier for the single-mother household in low-income groups (Ōsawa

2019). Such observations raise the question of whether the “Nocturnal Body” of democracy in Japan could have existed not only through race but also through gender hierarchy.

In Japan, at the stage when the COVID-19 pandemic became a reality, neoliberalism as a “political project” was operating with a certain degree of distinctiveness, as shown above. How “Biopolitics” and “Necropolitics” developed in such an environment will be examined in the next section.

### **Family and management of “life” and “death” during the pandemic in Japan**

The Japanese government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the introduction of a “new lifestyle” to encourage changes in everyday behaviour and consciousness. In the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's introduction of practical examples “for this “new lifestyle”, specific behavioural guidelines were encouraged. These included “individual basic infection prevention measures”, “fundamental daily lifestyle habits”, “lifestyle practices tailored to specific daily situations” and “new work styles”. What I understand from the text, is that the recommendations do not only call for individual behaviours, such as wearing masks, washing hands, and maintaining social distancing, but also for certain adjustments in interactions with others and work practices, like “focusing on eating and keeping conversations minimal”. These requests from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare may be interpreted as an exercise of power technologies associated with advanced forms of “governmentality.” This mode of governance presupposes a “productive subject” who proactively optimizes their own existence and conduct.

Nevertheless, it must also be addressed here that the pandemic measures, including the introduction of the “new lifestyle and the development of the health care and medical system” led to job insecurity and difficulties in daily life due to economic disruptions. As a

result, these measures necessitated significant political intervention by large public institutions. For example, as Kanai Toshiyuki discussed, the widespread school closures revealed the role schools had been playing as care facilities (Kanai 2021:193–199). Although, in the case of Japan, these closures were implemented suddenly without the provision of measures such as compensation for lost wages, resulting in significant chaos. This suggests that pandemic countermeasures would have been better grounded not in advanced forms of “governmentality,” but rather in a 19th-century model of “governmentality.” In this way, public institutions, in cooperation with specialists like medical professionals, establish systems and foundations designed to appropriately support people in leading healthy lives.

However, the government's response to large-scale organizational interventions, such as expanding testing and medical systems, providing compensation for business closures, or offering direct economic support through cash payments, was observed to be consistently passive.

Takenaka Harukata explains that the progress of COVID-19 countermeasures in Japan was limited and lacked a sense of urgency. This can be attributed to the complexity of power relations between the prime minister and local governments, as well as a lack of “capacity” resulting from administrative and fiscal reforms that had advanced since the 1990s. At the same time, Takenaka's descriptions of individuals within the Abe administration reveal a reluctance to engage in large-scale economic support, a preference for voluntary “self-restraint” measures, and a tendency toward neoliberalism as a “political project” (Takenaka 2020).

In this context, the family-based approach to governance was maintained, as symbolized by the fact that a fixed number of benefits was paid to the head of the household in a lump-sum payment for each family (Arami, special issue). In addition, with public social and economic support not progressing, families were required to manage various issues of dai-

ly life during the pandemic on their own, while continuing to live as families.

On the other hand, as already pointed out in the emergency proposals and reports by the aforementioned "Research Group on the Impact and Challenges of COVID-19 on Women," immediately after the declaration of a state of emergency and the issuance of closure requests to restaurants and other businesses, many women working in the service industry became targets of layoffs, non-renewal of contracts, and reduced shifts. After July 2020, the number of employed women began to increase, but from November of the same year, it plateaued and by March 2021, the employment level had not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau, 2021). According to the report by the "Research Group on the Impact and Challenges of COVID-19 on Women," a survey targeting female employees in dual-income households in private companies revealed that 18.8 percent of respondents who experienced a reduction in income reported cutting back on food expenses, compared to 7.7 percent of respondents who did not experience a reduction in income (Research Group on the Impact and Challenges of COVID-19 on Women, 2021:11 & Figure 12). The report further examined issues such as economic hardship, experiences of domestic violence from spouses, the disproportionate burden of increased time spent on housework and childcare falling on women, reduction in personal time, and heightened stress.

In line with these research findings, newspaper and magazine articles reporting on the increase of women's suicides during the pandemic convey how women, despite facing difficult circumstances, were driven into a corner precisely because they took on the role of "corporatizing" the family and genuinely tried to fulfil it (Rich and Hida 2021; Furukawa 2021; Shūkan Josei PRIME Henshū-bu 2021). The director of the Japanese Association of Mental Health Services commented in an article in *The Japan Times* that "women bear the responsi-

bility for infection prevention" and that "they must pay attention to their family's health, maintain cleanliness, and are being looked down upon in case they fail to fulfil these obligations appropriately" (Rich and Hida 2021). In reality, women who are mostly regarded as the primary manager of the household due to gender norms, felt an immense responsibility to prevent infections within their families. Additionally, they also began to endure significant psychological burdens by blaming themselves as being a burden on the family due to unemployment or reduced income. However, with the state of emergency declared and a reduction in their personal time, it had become difficult to secure opportunities to release such psychological burdens outside the family. Moreover, when their families are at risk, they experienced a psychological resistance to prioritising themselves. In such a process, "biopolitics" and "necropolitics" seem to be closely intertwined. It is precisely because they are strongly motivated to "corporatize" the family that it becomes a significant psychological pressure. On the other hand, when they fail this "corporatization", in other words, when they deviate from the standard family model, they become acutely aware of being "exposed to death". When viewed in this way, managing a family during the pandemic was in fact a psychologically burdensome and life-draining task for women living with their family.

On the other hand, the tendency for women who do not fit into the "male breadwinner family model" to fall victim to "necropolitics" not only persisted but intensified due to the conditions of the pandemic. An article by an NHK reporter covering the case of a homeless woman who was assaulted and killed at a bus stop in November 2020<sup>7</sup> reported that the woman had gotten a divorce because of her husband's violence and subsequently moved from job to job, working as an irregular worker for a long time. Due to her work being irregular and short-term, she began sleeping in internet cafes a few years prior. During the pandemic,

when she was unable to find work, she sat at bus stops from late night until early morning, where she was reported to have fallen victim to the attack. According to the article, the man who killed the woman stated in his testimony that she was “in the way” and expressed a strong desire to get rid of her (Tokuda & Okazaki 2021). Additionally, Journalist Nakamura Atsuhiko has reported multiple cases of female university students engaging in “sex work”<sup>8</sup> during the pandemic to cover tuition and living expenses, some of whom were sending financial support to their parents (Nakamura 2020, Nakamura & Fujii 2020). In Japan’s history, there exist countless of cases of women who, separated or widowed, found themselves outside the marriage system and were driven into low-wage, precarious work, as well as cases of young women engaging in sex work due to their family’s financial circumstances. Due to the growth of the national economy, such cases became less visible for a time or shifted overseas. However, since the 1990s, with long-term economic stagnation and the advancement of globalization, they have become visible domestically, once more. In other words, “accumulation by exploitation” accompanied by “necropolitics” once again began to unfold openly within Japan, and (this situation) has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Could the situation currently unfolding not also be interpreted in such a way?

## Conclusion

Mbembe describes “necropolitics” as a pharmakon. The interpretation that it is both “poison” and “medicine” may refer to its duality, in the sense that the community is protected by excluding the object deemed as harmful. Nonetheless, the simultaneous progression of opposing processes was the core of the discussion on governance in the first place. Going back to Foucault, governance refers to a process where, for the individual, it is both the act of becoming a subject and, at the same time, a process of being subordinated to power.

Focusing on this duality of governmentality, Benjamin Bratton argues that it is important to develop a positive form of “governmentality” in the post-pandemic world (Bratton 2021). As previously mentioned, it is indeed conceivable that the 19th-century model of “governmentality,” in which the state establishes healthcare and welfare systems and undertakes large-scale interventions, is better equipped with the appropriate governance capacity necessary to respond to a pandemic. However, after re-situating the concept of “necropolitics”, which has long remained inadequately discussed in discourses on “governmentality”, it becomes necessary to carefully consider the extent to which the idea of transforming “governmentality” in a positive direction is both feasible and effective. In particular, it is necessary to ascertain how a positive form of “governmentality” can tame the drive toward “necropolitics” and suppress violent exclusion.

Based on Brown’s argument, which concludes that neoliberalism has become a Frankenstein, the crux/core of the issue seems to lie in the fact that “governmentality” is grounded in a specific understanding of “the economy”. In capitalism—especially neoliberal capitalism—individuals are required to outcompete others in the market, maximize economic benefits and, to that end, adhere to and defend their private sphere in order to optimize their own life and livelihood. The exclusion of others is therefore an essential element in the processes of neoliberal capitalism. In contrast, the cooperative model, which has been gaining attention in the context of over a decade of austerity policies following the global financial crisis, presents a contrasting understanding of economic dynamics and ways it relates to and supports others (Guinan and Hanna 2018). In this cooperative system, as the number of members increases and the organization expands, the more stability as an economic system is achieved. In other words, the relationship with others envisioned here is rooted in what Raymond Williams once discussed as “communication,” conceived



as the act of first recognizing the existence of others in order to assert one's own claim to live, and then accepting those claims (Williams 2011 [1961]:58–59). When envisioning a system of governance, wouldn't it be essential to carefully examine how such differences in logic significantly influence the workings of power technologies?

## Acknowledgements

The report "Gendering the Politics of the COVID-19 Crisis: Solidarity in the 'Social Distance' Era" was presented at the 2021 Annual Meeting and Research Conference of the Japanese Political Science Association, Subcommittee B3 based on the draft of this paper. Valuable insights for revising the paper were gained from the comments provided by Prof. Yamazaki Nozomi and Prof. Noguchi Nobuko, who served as discussants. I would like to express my gratitude once again.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This quote is an English translation of the Japanese version of the book.
- <sup>2</sup> The cited section is not included in the English version of the book.
- <sup>3</sup> In the English version, the corresponding section is as follows: "Older than superfluous wealth was another by-product of capitalist production: the human debris that every crisis, following invariably upon each period of industrial growth, eliminated permanently from producing society." (Arendt 2017 [1951]:195).
- <sup>4</sup> Due to their gendered existence, women often become "productive subjects" and face various challenges in continuing to act as such. This is discussed from different perspectives in the articles by Okano, Miura, and Schieder included in this special issue.
- <sup>5</sup> In my cited work, I argue that through the development of such biopolitics, biological reproduction of humans (the birth of humans as organisms), economic reproduction (the recovery of workers from daily labour and the securing of necessary labour through the education, training, and socialization of the next generation of workers),

and socio-political reproduction (the cultivation and preservation of the members of society and the nation, maintaining both society and the nation-state) are closely interconnected and practiced through family life. I discuss how this "reproduction system" once functioned in post-World War II Japan (Takeda 2005).

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431\\_newlifestyle.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/0000121431_newlifestyle.html) (Last accessed: March 8, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> This woman's case is discussed in Katada (2021) and Amamiya (2021).

<sup>8</sup> The relation between women's poverty and "sex work" in Japan, including the ways in which the term "sex work" is used, has long been a subject of debate. What this paper seeks to address, is not the nature or social evaluation of "sex work" as a profession itself, but, as Fujita Takunori has pointed out, that in Japan, "sex work" often effectively serves as a de facto poverty countermeasure under the logic that "if a family lacks financial means, one can earn tuition or living expenses by engaging in the sex industry" (Fujita 2021:131).

# An Examination of the Concept of “Honorary Male”

## Why are Female Leaders Criticized?

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Translation by Audrey Chau, Nina Urban, Johanna Wieser, and Julian Wollinger

Suzuki, Ayaka. 2025. “An Examination of the Concept of “Honorary Male” Why are Female Leaders Criticized?”, *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 48-63. DOI: 10.25365/aj-2025-90-06.

### Introduction

The Gender Gap Index (GGI), which is reported annually in Japanese mass media, highlights structural problems in Japanese society. Published since 2005 by the World Economic Forum, a Swiss-based think tank, the GGI quantifies and ranks the gender gap in countries around the world<sup>1</sup>. In 2023, Japan’s GGI was 0,647, ranking 125th out of 146 countries, the lowest ever recorded (Figure 1).

As many researchers and journalists have pointed out, the main reason for Japan’s low GGI is its low scores in the categories of politics and economy. In 2023, the scores for health and education were 0,973 (59th) and 0,997 (47th) respectively, which are rather high among the participating countries. On the other hand, the scores for politics and economy were 0,057 (138th) and 0,56 (123rd). The figures for the indicators used for politics are all low: 0,111 (131st) for the ratio of male to female members of parliament (members of the House of Representatives), 0,091 (128th) for cabinet ministers and 0,000 (80th) for the tenure of male to female heads of the executive branch over the past 50 years. In the category of economy, the ratio of male to female employees in managerial

occupations is particularly low, at 0,148 (133rd). In short, female leaders in the political and economic spheres are constantly underrepresented.

Efforts to increase the number of women in leadership positions have so far been undertaken as a national policy, as described below. The difficulty, however, is that simply increasing the “number” of women leaders is not enough. In recent

years, the nature of female leaders has been discussed utilizing the term “honorary male” (*meiyo dansei*), as follows: “In Japan’s history, there have apparently only been seven #female governors / Of course, it’s a problem if there are only more female politi-

cians who are like honorary males, but still, Japan is harsh...”<sup>2</sup>, “Even if we say that women can be leaders, if women are fulfilling the ‘male’ role of a leader by acting like men, then they may just be honorary males”<sup>3</sup>. These discourses raise the question of whether increasing the number of female leaders without challenging the masculinised status of “leaders”, can be directly linked to gender equality.

This paper takes up the term “honorary male” as it is used in the context of criticising female leaders, and considers what exactly the concept of “honorary

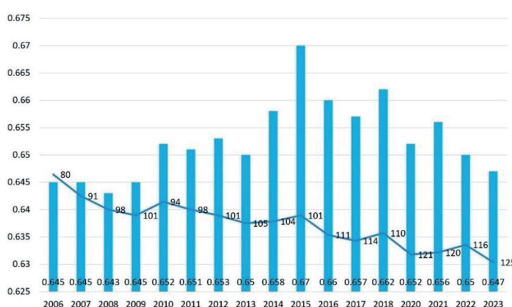


Figure 1: Development of CGI (bar chart) and Japan's rankings (numbers on the line)

male” is. To this end, the argument is developed as follows: First, an overview of policies aimed at training and increasing the number of female leaders in the country is given, and it is argued that the debate about “honorary males” arose around the same time (Section 1). Next, it is identified when and how “honorary males” have been discussed in the media, mainly newspaper articles (Section 2). Finally, the characteristics inherent in the term “honorary male” are discussed in comparison with similar concepts that have been discussed in feminist movements/studies (Section 3).

## 1. National Trends Regarding Female Leaders

### 1.1. State of Efforts in Japan

Since the 2000s, policies to increase the number of women in leadership positions have been implemented. In 2003, the Headquarters for the Implementation of Gender Equality, which was established within the Cabinet, decided on the target of “30 percent by 2020” (commonly known as “202030”) as part of the Positive Action Plan. This target states that “the proportion of women in leadership positions in all areas of society should be at least 30 percent by 2020”<sup>4</sup>. Leadership positions here refer to (1) members of parliament, (2) persons in positions equivalent to head of department or above in companies and organisations, and (3) persons engaged in highly specialised expert technical professions (decision by the Council for Gender Equality, 2007).

This 30 percent figure is well-founded. In *Men & Women of the Corporation* (1977), Rosabeth Moss Kanter proposed the concept of the “golden 30 percent”. According to Kanter, it is not “numbers” but “proportions” that are important for social minorities to exert influence in organisations and groups (Kanter 1977=1995). This “golden 30 percent”, also known as the critical mass, is said to be able to exert influence on an organisation or group when the minority share exceeds 30 percent (Dahlerup 1998)<sup>5</sup>. Even today,

critical mass theory continues to be the subject of a growing body of empirical research. A study by Joecks *et al.* examined the proportion of women on the boards of 151 listed German companies between 2000 and 2005 and found that when the number of female directors exceeded 30 percent, the innovative nature of the company increased (Joecks *et al.* 2013).

Unless they reach critical mass, minorities are disadvantaged rather than empowered, even when participating in organisations and groups. Kanter refers to minorities that do not reach critical mass as „tokens” (Kanter 1977=1995). When the minority is women, Murakami Ayaka (2023) describes the consequences for women who are forced into the position of tokens as follows: (1) “visibility”, in which a minority, especially women, receives a disproportionate amount of attention; (2) “polarisation”, in which their differences from the majority are emphasized; and (3) “assimilation”, in which the tokens internalise the majority’s standards. Many of the difficulties experienced by female leaders may be due to the fact that they have not reached the critical mass described above and have been placed in the position of tokens.

