

# A Disagreement of Being, A Critique of Life and Vitality in the Meiji Era

by

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Department of East Asian Studies  
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## Abstract

My dissertation involves a critique of the concept of life or *seimei* as it emerged in modern use during the Meiji era (1868-1912). Specifically, I have outlined the conditions of possibility for thinking *seimei* at particular moments in the development of the modern, market-centered Japanese nation-state in historical and literary terms such that I can begin to use these conditions to think its impossibilities. In short, I argue that a central condition of possibility for thinking life in its modern, historical form is a process of individuation that takes hold of and shapes bodies at an ontological level. By critiquing life and its ontology of individuation, I unearth the traces of an impossible “apriori collectivism” - that is, a collectivism not merely reducible to a congregation of individuals, but originally collective – buried under the calls for individual freedom, self-help, and industrialization that were at the heart of the Meiji era’s modernization project. I track this apriori collectivism in a lineage relating (through non-relation) the mutual aid societies or *mujin-kô* of the Edo period to the life insurance industry of the Meiji 10s and 20s. I then use this material history of life as backdrop to my study of the literary trends in the latter decades of the Meiji era, and end with a consideration of the political and aesthetic implications *seimei* has for thought by taking up a study of Iwano Hômei’s *Shinpiteki hanjûshugi* (*Mystical Demi-animalism*).

## Acknowledgments

There is such a strange tendency in acknowledgments only to tip one's hat to those one felt had a hand in promoting the creation of a work like a dissertation. Reading about so much gratitude at the beginning of a text, I always wonder who were the figures that were left out of this account, since, in my case at any rate, I was "helped" just as much by those that hindered my progress, as I was by those who were in earnest support of my studies. Because I can think of nothing that expresses more the principle of apriori collectivism as engaging in a project. Whether it is a matter of research or artistic performance or simple work, a project and its products are always given expression through a series of pressures shaping the conditions according to which the project can find itself. It has been my experience that the site of production for these pressures are often more ambiguous than I might initially want to believe, while the authors of instigation were not always ones that I might have wanted to acknowledge. For the doctoral student, our instigators are just as much the figures we hold as our "enemies" to thought as our "friends," because the former more than anyone gives us our reasons for thinking real definition. They are those that did what they could to delegitimize our position, and in so doing made us only more aware of the need to critique legitimacy itself. They are the hindrances that hid in the words of our colleagues that made us stop in our tracks, and suddenly think. At last, finally, think! If I am to acknowledge those that made this work possible, I must acknowledge those that hindered as much as helped, because they defined the community of thought that gave birth to this work, and I am indebted to their contributions. Often the best advice came from those who disagreed with me.

These, the helpful and the hindering, are only the few in comparison to the wealth of aid I received from people whose names I never knew but whose own daily projects and labors interwove with my own in ways for which I can hardly even begin to account. These nameless contributors and their creations are just as much a part of this project as those whose names I can bring to mind, and it is to these creators that I owe a deep gratitude.

My true wish, however, is that I would never have need to acknowledge. My wish is that projects would emerge without names, or that the project itself became the name

designating a collective univocity that found its place in the world temporarily, and then dispersed. That its trace left behind would stand like ancient burnt stones marking a forgotten joyous occasion. That these names would say more about a world moving forever towards the fluid creation of collectivities rather than their decadence into selves. For now, I give the names simply to express a deep gratitude, and make of this gratitude my ongoing wish for the coming community: Janice Brown, Linda “Ma” Callaghan, Miyoko “Sis” Callaghan, Patrick “Bro” Callaghan, Robyn “Sis” Callaghan, Eric Cazdyn, David Chai, Paul Chin, Craig Colbeck, Greg Depies, Mark Driscoll, Ian Drummond, Norma Escobar, Olga Fedorenko, Takashi Fujitani, Christina Han, Fred Judson, Kie Kajihara, Ken Kawashima, Sunho Ko, Uno Kuni’ichi, Lori Lytle, Annie Manion, Maryon Mclary, Mark McConaghy, Arthur Mitchell, Ilona Molnar, Ryan Moran, James Poborsa, Janet Poole, Baryon Posadas, Paul Roquet, Gail Russel, Alex Schweinsberg, Celia Sevilla, Vincent Shen, David Stiles, Tooru Takahashi, Max Ward, Tim Yang, David Zadak, Denny Zadak, and Georgina Zadak. And to the one person who is the constant reminder that my wishes are not just idle dreams, but have a real texture and tension in the world, if only on a very small and private scale, to the one who is always my joyful displacement, Michelle Callaghan.

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## A Note on Translations

Though I have provided the standard English translations of texts where these are available, all translations of Japanese texts without a cited translator are my own, and I take full responsibility for their accuracies and inaccuracies. In terms of Japanese names, I have followed the Japanese convention of placing family names before given names (e.g. Tayama Katai), except in instances where the Japanese author publishes outside of Japan in a language other than Japanese, or is more commonly referred to according to a name order in which the family name follows given names (e.g. Stefan Tanaka). All romanizations of Japanese terms follow the Revised Hepburn format.

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# Introduction

## General Abstract

*My main purpose in the chapters to follow will be to develop an historical critique of the concept of life (seimei) in the Meiji era (1868~1912). Instead of appealing strictly to vitalist trends in the concept's intellectual or literary history, I have chosen to focus instead on life's more material historical development through the life insurance industry that first took root in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the Meiji era and bloomed into one of, if not the, most successful industry in the era's forty-five year span. I begin my analysis of this development first by locating a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the industry showing how its utopian aspirations for mutual protection and aid are given expression through a social form that itself is a betrayal of the principles of the utopia (Chapter 1). I do this by first linking this history of life insurance to the mutual aid societies, or mujin-kô, that proliferated in the Tokugawa period (1600-1867). In my study of the emergence of these mujin-kô as they appeared in the rural areas of the han or domains, I notice a logic of what I term "apriori collectivism," defined roughly as a collective engagement that is not reducible to its individuated parts, working itself out outside of any state involvement in the governance of village economies (Chapter 2). I develop this history of the mujin-kô in relation to the history of life insurance not to show how the two mutual aid forms are similar, but rather to show how the differences between these economic forms indicate a greater differentiation in the organization of bodies and subjects over different time periods. I characterize these differences as more than mere shifts along the surface of an otherwise consistent strata of national being, and use the changes to land tax and money in the first years of the Meiji era to illustrate that these changes constituted a fundamental transformation in the "state of being" that characterized the Tokugawa and Meiji eras (Chapter 3). Once I have established the nature of this differentiation, I can then focus in on a logic of modern life made visible through the failures and successes that accompanied the implementation of the life insurance form (Chapter 4). The necessary individuation of bodies and subjectivities that was key to the proper operation of the life insurance form and the market economy on which it depended provides stark contrast to the logic of apriori collectivism I found operative in the rural economies of the Tokugawa period. Once I establish*

*the political economic outline of this concept of life as read through the life insurance industry, I establish resonances between its process of individuation occurring in the market sector and the internalization of a private space of life in Meiji era literary production. The political novel or seiji shōsetu becomes a key form for thinking this resonance as I note how the censorship and peace preservation policies of the Meiji state worked to quell the proliferation of anti-state political voices that found expression through this novel form. These state policies allowed the Meiji oligarchy to train subjects into abiding by the individuation process that was so key to the operation of the market (Chapter 5). I end by showing how these policies at the political economic level found not only their expression, but promotion and reproduction in the aesthetic field through a championing of forms of vitalism that accept the new individuated reality of the Meiji state as the only given reality according to which forms of naturalist, realist or biographical literature could adhere (Chapter 6). Instead of focusing in on standard literary figures of the era in the naturalist, realist, or romanticist vein, I take up the study of much overlooked literary scholar whose work is central to the reproduction of this brand of individualistic vitalism, and is also one of the key pioneers of what is considered Japan's own distinct novel form, the shi-shōsetsu or I-novel. This literary figure is Iwano Hōmei, and the work that I study is his seminal, Shinpitsu teki hanjūshugi, or Mystic Demi-animalism.*

The above summary covers the basic structure of the following work, and to avoid any redundancies, I thought it better to use the rest of my introduction to establish the context in which this critique was written, so the reader will gain a sense of some of the motivating factors that informed how I came to deal with the problems that I did in the manner that I chose.

Before I continue I feel it necessary to add a note concerning the place I see this work occupying in relation to Japanese studies. As is apparent from the first few paragraphs of my introduction, I do not locate the space of this work strictly within the limits of “Japan.” I provide a more detailed explanation for my reasons for this in the final sections of this chapter, but I think some of it bears repeating here. Although I am a scholar of Japanese studies, and this is a work that would best be categorized as a work of Japanese history (spanning the late Tokugawa to the late Meiji period), I have not organized my reading of the

concepts, histories, and narratives of the material to come to answer questions specific to this field. Rather, my hope is that this work will turn Japanese history outwards to concern itself with questions that cut through the various disciplines peopling the humanities, social sciences, and even the sciences in North America. This is both the luxury and necessity of writing at a period of time when the stakes of writing on the politics, economy, and literature of life have risen to such an extent that they can no longer hold themselves to their disciplinary or regional limits. I breach these disciplinary limits, however, only with the deepest respect for work done by Japanese studies scholars. Because I believe deeply that the concerns and concepts that come from a study of the Tokugawa and Meiji eras, can and must speak to the concerns of our contemporary moment, if only we are allowed to let their differences infect the tenor of our thought.

And with this in mind I turn to the concerns that have informed my critique of life in the Meiji era.

## **I. The Affects**

### **1. Paralysis.**

Where most may have little difficulty introducing the word “life” into general conversation without a second thought, I have found myself weirdly sensitive to its every enunciation. My reaction as of late has been one of paralysis. “Well, that’s life,” a friend might say, and my entire body would tense in response. “My life is a mess,” a colleague might mutter in passing, and I would paste a sympathetic smile on my face for fear of revealing the momentary system shutdown that assaulted my mental faculties. As “life” is the key concept to my research, this paralysis poses a constant conundrum for me. I am

reminded of St. Augustine's contemplation of time in Book XI of *The Confessions*<sup>1</sup> or Martin Heidegger's opening remarks in his critique of being in *Sein und Zeit*,<sup>2</sup> in which both author's note the strange problem they face when dealing with a term that few have difficulty using in everyday speech, though most would be hard pressed to define if asked to do so. Life, as I discovered, can be included amongst these enigmatic terms. Each time it was mentioned, my paralysis would be instigated by my own internal attempts to grasp with precision what people were saying when they used the word. I was caught in the unfortunate position of taking "life" too seriously only to discover its meaning seemed to shift and change with every use.