The “202030” target set for 2023 was ultimately not met. As of June 2020, the proportion of female members of the National Diet was 9,9 percent in the House of Representatives and 22,9 percent in the House of Councillors<sup>6</sup>, while the proportion of female national civil servants in the positions of head of local agencies, deputy head of divisions in ministries, or an equivalent (designated) position was 12,3, 5,9 and 4,4 percent, respectively as of July 2020<sup>7</sup>. In political and policy-making processes on a national level, the “202030” goal was achieved in female participation in civil service recruitment exams (36,8 percent), female participation in career-track positions (35,4 percent), female participation in national councils (40,7 percent), and female participation in expert commissions (30,3 percent). The same applies to the local level: at the

end of December 2020, the proportion of female members of local councils was 20,4 percent in city councils of government-designated cities, 16,2 percent in city councils as a whole, and 11,5 percent in prefectural councils, although the special district council was the only one to exceed this figure at 30,2 percent. According to the White Paper on Gender Equality 2021, all prefectural councils have female councillors, while approximately 30 percent of town and village councils still have none. The highest proportion of women in the local civil service was only 29,2 percent in positions equivalent to assistant managers in the head office of a municipality. The “202030” target was subsequently adopted in the Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality, approved by the Cabinet in December 2020, with the aim of achieving it “as early as possible in the 2020s” and achieving “a society in which there is no gender bias among people in leadership positions” in the 2030s, which is still being pursued.

The Act on the Promotion of the Active Engagement of Women in Working Life, which entered into force on 1 April 2016, sets out the basic principles for the promotion of active participation of women in the economic sector. The objectives of the act are: 1) to establish basic principles for promoting the active participation of women in the labour market; 2) to clarify the responsibilities of the state, local authorities and employers; 3) to formulate basic policies and action plans for employers; 4) to establish support measures to promote the active participation of women in the labour market; 5) to respect the human rights of men and women, and achieving a prosperous and dynamic society capable of responding to the growing trend of low birthrates and an ageing society, the diversification of people’s demands and other changes in the socio-economic situation.

Scholarly evaluations of the Act on the Promotion of the Active Engagement of Women in Working Life, which is limited to ten years, are mixed. Nakano Madoka (2017), for instance, argues that while the

law has prompted large companies to address the causes of women’s high turnover and limited promotion opportunities, it largely neglects women outside major firms. Moreover, the normative principles articulated in the act have themselves been subject to critique. Article 2.2, in particular, stipulates the following principles:

The provision of an optimal environment in which *men and women*, regardless of gender, can *easily fulfil their roles as family members with regard to childcare, nursing care and other family life activities*, while at the same time pursuing their professional activities, with mutual cooperation and social support, thus enabling a smooth and continuous reconciliation of professional and family life. (emphasis by the author)

Kiyosue Aisa sharply criticised this principle, stating that “there is no perspective on women in diverse families, difficult financial situations, etc.” (Kiyosue 2017:36). This criticism is undoubtedly inevitable, given that the law assumes that heterosexual couples form a family and that care, such as childcare and nursing care, is not outsourced but takes place in the home.

## 1.2. An Eruption of Discomfort Regarding Elite Women

As we have seen, the efforts made since 2000 to increase the number of women in leading positions have not borne much fruit. In addition to this situation, there has recently been a growing sense of unease, expressed mainly on social media, towards some women in senior positions in politics, the national civil service and private companies.

As a typical example, let us take a look at the incident of the flaming of an elite female bureaucrat at the end of February 2021. The incident arose from a series of media reports alleging that Yamada Makiko, then spokesperson for the Cabinet (her title at the time), had received expensive hospitality from a broadcasting company where Prime Minister Suga



Yoshihide's eldest son worked. Amid daily reports of the incident, the content of Yamada's comments in a video recorded and released when she was the vice-minister of Internal Affairs and Communications caused controversy. This video was published on YouTube on 4 June 2020 by the Association Learning of Tomorrow (*chō kyōiku kyōkai*; 超教育協会)<sup>8</sup>. In the video, which was designed to send a message to university students about how to succeed in the future, Yamada spoke about the importance of meeting lots of people and taking on a variety of challenges, while also sharing her own personal experiences. However, her statement that one should never refuse a drinking session (*nomikai*) as a means of achieving success and that she herself was "a woman who never refuses a drinking session" was seen as problematic.

The controversy was exacerbated by several factors. Many women are still faced with the "second shift" of household responsibilities when they come home, putting them in situations where they have no choice but to refuse drinking parties. As long as the responsibility for caring for the home and a culture of communication outside working hours are maintained, the "don't turn down drinks" prescription is of no use to them. Yamada's background as an "elite woman" also added to the criticism. After graduating from the School of Law at Waseda University, she joined the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (now the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) in 1984, and became the first female secretary to the prime minister in Abe Shinzo's cabinet in November 2013, subsequently serving as chief cabinet secretary, director-general of the Information Distribution Administration Bureau and vice-minister of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. From September 2019, she was appointed as the first female spokesperson for the cabinet under Suga Yoshihide. The *Mainichi Shinbun* newspaper, which reported on a series of incidents, described her as "a symbolic presence

of 'women's success' promoted by Abe's government"<sup>9</sup>.

In response to the news report, columnist Kawasaki Tamaki published an essay entitled "If this continues, I too will become an old-timer" The shudder that went through the women who became elite by never turning down a drinking session – the sad way of life of honorary males who are denied". After noting that the term "honorary male" used in the subtitle of the essay is "a word that is sometimes used as an insult on the Internet and requires careful handling" (Kawasaki 2021), Kawasaki suggests that Yamada's comments may have been driven by the male-centric culture and homosocial nature of companies and organisations, and that in order to join their ranks, she had to learn to drink, smoke, play golf and become an "honorary male". But Kawasaki does not stop at criticism. In response to women leaders who sympathise with Yamada's pride in being "a woman who never refuses a drinking session", and who look back and wonder if they too are being judged for this, Kawasaki expresses the following mixed feelings:

We cannot blame them in the slightest. Those were the times, those were the outstanding women who survived such a society, desperately clinging to the pyramid and climbing it, paving the way for the younger generations to follow. The "woman who never refuses a drinking session" was also an ill-advised way of getting by those days. (Kawasaki 2021)

While Kawasaki criticises the "assimilation" into the majority of men in the organisation and the work culture in which attending drinking parties is implicitly mandatory for promotion, she also shows a certain understanding that without it, today's female leaders would not have been able to "pave the way for the younger generations".

What were "those days" like? A turning point in the post-war history of women's labour was the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985, which came into force in 1986.



This law opened the way for women who had graduated from four-year universities to work in the same career-track jobs as men. On the other hand, it also led to a widening gap between women in career-track jobs and women in general employment, women in non-regular employment and women with no jobs<sup>10</sup>. The year 1985, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted, is also considered the “first year of women’s division” and the “first year of women’s poverty” (Ueno 2017:99).

The women who were employed as career-track workers between 1986 and 1990 are known as the first generation of women under the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. The aforementioned Yamada joined the ministry in 1984, and although she was recruited slightly earlier, she can be said to have built her career at about the same time as the women of the first generation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law. The 2004 White Paper on Gender Equality contains the results of a questionnaire survey conducted on the first generation of the law in question. There were 91 respondents, of whom 46 (50,5 percent) were married, 38 (41,8 percent) were unmarried and 64 (70,3 percent) were childless. The most common challenges to continuing to work were childcare (21,7 percent) for married women and the lack of role models (23,7 percent) for unmarried women, compared with 15,2 percent for married women. The main reasons for being able to continue working were “the husband’s understanding and cooperation” (32,6 percent) and “no children” (17,4 percent) for married women, while “being single” was cited by half (50,0 percent) of unmarried women.

The survey also asked participating women covered by the first generation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law,

as well as members of various councils, to predict what employment and working conditions would look like in 2020. Figure 2 summarizes the share of positive responses to three questions: (1) whether it would become easier for women to find jobs due to fewer age-related questions in recruitment and hiring; (2) whether the gender wage gap would shrink significantly as more women entered management positions; and (3) whether more than 20 percent of men would take childcare leave. Across all three questions, first-generation Equal Employment Opportunity Law workers gave fewer positive responses than council members. Commenting on these results, the White Paper states:

Many of the women cited the lack of role models as a major challenge, revealing how the first generation of Equal Employment Opportunity Law workers had to build their careers without the guidance of senior female leaders. Having worked in such an environment, they tend to be more pessimistic about their employment prospects than the councillors (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office 2004: 76).

More than three decades after the Equal Employment Opportunity Law came into force, many women recruited in its early years who remained in the workforce now occupy senior positions. They advanced their careers

despite the absence of institutional support for reconciling work and family life. Today, however, their status as “female leaders” is subject to critique. A key entry point into this debate is the term “honorary male,” often invoked in criticisms of women leaders. What kinds of discomfort do women articulate toward some female leaders through the use of this label? The following section traces the origins and uses of the term “honorary male.”

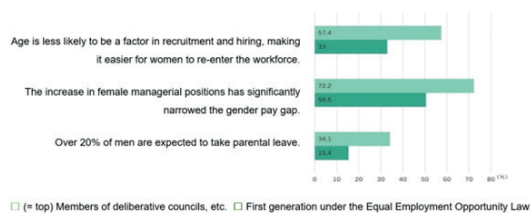


Figure 2: Projections on the employment and work Situation in 2020 based on the “2004 White Paper on Gender Equality” by the Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office.

## 2. How have “Honorary Males” been Discussed?

### 2.1. Today’s Understanding of “Honorary males”

As mentioned in Kawasaki’s essay quoted in the previous section, the term “honorary male” carries a negative connotation of “it is not desirable to be like this”. The definition of “honorary male” varies slightly from author to author. The main descriptions include: “a minority of women who behave like men” (Ueno 2005); “broadly speaking, ‘women who have been influenced by masculine values’” (Artesia 2020); “slang for women who have adopted masculine values” (Nitta 2014); “women who conform to a society designed for male workers” (Ogawa 2015), and “women who, despite being female, have become ‘male fundamentalists’ of male chauvinism” (Kobayashi 2016). Taking all these definitions into account, “honorary males” are those who (1) internalise masculine values, (2) behave like men, (3) do not question this behaviour, and (4) represent a minority of women.

The term “honorary males” is thought to have originated from “honorary whites”. Just as “honorary males” does not imply actual honour, even though it contains the word “honour”, “honorary whites” does not refer to an honourable white person. The term “honorary whites” was coined and popularised by opponents of the apartheid system in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. The apartheid system was a policy of racial segregation that discriminated between whites and others, with Asian people also facing discriminatory treatment. But even among Asians, the Japanese differed from the Chinese and Indians, who were mostly seen as lowly workers. At the time, Japan was a ma-

ajor trading partner of South Africa, and Japanese expatriates were treated the same way as whites under a “gentlemen’s agreement”.

The term “honorary whites” originated in discussions of the treatment of Japanese as “quasi-whites” in apartheid-era South Africa. As Yamamoto Yume (2022) notes, it was not an administrative designation but first appeared in South African newspapers in the 1960s. Chinese and Nikkei residents, in particular, were often portrayed as indistinguishable, and press coverage with a tone of sarcastic criticism emerged around this issue. In the 1970s, amid the growing international anti-apartheid movement, the term gained traction in Japan. By drawing attention to the category of “honorary whites,” activists sought to encourage Japanese audiences to view events in distant South Africa as directly relevant to themselves, thereby making the anti-apartheid movement more accessible and resonant with the general public (Makino 2016).

When did the term “honorary males”, presumably derived from “honorary whites”, come into use? Figure 3 shows the popularity of the search term “honorary males” on Google Trends. Popularity indicates the demand for a term in Google searches. The value of the highest search demand during a period is set to

100, and all other scores are calculated relative to this value. Looking at the period from 2004, when Google Trends started its service, to May 2023, the highest search demand for “honorary male” was in March 2005 (100), followed by January

2006 (70), October 2008 (55) and May 2004 (51)<sup>11</sup>. Figure 3 shows that there are two patterns of change in popularity over this period. The first change happens from January 2004 to September 2017, where there is a clear difference between high

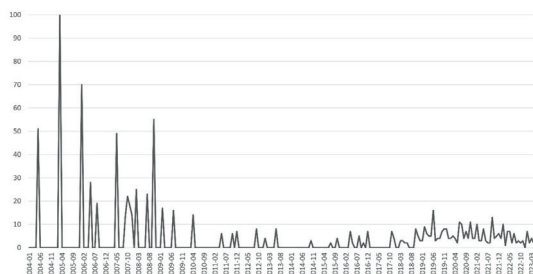


Figure 3: Popularity trends of “honorary male” based on Google Trends data (2004–2023)

and low demand for searching. During this period, it can be assumed that the keyword “honorary males” was searched for whenever an event or incident was reported. The second is the transition after October 2017. Although the popularity figures themselves were not high during this period, it seems that the keyword was constantly being searched for. It can be said that this is the period in which the above-mentioned debates about “honorary males” took place.

## 2.2. References to “honorary males” in academic literature

To the best of my knowledge, there is no academic research that has developed a coherent discussion of what/who “honorary males” are and why or how they become such. However, there are references to “honorary males” in academic literature, although they do not focus on the subject. For example, Tamura Kimie (1994) uses J. Lacan’s theory to examine what the “unconscious desire in the relationship between women and men” (Tamura 1994:2) that produces and reproduces discrimination against women is. She describes the difficulty of discussing gender differences in feminist research as follows: In essence, since the function of language itself, as the logos of logical thought, is based on the male principle, “as long as a woman remains within the logos of language and expresses herself, she can at best be an honorary male” (Tamura 1994:3). Here, Tamura points out that if a woman speaks on the basis of the “logos-language function”, which is based on the masculine principle, then she is not a woman, but an “honorary male”. However, there is no specific reference to what an “honorary male” is to begin with.

The term “honorary male” has been in use relatively often in literary studies. In such cases, it is the female characters in the work who are presented as “honorary males”. Taniguchi Hideko (2000) critically discusses the character of Portia in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and her role in the story in

terms of “honorary males”. Portia settles Antonio’s case by disguising herself as a lawyer and masquerades as a man to help her fiancé Bassanio and his friend Antonio, who desperate need because of Antonio’s financial support for Bassanio. Despite the presence of Bassanio, no one realises that the lawyer is Portia, and Portia herself does not reveal her true identity. Taniguchi argues that Portia’s setup leads her to become “a kind of honorary male by dressing up as a man and reinforcing male-centred values by existing as a ‘superior woman like a man’” (Taniguchi 2000:36). The “honorary male” is also not described in detail here, although it is said to reinforce the male-centred ideology by forcing women to dress as men to compete with men on an equal footing.

The paucity of references to “honorary males” in academic literature may be due to the fact that, at least in the 1990s, the meaning of the term was to some extent shared. It was assumed that the reader would understand the term without further explanation. This suggests that the term “honorary male” was in use before the 1990s. In the next section, I examine the use of the term “honorary male” in newspaper articles where it can be traced over a longer period.

## 2.3. Mentions of “Honorary Males” in Newspaper Articles

Newspaper articles mentioning “honorary males” were sampled as follows. The four newspapers selected were *Asahi Shinbun*, *Nikkei Shinbun*, *Mainichi Shinbun* and *Yomiuri Shinbun*. The keyword “honorary males” was searched in the Asahi Shinbun Cross Search, Nikkei Telecom, Nikkei and Mainichi Shinbun print search and the Yomiuri Shinbun print search. Three articles found in Asahi Shinbun Cross Search in the *AERA* magazine and one article found in Nikkei Telecom’s „Nikkei Bulletin News Archive” were excluded to maintain consistency with newspaper articles. A total of 20 articles were collected (Table 1)<sup>12</sup>.

Year	Date	Newspaper	Title	Issue	Category
1985	11 July	Asahi	The “Iron Lady” is an honorary male (Nairobi correspondence)	Morning	General (3)
1992	14 June	Nikkei	"The Women Who Left the Dollhouse" by Angela Hallworth (Book Review)	Morning	
1993	10 March	Yomiuri	[Modern History Revisited] (215) The Thatcher Era (Part 2) To dictatorship through the imposition of a per capita tax (Serial)	Evening (Tōkyō)	W Culture
	13 Oct.	Yomiuri	[Sounds of the tide and the wind] Women's tragedies contributed by Wakita Haruko	Evening (Ōsaka)	Culture
1994	24 May	Yomiuri	[Continuation: Gender Studies] (Part 15) Meals at a different table from that of my husband - A Serial Contribution by Hasegawa Mariko	Evening (Tōkyō)	Culture
1997	17 April	Asahi	Apple of the eye/Aomori	Morning	Aomori
1998	13 March	Nikkei	Bamboo Barrier - Saitama Prefecture Deputy Governor Bandō Mari (Tomorrow's Topics)	Evening	
	4 May	Asahi	Noguchi Ikuko appointed director of Fukuoka City Women's Centre (With This Person)/Fukuoka	Morning	Fukuoka
	25 June	Asahi	Okifuji Noriko: My issue with the 98th Upper House election from a grass-roots perspective (Part 6)/Kanagawa	Morning	Kanagawa
2002	12 Feb.	Mainichi	[Thought Box] I can't keep up with you = Yamada Takao	Morning (Tōkyō)	
2015	8 May	Asahi	Performance by the theatre group "Warai no Naikaku" in Ōsaka from the 14th to the 18th, satirizing societal issues, including female discrimination against women	Morning	Ōsaka City
2018	24 April	Asahi	(Editorial) The obstacle of the “Ban on Women”: A discussion with Moriyama Mayumi, Satō Fumika, and Takano Toshihiko	Morning	Opinion
	27 April	Asahi	(Editorial) NO to Sexual Harassment, why can't we stop it? A discussion with Murao Nobutaka, Nakano Madoka and Tanaka Toshiyuki	Morning	Opinion
2019	1 March	Asahi	(8 binding spells to say goodbye to: Part 3) Turning to “male society” to survive	Morning	General (5)
	18 July	Asahi	(Interview on the new Reiwa Era) Ambition and desire grow thin - With author Hayashi Mariko	Morning	Opinion
2020	18 July	Asahi	Book Review: ‘The Empress: Koike Yuriko’ by Ishii Taeko	Morning	Reading (2)
	21 July	Asahi	Online slander lawsuit settled for 3,15 million yen: “Nobody is happy” says Fuka Haruna	Morning	Society (2)
2021	2 March	Asahi	(My ThinkGender) Ōku Akiko, a film director who does not stir up conflict based on gender, age or opposition	Evening	Social Integration
	8 March	Nikkei	The misogynistic remarks of poet and sociologist Minashita Kiriū reveal a desire for homogeneity (theory of diversity evolution)	Morning	
2022	3 Oct.	Nikkei	Hayashi Mariko's way of surviving in a “male-dominated society” by accumulating power without being coquettish	Evening	

Table 1: List of newspaper articles concerning “honorary males”

The earliest article was published in the *Asahi Shinbun* on 11 July 1985: “The ‘Iron Lady’ is an honorary male (Nairobi correspondence)”. This article reported on an NGO forum held at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, where participants from London were asked to share their views on issues such as unemployment, cuts to welfare budget and the downsizing of childcare and care for the elderly that took place under the Thatcher government. Statements such as “Even though we have a Queen, and even though we have a female Prime Minister, we still say, ‘men first...’ Thatcher? She’s an honorary male. You can’t expect anything from someone who has gained status in established society by becoming as close to a man as possible” were published. A Yomiuri article from 10 March 1993, titled “[Modern History Revisited] (215) The Thatcher Era (Part 2): To dictatorship through the imposition of a per capita tax”, also discusses Thatcher as an “honorary male”. As part of a series of articles on the history of Thatcher’s government, it is noted that Thatcher had the reputation of being “an honorary male for political expediency” and that “she was not a real woman”.

The articles published in the 1990s up to 1998, did not use the term “honorary male” as to evaluate prominent female politicians, but rather there was a noticeable trend towards women questioning whether they themselves had become “honorary males”. For example, in the article “[Continuation: Gender Studies] (15) Eating at a different table from that of my husband” of 24 May 1994 in the serial column by Hasegawa Mariko, she recounts her experience on a visit to Tanzania with her husband as a wildlife researcher. Although it is not customary for men and women to eat at the same table among the local Tongwe people, Hasegawa, as a wildlife researcher, gave instructions to the Tongwe men and ate with them, leading her to wonder if she might have been considered an “honorary male in the course of [her] duties”. She also stated, “[she] regret[s] that at the time [she]

was busy working as an ‘honorary male’ and did not have the luxury of treating the Tongwe women as fellow women.”

The same is true for other women’s stories. The *Asahi Shinbun* article “Apple of the Eye/Aomori” of 17 April 1994 was written by a journalist working for the *Asahi Shinbun*. Reflecting on her first year on the job, the author says that “even though I drive a full-size car around the prefecture and stop alone in small restaurant on my way home from work, people don’t look at me strangely because I am ‘the journalist’” and wonders if she is “an ‘honorary male’ in the sense of South Africa’s ‘honorary whites’” and if “the title ‘newspaper journalist’ diminishes [her] ‘feminine’ aspects and gives [her] some kind of special treatment”. She expressed mixed feelings about being envied by women in roles such as mothers and wives, saying candidly: “I wish everyone could live freely and naturally”. In addition, the *Asahi Shinbun* article of 4 May 1998, “Noguchi Ikuko appointed director of Fukuoka City Women’s Centre”, interviewed Ms Noguchi, the newly appointed director of the Fukuoka City Women’s Centre “Amicus”. Noguchi mentioned receiving a message saying “Don’t become an honorary male” while working in the *Nishinippon* editorial office. She acknowledged the importance of not forgetting the female perspective, but also pointed out the difficulty of maintaining it without reinforcing gender roles.

In the 2000s, there was only one such article. Since the late 2010s, however, the number of articles referring to “honorary males” has increased. Articles published during this period are characterised by the use of the term “honorary male” when discussing incidents and social issues. As shown in Table 1, whereas previously, most articles were published in the local and cultural sections, this period saw an increase in the number of articles published in the opinion, social, and general sections. This is consistent with the Google Trends data mentioned above, which suggests that discussions



of “honorary males” became more commonplace during this period.

During the 2010s, two main incidents have been discussed, using the term “honorary male”. The first is the custom of not allowing women to enter religious spaces. An *Asahi Shinbun* article entitled “(Editorial) The Obstacle of the ‘Ban on Women’: A Discussion with Moriyama Mayumi, Satō Fumika, and Takano Toshihiko” published on 24 April 2018 is consistent with this. An incident that occurred on 4 April 2018 forms the background to the discussion. During the spring tour of the Grand Sumo Spring Tournament in Maizuru City, Kyōto Prefecture, the mayor suddenly lost consciousness during his speech. Nurses at the venue rushed into the sumo ring to provide first aid, but the Japan Sumo Association declared that they had to leave the ring because they were women. After the mayor was taken to a hospital, and the women left the ring, it was reported that a large amount of salt was thrown on them. The ban on women in the ring has long been problematic and has created practical problems for female mayors, who cannot give speeches in the ring in the same way as their male counterparts. The article is based on interviews with three experts. One of them, Satō Fumika, criticises that, like the issue of women being banned from the sumo ring, the exclusion of women from organisations has been justified throughout history. She also argued that if organizations with such a history try to include women without changing their nature, women will either be labelled as “second-class” or only those who can adapt to the organization will be treated as “honorary males”.

The second incident was the sexual harassment of a female journalist by the Vice-Minister of Finance, which was reported on the 12 April 2018 and caused a huge stir. The 27 April 2018 *Asahi Shinbun* article entitled “(Editorial) NO to Sexual Harassment, why can’t we stop it?”, consists, like the previous article, of interviews with three experts. In her interview, Nakano Madoka says that

women who worked before the Equal Employment Opportunity Law were also victims of sexual harassment, but that they put up with it in order to survive in a male-dominated society, which “may have given the men in power the wrong idea”. Nakano refers to these women as “a generation that was forced to acquire the status of ‘honorary males’” and points out that when younger women saw these “older generations”, they “may have felt that they had to persist as well”.

During this period there were also articles about women protesting against being called “honorary males”. The 21 July 2020 *Asahi Shinbun* article entitled “Online slander lawsuit settled for 3,15 million yen: ‘Nobody is happy’ says Fuka Haruna” reports that a lawsuit against an individual who defamed Fuka on social media has resulted in a settlement. One of the specific defamatory statements was that she was referred to as an “honorary male”. In a *Nikkei Shinbun* article of 3 October 2022, entitled “Hayashi Mariko’s way of surviving in a ‘male-dominated society’ by accumulating power without being coquettish”, author Hayashi Mariko reveals that she was once called an “honorary male” (implying that she gained privileged status by flattering men), to which she replied, “I have no intention of currying favour with men”. This suggests that directly labelling certain individuals as “honorary males” is now perceived as “slander” and is beginning to become a problem even among private individuals.

#### 2.4. Summary

In this section we have looked at the changing ways in which the term “honorary male” has been used in online media, in academic research and in newspapers. The earliest confirmed use of the term “honorary male” was in a 1985 newspaper article, referring to Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, known as the “Iron Lady”, for her neo-liberal policies, as an “honorary male”. Although less frequent, articles using the term “honorary male” continued to appear regularly throughout the 1990s, and the concept

was also referred to in academic literature. However, there is evidence that the term “honorary male” has been in use more frequently since the late 2010s.

From this point of view, the discourse surrounding the “honorary male” from the late 2010s to the present seems to be different from the way it has been used in the past. Up until the 1990s, particularly in the press, the narrative of the “honorary male” was used against particular individuals or in the reflections of women workers. Today, the term is used in a wider range of subjects and has taken on an aspect of defamation, with people being sued for using it.

The third section will consider the characteristics of the term “honorary male” used to express discomfort with and criticism of female leaders. There are similar concepts in feminism that have been used alongside “honorary male”. By comparing these terms, I believe we can infer why this label has come to be used today to express said discomfort with and criticism of female leaders.

### 3. Daddy’s Girl and *kō-itten*

#### 3.1. Daddy’s Girl

“Daddy’s girl” (*chichi no musume*) is another term that has been discussed extensively, especially in Japanese feminism. Although there is no clear definition, the term generally refers to women (=daughters) who are more devoted to their fathers than to their mothers and who have internalised masculine values through their fathers.

“Daddy’s girl” is very close in concept to “honorary male” and in some respects the two are connected. One example is an article by the English literature scholar Fujimori Kayoko (1997). She attempts a feminist reassessment of the writings of the American author Mary McCarthy. Fujimori points out that one of the reasons McCarthy’s works have not been on the chopping block of feminist criticism is that she has been perceived as an “honorary male”. In discussing this, the paper refers to Miranda in Shakespeare’s *The*

*Tempest*. Miranda lives with her father, Prospero, on a deserted island. Isolated from the outside world, she is unaware of the ways of women in her time. Raised by her father, Miranda is portrayed as a woman who is subservient to him and has internalised his way of life and masculine values. Fujimori notes that “daddy’s girls” are “more likely to be recognised by male society as ‘quasi-members’ because they are familiar with the rules of that society and do not pose a threat to it and therefore do not undermine its order” (Fujimori 1997:100). On this basis, she argues that women who are expected by their fathers to have certain skills, and who strive to meet their fathers’ expectations and thereby achieve accomplishments that are recognized by male-dominated society, are commonly referred to as “honorary males” (Fujimori, 1997:100). Thus, Fujimori includes the concept of “daddy’s girl” in defining “honorary male”.

If the conditions for the emergence of “honorary males” are an individual’s survival strategy within male-dominated firms, it is in the home that “daddy’s girls” are raised. In her discussion of misogyny rooted in Japanese society, Ueno Chizuko (2010) highlighted the mechanism of “daddy’s girls” as one factor contributing to women’s internalization of misogyny. According to Ueno, as daughters grow up, they witness their fathers directing misogyny against their mothers in the form of domestic violence or moral harassment. As a girl, she shares her mother’s gender and develops a sense of fear and despair that her father will treat her in a similar way. However, unlike her mother, the daughter (seemingly) has options to avoid such a situation. According to Ueno, one way is to use her mother as a negative example and refuse to be like her. Another is to enter a rivalry with her mother by competing for her father’s affection, and to look down on her by winning this game of favouritism. “In this way, the daughter becomes a ‘daddy’s girl’ under the patriarchy”, noted Ueno (Ueno 2010:159).

### 3.2. *Kō-itten*

“*Kō-itten*”, a Japanese expression used to describe a singular woman in a group of men, is a common term. It refers to a situation where there is only one woman among many men, and it is said to have its origin in a line from the “Poem on Pomegranates” by Wang Anshi, a literary figure during the Northern Song dynasty in 11th century China. The poem mentions *manryoku sōchū kō-itten* (万緑叢中紅一点), which means “one red pomegranate flower blooming among a thousand green leaves”, which differs from the contemporary meaning of “*kō-itten*” in Japan. “*Kō-itten*” is also often discussed in literary studies. The literary critic Saitō Minako published a book in 1998 entitled “Essays on *kō-itten*”<sup>13</sup>.

According to Saitō, the “upper echelons” of post-war Japanese society are not strictly “a world of ‘only men’”, but “composed of ‘many men and a few women’” (Saitō 2001:7). In both anime and *tokusatsu*, a genre of films that relies heavily on special effects and action scenes and is primarily aimed at children, as well as in educational reading materials, this setting of “many men and a few women” is conventional/customary. Saitō suggested that this reinforces the upper stratum of society, which is also composed of “many men and few women”.

The concept of “*kō-itten*” is said to be simply a question of “quantity”, but Saitō pointed out that it is less a question of “quantity” than of “quality”. What kind of woman is allowed in the midst of “many men”? In other words, what kind of woman would most men accept? Saitō focused on the “quality” of “*kō-itten*”, analysing characters that appear in anime, *tokusatsu*, and biographies, and the settings in which they are placed. As a result, Saitō found four patterns of female characters: 1. the “Magical Girl”, who is the ideal “daddy’s girl”; 2. the “Scarlet Warrior”, a young woman who is the Madonna for older men; 3. the “Evil Queen”, an adult woman who is unfit to be a mother; 4. the “Holy Mother”, who supports the characters from the shadows. The

portrayal of female characters in children’s media is poor, full of stereotypes and etched into young children’s brains. Saitō attributed this to the long tradition of negative portrayal in Japanese anime culture.

### 3.3. Why “honorary male”?

So, why has the term “honorary male” become so widely used when discussing issues of women and leadership, or women and power, in contemporary society, even though “daddy’s girl” and “*kō-itten*” are similar in concept?

There is a certain awkwardness attached to the term “daddy’s girl”. To label a real woman as such, it is necessary to understand the circumstances of her upbringing. In 2020, non-fiction writer Ishii Taeko published an account of the life of Tōkyō governor Koike Yuriko. Ishii describes Koike’s speech at a symposium for smokers, organised to oppose passive smoking when it first became a social problem in 1985, in the following way:

Dressed in ethnic Middle Eastern clothing, she exhaled smoke while wearing a head-to-toe veil, adding a touch of allure. She preferred to be treated as an “honorary male” in a male society, to be attached to it rather than confronting it. That’s probably why she was noticed and promoted by so many bigwigs. (Ishii 2020: 146)

In this retelling, when Ishii mentions the family environment in which Koike was born and raised, her father is often mentioned, but her mother is not, which could be a subtle reference to her being a “daddy’s girl”. However, such a detailed understanding of their family environment is limited to a very small number of people, such as other politicians. It is uncomfortable to use the term “daddy’s girl” to express discomfort with or doubt about a woman you are close to, such as a female boss at work. On the other hand, the term “*kō-itten*” also lacks aspects that can be captured by the term “honorary male”. Author Hayashi Mariko’s essay “*Kō-itten*” illustrates this quite clearly. The essay describes an episode in which Hayashi her-

self was in the position of the only woman among many men. Hayashi recalls her experience of being invited to join an all-male choir group filled with politicians and businessmen, and her solo performance as the opening act during their provincial tour, in the following words:

I've always thought that most women envy being the only woman in a group of men. It's the kind of thing where you win by default, *with no competition*. In my case, with a large number of men are supporting me with a wonderful choir, it seemed to look really good on a visual level. (Hayashi 2005:51)

However, this situation changed with the arrival of women from outside the male group. On their way home the choir met two women on the bullet train, who had come to attend the concert. It is said that they were the *mama-san*<sup>14</sup> and a hostess at a club in Ginza, and the men went to pour them beer. The members of the group sitting next to Hayashi looked at her and said in a somewhat exasperated tone, "We've been in the mountains for two days *without a woman*" and "That's right! We can't help it, can we?" (Hayashi 2005:52-3). Hayashi said she listened with mixed feelings.

As Saitō argued above, this essay shows that the privilege of being the "token woman" in a male-dominated group is not given to just anyone; rather, the men in the group decide who to include. The essay suggests that in Hayashi's case she was welcomed as a non-sexual woman who would not disrupt the male group dynamic. The group members who say, "without a woman" indicate that she is not seen as a sexual "woman". The constant stream of choir members refilling the drinks of the two women on the bullet train suggests that they were perceived as "sexual objects" by the male group and therefore treated differently.

Thus, it can be said that the distinctive feature of "*kō-itten*" lies in the way it is focused. As Hayashi argues, there are "no rivals", and when we think of the term "*kō-itten*", our attention is drawn to

the relationship between the single woman and the many men within a group. For women in the position of the "token woman", there are no "rivals" within the group, and women outside the group cannot be "rivals" because they are not allowed into the group. Because the focus is on relationships within the male group, women who are outside of it are not part of the discussion when the term "*kō-itten*" is used.

The use of the term "honorary male" in comparison to "daddy's girl" and "*kō-itten*" provides the following advantages: Firstly, it offers the convenience of being able to use the term independently of a particular individual's upbringing. This is both a feature and a drawback of the term "daddy's girl". Secondly, we can broaden the discussion to include women who are outside the male group and who are overlooked by the term "*kō-itten*". These women, who are not involved in the internal dynamics of the male group, may find this term more appropriate to what they experience. In addition, the term "honorary male" focuses on a woman's "quality", whereas "*kō-itten*" refers to a woman's status among many men, which is why term "honorary male" is now widely used.