The novelist and literary critic C.S. Lewis provides an entry point into thinking through this mass of indistinction that is "life;" yet, his is not a simple map of its meaning and uses. Quite the opposite. In the second edition of his *Studies in Words* he spends an entire section unraveling the knot of life's meaning as it is used in literature.<sup>3</sup> He begins his analysis, as so many do, with ancient Greek. He notes that instead of a single term, Greek offered four terms to indicate life: *bios* (βίος), *aiôn* (αἰών), *zôê* (ζωή), *psukhê* (ψυχή). These defined life in a variety of ways: life as that which an organism loses with death, life as

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<sup>1</sup> "For what is time? Who can readily and briefly explain this? Who can even in thought comprehend it, so as to utter a word about it? But what in discourse do we mention more familiarly and knowingly, than time? And, we understand, when we speak of it; we understand also when we hear it spoken of by another. What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not: yet I say boldly that I know, that if nothing passed away, time past were not..." From Book XI, Chapter XIV of St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 1st ed., *Vintage Spiritual Classics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> "It is said that 'being' is the most universal and the emptiest concept. As such it resists every attempt at definition. Nor does this most universal and thus indefinable concept need any definition. Everybody uses it constantly and also already understands what is meant by it." From Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996). 1.

<sup>3</sup> In "Chapter 10, Life" of C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, London: Cambridge U.P., 1967).

biological life, life as that which spans the period between birth and death. He then turns to the Aristotelian notion of life found in the contemplation of *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία), or “the good life.” This opens life up to its political and ethical implications, as the good life finds expression, not in the temporal limits defining a being’s existence, but in the quality of that existence. In Aristotle’s *Poetica* Lewis finds another meaning to supplement this last: life as *bios* is given as the “common lot” apportioned to all men. “‘Tragedy,’ says Aristotle, ‘is an imitation not of personalities but of action and *bios* and happiness.’ In Latin, *vita* is used in the same way. ‘The fear of hell disturbs human *vita*.’”<sup>4</sup> In English, Lewis finds this counterpart everywhere in literature that lauds or bemoans the “life of men.”

The complications in defining this term are then deepened when Lewis exposes the tendency for the term to fall into ideological use. He brands this its “semantic halo” by which the term loses all its sense because of its constant association to emotional enunciations. “The emotional sense derived from one sense of the word can thus disastrously infect all its senses. The whole word is haloed, and finally there is nothing but halo. The word is then, for all accurate uses, dead.”<sup>5</sup> He then notes that this death of life is most often perpetrated most by those using life in approbation of a world of value which seems purposely given ambiguous definition. Lewis offers as example a quote from William Ernest Henley’s *Hawthorn and Lavender*: “Life! Life! Life! Tis the sole great thing this side of death.” He then comments, “Obviously Henley means by life some element or state within life on which he sets a high value, but his use of the noun life gives us no clue to what this

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 277

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 283

element or state is.”<sup>6</sup> This “haloed” life provides the possibility for discord amongst its proponents, since there is nothing to guarantee that the system of valuation implied by one enunciation of life will find resonance with a following enunciation. One need only consider the debates surrounding abortion to gain a sense of the real antagonisms that can emerge when two value systems collide over the “haloing out” of the term, the most tragic irony of this clash expressed in the murder of doctors at abortion clinics.

And still life’s complexity deepens as Lewis notes how this clash of specificities in the value of life and its expression finds more discord when life also becomes the means to express a more general valuation through its use as an “ellipsis for ‘real life.’ The distinction between real life on the one hand and, on the other, daydreams, expectations, theories or ideals is familiar, but very difficult to state in watertight form.”<sup>7</sup> A “real life” finds its root in an assumed shared sense of valuation that runs counter to the more specific uses of the term that are meant to express individual sensibilities. As a graduate student, I have become quite familiar with this use of the term and its tendency to allow the speaker to jump from the particular to the general; it is the burden of the graduate student to have constantly to face those who do not consider academic work a legitimate undertaking and express this asking when one plans to “get a real life?” My temporary paralysis, in this case, has proven useful, as my body can find only a single response: I smile politely, but say nothing and move on.

Considering these loose and ambiguous applications of the term, how else could I react to my encounters with life except through paralysis? Even in the briefest off-hand

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 279

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 289

remark, I could feel entire ideologies crash against me, leaving me to pick up the scattered remnants of a conversation already passed. Even after arming myself with Lewis' categories, my chase after the meaning of life often proved fruitless, and I began to wonder if its ambiguity wasn't a necessary aspect of its definition. So many tears in the fabric of our collective existence, in how we manufacture systems of valuation, forms of common sense, and notions of a shared real, seemed easily sutured over in everyday conversation with the careful deployment of a single term: ah, life.

Yes, life.

Moreover, it seemed that for all my research into the meaning of life, no definition, no matter how complex, could provide a map as to its effects in expression. I came to agree with Lewis that life was often used to conceal as it promoted certain value systems, and also worked to smuggle the particularities of valuation into a shared sense of what was real, but there was nothing in this definition that offered any means to determine what effects were produced from this concealment. My paralysis wasn't abated. As my experiences of conversational arrest continued, I began to suspect that if life, as Lewis understood it, could be used to conceal and sometimes resolve the differences separating conflicting value systems, then could it not also be put to the task of creating these very same value systems? In fact, if we were to abandon what I discovered to be an endless, and often pointless, search for a term's meaning, and instead focused on what it produced in discourse and thought, wouldn't it be more appropriate to think of life, not simply as a linguistic term bounded by a set definition, but as a kind of concept *organized around the very production of its meanings and valuations*? A conceptual factory engineering the concealments, ellipses, and ambiguities that we only experience *ex post facto* following the enunciation? What would it

mean, then, to look at life, not according to a logic of its representative capabilities, but from its productive potentiality? I think it somewhat ironic that a concept whose very mechanisms imply notions of production and reproduction would not itself be thought of in relation to its own productive and reproductive abilities. How would one go about studying this? What object of study would provide an entry point into this kind of engagement with life? It was these questions that brought me to the ideas I outline in the following chapters concerning life insurance, vitalism, and the Meiji era.

## 2. Anxiety

A very particular anxiety accompanies the work of a North American scholar working in Japanese Studies. It is an anxiety that seems to come to the forefront with anyone whose work forces them to straddle cultural or linguistic boundaries. These anxieties center on matters of difference and its subtlety. Despite all my paralysis in conversations concerning life, I am constantly reminded by the texts with which I engage that it is not even “life” that is the focus of my research. In fact, the term “life” in English has no single counterpart in Japanese. Similar to its Greek counterparts, life in Japanese terminology can be broken down into a variety of terms whose form cannot even be represented with the Roman alphabet. The term I have chosen as the focus of my study, *seimei* (生命), is accompanied by a variety of other terms indicating some aspect related to life. In terms of the purely biological *seibutsu* is used, a term that provides the core characters for the word biology: *seibutsugaku*. For human life there is *jinsei*. For everyday life *seikatsu* is most commonly used, as in *nichijō seikatsu* (lit. the living activities that accompany a normal day). When indicating the span of one’s life, the term *shōgai* is used. *Shōgai kyōiku*, or lifelong education, is a common phrase

used in this case. If we were to compare the above terms, we might conclude that life in Japanese is reducible to a single character. Compare 生命 (sei-meī), 人生 (jin-sei), 生涯 (shô-gai), 生活 (sei-katsu), 生物 (sei-butsumu), and we discover the link joining these five terms is the character 生 (sei, shô). A further look into this character would reveal it, on its own, also denotes life and living. The verb “to live” is given by *ikiru* or 生きる. *Sei* even bears the supplemental burden of denoting the reproductive action of life - to give birth: *umu* or 生む.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it functions to indicate the freshness or liveliness of life through its reading as *nama* (*nama-biiru*, draft beer; *namaiki*, fresh/impertinent; *namauo* or *namazakana*, raw fish). This should tell us, then, that “life” in Japanese is reducible to a single determinant linguistic form, *sei*. We could only say this, though, were we to ignore some other key terms for life including *inochi* (命), probably the most prevalent term used to indicate life itself next to *seimei*, and a homonym for *seimei* which differs precisely based on the writing of the character *sei* - 性命. In the first years of the life insurance industry translations of the “life” of life insurance often alternated between these two forms, 生命 and 性命. The subtle difference distinguishing the two had to do with a matter of emphasis where 性 indicates a form of life given over to gender distinctions or a life in which one’s nature (or heart as the *risshinben*, 心, radical indicates) was determined, while 生 was a more general term free of these distinctions. In the end, 生命 became the standard term, and to this day is the more common reading for life between the two homonyms.

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<sup>8</sup> The more commonly used character for this, however, is 産.

The above only scratches the surface of the possible diffractions and ruptures that come to us when attempting to find consistency between uses of the term “life” as given in English and its counter, *seimei/jinsei/inochi* etc. in Japanese. Were we to give it the kind of depth of study in common usage as C.S. Lewis does, our map of the term would explode with problems. How would we account for the use of 生 in terms such as *seito* (生徒) and *gakusei* (学生; both indicate student), *sensei* (先生, teacher), or *kiji* (生地, cloth)? What of its connotation in language practices? Was it, as in English, given over to the haloing effect Lewis notes? Would we need to understand *seimei*'s derivation through ancient Confucian or Buddhist texts to note its parallel development to life from the ancient Greeks until now? As we can see, a study of the literal meaning of life compared across the Japanese and English linguistic realms would constitute a lifelong (*shôgai*, 生涯) work in itself, and one that I have no interest in pursuing. In the end, I am compelled to ask what such a project would offer us besides a reaffirmation that differences and the consequent anxieties they produce in us can be suppressed so long as we have the time and knowledge to expend on the suppression? I prefer to hold my anxieties closer to me, as I think the anxiety of difference is in itself a valuable companion, and not an enemy to the cultural or Area studies specialist.

I am a translator. This is what my anxiety tells me. The mistake in thinking the task of the cultural studies translator of course is to assume that translation has only to do with the barriers separating different languages and cultures. Philosophy teaches us that existence itself emerges as an act of translation. For Immanuel Kant the experience of existence is guaranteed via a translation of the Faculty of Reason. For Heidegger, the ontic and ontological encounter each other across a border of constant translation and disambiguation. In History we learn quickly that the chronicling of time is itself a translation of events and

their significance. Even linguistic translation is not simply a matter of taking one word in a given language and finding its counterpart in another. As Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin have both noted,<sup>9</sup> translation does not begin at the border between languages, but must wrestle the differentiations that persist within a given language itself. With this understanding of translation in mind, it seems to me the anxiety that translation produces for the Area Studies specialists is often warped.

Or should I say this anxiety inherent to translation is often made to work backwards. Instead of pointing us to the creative potentialities inherent to difference, it often gives rise to an overdetermination of our authority to speak definitively on cultural uniformity as we reproduce a desire for clarity pulled from the murky waters of cultural and linguistic variation. This is not to say that we should not be allowed some authority to speak. Our position as specialists is not a random assignation, and authority does not come cheap. As those in the field are keenly aware, we earn our place through years of language and cultural study, through a dedication to a lifetime in constant cultural and often physical displacement. As practicing Japanese, East Indian, Vietnamese, etc. specialists in North America, we live with our cultural referents scrambled because more often than not we must work between incommensurables – between life and *seimei*, between clarity and ambiguity, between the particularities of our current situation and the general field of our inquiry, and yet we must wrestle to make sense amidst so much subtle variance. The clarity of our expression is born from the anxiety indicating its opposite; I would ask only why our attempts to assert

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<sup>9</sup> This notion of translation can be found throughout Derrida's work. A good starting point would be Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001). For translation in Benjamin see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1978). 69~82.

authority should be aimed at suppressing the nature of this anxiety. Rather, shouldn't we celebrate it, and in so doing celebrate the differences and disorientations that surround us? Are these not, after all, the source of all our creativity, not just in our respective fields, but also for thought itself? With the above in mind, I have not organized the following work as an attempt to show how life read within the Japanese context is different from our understanding of life within an imputed "Western" discourse. I believe that kind of research has found little traction within the field of Asian studies at least since the publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking work in 1978, *Orientalism*.<sup>10</sup>

My anxieties then have pushed me away from a sense of translation that conceives itself purely as a practice that occurs between culturally determined languages or spaces. This is why, outside of the above ruminations, I have not pursued the "meaning" of life or *seimei* in this work, and I have spent little energy worrying over the etymological roots of words as they are read in Japanese and then interpreted into English. Instead of what life or *seimei* means, I am far more interested in what it produced as it emerged at a very specific period in the formation of what would become a capitalist nation state. I am interested in the history of *seimei* as a concept, and what a historical critique of that concept produces for thought in our own time. As we will see in the following pages, *seimei* is nothing if not productive. It becomes not only the motivating concept behind an entire industry, the life insurance industry, but also a key concept promoting a particular organization of being itself. This being, I will argue, is the capitalist state of being, and it is my ultimate assertion that life, counter to many who have engaged with the term in its political, cultural or aesthetic form, is

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<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

homologous to capital. Which is to say, it not only shares the same space and time of capital, but functions to reproduce that space and time. What should surprise us, however, is not this homology, but rather that when we begin to inquire after what it is precisely that life as a concept produces within the logic of a market centered economy, we discover that life is predominantly aimed at producing its opposite. Life makes the production of death either according to a logic of sacrifice or negligence – logics described by Giorgio Agamben in his work *Homo Sacer*<sup>11</sup> – thinkable, and in making them thinkable, possible such that this possibility, once lifted up to a national scale, could be seen as necessary. As Michel Foucault has noted in his lectures on *biopower*, life becomes a consideration simultaneous to the conceptualization of society as something to be defended.<sup>12</sup> Society itself was given life, and one valued to the extent it could tolerate the sacrifice of individuated lives for its defense. The Meiji era could not provide a better historical ground upon which to come to understand this strange and dangerous productive potentiality of life/*seimei*.

### 3. Frustration

Instead of chasing down meanings, I have thus spent the following pages tracking down the concept of *seimei* to address a particular problem: How does a subject come to desire its own subjection? This research has been informed by work done in French theory of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, especially through the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Rancière, Gilles Deleuze, and Alain Badiou. I will explain my reasons for making use of late 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2003).

Century French theory for work on the Meiji era in a section below, but for now I would point only to the shared problem of self-subjection that links these four theorists together. Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault have more directly wrestled with the issue of self-subjection in their work. This is the central problem to Deleuze's theorization of the desiring machine and the state apparatus in his work with Felix Guattari on the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.<sup>13</sup> For Michel Foucault the presence of this problem is much subtler, yet still essential to understanding the relevance of his work on the intersection between power and life. One might argue that self-subjection is one of the motivating forces behind the shift historically from *sovereign* to *bio-* power. How else can we account for a movement from the power of the sovereign to make live and let die, a power that centralizes itself around the paranoid rule of a single figure or body with the ability to enforce rule, to the power of the state to create a population that motivates itself both through its ability to make itself live, and by virtue of its tolerance of the state's tendency to let others die?<sup>14</sup>

For Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière I would argue that their close ties to the works of Karl Marx compel them to be theorists thinking through self-subjection, even if their theories do not deal explicitly with this issue. The very notion of ideology in the works of Marx is focused on self-subjection, and must do so else it threatens to leave a central gap open in a theory of capitalist production. Stated simply, it is not enough to show how capitalist logic functions according to a productive contradiction that allows for the

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<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol 1.*, trans. Mark Seem Robert Hurley, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, Vintage books ed., 3 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

exploitation of labor power by the capitalist classes. It is not enough to show how miserable and immiserating the very being of capitalism can be towards those it uses for the reproduction of its own systematic expansion. None of this makes any sense, in the history of capitalist development, or in its function today, if we cannot come to an account as to why a collective group would agree to subject themselves to capitalist immiseration in the first place. Without at least some semblance of an answer to this problem, Marxist historiography loses its potential to embody the change it theorizes. Worse than this, it threatens to reduce itself to mere finger-pointing. Considering the pervasiveness of capitalist logic in the world around us today and the problems with which we must all wrestle at the level of our everyday, when we address the question of self-subjection to capitalism we are not asking how others could so easily fall victim to its pull. We cannot afford to sit in such luxurious ivory towers. We must ask how we too could be trapped in its embrace. Only in dealing with our own frustration resultant from acknowledging our complicity to a system we wish to critique will we be able to begin to think an alternative to its form.

My engagement with self-subjection was made all the more critical due to the events of the last few years during which this work was written. In the midst of my research on life in the context of the Meiji era, the world around me crashed. Though initially most were left disoriented as to what caused the stock market crash of 2008, a narrative would eventually emerge explaining its causes. Subprime loans were at the heart of the problem. Specifically, speculation on US mortgage backed securities guaranteed through collateralized debt obligations and credit default swaps had proliferated throughout the trading sectors of the global economy to such an extent that the world's stock markets became dependent on "toxic" loans handed out to US homeowners who did not have the financial resources to keep

up with their interest payments. When these subprime loans began to go sour, the stock market experienced a crash the likes of which it had not seen since 1929.<sup>15</sup> In the wake of the crash, the US government led first by a republican administration and then followed by a democratic one, and the EEC led by the conservative governments of France and Germany, put into play trillions of dollars worth of bailout money backed by taxpayer dollars in an attempt to re-stimulate capital circulation across global stock markets. Though many would argue that the stimulation packages stopped the hemorrhaging of the global economy,<sup>16</sup> few asked what they did to resolve the fundamental problem at the heart of the crash. The problem, however, was not a difficult one to understand. As Alain Badiou noted in an article in 2008 for the French newspaper *Le Monde*,

Ultimately, all of this came about because tens of millions of people are on such low incomes – or non-incomes – that they cannot afford anywhere to live. The real essence of the financial crisis is a housing crisis. And the people who cannot afford anywhere to live are certainly not bankers. We have to go back to the lives of ordinary people.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, when the same governments that attempted to bail out the banks finally turned their attention to the lives of ordinary people, they did not do so bearing trillion dollar gifts. They came bearing austerity measures that asked an already immiserated population to

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<sup>15</sup> This is the narrative, with slight variations, that would be accepted by most commentators on the 2008 Financial crisis. The number of works on the crisis would be too numerous here to mention, so I point the reader to the US government's own results from its special committee on the crisis. United States. Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission., *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report : Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States*, Authorized ed. (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2011), US Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission., *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report : Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States*, Authorized ed. (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> See in particular Paul R. Krugman, *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), Andrew Ross Sorkin, *Too Big to Fail : The inside Story of How Wall Street and Washington Fought to Save the Financial System--and Themselves* (New York: Viking, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> As quoted in Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2010). 98.

tighten its belt buckle for an indefinite period to come. In North America, the *Occupy Wall Street Movement* rose up in defiance of what it characterized as class warfare between the 1% of rich capitalists and the 99% of middle to low income earners that bore the burden of the crisis. In Europe, only recently, the populations of France and Greece made their dissatisfaction with the new economic logic of austerity measures clear by ousting its conservative leaders, replacing Nikolas Sarkozy in France with Socialist Party leader Francois Hollande, while Greek voters split their votes across several parties providing no clear winner to their 2012 elections.

In the weeks following these election results, the stock markets turned sluggish. In Canada, despite an almost euphoric triumphalism of the Canadian banking system whose regulatory mechanisms seemed to make them resilient to the stock market crash, the discourse of austerity still managed to find its way into political debate at the provincial level. In Ontario, Premier Dalton McGuinty's liberal government, backed by the Drummond report, put forth a budget plan steeped in the logic of austerity as it outlined a program of massive cutbacks across government social programs to pull the province out of its spiraling debt burden.<sup>18</sup> In Quebec, students flooded the streets in opposition to the Charest government's attempts to increase tuition fees to colleges and Universities by an unprecedented 75%. Anger not just at the skyrocketing costs of education, but at the hypocrisy expressed by a government that asked its people to tighten their belts while MPs

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<sup>18</sup> For details on the Drummond Report see Robert Benzie, "'Drummond Report: New Roadmap for Ontario Includes Higher Hydro Bills, Larger School Classes'" *The Toronto Star* (February 15, 2012).

used taxpayer money to fund stays at luxurious hotels,<sup>19</sup> and made 10 billion dollar accounting errors in the public report on its military spending,<sup>20</sup> mobilized record numbers onto Montreal streets in the largest protest rally in all of Canadian History.

Where these recent protests might prove a triumph for those interested merely in seeing the people rise up against their government for its own sake, for anyone interested in addressing the more fundamental problems that have revealed themselves to be inherent to our political and economic systems, these recent ground level events cannot but lead to a feeling of frustration. This is neither a frustration aimed at the politicians, hedge fund managers, or media pundits that organized the reality that became the financial crisis, nor is it aimed at the protesters that came together to decry the flaws inherent to the capitalist system. To understand this frustration one need only take a moment to ask what if: What if every protest movement achieved its aims? What if the protestors in Quebec were successful in reducing the costs of tuition to zero, and Jean Charest's provincial government was overturned. What if François Hollande was successful in France in re-instantiating socialist principles to French society, while the Greek government found its coalition that could successfully find a means to deal with its current debt crisis? What if the Occupy Wall Street Movement was successful in its calls for a more equitable market system, and a strict punishment of those that were responsible for the housing crisis and its crash? What then? A return to a Keynesian style economics that would continue in its attempts to make for us a better, kinder and more equitable capitalist system?

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<sup>19</sup> Meagan Fitzpatrick, "Bev Oda Apologizes for Swanky Hotel Stay," *CBC News* (April 24th, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> "Mackay Aware of F-35s' Extra \$10b Cost," *CBC News* (April 8th, 2012).