## Conclusion

This paper has outlined the current debate surrounding the term "honorary male", examined the changes in the way it is used, and looked at its frequent utilisation in contemporary Japanese society. It has also compared it with similar concepts such as "daddy's girl" and "*kō-itten*". This trend is likely to be driven by the growing number of women in leadership positions, such as politicians, civil servants, and business executives. However, progress is still insufficient on a global scale. Despite a steady increase in numbers, organisations and working cultures remain so male-dominated that women are still forced to "fit in" in order to reach leadership positions. In addition, the use of the term "honorary male" is a sign of discomfort with women leaders who do



not question this. Perhaps it is time to look beyond simply increasing the number of women in power, and to question what it means to be a female leader.

It goes without saying that it is important to have women in decision-making positions, and therefore it will be necessary to continue to increase the number of women in leadership positions. However, there is a growing international debate within feminism about women leaders. This was triggered by the book *LEAN IN* by Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook (and now director of Meta). In the book, Sandberg offers many practical tips for women in business, such as not giving up on their career, finding a mentor, negotiating within the company, and working as much as possible during pregnancy to facilitate a smooth return to work after childbirth (Sandberg 2013=2018). The book's message of taking initiative has

resonated not only in the United States but also the world. It has become a best-seller in many languages.

Although Sandberg identifies as a feminist, many feminists are critical of her. Cinzia Arruzza *et al.* have dubbed Sandberg's feminism "Lean In-feminism" and have strongly criticised it for failing to include women who are not employed in corporate settings, who are often non-white and precariously employed (Arruzza *et al.* 2019). Angela McRobbie coined the term "neo-liberal feminism" to criticize the fact that, as long as it is aiming at succeeding within existing social systems, it only serves to reinforce neoliberal policies such as cutting state welfare (McRobbie 2020=2022). The discourse around the term "honorary male" that I have examined in this paper can be said to be linked to these debates on international neo-liberal feminism debates.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The GGI indicates gender inequality in the four areas of politics, economy, healthcare and education, with values ranging from 0 to 1, the closer to 1, the lower the inequality. Although the GGI is well-known in Japanese society, it is by no means sufficient to quantify the degree of “gender equality” in a country. For example, the GGI, which strictly examines the “disparity” between men and women, does not include fe-male-specific phenomena such as the maternal mortality rate (Tsutsui 2023).

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/matsudosimasuda/status/1434375067173994499> (accessed July 23, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/Erinadinfinity/status/895784135104638976> (accessed July 23, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> “Positive Action”, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, [https://www.gender.go.jp/policy/positive\\_act/index.html](https://www.gender.go.jp/policy/positive_act/index.html) (accessed June 30, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> See Murakami Ayaka (2023) for a discussion of the problems of gender ratios in university organisations using critical mass theory.

<sup>6</sup> “White Paper on Gender Equality 2020”, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> The following data up until the data for local civil servants refers to the White Paper on Gender Equality 2021, Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan.

<sup>8</sup> Since the report was made, the video has been closed to the public.

<sup>9</sup> Nomura, Fusayo 野村房代. 2021. Katsute wa “seikatsusha mesen” kyōchō Yamada kōhōkan wa doko de kawatta no ka かつては「生活者目線」強調山田広報官はどこで変わったのか [Where did the once “seikatsusha mesen” emphasis Yamada public information officer change?]. *Mainichi Shinbun* 毎日新聞, February 27, 2021. <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20210226/k00/00m/040/186000c> (accessed May 26, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> In her essay “Tea Girls” (*ocha joshi*), Sakai Junko describes the awkwardness between women in the workplace immediately after the implementation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law as follows: “In the company, which is like a family, a ‘man-like woman’ in the name of a career-track employee has appeared [...]. The women in general employment who played the role of mother or sister in the company now must support the ‘man-like woman’ as well. It is a relationship in which both those who look after and those who are looked after cannot help but feel a certain discomfort” (Sakai 2020:34).

<sup>11</sup> It is not clear why search demand increased at each point in time, so we can only speculate. For example, one incident reported in May 2004 (popularity = 51), when search demand first increased, was the Abu Ghraib prison abuse case. After the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, a whistleblower revealed that US soldiers had repeatedly sexually abused Iraqi prisoners of war at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, which was run by the US military as a detention facility. Part of the US government’s internal investigation report was leaked to the mass media, leading to international condemnation. The fact that there were female soldiers among the perpetrators has also been sensationalised. We can assume that the demand for the search term “honorary males” increased because female soldiers committed acts of aggression together with male soldiers in the male-dominated domain of the military.

<sup>12</sup> The “Category” column in the table lists those displayed by each company’s article search service.

<sup>13</sup> In the following, reference is made to the *chikuma bunko* edition published in 2001.

<sup>14</sup> A *mama-san* is a woman in a position of authority in a nightclub that is often perceived to be maternal. She is usually in charge of the other workers. (translators’ note)

## Buried Thorns:

### For a queer politics of a potentially invisible multiplicity

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Shimizu, Akiko. 2025. “Buried Thorns: For a queer politics of a potentially invisible multiplicity”, *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 64-76. DOI: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-07.

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#### 1. The duality of queerness

Thirty years ago, Teresa de Lauretis introduced the term “queer theory” in a special issue of the journal *Differences*. According to their introductory remarks, queer theory, imagined as an approach with a certain critical distance to lesbian/gay studies, is characterized by “a double emphasis- on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silences” (De Lauretis 1991: iv). What is described in their introduction is, actually, on the one hand the breakaway from thoughts about gay and lesbian sexuality as something enclosed within clearly defined boundaries—“marking the limits of the social space by designating a place of culture” (De Lauretis 1991:iii) while on the other hand, the importance of the differences that have been rendered invisible between lesbian women and gay men, or between black lesbians and white lesbians. Although early queer theory of the late 1980s and early 1990s tends to only refer to the critical deconstruction of identity categories as its defining characteristic, it is worth noting that this dual orientation was clearly stated as a point of departure.

This duality—on the one hand, the assertion of difference (between non-normative sexuality or gender and their normative counterparts), and on the other hand, the notion of universality and solidarity based in it (which challenges the concept of identity as a clearly de-

fined entity)—was a particularly prominent feature of early queer politics and theory, embodying two contradictory yet equally important orientations<sup>1</sup>. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* and the series of discussions by Judith Butler before and after, especially their arguments concerning “gender performativity”, can be understood precisely within this context. That is to say, the theory of “gender performativity” was proposed as a response to two demands: on the one hand, it is necessary to resist the invisibilization or nullification of the gender difference marked as “woman”; and yet, on the other hand, we must imagine a politics that does not foreclose it as determined by a naturalized essence, nor preclude the wider and more diverse existences of women. Perhaps, it could be said that this claim was informed by the imperative to create space for lesbians—who had long been rendered invisible and disregarded both theoretically and politically as women and homosexuals—while simultaneously avoiding the impasse of pursuing so-called “lesbian specificity” as completely distinct from heterosexuality<sup>2</sup>.

In that sense, Butler’s *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, published in 2015, could be understood as a deliberate attempt to re-inherit the political and theoretical steering of queer theory that has continued over the past 30 years, and in particular, the theoretical demands that lay at Butler’s own starting point. It is precisely because the central

task of this book is to inquire into the political possibilities opened up when diverse, non-normative bodies, bodies effectively denied the right to exist, nonetheless carve out their own existence through physically appearing and assembling, that the term performative, which had not been so forcefully foregrounded in Butler's writings since the turn of this century, is once again placed in the title<sup>3</sup>. This is also a revisiting of the questions embedded within queer theory and politics for the past 30 years—questions that at once necessitated Butler's theory of gender performativity and have been critically directed at it<sup>4</sup>: if the livability of bodies is opened up through their collective appearing, then to what extent does that very survival depend upon the uniformity of the bodies that appear and assemble? Furthermore, the focus on the differences that are able to appear, and on the gatherings of bodies that are able to assemble, raises the question of to what extent such focus stands in solidarity with those differences for which appearing is more difficult, and with those bodies for which assembling is more difficult; and to what extent it demands the effacement of those very differences and bodies.

Providing any sort of general answer to these questions is, however, beyond the scope and intention of this paper. What this paper attempts is, by taking as one concrete point of reference the feminist debates over trans issues that have been unfolding on Japanese-language social media since the latter half of 2018, to reconfirm the significance, within queer politics, of these questions that pierce, like thorns, into orientations toward solidarity and coexistence. This paper will first present an outline of this debate, confirming that the issue here is a form of solidarity based on the assumption of a specific, uniform vulnerability and its appearance. It will then take up Butler's discussion of political mobilisation of vulnerability in *Assembly*, pointing out that concepts such as “unchosen proximity” and “multiplicity” are elaborated

there as a way of carrying forward the duality surrounding difference and solidarity. What can be seen here is a distinctly 1990s-style queer politics that insists that the thorn lodged in the side of solidarity is also the wedge that makes solidarity possible. However, whereas 1990s queer politics and theories tended to emphasize on the politics of visible differences, this paper instead directs attention to plurality that encompasses differences that do not necessarily appear—in other words, the political potential of thorns that remain submerged.

## 2. Uniform vulnerability

In July 2018, Ochanomizu University announced its decision to allow transgender women to be included among students eligible for university entrance examinations for the 2020 academic year<sup>5</sup>. This decision was based on discussions among various women's universities following the establishment of the 2015 Science Council of Japan's “Subcommittee of the Law Committee on the Protection of LGBTI Rights in Society and Education” and trends in women's universities in the United States (Takahashi 2019, 31-5). While this should have been a positive step forward in the protection of the rights of transgender youth in Japan, it was not an especially radical or surprising turn of events. However, following this announcement, discriminatory comments targeting transgender women, including direct attacks and insults, became a prominent feature on Japanese-language online platforms, particularly on social media sites such as X (formerly known as Twitter) (Iino 2019; Hori 2019). What makes this expression of transphobia noteworthy is that, while it was observed among those who self-identify as conservatives, it was also—in some cases even more so—upheld by women and feminists<sup>6</sup>. Following the announcement of Ochanomizu University on 2 July, one of the first high-profile reactions on social media was a post from right-wing author Hyakuta Naoki on X<sup>7</sup> ridiculing transgender female students as (hetero-



sexual) men infiltrating a women's-only university. Despite the immediate criticism this kind of mockery from conservatives attracted, the exact same view regarding transgender women as "men invading women's spaces" began to be widely expressed, shared, and disseminated on social media by some women and feminists<sup>8</sup>.

The differences and conflicts among feminists concerning transgender issues are not new (Tsutsui 2003b; Califa 2005; Yamada 2019), and since the 2010s, the resurgence of these conflicts has become increasingly prevalent in various countries and regions that have been making strides towards the protection of transgender rights, with the UK playing a leading role. The situation on Japanese-speaking social media is not an isolated case in this sense. Indeed, rhetoric that portrays transgender women as intruders into women's spaces and usurpers of women's hard-won rights, denunciations that depict transgender lesbians as mere heterosexual men forcing lesbians and bisexual women to engage in sexual acts, and reductionist views that recognize no form of "bodily sex" other than that which is reducible to differences in external genitalia, bear striking similarities to those presented in past debates. It is also known that several accounts have actively spread these arguments from a foreign-language context into the Japanese-speaking context. It is still crucial, however, to examine the ways in which a globally circulating transphobic discourse has manifested locally within the Japanese-speaking sphere. What stands out in this regard is the overwhelming appeal of arguments related to women's bodily fears and sexual traumas.

The logic and rhetoric of criticism and exclusion directed towards transgender (especially transfeminine) individuals that have been introduced and disseminated on Japanese-speaking social media can be broadly categorised into several distinct groups. For example, firstly, given the physical and sexual fears and traumas that "biological" women are

subjected to, they argue that (gendered) spaces for women should be explicitly restricted to "biological" women, or at the least, those without penises, and that transgender women are a threat to these boundaries. Secondly, they argue that transgender women are able to avoid gender discrimination and disadvantages that cisgender women have faced since childhood due to their "biological"<sup>9</sup> female bodies. Therefore, they claim that providing trans women access to the limited opportunities available exclusively to women merely preserves and reinforces existing discriminatory structures. Or, thirdly, they assert that gender is nothing more than a discriminatory construct based on the biological differences between two sexes. As a result, the discussion of recognising gender self-identification, which does not necessarily align with biological sex distinctions, is perceived as a form of contempt for women's experience as a discriminated minority. Although all of these arguments have been presented repeatedly, there is a clear difference in terms of the explosive impact on Japanese social media. To illustrate, in the English-speaking world, the second claim is frequently discussed along the issue of the impact of high performance in high school girls' sports on opportunities for higher education. In the Japanese-speaking world, however, this example does not garner such widespread support. Even with regard to the admission of trans students to women's universities, claims of opportunity usurpation are not as important. What has been more prominent is a sense of sympathy associated with the first argument, namely that female students who suffer from the trauma of sexual violence would not be able to receive education in a safe environment. The third claim, too, is frequently presented in Anglophone feminist discourse within the context of discussions on how to understand the concept of gender; and yet, it is more often repurposed, in the Japanese-speaking context, to reinforce the focus on the sexual fears and traumas experienced by



“innate” women on the basis of biological sex difference<sup>10</sup>.

The focus on the physical and sexual fears and traumas of “innate” women has a strong affective appeal across a wide audience. This is evident in the assertion that the use of women’s restrooms and public baths by transgender women, who (may) have a penis, threatens the safety and comfort of ‘innate’ women, and therefore should not be allowed. The claim has been taken up not only by women and feminists, including of sexual violence survivors active on social media (Hori 2019, 7; Ozaki 2019, 12; Mitsuhashi 2019, 17–18), but also by conservatives who argue that the claims for rights of LGBTI people has “gone too far”<sup>11</sup>. However, the relentless gender surveillance, particularly in public restrooms, significantly hinders the freedom of movement and activity of transgender people, as well as exerts pressure on the daily lives of individuals<sup>12</sup> who may not necessarily identify as transgender but do not conform to certain expected gender appearances (Halberstam 1998: 20–29; Tsutsui 2003a: 55–57). Moreover, it is impossible, from a purely practical standpoint, to check the presence or absence of someone’s male genitalia in restrooms without severe human rights violations. The notion of transgender women exposing their male genitalia in the women’s section of public bath is also far removed from actual reality (Endo 2019; Mitsuhashi 2019: 18–19). When women and feminists critical of trans inclusion insist on these claims despite the fact that such critiques have been repeatedly articulated, what emerges is a desire to secure the uniformity of “womanhood” through an imagined sameness of sexual and bodily vulnerability, and, in turn, to locate the very foundation of solidarity among “women” in the protection from that vulnerability. In other words, for those who persistently seek to police access to women’s restrooms and women’s section in public baths, the issue is not whether a given user will actually commit an act of sexual violence; indeed, whether the

person possesses a penis is scarcely the real concern. The question is whether a body can be recognised as that which could be penetrated and injured by a penis<sup>13</sup>, and whether it is possible to share the agenda setting where protection from that injury is of paramount importance - no matter what other injuries might be inflicted in the process. For a body to be fully secured against such harm, it is necessary that bodies are clearly discernible whether they are situated on the side that inflicts harm or the side vulnerable to it: bodies whose appearance renders this membership ambiguous, or whose actual position diverges from their appearance, can by that very fact become removed from the collective framing of the problem, and may thereby lose their claim to solidarity.

### 3. Mobilising vulnerability

As *Assembly* points out, “feminist theorists have for a long time argued that women suffer social vulnerability disproportionately” and while “there is always a risk in claiming that women are especially vulnerable [...] there is still something important to be taken from this tradition” (Notes: 140)<sup>14</sup>. Butler, who repeatedly cautions that they are “especially aware of how counterproductive it can be to understand women’s bodies as particularly vulnerable” (Notes: 139), nevertheless attempts “a consideration of vulnerability as a form of activism, or as that which is in some sense mobilized in forms of resistance” (Notes: 123), precisely because “vulnerability implicates us in what is beyond us yet part of us, constituting one central dimension of what might tentatively be called our embodiment” (Notes: 149)<sup>15</sup>.

As embodied beings, we cannot, however, sustain survival on our own and always require support from the outside. The body “despite its clear boundaries, or perhaps precisely by virtue of those very boundaries, is defined by the relations that make its own life and action possible” (Notes: 130): it is dependent “on other bodies and support networks” (Notes:

130)– “precisely because bodies are formed and sustained in relation to infrastructural support (or their absence) and social and technological networks or webs of relations, we cannot extract the body from its constituting relations – and those relations are always economically and historically specific” (Notes: 148). In order to survive, a body must inevitably be open and exposed to various relations with things that are not itself, and therefore all bodies are without exception vulnerable. (“Vulnerability may be a function of openness, that is, of being open to a world that is not fully known or predictable.” (Notes: 149)) For this reason, instead of making the futile effort of closing the body off of external exposure in order to eliminate the possibility of being harmed, Butler argues, we should work “to think vulnerability and agency together” (Notes: 139) and explore the possibility in which “vulnerability is itself mobilized, not as an individual strategy, but in concert” (Notes: 151).