My frustration has thus to do primarily with the lack of imagination that this current financial crisis revealed. That when faced with a blatant imbalance in the distribution of wealth, best exemplified in the now infamous image of rich Wall street traders drinking champagne in celebratory fashion while staring down at the protestors of the Occupy Wall street Movement, anti-capitalist movements found a voice to protest the current system, but few, if any, had a plan for what would stand in its place. Few had what Alain Badiou has termed an *Idea* to lead them through their own frustrations. I think it important to note that it would be a mistake to characterize this as strictly the fault of ignorant protestors or the uneducated masses. I do not ascribe to the critique of the Occupy Wall Street Movement that was prevalent in the media during its occupation of Zucotti park that they're inability to provide legitimate alternatives to the current economic and political system was reason to dismiss the movement altogether.<sup>21</sup> Even the most well respected economists commenting on the crisis such as Paul Krugman, Joseph Stiglitz, and Carmen Reinhart did little to promote a radical rethinking of the economy. At worst, they were historical reformists, noting that anyone thinking "this time its different" were victim to an ahistorical sensibility, and that to figure a way through the crisis required only return to the history books to find an appropriate fix for this temporary aberration in market flow.<sup>22</sup> At best, they promoted precisely what the Occupy Wall Street Movement demanded, a radical rethinking of the

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<sup>21</sup> See Nelson D. Schwartz and Eric Dash, "In Private, Wall St. Bankers Dismiss Protesters as Unsophisticated," *The New York Times* (October 14th, 2012). Though New York Times Op-Ed Columnist, Nicholas Kristof, does not dismiss the movement for these reasons, he does indicate the prevalence of this critique in his article Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Bankers and the Revolutionaries," *The New York Times Sunday Review* (October 1st, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Carmen M. Reinhart and Kenneth S. Rogoff, *This Time Is Different : Eight Centuries of Financial Folly* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

economy. Unfortunately, as with the protesters, they fell short of offering anything more than the hope that this new economic form would some day take shape.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, we cannot, must not, think this lack of imagination according to a logic of ideology in the traditional sense – that somehow we have all had the wool pulled over our eyes, and it only requires a little more care and intelligence to reveal the true nature of our lack. My frustration concerns issues that are more structural in nature. Which is to say, this lack of imaginative alternatives to capitalist modernity is not the fault of any one movement or group, but an endemic feature of the capitalist logic itself. Why else, as Slavoj Žižek has noted, is it the case that we seem to have little difficulty in imagining the end of the world, and yet still cannot imagine the end of Capital itself?<sup>24</sup> Much earlier than this, Fredric Jameson pointed out this horizon of thought concerning the challenge in introducing new forms of aesthetic intervention into a capitalist society in his 1991 work, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. He writes:

...the new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010).

<sup>24</sup> “Think about the strangeness of today's situation. Thirty, forty years ago, we were still debating about what the future will be: communist, fascist, capitalist, whatever. Today, nobody even debates these issues. We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay. On the other hand, we are obsessed with cosmic catastrophes: the whole life on earth disintegrating, because of some virus, because of an asteroid hitting the earth, and so on. So the paradox is, that it's much easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than a much more modest radical change in capitalism” quoted in Astra Taylor, “Žižek!” (US: Zeitgeist Films, 2005).

act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of this limit of thought within capitalist (post) modernity, frustration not only becomes a key motivational force pushing us into confrontation with these limits to thought, but also becomes the sign of the breach of this limit. The form of frustration itself holds within it a logic of excess formed through an organization of desires that could not take shape were they not in excess of the structural limits that kept them in place. Frustration bleeds its alternatives, and it is only a matter of allowing frustration to persist so that it may find more concrete forms of expression.

We need, at the same time, to be careful of this frustration in not being too naive with regard to its emancipatory potential. There is nothing glorious about frustration. At the same time that it formally may indicate to us the potential for a breach of the limits imposed on us by our current situation, it can only do so if it simultaneously makes our structural engagement with that which frustrates us one of self-subjection. It would be too easy to aim our frustration at capitalists and their “greed,” or protesters and their “sense of entitlement.” If the frustration I speak of has structural roots that exceed our own subjective experience, this also means the production of our subjectivity is organized in unison with that which has lead us to frustration. In a capitalist system whose reality depends upon the participation of all to ensure the reproduction, not just of a particular mode of production, but of the reality of that system at the subjective level – we not only must be made to desire our consumer freedoms, our moral markets, and our rights to privacy and private ownership, we must also

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<sup>25</sup>Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Post-Contemporary Interventions*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). 54.

desire our desire; this is the quintessential logic of the relation of the commodity to the subject<sup>26</sup> – any frustration that can be derived from this system of desiring desire must be one of self-subjection.

I can think of no concept that expresses this complex of self-subjection better than the concept of life itself. We do not need to be compelled to design our own “lifestyles,” to promote moral programs aimed at the preservation of “life,” or to change our own habits with the aim of prolonging and protecting the sanctity of our life and the lives of those around us. We do this willingly. Yet, the very organization of our attitude towards life falls conveniently in line with the larger state structures that keep us in subjection to its divisive power. This is not to say that the effects of state power are uniformly pernicious. I am more than grateful for the medical advancements that protect my health and welfare. I believe in the utopia that life insurance itself dreams of. But only to an extent. Just as we must do with capital, we must always hold our critique of life across the impossible dialectic that Fredric Jameson saw at work in Marx’s own thought. We must both acknowledge the real benefits that life and capital have brought to our existence while at the same time confronting their real violences and privations. Where there has been no end of critiques on Capital since Marx, however, I feel similar critiques of life have been strangely lacking. If there is any concept today, following the collapse of the grand narratives, the corruption of the unified subject, and the critique of essences, that still holds the line against thinking our impossible

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<sup>26</sup> Psychoanalysis might term this the desire for the *petit objet a* – a desire that constantly defers itself because of its own interest in keeping itself activated. I would not, however, read this, as some might make the mistake of doing, as some kind of interior mechanism within the realm of the psyche. There is no interiority to the subject, and as we will see with the logic of life, that life of the subject was always just the illusion of an interiorization of a political being given little choice but to privatize its own realm of inaction.

exit from the violences accompanying capitalist being, this concept is life itself. In recent years, it has been the concept that many have turned to as their protagonist in the attempt to think through an emancipatory politics. I think this turn to life and vitalism is seriously misguided, which is the reason I have characterized this work as a *critique* of life itself.

It is to these contemporary vitalist works that I turn to in the next section.

## **B. Theoretical Context**

### **1. Productive Affects**

Paralysis. Anxiety. Frustration. Too often these emotional states are treated as pernicious influences to rational society. In fact, emotion itself is often characterized in enlightenment thought as the enemy of reason. For Descartes the emotions give rise to a chaos of superstitions that must be dispersed by the harsh light of rationality. For Kant, the world on the side of the percept is bracketed out in order to avoid the warping effects of the emotions, so that the structure of reason can more readily be understood. In his above analysis of the meaning of life, Lewis characterizes the haloing effect as one in which emotion takes hold of a definition and effaces its more rational definitions. In contrast to these assertions, I find the emotions, or the affective architecture that gives rise to what we term “emotions,” far more productive in relation to an understanding of the nature and function of thought and its practice. Thus, I have tried to illustrate in the above sections a key point that will form the basis of my analysis of life. In fact, it is a point of absolute necessity in understanding the nature of my critique. Emotions are not the enemy of reason. When placed in relation to a subject formed at the axis of passive and active potentials, the affects that give rise to emotions provide us a more fundamental understanding of the

structure of forces influencing the production of that subject. Reason, under this topology of the affects, becomes just another expression of emotion. More to the point, reason is the child of a given affective order, and so is only important to an understanding of the relation between thought and action as merely one more cog in the mechanical assemblage of affects. In this I follow the work of Gilles Deleuze and Benedictus de Spinoza as they provide what I think to be the most rigorous and effective theory of the affects by which an understanding of life's conceptual role in the establishment of a capitalist state of being can be achieved.<sup>27</sup> In the chapters to follow I will attempt to make this theory of the affects and their "order" under capitalism more plain, but for now I would only like to note the warping effect that a particular attitude towards the affects, and their emotions, has on the limits of thought.

We often line our emotions up according to a more stable order of good and evil. Love, kindness, joy, and sympathy are placed on the side of the good. Frustration, anger, hate, and anxiety are placed on the side of vice and evil. Thought stops here as the valuation of these values takes hold of thought for the production of a set order to our emotional motives for action. I may act out of love and kindness, but I must avoid action given impetus through the baser emotions. What I have tried to show above is that the affects and their expression in emotion are often much more complicated than the usual fable of good and evil might have us believe. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, was the best critic of this fable, and provided acerbic attacks on some of the most valued emotional virtues of the Christian faith. With a physician's accuracy, he dissected the fleshy warmth of

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<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1992), Benedictus de Spinoza, "The Ethics," in *A Spinoza Reader, the Ethics and Other Works* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

sympathy, humility, kindness to reveal the bloody and complicated mess of relations that often made these virtues the companions of power and the most egregious hypocrisies. Yet, despite his acuity for the corruptions inherent to Christian doctrine, one affective concept seemed to slip his grasp. This was life itself. As a representative of a tradition of thought given the term *lebensphilosophie*, or life-philosophy, Nietzsche was not oblivious of the concept of life and its logic of operation, but on the contrary, made life a central concept, next to will and the eternal return, of his philosophy of becoming. Appropriating life from the more doctrinal notion within Christianity of the tree of life, Nietzsche made life far more robust and vital to thought. By focusing on a critique of one form of life, the Christian life, Nietzsche failed to note the outline of a life and vitality that was organizing subjectivity according to a different set of limits defined within the political economic sphere of Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Which is to say, that Nietzsche was only one in a long line of philosophers and thinkers that mobilized a concept of life as protagonist to a critical project that did not consider the larger political economic framework according to which this concept found its vitality. This, of course, is an unfair critique of Nietzsche's work, since the concerns of his day required he take on a different set of targets. His work is not any less important to me, because of this "oversight." In fact, I would argue that Nietzsche's contribution to thought – his critical awareness, his philosophical joy, his search for thought beyond good and evil, and his concern over the revaluation of values – has set the conditions of possibility by which my own work could find expression. In terms of life itself, he simply had different fish to fry. What seems odd, however, is that since then, few if any following in Nietzsche's critical footsteps have turned their sites on life. All other transcendent or

universal concepts may have fallen at the feet of contemporary critique. Yet life continues to thrive.

In the next few pages, I will take up some more contemporary work on life to show what I conceive of shortcomings in thinking life for which my work hopes to compensate. These shortcomings can only be seen from a particular perspective, however, and are not meant to be read as critiques altogether of the works involved. I have only meant to tilt the looking glass a little so that we may perceive the problems of capital and its history according to a different diffraction of light.

## **2. Historical Empiricism**

Before I lay out my points of critique of more recent work on life, I think it important to note my critical allegiances at this point, since they are key to understanding why I have asked the questions and addressed the problems that I do. First and foremost, this is a work of history, and it is one indebted to theories of empirical history in so far as I have let my archival research decide the course of the work's narration. Readers may find my attachment to empiricism discordant with the critical theories I have mobilized and the theorists that have come to my aid in this endeavor. Some might ask if empiricism isn't one of the enemies of critical theory? I would answer that we must make a distinction between empiricism and positivist empiricism. Where the former, developed through the work of such historians as Leopold von Ranke and informed by the rational skepticism of David Hume, emerged in reaction to what was conceived as an overestimation of the power of rational thought to express a world not necessarily organized according to reason's own logic, the latter cast aside all such skepticisms in the treatment of objects, subjects, and time

making all matter itself resistant to theorization. Where the former encourages us to continue to think through the theoretical implications using history itself as our ground, the former more often than not attempts to place a wedge between history and theory in order to submerge its own theoretical allegiances. An object is an object and data is data, says the positivist, and we should simply treat them as such. Considering the long history of thought that has continually put a question mark on the nature of consistency expressed through the paradoxes posed by Zeno of Elea, Plato's aporias, the religious debates of the medieval period, and the fundamental doubts concerning existence that gave birth to modern thought, this kind of ignorance of the problems regarding consistency seems to me a strange kind of blindness to the problems of thought.

Empirical history began, not with the abandonment of theory - Leopold von Ranke was far too versed in philosophical traditions to treat "theory" so dismissively<sup>28</sup> – but with its refinement. Because history is not separate from theory. What historical empiricism forces us continually to confront is the fact that *that history and thought are intricately implicated in the production of one another*. In fact, I would push this further in stating *that history is the apex of expression for theory*, not its antagonist.<sup>29</sup> It is the historian's task, once he or she has opened themselves up to the radical contingencies and multiplicities of their work, to come to terms with the theoretical implications of their discoveries and make them clear in their writing. In my own work on the history of a particular concept of life, I have tried to make the theoretical implications of this work plain.

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<sup>28</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers (New York, N.Y.: Irvington Publishers, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> I have Ken Kawashima to thank for pointing out this relation of history to theory.

### 3. French Theory

At the same time that this work is first and foremost a work of history, it is also a critique, and I have had to depend on the aid of others to refine my sense of the nature and implications that a critical work entails. I have chosen to follow a particular line of inquiry developed according to a tradition that some might call French post-structuralism, and others might simply indicate as French theory of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I have not done so out of blind faith in the work of such authors as Jacques Rancière, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault, nor do I see myself as a victim to a form of theoretical faddism particular to my time of writing. A look at the work being done on life and vitalism today would reveal that any attempt to wrestle with the theoretical implications this term without engaging with the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze would be remiss in addressing the key issues and questions that this concept has pulled to the fore. Michel Foucault's work on *biopower* has stimulated and influenced a mass of work both dealing with life as a conceptual category by the likes of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Roberto Esposito, and Nikolas Rose, not to mention an endless list of historical works covering a broad field of topics elaborating upon intersections between life and power, politics, race, health, security, geography. It has also stimulated a series of neologisms all taking the prefix "bio" as their center of organization. We no longer can study biopower without considering biopolitics, bioethics, bioeconomics, biocapital, biomedical technologies, biotechnology... The list goes on, as Foucault's unique critical and historical methodologies have opened up an endless and fruitful space for thinking the relationship between power and life. With Gilles Deleuze, his revitalization of two key figures of *lebensphilosophie*, Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson, along with his contemplation of life as pure immanence in one

of his final essays, has tinged writers and thinkers following in his footsteps with the hue of vitalism. Clare Colebrook's *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life*, Keith Ansell Pearson's *Germinal Life*, and Eugene Thacker's more recent *After Life* are the most emblematic of this strain of vitalist work, though only the latter's work is written as explicitly critical towards the concept of life itself. It is within the context of this mass of work on life and vitalism stimulated by French theory that I hope to offer my own particular historical reading of the concept. I do not just mean to contribute to this work, however, but hopefully provide a space to look at it critically.

Along with their contributions to work with life, these French theorists have furthermore offered me an exit to the traps in thinking life that I have found to be frustratingly prevalent in work outside of their tradition. As mentioned above, what seemed most peculiar to my reading of the history of this concept in the Meiji era was its ability to produce forms of subjectivity that could end by desiring their own subjection to economic and political systems that didn't hold their interests at heart. The work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze proved useful to deal with this problem, not simply because they themselves made the issue of self-subjection central to their own work, but also because they did not take the relation between subject and object as given. The subject was the product and not the foundational ground for thinking modes of being. In this, French theory provided me a break from more phenomenological or neo-Kantian modes of engaging with life that took the experience of life as primary without giving any thought to the conditions of possibility that made this experience possible. For phenomenology, the subject-object relation is the guarantee against which all theorizations of experience may be explored. This proved an obstruction to my historical work on life, because this kind of essentialization of

the subject-object relation provided no wiggle room for thinking the radical transformations in experience itself and the plasticity of subjectivity indicated by these transformations that were key to understanding the shift from feudal to modern capitalist social relations.

Lastly, French theory allowed me to push the questions I asked with this history of the Meiji era to a level deeper than is allowable under other theoretical or methodological frameworks. Which is to say, French theory embodied in the works of Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Rancière, opened up my historical critique to questions of an ontological nature. In particular, I have focused in on a debate over the nature of being between the two French theorists, Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze. This debate I think marks nothing less than a radical transformation in the form of thought on being, and has become the productive ground for thinking our exit strategies from the strictures to the capitalist mode of being that hold us bound to our limits today. If the problem is how to think the impossible exterior to capitalist (post)modernity, then an acknowledgment of the potential this transformation has allowed for thinking thought is absolutely essential in charting our line of flight beyond capital's overwhelming grasp. What is at the heart of this debate between Badiou and Deleuze is the nature of being's multiplicity. The very question of being's multiplicity thus puts us in a framework that is radically different from all other ontological considerations, as the burden of thinking being is not placed on theorizing its unification for all things at all times, but rather thinking being as an engine of difference. For the historical empiricist this provides a boon to research as it allows us to break from organizing our histories strictly according to its rationalities, its

consistencies, and it unities, but opens up history to its ruptures, contingencies, and inconsistencies.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. Japanese Critical Theory

With all my attention on French theory, some might wonder why there seems to be a deficiency in considerations of Japanese critical theory with regards to life. Am I not committing an act against cultural authenticity by reading my critique of Meiji era life against a background of French theory? My answer to this is more practical than theoretical. As a Japanese historian dealing with the history of the life insurance industry, and the development of the concept of life across literary registers, I have spent the majority of my time engaged with Japanese texts of the Meiji era. In order to make the results of my research accessible to a North American audience, however, I felt compelled to frame these results in terms that would be more familiar to my reading audience. All the critical work I address in the following pages can be found in English translation (with the exception, regrettably, of work by Gilbert Simondon), and has been the object of some debate within North American academic circles.

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault was the first to acknowledge this potential in his article on “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice : Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977). Yet, instead of writing on behalf of history and its metaphysical potential, Foucault was compelled by the particular brands of historicist writing and metaphysical concerns of his day to write genealogy in antagonism to history and metaphysics. At the same time that we was writing counter to the positivist empiricisms in historical work and phenomenological tendencies of philosophical work of the time, he himself was contributing to a radical reorganization of the relation between history and its metaphysics. With Gilles Deleuze’s embrace of a logic of difference and the univocity of being in his two works *Expressions in Philosophy* and *Difference and Repetition*, this revolution in metaphysical thinking was given real expression. History could begin thinking, thanks to the contribution of these two thinkers, its ruptures and differences rather than its unities and consistencies. Alain Badiou in his turn has politicized this multiplicity of being such that we can revisit these theories of being and history according to their political potentialities in the contemporary moment.

This is not to say that these same debates around life have not been taking place in Japanese academia. In looking at these debates, however, any critique of cultural authenticity would seem to fall short, as many of these debates are centered around the same French theorists with which I have engaged. There is an especially large corpus of work in Japanese critical theory that engages with the work of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Gilles Deleuze. Unfortunately none of this work on French theory and life in Japan by the likes of Uno Kuni'ichi, Higaki Tatsuya, Koizumi Yoshiyuki, and Kanamori Osamu to name only a small representative few, is available in English translation.<sup>31</sup> Because of the depth and rigor of the engagement these Japanese critical thinkers deal with the same French theory I have chosen as my critical reference point, I fear doing justice to the slight variances of these engagements would require a separate monograph length work. I have only begun to tap the treasures of this work recently, but plan to begin introducing their work to English speaking audiences in the near future.

Because our critical reference points are the same, however, I think it fair to say that as much as I hope to contribute to debates on life in North American history and critical theory, I think this work will provide a similar contribution to those debates taking place amongst Japanese critical theorists as well.

## 5. The Necessity of the Meiji Era

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<sup>31</sup> For a few representative examples, see Tatsuya Higaki, *Nishida Kitarô No Seimei Tetsugaku; Berukuson, Dburuuzyu to Hibikiâu Shikô* [*Nishida Kitarô's Life Philosophy; Echoes of Bergson and Deleuze*] (Tokyo: Kôdansha Gendai Shinsho, 2005), Osamu Kanamori, *Sei Seiji No Tetsugaku [the Philosophy of Biopolitics]* (Tokyo: Minerva Shobô, 2010), Kuni'ichi Uno, *"Tan Naru Sei" No Tetsugaku [the Philosophy Of "Mere Life"]* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2005), Koizumi Yoshiyuki, *Dburuuzyu No Tetsugaku; Seimei, Shizen, Mirai No Tame Ni [Deleuze's Philosophy; Towards Life, Nature, and the Future]* (Tokyo: Kôdansha Gendai Shinsho, 2000).

If we are to take history seriously, we must encounter the limits of modern historiography seriously. We must consider the limits in its ability to think the shift separating the modern from the feudal not merely as a transformation of this or that discursive strategy or this or that mode of production, but rather as a threshold for thinking the historical itself. This is why the Meiji era is not just convenient, but absolutely critical for thinking this life as threshold to thought, because it provides for us a distinct breach marked by radical transformations, not just in manners of speech and behavior, but in the organization of time and space itself. The Meiji era provides for us a means for thinking radical change if only we can abandon all those categories of thought that would turn its ruptures and destabilizations into just more variation across a surface of similitude. Instead of thinking the Meiji era as the exemplar of developing nations playing catch up with the developed world, we could find in it the perfect space to encounter a capitalist development that has no means to figure itself against evolutionary or naturalist modes of historical change. There was nothing natural about the shift from feudalism to capitalism in the years linking the Tokugawa to the Meiji era, and there is nothing in this history to allow us an escape route for thinking it as a natural development. As I will show in the following pages, the shifts especially in space and economic practice made possible by such things as the land tax reform, and the centralization of the banking industry, were deliberate acts made by men with specific intentions in mind.

The Meiji era provides for us, more so than any other history, the possibility of thinking capitalist modernity, not as the result of a manifest destiny, but more as one other political economic form whose instantiation was never guaranteed, but had to be enforced. Consequently, the success of its implementation was constantly plagued by doubts,

disagreements, and disorientations. In taking these disorientations up in our historical analysis and tracing them backwards against a backdrop of radical difference that is the set of practices and ways of being of the Tokugawa period, we can begin to outline political economic alterity itself; to think the unnamable Idea that might instigate radical transformation, or at the very least, provide the means to think a few potent alternatives to the problems plaguing us in our own age.