This is a particularly important strategy for those whose existence is disproportionately threatened socially and politically. As Butler emphasises, the fact that all bodies are necessarily vulnerable neither presents a general ontology of the body nor gives a universal importance to vulnerability. The various relations that constitute a body are “always economically and historically specific,” and therefore, “if we say that the body is vulnerable, we are saying that the body is vulnerable to economics and to history” (Notes: 148). If this is the case, when certain bodies are deprived of the relations that sustain them and rendered disproportionate susceptible, one of the crucial means for those bodies to survive would be to politically demand the restoration of those various relations. “[U]nder conditions in which infrastructures are being decimated, the very platform for politics becomes the object around which political mobilization rallies” (Notes: 128-9). Bodies that have been deprived of their various relations and whose survival is threatened then give purpose to political

mobilisation by exposing their vulnerability. Bodies that are not permitted to exist and emerge as having political agency, nevertheless, through their coming together as vulnerable bodies without such permission, retroactively - or perhaps I should say performatively - demand the relations that make their survival possible. In other words, “the political demand is at once enacted and made, exemplified and communicated” (Notes: 137).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Butler expresses concern that such political strategies that do not position vulnerability and agency in a mutually exclusive relationship may risk universalising and essentialising vulnerability in a gendered form. Arguments that define women by their inherent vulnerability appeals to paternalistic powers, such as the state, to protect them. Certain attributes that define gender, such as vulnerability, have been unequally distributed under particular power regimes “precisely for the purpose of shoring up certain regimes of power that disenfranchise women” (Notes: 142–143). One example would be the discourse of online trans-critical groups that insist on the safety of “innate women” in public spaces and prioritises their protection from sexual violence (and from any experiences that might evoke trauma from past violence—for example, fearing that women’s restrooms they use might also be occupied by women with penises): they draw, on one hand, upon the “tradition” of feminism, while, on the other, invoking claims such as the heightened severity of sexual harm to “innate women” due to their reproductive capacity as justification for protecting these women. In this context, the primary concern is not the violation of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, but rather the potential abuse of the reproductive function that women are expected to fulfil in a patriarchal society.

More directly relevant to the discussion in this paper, however, is the passage where Butler speaks of “a distinct zone of vulnerability” as a risk posed by the mo-

bilisation of vulnerability. “The very debate about who belongs to a group called ‘women’ marks a distinct zone of vulnerability, namely, those who are non-gender conforming, and whose exposure to discrimination, harassment, and violence is clearly heightened on those grounds [by basing the definition of women on the concept of vulnerability]” (Notes: 142). This sentence is not immediately followed by a discussion of the circumstances under which “the debate about who belongs to the group called ‘women’” is deployed to deliberately attack those referred to here through the proprietary claim to vulnerability<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, when Butler cites examples of the “strategic use of vulnerability” by majorities – for example masculinity is said to be ‘attacked’ by feminism, the general public by gender/sexual minorities, whites by Latinos, or Europeans by new immigrant communities – those instances can easily be recognized as resonating with the claim that trans women threaten penetrable and violable “women’s bodies” by the penis.

It is understandable, then, that Butler introduces the notion of *plurality* when the collective mobilization of vulnerability is invoked as a response to the condition in which certain populations are placed in unevenly vulnerable positions (Notes: 151). As stated before, vulnerability has always been distributed according to specific historical and economic arrangements; Butler does not aim to present it as an ontology of the body. But then again, to define certain groups—often those who can be indeed described as disproportionately vulnerable – as characterised by a shared uniform vulnerability also constitutes a big issue of its own. Thus, the collective mobilisation of vulnerability brings us back to the questions posed by early queer politics and theory: how to attempt solidarity without silencing the claims of bodies that struggle to gather or differences that struggle to appear. The “notion of plurality that is thought together with both performativity and interdependency” (Notes: 151) is required

by the orientation towards solidarity that contains – or perhaps I should rather say constituted by– difference. What should be noted here is that plurality here is by no means a way of avoiding vulnerability. Butler points out that interdependency, here linked to the concept of plurality, does not signify some “beautiful state of coexistence” or “social harmony,” but rather that “there is no way to dissociate dependency from aggression once and for all” (Notes: 151). The concept of plurality thus concerns the importance of the situations in which vulnerable entities are forced to coexist despite posing threats to each other’s existence. It is precisely this very situation that constitutes “coalition,” and thus solidarity based on differences, which Butler demonstrates through quoting Bernice Johnson Leigon: “Most of the time you feel threatened to the core and if you don’t, you’re not really doing no coalescing... You don’t go into coalition because you like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that’s the only way you can figure you can stay alive” (Notes: 151-52). “The body is always exposed to people and impressions it does not have a say about, does not get to predict or fully control,” and “solidarity emerges from this rather than from deliberate agreements we enter knowingly” (Notes: 152). Rather than hastily resolving the differences that make it difficult for bodies to come and be together—the differences that sometimes threatens each other’s existence—we let these differences remain unresolvable, let them stay as difficulties and threats. It is precisely there that Butler finds the possibilities of coexistence and solidarity.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Buried thorns

In a sense, this is a profoundly 1990s form of queer politics. As Butler stated in a different chapter of *Assembly*, “[one] political point probably has remained pretty much the same [Since the 1990s when they wrote ‘Gender Trouble’] even as my focus has shifted, and that is that

identity politics fails to provide a broader conception of what it means, politically, to live together, across differences, sometimes in modes of unchosen proximity, especially when living together, however difficult it may be, remains an ethical and political imperative" (Notes: 27). When living together is thus articulated as a form of "unchosen proximity", this proximity should not be understood as merely abstract or ideal. It may, for example, refer to the "unchosen proximity" in gendered public spaces (for both cisgender women, who fear the "threat" posed by trans women, and trans women, who fear the risk of being targeted by transphobia); it may also refer to the "unchosen proximity" of "we are already here", as queer activism in the 1990s has repeatedly asserted, in the face of the homophobic and discriminatory society looking away from and denying "our" existence. A little earlier in the previous passage, Butler states: "when people amass on the street, one implication seems clear: they are still here and still there; they persist" (Notes: 25). It is difficult not to hear it this the echo of one of the best-known chants of 1990s queer politics: Queer Nation's "We are here, we are queer, get used to it." The power of this chant lies in its performative declaration that queer "we", not fitting in "here" (=straight society) and therefore deemed expendable whether through homophobic hate crimes or AIDS, nonetheless have persisted/are persisting "here" as such. In this sense "persistence" is linked first and foremost to the assertion of difference. In other words, Queer Nation's chant can be read as an assertion towards the possibility of solidarity based on difference: a declaration that "we are the thorn in solidarity's side".

At the same time, however, it has often been pointed out that these claims of difference in the 1990s tended to go hand in hand with the literal visualisation of difference, and that it had the effect of bringing specific differences into focus in accordance with their historical and economic *appearability*. The

strategy of visually asserting difference, as is exemplified by the fact that Queer Nation's eye-catching activism were often termed 'advertisement-like', became increasingly indistinguishable from the marketing strategies of late capitalism<sup>18</sup>. In order for the "advertising methods" that promote specific differences to be effective, it is often necessary for other differences to be sidelined as superfluous or excessive. Thus, for those who were neither imagined as consumers of shopping malls nor even supposed to be there, such as racial minorities or the poor, Queer Nation's "advertising" activism, most notably its so-called "mall actions," could function as an exclusionary form of action<sup>19</sup>. What was desired was a difference noticeable enough to catch the consumer's attention, but not to the extent that they might look away: a difference that stimulates the majority's desire just enough without threatening them. If that is the case, then we might conversely argue that, for the majority consuming these politics of visibility, what is as undesirable as an excessively visible difference that compels aversion is a difference so unremarkable that fails to attract attention, to the point of being difficult to even recognise or detect.

These are differences that are difficult to detect, that appear, at first glance, to conform to the majority: buried, "passing" differences. In the context of the Japanese transgender community, the term *maibotsu* (literally translated as "burying oneself", or in this case "going stealth") refers to a state where an individual lives socially as their desired gender without disclosing or being recognized as having transitioned or being in the process of transitioning<sup>20</sup>. In a broader sense, however, we might take *maibotsu* to include any situation in which a person successfully *passes* as their desired gender within a specific social context of everyday life. Aiming to blend in with the majority, *Maibotsu* may seem far removed from the strategy of the queer nation, which asserts an "unchosen proximity" by boldly declaring "we, who are different, are



here, no matter if you, the majority, likes it or not.” However, Queer Nation’s chant also seems to allow for a slightly different interpretation as well: “we” have already been here, without “you” knowing, and that although “we” are different and queer, “we” have always been indistinguishably adjacent to “you”. Understood in this way, it can be comprehended as somewhat different from a self-identifying declaration such as “We are the thorns, look at us.” Rather, this is a message that the thorns constituting this unchosen proximity have already been here, without being detected or recognised, hence remaining unremoved. What is crucial here is not so much to point out that “the thorn is here” as to make it retrospectively obvious that the thorn “was somewhere around here”, thereby hinting that even now it “will/must still be somewhere around here”.

This insistence on a difference that remains, so to speak, buried is sometimes understood as a threat to solidarity, even more so than that which is visualized. When the qualification for solidarity is contingent on bodies with uniform vulnerability and their detectable appearance—this is the exact point to which trans-critical women’s and feminists’ arguments often return, as discussed in section two, — their vigilance will be all the more intensified. This is how the following tweet by an account that had long been speaking out as a transgender person came to be repeatedly referenced on Japanese-language social media as evidence to support fears about “trans women threatening the sexual and physical safety of cisgender women.” : “You know, I’d go into the women’s public bath with my dick tucked between my thighs and go ‘Y’alright?’. Am I a little too crass or what?”<sup>21</sup> Whether this was a true story or, as the speaker later explained, a fictional one, what is being told here is an episode in which entering a women’s bath was/is not an issue, and in this sense, and, in that sense, is nothing more than a story about escaping detection and passing as a woman. Other female guests in

the women’s bath either did not detect the tucked penis, or, even if they might not have found it agreeable, nonetheless shared an “unchosen proximity” with a body that could use the facilities that way, allowing that body to pass as one entitled to the women’s section, and did not report or complain to the management afterwards—which clearly is the point of this story. Of course, if this anecdote was fictional, one could still point out that it is an overly optimistic story, and that actually encountering such a body in the women’s section of a public bath surely would be so threatening for cisgender women that they would never accept coexistence. However, this was not what most of the criticism towards the aforementioned tweet argued. What was repeatedly voiced in reference to this tweet was the fear of trans women entering the women’s sections of public baths with their male genitalia exposed. As discussed in chapter two, the image of trans women using the women’s section in public baths exposing their male genitalia is totally divorced from the reality of trans lives. That a story about passing as a user of the women’s bath precisely by *making the penis invisible* (“tucked between the thighs”) should be transformed into a story about *the conspicuous exposure* of the penis, however, is not because the latter is more suited to instilling fear. The reason why “dick tucked between my thighs and go ‘Y’alright?” provoked strong reactions from trans -critical commentators is that it speaks a posteriori of the existence of differences that are not exposed and therefore not detectable from outward appearance. Moreover, it is also because of the intentionally casual manner it talks about how easy it is to elude detection<sup>22</sup>. The statement was received not only as disrespecting the fantasy of security and safety supposedly brought by coexistence or solidarity based on uniform vulnerability and their detectable appearance—“By the way, I was there, too, just with my dick tucked between my thighs, but you didn’t even notice, did you?”— but as threatening the very basis



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of that fantasy. In other words, it was taken as callously suggesting the possibility that the difference between cis- and trans- women may not be detectable. To alter the story of *maibotsu* (being buried; going stealth) and passing into one of conspicuous exposure is, then, nothing other than a gesture of denial of that very possibility, a return to the fantasy that there must be a visibly detectable difference.

This is why assertions of fear and anxiety about the possibility of trans women with a penis using women's toilets—"If trans women with a penis can use women's toilets, then it will reach a point where cisgender men can sneak in," or "If the use of women's toilets isn't limited to people without a penis, cisgender women will feel too afraid to use public restrooms"—cannot be soothed with the explanations such as "Trans women who use women's restrooms are already passing as women, regardless of whether they have a penis or not, and any cis man who can blend in equally well could also pass as cis women and enter", or "It is entirely unrealistic to base the right to use women's restrooms on the presence or absence of a penis of a person, and it would result in newly/freshly exclude those who have a penis and are already using the facilities without a problem." The real scandal here is not the possibility that trans women might use women's restrooms, or even the possibility that this might lead to cis men with a penis gaining entry; the scandal lies in the realization that trans women have already been using women's restrooms, and doing so without being detected. The claim of buried differences confronts us with the fact that "unchosen proximity" has already been unfolding, whether we are aware of it or not. Our bodies are exposed to "people and impressions [the bodies do] not have a say about, [do] not get to predict or fully control," (Notes: 152) and they are compelled to coexist and form solidarity with those who may threaten each other's survival.

The claim of buried differences urges one to be self-aware of that, whether wanted or not. It is, in some respects, only natural that those who are disproportionately vulnerable - such as women living in a sexist society - should perceive such "unchosen proximity" as especially threatening: the more one is situated in a position of socially and historically heightened vulnerability, the higher the risk of not being able to survive the coexistence. Yet at the same time, precisely for that reason, it has to be recalled that those who occupy a minority position—those more vulnerable in a given situation—are the first to be made aware of unchosen proximity. If you only realize after the fact that proximity has occurred without you noticing it, then that very belatedness indicates that you are in that particular situation among those privileged to bear lesser risk of coexistence.

The claim of the buried differences can thus be understood as a call for sharing the risks associated with proximity and coexistence more equally—rather than overburdening certain bodies with the excessive risk of visibility or detection in order to maintain the fantasy that no differences exist that do not manifest in a detectable form, do not exist. It advocates for the collective assumption of the risks of unchosen proximity to which all bodies are inevitably and involuntarily exposed to. Moreover, any strategy for survival would be meaningless if it did not begin from the premise of the inevitable proximity; and if so, this call can also be seen as an appeal to reduce the risks for all bodies and increase the possibility of survival. This call is not made at the expense of exposing the already disproportionately vulnerable bodies of minorities to further threats, but rather through the survival of those bodies that may not be detectable. In other words, it is through those bodies that are not clearly apparent and visible but have nonetheless certainly appeared and survived.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> De Lauretis describes this as “claiming at once equality and difference” (De Lauretis 1991: iii). Queer politics is “characterized by the emphasis on difference on the one hand, solidarity based on universality and commonality on the other, and the search for a difficult balance between the two” (Shimizu 2018: 15). See Shimizu (2018) for a discussion of how these characteristics are manifested in the chants of the Queer Nation, which are also discussed in the second half of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The latter dilemma regarding “lesbian specificity” and the erasure of existence is briefly summarised in Butler (1993).

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the concept of performativity was expected to be a site of action despite this, Butler explains in their book that they “tried to locate in gender performativity a form of inadvertent agency” (Notes: 32).

<sup>4</sup> These questions are closely related, for example, to debates over the political efficacy of “coming out” in the face of growing AIDS panic and homophobia (Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990), to the racial and class bias of queer politics as discussed below (Cohen 1997), or to critique of the visual politics of early queer theory (Tyler 1991; Martin 1994).

<sup>5</sup> The exact wording of the document dated 10 July 2018 published by Ochanomizu University is as follows; “Ochanomizu University has decided to accept those who wish to study at a women's university based on their gender identity (transgender students who are male according to their family register, but whose gender identity is female)” (“Regarding the acceptance of transgender students”). <http://www.ao.ocha.ac.jp/menu/001/040/d006117.html>

<sup>6</sup> With regard to discussions and posts on Japanese-speaking social media, it is not possible to clearly identify the gender or political position of the speaker, as many accounts in the Japanese-speaking

world that stand on the side of trans critics in this debate do not use their real names. When I refer to “women and feminists” here, I have in mind cases where the speakers themselves identify themselves as women or feminists, or where they have been regarded as speakers belonging loosely to the “feminist cluster” prior to this debate.

<sup>7</sup> @hyakutanaoki (Naoki Hyakuta), “Okay, I’m going to try to study for the entrance exam now and aim for admission to Ochanomizu University in 2020!” X, 5 July 2018, 1:57 am, <https://twitter.com/hyakutanaoki/status/1014553691850924033?s=20>.