### **A Final Word on the Use of the Term “Japan”**

As I mention above, I have framed my work on the Japan in a slightly different fashion than what might be expected within the realm of Japanese studies. Consequently, I rarely make mention of “Japan” in the following pages, instead opting to address the Meiji era as an historical space and time all its own. I do this deliberately. Firstly, I do this because it would seem strange to term the conceptual space of this history a “Japanese” one when the period itself was marked by a fundamental concern by state builders over the lack of national cohesion. Secondly, I do this because I think there needs to be a space, as I mentioned above, to think Japan beyond the boundaries of Japanese studies. By overdetermining the space of my inquiry according to national boundaries, I would rob this history of its critical potential for telling us something about the differentiations inherent to capitalist modernity itself. I would threaten to write my ontology of difference across a nationalized space of similitude when neither the historical space itself, nor its relevance to thought spoke this same similitude. Put simply, writing Japan over this history would be to impose Japan upon a history that didn’t require the imposition. I think Japanese studies, and Area studies in general, have more to offer to thought than the mere “ghettoization” of their object of critique to subordinate national imaginaries. Lastly, it would seem hypocritical of

me in my attempt to outline the threshold of historical thought only to betray it for nationalistic purposes.

Just as I do not write the Meiji era under the sign of Japan, neither do I think it adequate to write the Tokugawa under this same sign. This is not to say Japan as a concept does not exist and is not operative either in the histories of these periods or in the actual intellectual practices of the time. Rather, I bracket out Japan so that we may encounter these histories, the people that inhabited them, and the practices that defined them, on their own terms outside of state or global imaginaries that would reduce our encounter to simply one more cultural anecdote. I have too much respect for the work done in Japanese studies in the past several decades and for the richness of differences in thought and practices that this term is often used to suppress.

## *Chapter 2.*

### *Seimei and its Utopias*

#### **I. Presence, equivalence, difference**

In presenting some of my work on life in the Meiji era at conferences and symposia, I am often confronted by the same question: “But how is this life any different from what we see in the Tokugawa period, the Muromachi period, the Heian... etc.?” It is a fair and important question, but one I think that points to a major hurdle historical thinking itself must constantly confront: the tendency to equate presence with equivalence. Often we take that which was present in our pasts and make it into an equivalence that will allow us access to it in thought. We must always speak the past in our now, and we would not be able to think the past without that kind of work. At the same time, I think there is a danger in submerging or even suppressing the sometimes subtle, sometimes radical differences that inhere to concepts which may seem the same on the surface. Of course there were concepts similar to life in the periods that came before the Meiji era. Of course the history of “life” could be traced back to time immemorial, but it would need to be done so at the cost of so many differences killed

for the sake of reading too much consistency in our past. Life would be our bridge built to efface the presence of an infinite number of gaps separating its every enunciation. The bridge, however, must always also act as the trace of these gaps. Thus when confronted with questions that ask me to consider building a bridge to the past lives of life, I rarely find anything more than a bare resemblance tying presences together, but find myself always more fascinated by this trace. I cannot account for every small fissure, but, to borrow an analogy from Michel Foucault, I can find amongst these fissures the movement of tectonic plates whose combined movements form the outline of mass chasms that reach down to the very substance of being itself. I will argue in the following work that one of these chasms is the Meiji *ishin*. The Meiji *ishin* is normally given as the events that include the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the “return” of the Emperor to the center of power in Japanese history. It is also normally considered the starting point for Japan’s development into a modern nation-state. In English *ishin* is often translated as reformation, but to keep readers from associating this term strictly with a reformatory narrative of historical progression I will stick to using the Japanese term. Those familiar with the debates surrounding the nature of the Meiji *ishin* know that these debates normally fluctuate between two poles of interpretation: the *ishin* as revolution, or as mere reform.<sup>32</sup> Instead of a either, however, I would see the Meiji *ishin* more as an *event* where an *event* is understood as a moment of radical contingency in which the organization of bodies, affects, rationalities, and subjectivities is made suddenly flexible such that a new order of being can emerge as effect

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<sup>32</sup> I will deal with these debates in more detail in Chapter 4.

of the event.<sup>33</sup> In this the event of the Meiji era was neither a reform nor a revolution, but rather maintained elements of the two narratives. It is important that we do not abide too strictly to older narratives that understand the transformation of the Meiji era as one that occurred thanks to the introduction of a more advanced exterior in the form of Western civilization. This may have been an operative concept for those at the time who spoke of the civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*) of the new populations taking form on the Japanese archipelago, but here we must make the distinction between a recoding of what were newly being reconstituted as older forms, and the more concrete social relations that made the Meiji *ishin* possible. We cannot ignore the fact that forms of merchant capital, commodity production, and primitive forms of accumulation were already emergent well in advance of the Meiji *ishin*. At the same time, we also need to emphasize the radical break that this event marked for how social relations came to be expressed. In the following pages I will be emphasizing the break the Meiji *ishin* marked with its past, but this emphasis must always be read with the continuities in mind. In fact, it is this very paradox in thinking the Meiji *ishin* as both break and continuation that will allow us to encounter it and the transformations that took place as more than either the effect of the importation of new technologies that put Japan on its “natural course” towards a market centered society, or a failed revolution. In fact, holding these two narratives in mind offers us a means to encounter the Meiji *ishin* as a reorganization of political being such that we can begin to think being itself along these paradoxical lines. Life became one more expression of this new order.

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<sup>33</sup> For theorizations of the event, see Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London ; New York: Continuum, 2005), Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold : Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

We must remember, however, that in the context of the Meiji era we are not dealing with “life.” As mentioned in the introduction, the English term “life” does not have a single counterpart in Japanese. *Inochi, seikatsu, seimei, seibutsu* are all possible translations. In terms of the Meiji era, I have chosen to focus on the history of a single term, and this is *seimei*. I do this for a very particular reason. First, as literary critic, Suzuki Sadami, has pointed out in his encyclopaedic work on life and vitality in the context of Japanese modernity, the term *seimei* only came into use in the early years of the Meiji. It was introduced through a translation of Samuel Smiles’ *Self Help* by Nakamura Masanao in 1871.<sup>34</sup> Smiles’ work is famous for its first line, “God helps those who help themselves,” and provided Meiji subjects with a series of biographical anecdotes of men that achieved greatness purely through their own individual efforts to rationalize the world around them. Because this idea of self-achieved success stimulated the imaginations of subjects only newly freed from the status restrictions of the previous era, the translation became an instant success, and was rivaled only by Fukuzawa Yukichi’s *Gakumon no Susume*<sup>35</sup> in publication sales. Thus, life as “seimei” entered the Japanese lexicon as a new concept tied to Western enlightenment ideals, and provides a convenient escape from the problems of equivalence and presence mentioned above, but it is not for this reason that I have focused on it for my historical critique of life.

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<sup>34</sup> Translated under the title *Saikoku Risshi hen* [*Compilation of Successes in the West*] in 1870.

<sup>35</sup> Published in sections beginning in 1872. In English it is known under the title *An Encouragement of Learning*. Yukichi Fukuzawa, *An Encouragement of Learning*, trans. David Augustine Dilworth and Umeyo Hirano (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1969).

Having spent over a decade collecting together and analyzing work on *seimei* in the Meiji and Taisho eras, the above mentioned Suzuki Sadami provides work on this concept that is, if nothing else, the broadest in scope. He begins in the first half of his research years on *seimei* focused on a period he characterizes under the term *taishō seimei shugi*, or Taisho vitalism. According to Suzuki, thought surrounding notions of life and vitality flourished in Japan in a period spanning the end of the Russo-Japanese war (1905) to the Great Kantō Earthquake (1923).<sup>36</sup> His later work on *seimei*, however, expands this periodization to cover a broad swathe of texts going as far back as the *Nihon shoki* and *Kojiki*<sup>37</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century up until the present day.<sup>38</sup> Although I owe the periodization of my own work on *seimei* to Suzuki's earlier work – like him I would mark the end of the Russo-Japanese war as a key moment for thinking life, the nation, and Japan itself as a shared national imaginary, I think his work functions best as an example of the limits that a strict focus on vitalism and *seimei* in the field of literary and intellectual studies poses for thinking the concept. What seems oddly missing from his work, despite the hundreds and hundreds of texts he mobilizes for his analysis, is the presence of a very particular understanding of *seimei* that was prevalent in the political economic spheres in the early decades of the Meiji. This is the life of the life insurance companies. The term *seimei* thus conveniently helps us tie together two vastly different cognitive maps around the concept of life, since it is *seimei*, and not some other

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<sup>36</sup> Suzuki Sadami, "*Seimei*" *De Yomu Nihon Kindai; Taishō Seimei Shugi No Tanjō to Tenkai* [Japanese Modernity Read Through "Life"; the Birth and Development of Taisho Vitalism] (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> The *Nihon Shoki* (Classical Records of Japan) and the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) are considered the two oldest classical works of Japanese history. The latter was said to have been written in 712 while the former was later written in 720.

<sup>38</sup> Suzuki Sadami, *Seimeikan No Tankyū; Jūsō Suru Kiki No Naka De* [an Investigation of Life-Perspectives; Amidst the Multiplicity of Crisis] (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2007).

form of the term, that is operative amidst these two fields of inquiry. My work in the following pages thus can be seen as an attempt to link these two fields through a concept that was operative both in life insurance (*seimei hoken*) and the vitalism that Suzuki sees beginning to emerge at end of the Meiji (*seimei shugi*). More to the point, I would like to show how the former concept of *seimei* that developed in the political economy of the Meiji era provided the outline according to which its more intellectual and literary form operated.

I think this is an important step in understanding how *seimei* worked as a productive concept within capitalist modernity, because for the industry men involved in the reproduction of this concept at the heart of their economic project, life or *seimei* was not something pulled from an archaic past, but was an altogether new concept that brought with it new economic technologies, and the potential for thinking whole new forms of social existence.

## **II. The Conundrum of *Seimei*'s Utopia**

### **1. The Two Faces of Insurance**

We cannot understand the relevance of this history of life insurance without taking into account the radically new reality it introduced into thought for the newly forming Meiji economic elites. More than a mere set of new economic technologies, life insurance held in its heart the hope that its utopian imaginings were not merely an idealization that operated in the *u-topos* or non-place of thought. The radically new economic technologies given form via the life/death tables, actuarial statistics, and their inherent calculus provided a distinct hope that entire social ideals could find their reality through the implementation of this economic apparatus. Early commentary on life insurance by the likes of Awatsu Kiyosuke,

one of the founding members of and a major contributor to the *Journal of Insurance* (*hoken zasshi*) established in 1895, and Fujisawa Rikitarô, creator of the first non-foreign life table,<sup>39</sup> constantly waged battle against those forces that would corrupt the life insurance utopia by not paying proper attention to its economic principles. I will deal with these issues in more detail in chapters four and five. For now, I would like to focus in on the wish itself that was life insurance. Quotes from two of the Meiji era's early pioneers of modern life insurance are illustrative of its utopian hopes. The first is one given by Wakayama Norikazu, former government official working as aide under Okuma Shigenobu in the Ministry of Finance's taxation bureau, who broke from the Ministry to attempt to establish what would have been the first modern life insurance corporation in the form of the Nittô Life Assurance Company (*Nittô hosei gaisha*) had his endeavor not stalled due to problems with the initial investment capital. He wrote,

In this terrible world what should be most lamented is that which follows from a lack of preparation. Forethought in preparation is fundamental for the sake of eliminating the fears and anxieties that follow misfortune. In Western Countries savings banks have developed, and people have been able to put away idle capital to be used in times of necessity. Yet, life is limited, and even a man's fortune has its limits, beyond which he must consider the future of his wife, and children. For this, there is nothing greater than life insurance. For this reason, savings banks along with life insurance enterprises have continued to develop in Western Countries.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> All insurance companies in Japan up until the introduction of Fujisawa's life table depended on a table that amalgamated statistics from 17 different tables based on British demographics. Fujisawa himself was a mathematician trained in Western style calculus. He was a strong supporter of the cooperative structure of corporate development and insisted before handing over his work on his life table to the founders of Nippon Seimei that they implement a mutual fund structure to their company whereby policy holders would be given a share of the profits derived off their premiums. Nippon Seimei agreed, and provided bonuses for policy-holders every several years. Both Fujisawa's and the British 17 Company Table were replaced in 1911 by the Japan Three Company Table (*Nihon Sangaisha Hyô*, 日本三会社表), a life table that used Japanese population statistics gathered from data accumulated by the three major insurance companies of the time, Meiji Seimei, Nippon Seimei, and Teikoku Seimei. This became the standard life table for all life insurance companies in Japan.

<sup>40</sup> *Meiji Seimei Hyaku Nen Shi*, ed. Sugiyama Kazuo and Shimura Kaichi (Tokyo: Meiji seimei hoken sôgô gaisha, 1981). 11.

The second quote is by Yasuda Zenjiro, founder both of the Yasuda Zaibatsu and the Yasuda Life Insurance Mutual Group, and is taken from the rules of agreement of Yasuda's first failed attempt at the establishment of a life insurance company, the Five Hundred Name Mutual Financial Group (*kyôσαι gohyakumeisha*).

From the beginning we organized a corporate union of members that privileged giving and mercy as first principles and in this we differed slightly from the life insurance companies of the West. When confronted by a death of one of our members, we provided funds for the bereaved as aid in efforts to maintain their costs of living. Thus for the bereaved we could allow them to perform the rights of mourning without any regrets, and for the dead we made every effort to ensure the wails of those not properly laid to rest in the earth were never heard.<sup>41</sup>

Here in both quotes we have all the formal requirements of the life insurance ideal. Like the more successful life insurance corporations that were to follow, Wakayama's failed life insurance venture and Yasuda's partially successful mutual finance group consisted of members who paid small premiums into a larger communal pot that would be used towards insuring wives and children against the possibility of an unexpected passing of the main breadwinner of the family. Money would be provided from this communal fund to cover costs of living as well as money for a proper burial. This form of mutual aid is at the heart of the utopian society life insurance is meant to create. A closer look at some of the language used in the quote by Yasuda can help us further open up the vision it is meant to put forward. In particular I was struck by the turn of the phrase, "perform the rights of mourning without any feel of ill will towards any" (*shi ni sôshite urami naku*), and pursued this a little further to discover that it was not without its precedent. The phrase has its roots in a quote from Mencius. In Book I of the Sayings of Mencius on King Hwuy of Liang, the passage reads as

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 17

follows:

If the seasons of husbandry be not interfered with, the grain will be more than can be eaten. If close nets are not allowed to enter the pools and ponds, the fish and turtles will be more than can be consumed. If the axes and bills enter the hill-forests only at the proper times, the wood will be more than can be used. When the grain and fish and turtles are more than can be eaten, and there is more wood than can be used, this enables the people to nourish their living and do all offices for their dead, without any feeling against any. But this condition, in which the people nourish their living, **and do all offices to their dead without having any feeling against any,**<sup>42</sup> is the first step in the Royal way.<sup>43</sup>

In comparing the Mencius passage to the two quotes given above we can see resonances in the image of a harmonized social whole wherein the excesses of society are used towards the care of all members of the society. The utopia of life insurance is a simple one, just as is the one given by Mencius: it is a society in which the operation of the whole functions to insure the care and well being of all both at a physical (costs of living) and emotional (care towards those that grieve their dead) level. What separates Mencius' imagined utopia from Yasuda's is the context of expression, and context in this case meant everything. Should we compare this image of society against the divisive and alienating industrial society that emerges in the decades following Yasuda's preliminary attempt at mutual insurance, one might be inclined to ask what went wrong? This, however, would be the wrong question to ask, since if we look at the success gained by such leaders of the industry as Yasuda Zenjiro himself, Abe Taizô,<sup>44</sup> or Kataoka Naoharu,<sup>45</sup> it seems a more apt question to ask what went right. When

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<sup>42</sup> The characters in Mencius for this highlighted section read “喪死無憾” which when broken down into the Japanese used by Yasuda becomes 「死ニ喪シテ憾ミナク」。

<sup>43</sup> From “The Works of Mencius,” in *The Four Books, Confucian Analects, the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, and the Works of Mencius*, trans. James Legge (Shanghai: The Chinese Book Company, 1930). 437-438.

<sup>44</sup> Abe Taizou (1849-1924) was one of the founding members and first president of The Meiji Life Insurance Company, Japan's first modern life insurance company.

one considers the trajectory life insurance takes as a modern capital bearing institution and the level to which it inverts this utopia to create the image of a social dystopia in order to maintain its longevity through time, then the question of what went right begins to take on a whole new importance.

## 2. Individuation

Though this work will take this question of what went right and the paradox inherent to this proper functioning into far greater detail in the following pages, allow me to elaborate a little further on the fundamental contradiction that sits at the heart of the life insurance form as it emerged in the Meiji era. If the utopian society imagined is one in which the whole functions to support each member, then the mediation of an institution like life insurance becomes completely redundant in such a society. Which is to say, if the utopian society imagined is actually achieved then the system of relations governing such a society would be organized in such a way that an institution like life insurance *would be made unthinkable*. In a market driven society wherein members of society are individuated such that there is no guarantee that the greater whole will take care of the individual members, however, an institutional intervention such as life insurance becomes necessary to mediate the gap between the function of the social whole and the individuated experiences of each member. Thus life insurance sits at the meeting point between the dream of the society it wishes and the contemporaneity of the system of relations it must mediate. The contradiction becomes

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<sup>45</sup> Kataoka Naohara (1859-1934) was one of the founding members and first president of the Nippon Life Insurance Company.

clear upon the realization that in order for the insurance form to achieve the utopia it strives for it must wish for its own death, since a social whole that takes care of its own will not require the mediation of such an institution. In light of this contradiction, the question of what went right for life insurance corporations truly becomes an inquiry into the failure of utopia fueled by a success of its formal application.

To give full weight to this notion of life insurance working in its proper, normative form, I think taking a short detour with the following story is needed to illustrate just what kind of dystopia can emerge from the proper functioning of the insurance form. This is a story documented in the history books of modern Japanese life insurance and occurs several decades beyond the scope of my own analysis. Thus it occurs at a time when life insurance had pushed passed its initial stages of development and was well entrenched within the various mechanisms that helped maintain modern existence.

### **3. The Crime of Life Insurance**

In 1935 a doctor and his wife owning a medical clinical on the Sakhalin isle and a separate home in Tokyo decided they would extricate themselves from a life of work and financial worry by putting to good use the doctor's skills as a practitioner working at the intersection between life and science. They would trade in the life of their first-born son for the money they could obtain through life insurance payouts.

The doctor took out several policies on his son's life which would provide a return equaling 66, 000 yen which was more than enough to cover their financial needs (66,000 yen put in contemporary prices based on a changing CPI comes to roughly 48.2 million yen or close to 500,000 USD if the current yen to dollar ratio is taken to be one to one). Once the

contracts were signed and the policy documents obtained, the family needed to perform one last act to ensure the completion of their plan. They needed to murder their son.

This was not as simple as they first thought. The same legal apparatus that provided the means by which they could turn the death of their son into profit (at this point the management of insurance companies was subject to legal regulation under the commercial code) was the same apparatus that obstructed the task of completing the transformation. Regardless of their parental right to wager against their son's life, they did not have the right to secure his death. That would be cheating. Thus they were faced with the same dilemma that many previous life insurance criminals and many of those to come had to face: how to make murder seem like an accident. Even with their expertise as medical practitioners, with all their knowledge on how to maintain life, they found themselves somewhat inept at taking it. At first, they thought a simple poisoning would do the trick. Because their eldest daughter was given management over the cooking duties for the family at their Tokyo home, they decided to enlist her help in killing their son. Following the instructions of her parents, the daughter slipped what was considered a killing dose of arsenic into her eldest brother's meal. That night, the family sat down around the dinner table for an evening meal of *korokke* and all except the son waited for the arsenic to take its effect. Unfortunately, the son's constitution was stronger than they'd expected and he survived the poisoning. They would need to try something else.

Their next attempt at murder used the resources of their clinic. Expressing concern for their sons well-being while he visited them at the clinic, the doctor and wife urged him to take a bismuth shot which was commonly used both for treatment of syphilis or dyspepsia (documents are unclear as to what use it was put in this case). The son willingly complied

with their request. To ensure no line of inquiry would implicate them in this particular attempt at murder, they tried to enlist the aid of one of their nurses. They urged her to administer an overdose of bismuth to their boy. She refused. Another failed attempt.

The next time they would leave nothing to chance. One night while the father was away at the clinic, the daughter and mother welcomed home the eldest son after a several day absence. He seemed to come home in a playful mood as the mother and daughter were able to pull him into a child's game that made use of a hand-towel (*tenugui asobi*). This game conveniently required the eldest son have his hands bound. Once having bound her son's hands, the mother went to retrieve a kitchen knife, and she and her daughter passed the knife back and forth taking turns stabbing the son to death. Once they were certain he had passed, they then went through the process of arranging their home to make it look like a break-in gone badly. The insurance companies paid out according to their contractual obligation. The family sold off their clinic and moved everyone to their Tokyo home. All seemed to have been going according to plan, until the police investigating the death noticed a small error on the death report filled out by the family. Contrary to the life insurance records, the family only claimed a 5000-yen policy on the report. On pursuing this discrepancy, they eventually unraveled the sordid details of the murder plot and the three, father, mother and daughter, were sentenced to prison on murder charges and insurance fraud.<sup>46</sup>

In reading the above anecdote taken from the history of life insurance crime, one might question the motives of the people involved. One would ask what kind of psychology would

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<sup>46</sup> In *Kazukijyo Tsukitari, Seimei Hoken Hanzai; Jirei Kaimei to Bôshi Taisaku* [*Life Insurance Crime; Case Descriptions and Preventative Measures*] (Tokyo: Tôyô Keizai Shinpôsha 1986). 11-13.

be behind such an act of conspiratorial filicide/fratricide that could bring together a family for the obliteration of one of its own. These are not the questions that concern me, however. I am much more interested in how social relations could be constructed in such a way that such an act was made thinkable, and then possible. “Common sense” tells us that life, especially that of a loved one, should be valued above all else. In fact, the institution of life insurance itself is ideologically founded on this notion of the familial bond,<sup>47</sup> as we can see in the quotes given by Wakayama Norikazu and Yasuda Zenjirô. How is it then that the very institution meant to support the connections between family members could have all its values turned on its head to produce such an incident as the one described above?