<sup>8</sup> Several articles detailing the background of this issue have been published in the June 2019 special edition of “Women’s Asia 21” by the Asia-Japan Women’s Resource Center, titled “Feminism and Trans Exclusion”. Additionally, several articles can be read on the WAN Women’s Action Network website under the tag “With transgender people” (<https://wan.or.jp/general/category/transgender> accessed 20 Aug 2019). However, as Haruka Tsutsui points out, as of summer 2019, almost all articles by feminists are on one side of the debate (the trans-inclusive side), as there were no feminist researchers, activists or others in the Japanese-speaking world who were presenting trans-critical discussions under their own names (Tsutsui 2019). An exception is an English-language contribution published in WAN, but the full name of the author is not listed (Fukuoka 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The exact definition of what constitutes a “biological woman” varies from speaker to speaker and is not necessarily uniform, but it is often used to refer to a person who has physical characteristics medically considered to be female and whose legally assigned sex at birth is female. The term also often implies that trans women (who are not “biological women”) are “only those who later became/have come to claim to be women (and are therefore not sufficiently female)”.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps part of the reason why discussions around trans (women) on Japanese-speaking social media sites have tended to emphasise the fear and trauma of sexual violence experienced by “biological” women is also due to the timing of the controversy. At this time, accusations of sexual violence began to gradually increase in the Japanese-speaking world, encouraged by the rise/climax of the #MeToo movement in the Anglophone world. There was also a growing sense of shared outrage toward secondary perpetration, such as disregarding accusations and slandering the accuser. Ochanomizu University’s

announcement took place precisely amid the public attention drawn to the BBC documentary on journalist Shiori Itō, who publicly disclosed herself under her real name as a victim of sexual abuse, and the ensuing criticism on social media sites when Sugita Mio, an incumbent member of the House of Representatives, blamed Itō for being a victim (Hori 2019).

<sup>11</sup> For example, former House of Councillors member Daigo Matsuura criticised the Opposition’s proposed LGBT Understanding Promotion Act on an internet TV programme in January 2019, arguing that, under this bill, it would be “discrimination” not to allow “women with male genitalia” into changing rooms and women’s baths, and that “the feeling of being afraid cannot be changed”. For a refutation of this claim, see Endo (2019). In addition, “Viewpoint”, a web column site operated by the conservative media outlet Sekai Nippō, published a critical article in August 2018, following the announcement by Ochanomizu University, entitled “Transgender women’s admission to women’s universities: “gender identity” makes eligibility for entrance examinations ambiguous”. The site also promptly published an article titled, “Human classification and ‘discrimination’: universities avoiding gender labels/indications?”, in response to Matsuura’s remarks, asked: “In public baths and hot springs, even if you have male genitalia, if your gender identity is female, you can’t refuse to take a woman’s bath, can you?”.

<sup>12</sup> It has been reported on social media that there are quite a lot cisgender women who have actually experienced being questioned based on their appearance when using women’s restrooms. This may be due in part to the fact that trans women, for whom the risks of being outed (when being found out as trans women) are high, are less likely to use women’s restrooms unless they are sure that they can pass as cisgender women (Tsutsui 2003a; Mitsuhashi 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, whether a body can be penetrated and (thus) injured by a penis is not determined by gender nor by presence or absence of a vagina (surgically formed or not). However, as can be confirmed by claims on social media that sexual violence suffered by cis women is more severe than that by trans women because of the possibility of pregnancy, there is sometimes a trend in claims emphasising the risk of sexual violence against “biological” women. This perspective tends to underestimate the possibility of a body other than



that of a “biological” woman being penetrated and injured by a penis.

<sup>14</sup>In critiquing arguments that emphasize the so-called “threat” posed by trans women, Iino Yuriko also takes as premise that “it is a fact that the risk of sexual violence against women remains high, and that as a result many women are compelled to maintain a heightened vigilance against male violence, and that anyone who denies this fact is committing a serious error” (Iino 2019:40).

<sup>15</sup>Butler discusses this in a different paper, published in 2011, in the form of “If survival depends not so much on the policing of boundary [...] but on recognizing how we are bound to others” (Butler 2011: 385).

<sup>16</sup>This may be partially due to the time and place *Assembly* was written. Even though trans-critical and exclusionary feminism had already become discernible in the 1970s, as mentioned above, what are now prominently visible in the Anglosphere as trans-critical feminists (they often call themselves gender-critical feminists) are generally understood to have emerged around the middle of the 2010s, most notably among U.K.-based writers. See for example Burns (2019).

<sup>17</sup>In her 2003 work, Eve Sedgwick focuses on a domain where “finitely many( $n > 2$ )” individuals coexist while maintaining their plurality, in order to “[enable] a political vision of difference that might resist both binary homogenization and infinitizing trivialization” (Sedgwick 2003; 108). She portrays the relationship as one of “being beside” (the condition of being adjacent), which is filled with contradiction and resistance, moving towards both “painful individuation” and “uncontrollable relationality” (Sedgwick 2003; 37). It seems important to note that both Butler and Sedgwick, who are known as leading exponents of early queer theory, try to think about issues of difference and coexistence/solidarity through a field of plurality that does not exclude (but rather respects) the possibility of conflict. This shared orientation toward a non-harmonizing coexistence seems crucial to any understanding of queer politics. See also Shimizu (2019) for a detailed discussion of Sedgwick’s argument.

<sup>18</sup>On the pursuit of visibility in queer politics in the 1990s and its affinity with the neoliberal market and the resulting tendency to devalue racial minorities and the economically poor, see Shimizu (2013) and Shimizu (2018).

<sup>19</sup>Queer Nation’s mall visibility actions, in which large groups dressed in for example drag to attract the

public’s attention and distribute political leaflets, had the intention to hijack a straight space and “sell” queer desires by visibly inserting queer bodies into shopping malls, which were supposed to be places for the exchange of straight desires (Berlant and Freeman 1992). However, as Cohen (1997) points out, this action isn’t always easy for racial minorities, even if it is possible for white queers, who aren’t blamed for aimlessly wandering around in shopping malls.

<sup>20</sup>An interesting point is that the issue that was often overlooked by 1990s queer theory and politics, which pursued the political possibilities of the manifestation of difference/appearance, was swiftly addressed not only by scholars focusing on femme lesbians (Tyler 1991; Martin 1994), but also by studies dealing with transsexuals—those seeking to “become” men or women (Prosser 1998). As Prosser stated: “The transsexual doesn’t necessarily look differently gendered” (Prosser 1998: 43).

<sup>21</sup>This post was in response to a comment from an acquaintance who identified as *X-gender* (which is similar to non-binary), who wondered whether they are truly ready to identify as *X-gender* while still using gendered spaces in everyday life.

The full post is as follows:

@hinakoozaki (Ozaki Hinako “Ginjō Short Stories vol.3” Now on sale)

“@tubu0430 Whoa, is the bar really that high? You know, I’d go into the women’s public bath with my dick tucked between my thighs and go ‘Y’alright?’ . Am I a little too crass or what? Also, if I’m in a hurry I use the men’s toilet. Standing up to pee is just easier, you know. I kind of use the term *X-gender* for that kind of zigzagging gender.”

X (formerly known as Twitter), 2012.11.11 12:04 AM, <https://twitter.com/hinakoozaki/status/267281477891395584?s=20>

The author of the post later stated that the twee was “fiction” and she apologised for her careless comments made in a conversation with an acquaintance more than five years ago, which were then taken out of context and used as the basis for criticism of trans women (<https://twitter.com/hinakoozaki/status/1111895157295579136?s=20>).

<sup>22</sup>Needless to say, this casualness emerges from the context described in the previous note. In reality, it is not so easy for gender nonconforming bodies in gendered spaces to avoid the policing gaze that attempts to make them visible, as discussed in section two.



# The Regionalism of Tamanoi Yoshirō: Its Timeliness and Potential for the Anthropocene

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Nakano, Yoshihiro. 2025. "The Regionalism of Tamanoi Yoshirō: Its Timeliness and Potential for the Anthropocene", *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 77-85. DOI: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-08.

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We live in the world, that is, among various non-human life forms and things. Language is the site of mediation between three *topoi* – the self, people other than the self, and nature, or more precisely, the site of interaction between the three. Human society is not an autonomous system. Individuals who are members of this system are not directly connected to other individuals, but are connected through their relationship to the world, that is, to nature. Language is a function of such a field.

–Watanabe Kyōji (2006, 81)

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>: The Anthropocene and the Entropic Process

The 21st century differs significantly from the previous modern eras in that the counterproductive nature of industrial society has become apparent in multiple dimensions and its effects are escalating on a global scale. In particular, the accelerating pace of global warming is dramatically altering the conditions of human existence, and the catastrophic future this will bring about is becoming more real every day, as evidenced by a series of reports by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the frequent occurrence of natural disasters attributed to climate change.

In this context, a group of scholars in the field of Earth science have proposed a new geological epoch, the *Anthropocene*, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, drawing attention to the profound geological impact of human activity since the Industrial Revolution<sup>2</sup>. As historians

of science, technology, and the environment Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz (2016) argue, this geological proposal challenges the “human exceptionalist” conception of history established in the modern West. Western modernity had cultivated a distinctive view of history that sharply separated human from natural history. Human societies were imagined to evolve autonomously—driven by science, technology, and industrial economy—while the Earth’s ecosystem appeared as a stable backdrop external to human activity. Yet the environmental pollution, global resource depletion, and climate change that became apparent in the second half of the twentieth century have revealed how human economic and social activities destabilize the global ecosystem, in turn undermining the stability and security of human livelihoods. These developments compel a fundamental rethinking of human history as inseparably embedded within natural history on a planetary scale.

Among the economists who anticipated the issues of the Anthropocene from the perspective of evolutionary biology was Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen from Romania. In a paper presented at the University of Florence, Italy, in 1974, he analysed the peculiar structure of the human biological evolutionary process as follows: Humans, like all other life forms, depend on the natural environment for their survival. In this respect, humans are biological beings. However, if we look at the process of human evolution, we

see not only an "endosomatic evolution" based on biological functions, but also an "exosomatic evolution" in which various tools are used as extensions of the body for survival. In fact, it is the latter that drives human evolution, as humans gradually come to live in organised societies (Georgescu-Roegen 2003).

According to Georgescu-Roegen, humanity is facing three problems as societies become more organised: (1) the emergence of social conflicts between the rulers and the ruled, (2) increasing dependence on industrial commodities, and (3) the waste of natural resources. After referring to the third problem, he concludes that "*although the problems associated with exosomatic activity are not all purely biological in nature, at the deepest level they are (anche se i problemi connessi con l'attività esosomatica non sono tutti di natura puramente biologica, i più profondi lo sono)*" (Georgescu-Roegen 2003, 78, original emphasis).

This may seem like a roundabout argument, but it is a brilliant one that explains the structure of the feedback loop between human society and the natural world from an evolutionary perspective. Georgescu-Roegen's intuition is developed further by the Italian economist Mauro Bonaiuti from the perspective of complex systems science and autopoiesis theory. According to Bonaiuti, there is a bidirectional feedback loop between the material system, the biological system, and the social system. The direction of causality is not only the "upward causation" that operates from the lower-class material system to the higher-class social system (the level beyond the laws of physics). There is also the "downward causation" that operates from the latter to the former. Human social life is not only dependent on and constrained by material and biological systems. The economic and technological systems created by humans force the evolution of social systems in a certain direction, which in turn influences the evolution of biological and material systems<sup>3</sup> (Bonaiuti 2023). Examples of the globalisation of the fos-

sil-fuel based economic and technological system that underpins industrial society include the emergence of greenhouse effects and the rise of global temperature as a result of increased carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, and the pollution of soils and oceans from the mass disposal of plastic products.

Humanity has developed from hunter-gatherer to agricultural and eventually industrial societies, moving toward ever greater socio-technical complexity. According to Joseph Tainter (2006; 2011), such transitions to what he terms "complex societies" have historically emerged as responses to existential challenges such as hunger and scarcity. In this sense, the rise of complex societies was historically valid within the contexts in which Western and other modernising societies were embedded. Today, however, humanity faces a paradox: the very systems of industrial society that once secured survival have, in their transformation into highly complex consumer societies, generated feedback loops that undermine the biological and even geological foundations of human existence on a global scale. As Tainter argues, complex societies ultimately confront rising environmental and social maintenance costs that lead, over time, to collapse. From the above considerations, the following structural problems of the contemporary world can be derived.

(1) As Georgescu-Roegen has made clear, according to the second law of thermodynamics, economic processes irreversibly increase entropy (disorder). Historically, industrial societies that consume large amounts of thermal energy have increased entropy at an accelerating rate<sup>4</sup>.

(2) The laws of thermodynamics imply not only the quantitative problem of increasing entropy. According to Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, the laws of thermodynamics have shown that heat causes a change in the forms of matter ("*la chaleur transforme la matière*"), i.e. a change in its intrinsic properties and state (Prigogine & Stengers 1986, 168,

original emphasis). In other words, the entropy process is one that changes the forms of matter.

(3) Introducing the laws of thermodynamics into the analysis of economic processes therefore means analysing not only the quantitative increase in entropy, but also the associated changes in the forms of matter. When we study the changes in the forms of matter at the macro-system level, we are analysing the changes in the forms of socio-biophysical systems caused by economic processes (\*This is a point related to Tamanoi's reflections on the "*materielles Dasein*" (*busshitsu no gensonzai*) in his later years and is addressed in the final chapter of this paper).

(4) The task of social science research in the Anthropocene is to analyse the changes in the forms of real world caused by the particular socio-technical regime of a globalised consumer society. For an illustration, see figures (A) to (C) (available on the journal website). The figures show, respectively, (A) the shape of the Antarctic ozone hole (NASA observation, 21 October 2019), (B) the shape of the coastline of the Japanese archipelago changed by the landslides of Typhoon Hagibis (GCOM-C1 observation satellite, taken on 13 October 2019 at about 10:55 a.m.), and (C) the metamorphosis of the marine ecosystem due to the disposal of plastic waste (National Geographic, June 2018). They are all morphological changes in material and ecological systems caused directly or indirectly by the globalised consumer society and the urban design that supports it. This suggests the breadth and depth of the geological influence of human exosomatic evolution. The social sciences of the 21st century will have to take into account the morphological changes that contemporary social systems impose on the real world as a whole. In other words, areas of research such as social morphology or economic morphology in the broader sense (including material and biological systems) will become necessary<sup>5</sup>.

(5) Today, as it becomes increasingly clear that the globalised consumer society is ecologically and socially unsustainable, there are various theoretical and practical attempts to envisage a transition to a sustainable civilization. The core idea of these attempts, collectively known as transition design, is that social design defines the ontological possibilities of humans, other organisms and material systems (for example, see Fry 2010). Thus, envisioning a sustainable future requires a design that takes into account the ontological dimension, i.e., 'ontological designing', as suggested by Tony Fry (2010) and Anne-Marie Willis (2006).

## 2. Transition Design and Post-Development Theory

### 2.1. From Development Critique to Transition Design

Post-development theory has been a major intellectual current shaping the academic discourse of Transition Design (see, for example, Escobar 2018). Emerging in the early 1990s, it interprets development policy—framed within the economic paradigm of Western modernity—as a “modern design project.” Post-developmentalists have since critiqued the cultural, social, and environmental consequences of such policies worldwide. Early research highlighted the erosion of local autonomy and culture in the Global South and began to conceptualize alternative societal models rooted in grassroots and indigenous community movements.

However, as we enter the 21st century, the negative impact of our globalised consumer society on the Earth's ecosystem is becoming increasingly serious, and it has become necessary to embrace a paradigm shift. It is precisely for these reasons that degrowth (*décroissance*) of the developed world has been proposed, mainly by Southern European post-developmentalists (for example, Latouche 2007). Today, global research of post-development is conceptualising scenarios of transition to a sustainable and plu-

ralistic world, while rediscovering and re-evaluating non-modern philosophical and cultural thoughts, as well as non-capitalist community economies in the regions of the Global North and the Global South (Escobar 2018).

## 2.2. From Humanist Cultural Theory to an Earth-Centric/Relational Ontology

It is important to note the methodological shift at the root of the changing debate on post-development. In the early 1990s, a number of post-developmentalists, inspired by post-structuralist and post-colonial critique of development discourses, denounced epistemological closure and violence conferred by the Western development paradigm and sought to reassess alternative forms of knowledge and cultural practices historically practised in non-Western societies to be in harmony with the organic universe (=cosmos).

For example, in his book *L'occidentalisation du monde*, Serge Latouche proposes two distinct cultural concepts 'vernacular culture' (*la culture culturelle*) and 'humanistic culture' (*la culture culturelle*)<sup>6</sup> (Latouche 2005, 66-82). The former refers to the totality of skills, wisdom and perspectives on nature that have been historically maintained in everyday life of different communities around the world, and in which humans are seen as corporeal beings embedded in the local milieux. The latter, on the other hand, is a concept of culture peculiar to Western civilization, which reduces culture exclusively to the realm of human mental activity. The origins of this concept can be traced back to the separation of mind and matter in Platonism. Humanist culture developed from the Renaissance to the 19th century as the culture and art of the intellectual class and became mass-popularised in the form of a cultural industry as consumer society began to emerge in the 20th century. According to Latouche, the globalisation of consumer society, that progressed through the post-war period of 'development', was nothing other than a process of destruction of

the vernacular cultures of non-Western societies, which led to the colonisation of social imaginaries with the globalised cultural products (i.e., consumer goods) encoded as images and symbols.

Post-development theorists from Latin America, South Asia, and West Africa share a common theoretical orientation that challenges Western epistemologies of development. The Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1995, 2008),<sup>7</sup> for instance, critiques the discourses of the international development system as epistemes rooted in modern Western thought. At the same time, he approaches non-Western cultural practices—such as those found in Latin American popular struggles against top-down development projects, in ways that reveal their ontological dimensions and alternative forms of knowledge, without reducing them to mere discourses or ideas. In this way, post-developmentalists emphasize the non-modern and non-capitalist character of vernacular life and culture in non-Western societies, embedded in relational systems where humans, other living beings, and both natural and man-made objects intersect.

It can be said, however, that some current of post-development, despite its critique of the Eurocentrism of development paradigm, could not escape a humanist tradition of social critique in its early stages. This tendency is evident in the work of one of its pioneers, Ivan Illich. While acknowledging everyday culture of non-Western societies as 'the vernacular', he maintained a humanist position on ecological issues (Paquot 2013). It should be noted that his humanist critique of development, together with his contemporaries such as André Gorz, Jacques Ellul, and Cornelius Castoriadis, contributed to the emergence of political ecology (*écologie politique*) and has lasting influence on the conceptualisation of degrowth in Europe, especially in France.

Illich's critique of the radical monopolies and counterproductivities of industrial societies remains highly relevant for today's globalised consumer so-

cieties. His reflections on the commons, discussed in *Gender* (1982), have been revisited by contemporary commons theorists such as David Bollier (2013), who organises countermovement against the neoliberal global economy. Illich's later work, particularly after *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (1985), advanced arguments with far-reaching implications for understanding the historical transformation of material culture and the body. Yet his humanist orientation may have limited his capacity to grasp the scale and depth of the challenges posed by the Anthropocene, particularly the entanglement between contemporary capitalism and the Earth system. At the same time, his critique of Earth System Science—especially its tendency to reduce humans to mere elements within a system—remains valuable at a moment when systems-theoretical approaches to ecology dominate environmental thought.

Twenty-first-century post-development theory, while retaining its earlier cultural critique, has shifted from a humanist orientation toward an earth-centred relational ontology that highlights the interdependence of humans, other living beings, and both natural and man-made objects<sup>8</sup>. As the global ecological crisis intensifies, this shift urges post-development theory to reconceptualize its foundations. Escobar (2018), in particular, has embraced autopoiesis theory and the currents of New Materialism in the English-speaking human sciences, advancing an 'ontological turn' within post-development thought. Building on this intellectual shift, several Southern European degrowth theorists conceptualize the transition to a sustainable world through similarly relational and ontology-oriented frameworks.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Tamanoi Yoshirō's regionalism in the present day

Incidentally, there is a Japanese current of thought that is overlooked in the international discourse on post-development theory. In the second half of the 1970s, the economist Tamanoi Yoshirō

introduced a unique transition design called "regionalism" (*chi'ikishugi*). Such a regionalism was proposed in response to the severe destruction of life in Japan caused by the industrial pollution of the post-war growth years. It established the ideal of sustainable reproduction of life as the foundation of peace and conceptualized a decentralised economic system based on local ecosystems. At its core is a unique realism called the "economy of the living system" (*seimei-kei no keizai*).

From a theoretical point of view, Tamanoi initiated a Copernican paradigm shift. First, he took note of the argument about the second law of thermodynamics (the law of increasing entropy) found in Georgescu-Roegen's work and asserted the unsustainability of industrial society. This is a way of thinking in line with the concept of the "time of projection (*le temps du projet*)" proposed by Jean-Pierre Dupuy in *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé* (For an Enlightened Catastrophism) (Dupuy 2002). It thus offers an argument that shows the limits of the ideology of productivism and urges a degrowth paradigm.

Second, he developed a distinctive ecological economics that he termed the "economics of the living system." For Tamanoi, the living system is "a system that sustains its overtime life activities by disposing the redundant entropy generated by life process" (Tamanoi 1985, 15). This framework conceives of humans not as subjects dominating nature but as beings metabolically interdependent with the ecosystem. On this basis, the economics of the living system breaks with the anthropocentrism that has shaped modern philosophy since Descartes and advances a biocentric ontology that re-embeds human beings within the metabolic cycles of other life forms.

Third, he introduced historical and cultural perspectives into the economy of the living system through the activities of the Regionalism Study Group, and his life experience in Okinawa, and his intellectual dialogue with Karl Polanyi and Illich. One of the things that Taman-



oi observed was the role of the local water-soil-cycles in dealing with the excess entropy generated by economic activity, which was managed as unique local commons through traditional agriculture, forestry, and fishing (Tamanoi 1985, 56). Illich appreciated Tamanoi's approach as a product of Japanese sensibility not found in Western ecological research at the time:

[I]n his own teaching and writing he [Tamanoi] brought a uniquely Japanese flavor to ecological research by relating cultural to physical dimensions. He did so by focusing on the interaction between an epoch's economic ideology and the corresponding soil-water matrix of social life. [...] To this purpose he used 'entropy' as a *semeion*, a signal for the impending threat to an exquisitely Japanese perception of locality referred to with terms which seem to have no comparable Western equivalent, like *fûdô*. [...] Tamanoi made me understand that it is possible to include soil, water and sun in philosophical anthropology, to speak of a 'philosophy of soil.' [...] A philosophy of soil starts from the certainty that reason is worthless without a reciprocal shaping of norms and tangibility; *seeing* the culturally shaped body cum 'environment' as it is in a concrete place and time. And this interaction is formed by esthetic and moral style as much as by the 'spirits' which ritual and art evoke from the earthly matrix of a place. (Illich 1992, 70-72, original emphasis)

In other papers (Nakano 2016, 2019), I have discussed how Tamanoi's regionalism aimed to reconstruct a community or commons based on the economy of the living system. In addition, I pointed out how his concept of "community", which he refers to as *kyô* (the common or the communal), goes beyond the category of economics and attempts to expand into politics, aesthetics and ethics.<sup>10</sup> Due to the length-constraint, it is not possible to go into detail, but the summary of its central aims is as follows:

1) A politics for the common good: Promoting regional decentralization of powers, limiting environmentally damaging development,

preserving regional ecosystems and culture, guaranteeing regional peace and involving citizens in local politics.

2) An economy of the commons: Building a circular economy that deals with excess entropy by adopting the perspective of the economy of the living system.

3) An aesthetics of a human-scale living space: The construction of a human-scale lifeworld that guarantees the reproduction of life. Inspired by Illich's argument in *Gender* (1982), concepts such as (gender) diversity and complementarity of human bodily senses and spatial perception are observed.

4) An ethics of the future: The conception of a biocentric ethics to preserve the life of future generations.

In the following passage on the ethics of the future, there is a clear gesture towards a post-anthropocentric ontology, in line with the arguments of today's post-development theory and new materialism:

For people living in a human-scale lifeworld, the most important principle is *identification*. A human-scale lifeworld is not the world dominated by the masculine principles that instrumentalise life for the sake of profit-making, efficiency and violent revolution. It is the world of living things in which goal and means become one. Since Galileo and Descartes, modern philosophy has created a world which transforms living things to lifeless objects. Philosophy is still evolving in that direction even today. The paradigm of modern philosophy makes it extremely difficult to find the world of living things. For my part, I have deepened my thought through the concept of the 'living system' and reached a conclusion that this is the only world with which human beings can identify themselves. For exploring the world of the living system, is there any more positive expression than *identifying ourselves with the flow of life, including future generations*? (Tamanoi 1985, 41, my emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

Of course, Tamanoi's thought was limited by his time. He did not anticipate the acceleration of global warming, the profound commodification of life under neoliberal globalisation, or the transforma-

tions brought by large-scale urbanisation and global mobility. Nevertheless, his regionalist vision of a future society offers conceptual tools that resonate with many transition design theories and discourses emerging in the twenty-first century. The visions of post-development in Japan can be deepened by revisiting the philosophical questions raised in Tamanoi's later work within the broader context of global intellectual history.

#### 4. Conclusion – Exploring Unanswered Questions

Finally, we will touch on two unanswered topics that need to be explored to enable the development of Tamanoi's regionalism as a foundational theory for transition design in the 21st century.

The first area, as I have argued elsewhere (Nakano 2016, 2019), is the development of regionalism towards an "aesthetics of place" within the context of the global research on the "epistemologies of the South" (de Sousa Santos 2016). The later Tamanoi's concept of a "human-scale lifeworld" has the potential to develop into a unique theory of body and place that rethinks human life and its reproduction from the perspective of the living system. The scope of this concept includes even deeper reality than the "everyday life world" in the phenomeno-

logical sense. However, Tamanoi's argument at the time was articulated on the basis of Illich's theory of "vernacular gender," which may have imposed limitations by reducing the human-scale life space to the vernacular lifeworld of female and male complementarity. However, from the perspective of contemporary philosophy, it should be possible to actively integrate relationships with non-human organisms and objects into the living system and reconstruct the human-scale lifeworld without adhering to a dualistic view of gender. New Materialism in contemporary philosophy and anthropological research on material culture offer a pluralistic approach that does not reduce matter and life to energy.

The second area, which I propose for the first time in this paper, requires a deeper investigation of the "form" of human life space, focusing on the concept of "*materielles Dasein*" (*busshitsu no gensonzai*) that Tamanoi intuitively posited in his last years (Tamanoi 1985, 73-74). Drawing on insights from Leopold Kohr and E.F. Schumacher's review of economic theory, especially their reflections on scale and technology, as well as morphological thinking in critical design studies, this second area could pave the way for a new research field, perhaps called "economic morphology".

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the annual conference of the Peace Studies Association of Japan (PSAJ) (The University of Niigata Prefecture, November 3, 2019). The translation is a revised version and was newly annotated on August 3, 2024 by Nakano Yoshihiro, specially appointed associate professor, Graduate School of Social Design Studies, Rikkyo University.
- <sup>2</sup> In March 2024, the International Union of Geological Science (IUGS) rejected the proposal by the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG), formed by the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy (SQS), of adopting the Anthropocene as a new geological timescale. This paper, originally presented in 2019, discusses the Anthropocene as a hotly discussed academic topic in the human and social sciences at the time.
- <sup>3</sup> The first edition of Mauro Bonaiuti's book was published in 2013, but the complex feedback loops between social, biological and material systems will be explored in greater depth in the 2023 edition.
- <sup>4</sup> The second law of thermodynamics (the law of increasing entropy) is based on the model of a closed system. In contrast, the Earth is actually an open-steady system formed by a circulating system of water and soil that cools the excess thermal energy released by economic processes (\*This point is explained in detail in the works of Yoshiro Tamanoi and Takeshi Murota). However, today's accelerated progress of climate change and the analysis of a number of IPCC reports show that human activities are destroying the balance of the global ecosystem to an extent that even the open Earth system cannot cope with.
- <sup>5</sup> A pioneering study that proposed the concept of social morphology was the study of Eskimo society by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1950): As for Mauss' anthropology, his work on symbolism as represented by the theory of the gift influenced the French "anti-utilitarian movement in the social sciences (M.A.U.S.S.)" (e.g. Alain Caillé) and the degrowth movement (*décroissance*) (e.g. Serge Latouche). His study on technologies and body has also been re-evaluated in recent years by the British anthropologist Tim Ingold and others (see, for example, Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the environment*, London: Routledge, 2000). However, Mauss' work on social morphology was not explicitly discussed in these schools of thought. On the other hand, Yoshiro Tamanoi, a pioneer of ecological economics in Japan, proposed a perspective that interprets entropic processes as "material morphology" in dialogue with Georgescu-Regen's theory. This conception may offer the possibility of reframing Mauss' social morphology within the metabolism of the Earth system. Let us call this perspective "economic morphology", based on Tamanoi's particular field of research. To put it in Karl Polanyi (1977), the "economy" here, however, does not refer to the formal economy in the narrow sense of the term, but to the substantive economy in the broader sense.
- <sup>6</sup> The adjective *cultural* in '*la culture culturelle*' originally referred to the act of cultivating the land through agriculture. In Latouche's thought, this meaning is more generalised to include all the techniques of life that come from the communion with the natural world. It is a concept that corresponds to '*le vernaculaire*' in the writings of Ivan Illich.
- <sup>7</sup> The Latin American post-development practices that Escobar seeks to make visible through his post-structuralist ethnography are located in the realm of nature-culture made invisible by the spatial power of modern Western development discourses. This point is particularly articulated in Escobar (2008).
- <sup>8</sup> For example, Shiva (2005) introduces an Earth-centric perspective in her theorising of Earth democracy. Escobar (2018) introduces relational ontology as an alternative to the modern dualist ontology that separates culture from nature. In his work on degrowth, Latouche (2010), whilst retaining humanist critique of development such as Illich, Gorz, Ellul and Castoriadis, also revisits diverse cultures outside Europe which have cultivated non-productivist ways of living in harmony with nature. All these theorists seek to overcome the anthropocentrism of the modern West in their respective manners and call for the pluriverse.
- <sup>9</sup> This is particularly true of the writings of Mauro Bonaiuti (Bonaiuti 2023).
- <sup>10</sup> Nakano (2016) is a Japanese language paper that summarizes the three viewpoints of political science, economics and aesthetics. Nakano (2019) is an English-language paper that adds a new ethical perspective to the argument.
- <sup>11</sup> Translation from Nakano (2019, 44).

# The US-Japan Alliance in the Post-COVID Era

## Intensifying US-China Rivalry and the Wavering Deterrence of US Forces

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Matsuoka, Misato. 2025. "The US-Japan Alliance in the Post-COVID Era: Intensifying US-China Rivalry and the Wavering Deterrence of US Forces", *MINIKOMI: Austrian Journal of Japanese Studies* 90-1, 86-95. DOI: 10.25365/aaj-2025-90-09.

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### Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted national resilience worldwide, including the operational readiness of armed forces. In the United States, outbreaks spread rapidly not only on Navy aircraft carriers but also across other branches of the military, including the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and National Guard, severely constraining routine operations and deployments. Some analysts have even argued that the pandemic could accelerate a broader decline in U.S. military power and deterrence, a trend described as "COVID-induced disarmament".

Meanwhile, global developments in recent years have reinforced the view of an accelerating decline of the US and the rise of China, with many expressing concerns about the antagonism between them. As tensions between the US and China intensify, the US-Japan alliance is facing the phenomenon of COVID-induced disarmament. This raises the question: How will these developments affect the future of the alliance?

This paper examines the impact of the rapid spread of COVID-19 on the deterrence capabilities of the US-Japan alliance and the nature of deterrence in the context of an impending transformation of the security environment. It does so with an eye to the US presidential election in November 2020, the strategic

orientation of the US and its posture towards China.

Michael Mazarr (2018, 2) defines deterrence as "the practice of discouraging or restraining someone [...] from taking unwanted actions, such as an armed attack." Originally focused on nuclear capabilities during the early Cold War, the concept of deterrence broadened in the 1960s to encompass conventional and even non-military instruments, reflecting the diversification of strategic threats. Deterrence is commonly distinguished between direct deterrence, aimed at protecting one's own territory, and extended deterrence, which involves protecting allies. The security guarantees provided by the United States in East Asia—including those underpinning the US-Japan alliance—fall into the latter category.

### COVID-induced Disarmament: The Spread of COVID-19 and the Decline of US Military Deterrence

In late March 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt of the US Indo-Pacific Fleet. Subsequent infections were confirmed on the nuclear-powered aircraft carriers USS Ronald Reagan, USS Carl Vinson and USS Nimitz, leading to an unprecedented freeze in US military deployments overseas. Documents from Brett Crozier, the former captain of the discharged USS Theodore Roosevelt, re-



vealed the crew's infections. As a result, he became a subject of criticism, particularly for revealing to the media that the Pacific Fleet, a vital deterrent in the vast Indo-Pacific region, had become dysfunctional.

As of 1 May 2020, more than 8,500 US military personnel worldwide had been infected with COVID-19 (Myers 2020). As this figure includes US forces in Japan, it has also raised concerns about infections within Japan. Regarding the situation of infected US military personnel in Japan, Defense Minister Kōno Tarō announced at a press conference on 3 April 2020 that the US Department of Defense had decided not to disclose the number of infections by base. Consequently, under the US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the Japanese government has been unable to determine the status of infections at US military bases in Japan.

To prevent the spread of infections, the public health emergency imposed on US troops stationed in Japan, as well as movement restrictions for US Department of Defense personnel were prolonged until mid- and end of June, respectively. Although these measures were aimed at avoiding the so-called "Three Cs", the three conditions that facilitate the transmission of infectious diseases (closed spaces, crowded places and close-contact settings), it must be acknowledged that this response has in fact resulted in a reduced deterrent capability in the traditional security domains of land, sea and air.

The spread of COVID-19 disrupted economic activity, restricting the operations of private companies serving as military contractors and partners. This reduction in shipbuilding and maintenance capacity has raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of the national defense industrial base. As Taoka Shunji observes, if the "plateau state" of prolonged economic stagnation—driven by sustained efforts to avoid the Three Cs (closed spaces, crowded places, close-contact settings)—persists, the national defense budget is likely to shrink,

modernization programs will be delayed, and spending on overseas deployments and training curtailed. While Taoka contends that "COVID-induced disarmament" has already taken place, it remains uncertain whether this phenomenon is merely temporary (Taoka 2020).

Scholars and policymakers have increasingly voiced concern over a potential decline in U.S. national power, particularly its military deterrence. Stephen Walt (2020) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic has so severely weakened U.S. capabilities that it symbolizes the "death" of American competence in governance and strategic leadership. This decline undermines not only the country's military and economic strength, but also allies' confidence and global trust in its ability to employ these resources effectively. Walt concludes that only fundamental political change can restore U.S. credibility and global influence.

Associate Professor Phillip Lipsky of the University of Toronto also invoked Charles P. Kindleberger's theory of hegemonic stability, humorously dubbing it the "hegemonic stupidity theory" in relation to the current international order under US leadership. "When the hegemon is stupid, the international system becomes unstable and prone to crisis", he said on Twitter, mocking the Trump administration (Lipsky 2020).

Similar to this critique, G. John Ikenberry (Princeton University) and Charles Kupchan (Georgetown University) contend that preventing Donald Trump's re-election in November 2020 was essential to overcoming the COVID-19 crisis (Ikenberry and Kupchan 2020). Their argument reflects a broader scholarly debate, as numerous analysts questioned the resilience of U.S. power and global leadership under the Trump administration.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, questions had emerged about the credibility of U.S. deterrence. In Southeast Asia, concerns centered on the Trump administration's "America First" policy and the simultaneous rise of China (Hey-

darian 2020). Reflecting these doubts, Ian Storey—an expert on the South China Sea conflict—has questioned the effectiveness of the U.S. military presence in the region. Such activities, including forward deployments of U.S. forces on allied territory, port calls, training exercises, and surveillance operations, are designed to signal resolve and deter potential adversaries, yet their actual impact has been increasingly scrutinized.

According to Storey, the US military's presence in hotspots such as the South China Sea has been transient, meaning that it has shown up primarily in response to Chinese actions and otherwise left the area unattended. Storey pointed out that this approach has allowed China to gradually strengthen its position in the region through a series of irreversible actions, such as advancing the construction of military bases in the South China Sea, and that the US military is ultimately not functioning effectively as a deterrent anymore (Beech 2020).

In response, China has sought to enhance its international influence through a blend of hard and soft power. On the hard-power side, it has strengthened its military presence in East Asia and increased deployments in the South China Sea, even announcing the creation of a new administrative zone. On the soft-power side, particularly since the outbreak of COVID-19, Beijing has engaged in “mask diplomacy,” supplying medical equipment—including masks—to countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The Chinese side's perception of a weakening of US Navy operational capabilities could further increase military tensions around Taiwan and the South China Sea (Jiji 2020a). At the same time, the US State Department claims that China is using the COVID-19 pandemic to exert military pressure on Southeast Asian nations such as Malaysia (Reuters 2020). In response, the US military has continued to conduct Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea to keep Chinese forces at bay. How-

ever, military experts suggest that China could take an even harder line, possibly employing new tactics such as using electromagnetic waves to temporarily disable the weapons and control systems of US warships (Jiji 2020b).

In April, China also deployed two Y8-Q patrol aircraft to the Fiery Cross Reef, an artificial island in the South China Sea. These aircraft are capable of detecting, tracking and following US Navy nuclear submarines, and, if so ordered, carrying out attacks. China is also catching up in the domains of cyber and space technologies (Fuse 2020).

In addition, China has reportedly expressed a preference for a Trump reelection, reflecting strategic calculations in response to U.S. policies. During the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign, Democratic candidate Pete Buttigieg cited an analysis by Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University, who argued that the U.S.-led alliance system had weakened under Trump. According to Yan, this shift created favorable conditions for China, including improved relations with traditional U.S. allies such as Japan. He concludes that, “in fact, China has identified its greatest strategic opportunity since the end of the Cold War” (Buttigieg 2020).

### **US-China Hegemonic Rivalry in a “G-Zero” World**

This situation may resemble what A.F.K. Organski describes as “power transition”. Power transition refers to a scenario in which a state challenging the existing international order gains power, while the previously dominant state experiences a relative decline. However, as we are currently witnessing, the transition of power does not proceed smoothly, and the hegemonic rivalry is likely to continue. This rivalry involves not only direct military power, but also competition in areas such as economics and technology, including AI, with intellectual property emerging as a key issue in the US-China trade conflict. Within this dynamic, the competition for security dominance increasingly intersects with other domains.

The U.S.–China rivalry is likely to persist across military, economic, and diplomatic spheres. This complex situation cannot be fully accounted for by either power transition theory or hegemonic stability theory. According to Robert Gilpin's hegemonic stability theory (1981), a hegemonic state stabilizes the international economic order by providing global public goods; when a rising challenger contests the hegemon, competition ensues, and the eventual victor assumes the role of organizing the international economic system as the new hegemonic power.

After the Cold War, there was a period when the international community was described as a unipolar system dominated by the US, the superpower, or as a multipolar system in which countries other than the superpower took the lead. Even today, with the growing presence of countries such as India and Southeast Asian nations, some see this as an era of multipolarity. But it may also be the case, as Ian Bremmer of the US political consultancy Eurasia Group has argued in the past, that the characteristics of a “G-Zero” (non-polar) world are becoming increasingly pronounced.

G-Zero refers to a world in which global leadership is absent, as developed countries focus on domestic issues. In an interview with *Asahi Shinbun* in June 2018, it was suggested that the Trump administration had accelerated the global trend towards a G-Zero world, causing a level of disorder that exceeded expectations (Aoyama 2018).

In the post-COVID era, it is possible that the hegemony of a single nation will no longer be sufficient to maintain the global order. Moreover, as China and the US are likely to continue to assert their influence and challenge each other's dominance in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, costly missteps or miscalculations could easily occur (Chan 2020). Although the end of the unipolar era is in sight, the US stubbornly refuses to relinquish its position as the hegemonic power, suggesting that the struggle

for dominance will continue indefinitely. What will be the role of the Indo-Pacific nations, particularly Japan, which is at the forefront of this G-Zero world?

### **The US-Led Liberal International Order and its Alliance Relations**

In Asia, the US-led alliances have been described as flexible relationships under concepts such as “alliance network” or “alignment” (Tow / Acharya 2007; Wilkins 2019; Matsuoka 2020). In addition, there has been a growing tendency to strengthen alliances based on ideological alignment since the end of the Cold War. US alliances, including the US-Japan alliance, have increasingly served as mechanisms for maintaining the liberal international order itself (Mochizuki / O'Hanlon 1998; Berger *et al.* 2007; Fujishige 2008; Ikenberry 2011; Matsuoka 2018). Value-based diplomacy and the development of Quad relations (comprising the US, Japan, Australia and India) are reflected in the rebranding of the Pacific Command (PACOM) as Indo-Pacific Command (INDO-PACOM), which aligns the strategy even more closely with the idea of containing China, especially under the Trump administration.

In April 2020, Mac Thornberry, a member of the US House Armed Services Committee, introduced the Indo-Pacific Deterrence Initiative bill, which proposed a budget of approximately USD 6 billion to strengthen missile defence and the capabilities of allies (House Armed Services Committee 2020). Admiral Philip Davidson, Commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, also requested an additional USD 20.1 billion in spending between 2021 and 2026 to prepare for the growing military threat from China in the Western Pacific region, particularly to Japan and Taiwan (Gordon 2020).

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, which made face-to-face exchanges difficult, virtual conferences were held during spring under the banner of “Quad Plus” between the US, Japan, Australia, India and other countries closely

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allied to the US (Grossman 2020). In response to China's growing influence, it has become increasingly clear that close cooperation between the US and its allies, including Japan, is a crucial part of the broader framework of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (Mie 2020).

### **Growing Perception of China as a Threat and the Entrenchment of a Hard-Line Stance**

The perception of China as a threat has intensified not only within the Trump administration but also across party lines in Congress. In the Senate, Senators Marco Rubio (Republican) and Jeanne Shaheen (Democrat) have led a movement to stop the transfer of federal retirement savings to China. In addition, various legislative measures have been introduced in response to COVID-19, such as the "Li Wenliang Act" and the "Stop COVID Act", as well as resolutions demanding compensation from the Chinese government. These developments highlight the increasingly tough US stance on China (Shaheen 2020; Cotton 2020; Gooden 2020).

Moreover, both Trump and Biden have proposed a hard-line policy towards China ahead of the US presidential election in November 2020. Biden outlined his foreign policy principles for the year in an essay published in the US foreign policy journal *Foreign Affairs* entitled "Why America Must Lead Again". While aware of China's rise, he advocates the preservation of a liberal international order and US-led alliances (Biden 2020).

Within the Democratic Party, a movement has emerged to defeat the Trump administration by working with progressive liberals, including Bernie Sanders, who was one of Biden's rival candidates. While this influence may lead to changes in Biden's foreign policy principles, his fundamental hard-line approach towards China is not expected to change. Whether Trump or Biden becomes president, given the damage caused by COVID-19 in the US and the resulting deterioration in US public opinion towards

China, it is highly likely that the US will maintain its hardline stance towards China.

### **US Strategy and the US-Japan Alliance: The Present and Future of US-Japan Integration**

Since the 1990s, major US military reforms have been pushed through, including the introduction of advanced military technologies and the reorganisation of military bases. At the same time, the integration of US-Japan military operations has progressed, and regular joint training and exercises have become more routine. However, in the context of COVID-induced disarmament, joint US-Japan training exercises or the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC 2020), which involves the participation of more than 20 countries, have been cancelled or postponed, and their scope and duration have been reduced. This has raised concerns about a weakening of the US-Japan alliance.

Nevertheless, new initiatives have been undertaken to address the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) and the U.S. Navy have introduced unprecedented joint training measures in Southeast Asian waters, including adjusting navigation protocols to avoid close encounters and relying on radio communication between warships. Both countries are also deepening their alliance to strengthen deterrence and response capabilities. In one example, five B-52 strategic bombers previously stationed at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam—considered vulnerable due to its proximity to China's intermediate-range ballistic missiles—have been relocated to Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota. This constitutes a notable adjustment in the operational deployment of U.S. strategic bombers.

In addition, collaboration on a new US-Japan joint missile interception system has improved communication between vessels. This includes the Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) system, which has further accelerated



integration by enabling highly accurate, real-time sharing of enemy location data. Recently, the MSDF's newest Aegis destroyer, Maya, became the first to be equipped with the CEC system, enhancing its missile interception capabilities. The Self-Defense Forces' (SDF) Space Operations Group was also newly established on 18 May, with US-Japan cooperation naturally included in its outlook. Amid concerns about the declining US deterrence, the US military and the SDF are stepping up their cooperation, which in turn strengthens the US-Japan alliance.

At the same time, the US National Defense Strategy formulated in 2018 emphasized "Dynamic Force Employment" and readiness capabilities. This approach implies a reduction in front-line forces, which could lead to a reduction in forward deployments. As the forward presence of the US military in Asia is seen as critical to deterring aggression, this shift could signal a US retreat from the world. Concerns that this could lead to a decline in deterrence in the future are intensifying (Kotani 2020).

A review of the U.S. Navy under Secretary of Defense Mark Esper indicates a strategic shift towards prioritizing mobility by reducing and lightening overall combat power and weaponry. The Navy is also exploring a shift from its traditional practice of maintaining a constant aircraft carrier presence in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific toward a more flexible crisis-response posture (Larter 2020). This approach reflects the U.S. emphasis on cost-effectiveness in force planning. Some analysts argue that deterrence could still be preserved while pursuing such optimization, for example through the adoption of unmanned systems, particularly in light of COVID-19-related operational disruptions to the fleet.

In addition to the three traditional domains – land, sea and air – that Japan's National Security Strategy focuses on, the 2018 Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines have also added the use of space, cyberspace and the electro-

magnetic spectrum. A report by the Atlantic Council highlighted the potential for US-Japan cooperation to counter the growing threat from China in the areas of unmanned aerial vehicles, drones, AI-enabled synthetic training environments and unmanned aircraft intercepting systems (Nurkin / Hinata-Yamaguchi 2020). Given the development of operations based on these new technologies, it is expected that this will further deepen the integrated operations of the SDF and the US military.

### **Security Environment in the Post-COVID Era**

In the traditional understanding of security, which focuses on military power *per se*, the continuing reduction of US forward deployments seems to symbolise a decline in its deterrence capabilities. Behind the scenes, however, security measures have been advancing beyond the deployment of military forces. Cooperation between Japan and the US has also steadily progressed in areas that transcend previous military collaboration, such as space and emerging technologies. In the future, security is likely to shift towards unmanned systems, with the promotion of emerging technologies and scientific and technological progress.

In addition to efforts to deepen the Japan-US alliance in this direction, new initiatives are being pursued in the context of COVID-19, which has limited the traditional functions of the armed forces. In the post-COVID era, it will be essential to overcome the traditional understanding of security as confined to the domains of land, sea and air, and to pursue a broader scope of security cooperation that includes cyberspace, outer space and infectious disease control.

However, there are differences in perception between Japan and the US regarding joint military technology research and development. According to Yamamoto Satoshi, researcher at the Institute for Future Engineering, it is impossible to conduct research and weapons development without considering Ethical,



Legal and Social Issues (ELSI), so these matters cannot be resolved instantaneously (Japanese Society of Public Utility Economics 2020). Moreover, realistically speaking, the US faces severe budgetary constraints. According to Heino Klinck, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, “it will be a slog particularly now in this COVID-19 environment as resources are even tighter” (McLeary 2020). The challenge will be to provide security with limited financial resources.

### **US-China Rivalry in the G-Zero Era, the US-Japan Alliance and Japan’s Strategy: Time for a Flexible Shift in Security Thinking**

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the US-China rivalry, raising questions about the effectiveness of US deterrence in Asia and providing an opportunity for reassessment. There is a strong tendency to see the situation as one of a declining US and a rising China. However, an examination of US strategy, its policy towards China and the US-Japan alliance suggests that this is less about a power transition than a protracted struggle for dominance in the G-Zero era.

Future security will no longer be limited to deterrence in the three traditional domains of land, sea and air but inevitably extend to fighting against invisible viruses and the protection of cyberspace. Rethinking deterrence against China and strengthening the US-Japan alliance from multiple angles is necessary in this context.

However, a number of issues remain to be resolved. These include the US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement and Japan’s financial contributions to US forces stationed in Japan (burden sharing). As the aforementioned Storey points out, it is time to reconsider the actual effectiveness of deterrence and think about a more flexible approach to security, rather than viewing the US military presence as an absolute deterrent.

As Collin Koh (2020) observes, scenarios in which the SDF must assume roles beyond those covered by the US

military necessitate the development of long-term, self-reliant defence capabilities. Building on this concern, the 2020 edition of the annual East Asian Strategic Review, published by Japan’s Ministry of Defense’s National Institute for Defense Studies, stresses the importance of a comprehensive multilateral and multi-layered security cooperation strategy to advance Japan’s vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (National Institute for Defense Studies 2020). Together, these perspectives underscore Japan’s dual approach of enhancing autonomous defence capacity while engaging in multi-lateral security partnerships.

In the US, more hard-line policies towards China are being implemented, such as a ban on visas for Chinese students in the high-tech sector. In the security environment of a G-Zero world, Japan must not only maintain its alliance with the US, but also accelerate the diversification of its partnerships, while closely monitoring the future of US-China rivalry in the non-polar system and respond flexibly to the changing security environment.

### **Update to the original article**

The rivalry between the US and China has intensified since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, confirming earlier predictions that security would extend beyond traditional military spheres. The US has strategically reinforced the “China threat” narrative to justify its security recalibrations and its alliances. The US-Japan alliance has evolved in response to these new challenges, moving beyond traditional military cooperation to focus on a multi-layered, technologically integrated framework. This comes at a time when President Donald Trump has accused Russian, Chinese, and North Korean leaders of conspiring against the US during a military parade in Beijing in August 2025, underscoring a perception of these nations aligning against Washington.

Against this backdrop, alliance dynamics are also being reshaped by de-

bates over burden-sharing and defense commitments. As Kanodia (2025) notes, Washington has urged Indo-Pacific allies, including Japan, to raise defense spending to NATO-like levels and to assume more explicit roles in potential contingencies with China. While such demands have generated unease, allies

remain inclined to adapt in order to sustain U.S. security guarantees. This adjustment, however, reinforces a trend toward militarization, raising difficult questions about how Japan can balance the strengthening of deterrence within the alliance framework with the need to avoid deepening regional tensions.

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