Except for the fact of the murder, this story seems formally to have all the characteristics of a tale of the good family, from acts of filial piety beyond normal expectations by the daughter, to the reinforcement of familial responsibility through attempts to resolve financial problems within the family, to a proper hierarchization of family values where the body of the eldest son is made the sacrifice for the financial security of the greater family whole. Thus this is not an example of the aberration of family values. It seems more appropriate to state that it is the extreme logical extension of the family and state values of its time. Looking at it in this way, we can see how this private act actually mirrors what was

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<sup>47</sup> Note, I emphasize that this is an ideological position. At the time of this incident, the notion of “insurable interest” was codified into the practices of the insurance industry through Provisos 385 and 386 of Chapter X of the Commercial Code of Japan. Under the terms of insurable interest a policyholder can only be linked to a beneficiary under a life insurance policy with the condition that the death of the policyholder would result in a financial loss to the beneficiary that supersedes anything covered by the policy itself. Thus, high level executives holding very particular knowledge of the running of a company can be insured with the company as the beneficiary because the loss of the executive would result in the loss of an accumulation of experience and knowledge that far exceeds the money that could be used to train new employees. Familial bonds therefore are not the basis upon which bodies come together under the terms of insurable interest unless the policy holder is the main and only breadwinner in the family, and the beneficiary depends on the policy holder to maintain their life.

taking place in the larger sphere of the state. Was not the state operating according to the very same logic that fueled the Doctor and his wife? With the Sino-Japanese war in full swing, the state was engaged in a nation-wide campaign to mobilize all of its sons towards their sacrifice for the protection of the greater whole. Their “lives” were made the sacrifice according to which the well-being of the state could be guaranteed. Just as the family made the determination to find the monetary value determined through life insurance policies more valuable than the life they covered, the state was in the process of inverting its value system such that the life of its people was deemed less valuable than the life of the state. Society had to be defended at all costs. The only difference between the family and the state was the agent of murder itself. Where the mother and daughter were physically responsible for the death of the son, the state depended upon its enemies to murder its sons. This is a key distinction as it forces us to ask how a situation could evolve such that the victim of murder could participate in an act that would subordinate his life to the life of a whole such that he would be able to throw that life away. How could he come to desire his own subjection to a system that prized itself over the individual lives that constituted it?

Thus the family’s interpretation of the set of values established with regard to life seem to flash for us a strange world of relations in which a criminal act could find its logical reflection in the legitimate operation of the state. To understand how this is come to be requires I go back into the life insurance industry’s historical development to determine how life - this term of supposed transcendent value and definition – could in fact be given definition and value, and then function to invert its own value form.

### **III. History of Life Insurance, History of an Event**

## 1. The Father of Life Insurance

Most histories of life insurance companies or the life insurance industry itself<sup>48</sup> divide the origin of modern Japanese insurance across a national divide. As the story goes, on the one hand, modern insurance could not have been possible without the introduction of modern insurance technologies from the West. The father of this importation narrative is none other than the so-called Father of Japanese Enlightenment himself, Fukuzawa Yukichi. He is lauded as the first insurance pioneer due to his initial introduction of the very idea of insurance through his two works describing the West, *The Conditions of the West* (*Seiyō jijō*)<sup>49</sup> whose first volumes were published in 1866 and *A Guide to Travels in the West* (*Seiyō tabi annai*) published in 1867.<sup>50</sup> Though, both descriptions of insurance practices in these works are cursory at best, providing only very rudimentary outlines for how insurance works,<sup>51</sup> Fukuzawa supplemented this initial introduction with an ongoing promotion of insurance practices at his school, Keio Gijuku (now Keio University), and was a frequent investor and promoter (through his newspaper publication, *Jiji Shimpō*) in many of the first attempts at establishing insurance schemes. Following Fukuzawa's lead, others continued the importation of insurance technologies such as the above mentioned Wakayama Norikazu,

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<sup>48</sup> Most of these histories are funded by the companies around which the histories are organized. Thus, on searching for historical work on a company such as the Meiji Life Insurance Company one does not find a single general history of the company, but discovers a wealth of histories commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup>, 100<sup>th</sup>, and 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the company.

<sup>49</sup> In Yukichi Fukuzawa, *Fukuzawa Yukichi Zenshu*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Vol. 2.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, in *The Conditions of the West*, Fukuzawa was self-admittedly so confounded by explanations of insurance on his initial trip to the West that he mentioned it only in passing. It was only on his return to the United States that he was given a more thorough education on the insurance industry, and so provided a more detailed, though still general, introduction to its mechanisms in his *Guide to Travel in the West*.

Fujisawa Rikitarô, and Awatsu Kiyosuke. Considering the radical and fundamental developments these importations promoted for the insurance industry, one would be hard pressed to argue against the narrative of foreign influence on the development of the Meiji era insurance industry; yet, this is not the only narrative available.

Insurance histories in Japan have also cultivated an indigenous narrative. This story traces insurance's roots back to the mutual aid associations of the Tokugawa era and before. In fact, Kobayashi Tadashi, author of the most thorough text on the development of insurance thought in Japan, *The Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought (Nihon Hoken Shisô no Seisei to Tenkai)*,<sup>52</sup> spends several sections of his history pursuing these indigenous traces. The key indigenous link between modern insurance and Japan's feudal past can be found in the *mujin-kô* and *tanomoshi-kô* forms. Originally thought to have formed in the early Kamakura period to pool funds for upkeep of temples and shrines, as well as for support for pilgrimages, the *mujin-kô* were eventually appropriated for use during times of duress to help farmers survive periods of low crop yield. These mutual aid groups became more prevalent during the Edo era once territory became segmented into *han*, and farmers were tied to the land under the feudalistic governance of the Tokugawa regime. One of the key necessities of the *mujin-kô* in its early manifestation was a fixed and local population that could develop economic ties through bonds of mutual trust and need. A feudal economy based on fixed agricultural populations was ideal for this kind of mutual aid

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<sup>52</sup> Tadashi Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]* (Tokyo: Tôyô Keizai Shinpô Sha, 1989).

form. Since the function of the *tanomoshi-kô* and *mujin-kô*<sup>53</sup> was intrinsically tied to the type of membership that made up each association, however, their forms and technologies changed with changing economic conditions. As the merchant class began to gain power in the later years of the Tokugawa regime, these mutual aid associations reflected the shift towards mercantilization, and lost their local flavor as they began to be used for the accumulation of large amounts of capital. Though I will go into more detail in the following chapter as to the nature and implications of this transformation, for now I merely want to point out the assumed indigenous nature of the *mujin-kô* and its connection to the later modern insurance form.

Rather than write my narrative of life insurance development according to these two historical narratives, I would like to tease out a third possible narrative. One that does not follow indigenous roots, or notions Western importation, but rather sees the change during the years of the life insurance industry's development as the effect of a full scale event according to which entire realities were overturned. As mentioned above, the event of the Meiji ishin was precisely a transformation that must be thought in the paradoxical space that worked both according to a radical re-ordering of social relations and a consistent continuation of trends that were already in development during the years before.

## 2. The Two Faces of Fukuzawa Yukichi

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<sup>53</sup> Though there has been some speculation on the differences distinguishing the terms *tanomoshi-kô* from the *mujin-kô* where "*tanomoshi-kô*" was thought to be the term used in the Kansai area, while "*mujin-kô*" was thought to be a term more prevalent in the Kanto area, the general consensus seems to be that the two terms were interchangeable and there is little to indicate that either were used with any less or more frequency in either the Kanto or the Kansai regions. See Ibid, Kahei Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]," in *Mori Kabei Chosaku Shû* (Tokyo: Hôsei Daigaku Shuppan Kyoku, 1982).

Though Fukuzawa Yukichi was one voice that emerged in the midst of this event, we can see how easily it is to forget the radical nature of his ideas during his time of writing. After all, he is the face of the ten thousand yen bill. He is the “Father of Japanese Enlightenment,” and his works are considered standard to the canon of Japanese political thought. Yet, this was not the case at the time of his writing. There is another Fukuzawa that stands in stark contrast to this historical figure. It seems easy to forget that the reality of the Japan that we are familiar with today was not the Japan at the time of Fukuzawa’s writing. Yet, is this not the assumption that is made by progressive histories that see the gradual development of modern Japan from its primitive forms to the present as though “Japan” were following some already pre-written script of transformation? To be sure Fukuzawa was influenced by his visits to Europe and the United States, but to state that his enlightenment ideals were simply a repetition of thoughts and ideas he encountered elsewhere would be to rob him of the very historical specificity of his enunciations. Modernization theory, as a mere extension of colonialist ideology, sees Fukuzawa only as the man who introduced Western enlightenment to Japan, as though either of the two concepts of West or Japan were stable to begin with. Any consideration, however, of events transpiring in any of the spaces indicated by the terms “West” or “Japan” in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century would reveal that their realities were far from stable. Lest we forget that this “West” had only just come from a series of revolutionary movements that had put in turmoil social relations across Europe, while the United States was itself only a relatively new addition to independent state entities in the world market. Which is to say that more than merely introducing already legitimized notions of freedom and equality from the Western world into the known territory that was Japan, Fukuzawa stood at the center of a maelstrom of collective change, and spoke in

disagreement with the one accepted reality that surrounded him, but did so while simultaneously speaking a world already taking shape. To characterize him as a prognosticator of the reality of the modern Japan we know was to come would be to rob his words of their immanent risk. To take an example, from a contemporary perspective, the oft quoted opening words of Fukuzawa's *An Encouragement of Learning*, "it is said that heaven does not create one man above another man,"<sup>54</sup> seem simply the affirmation of ideals of equality that we can assume to be legitimate and valid; yet, when we consider the structure of relations under the Tokugawa shogunate with its caste system deeply entrenched in neo-Confucianist thought, and the relative newness of the reforms a still weakened and unformed Meiji state had attempted to implement at the time of Fukuzawa's writing, one can't help but recognize the risk and revolutionary nature of such an assertion. It would be a mistake to see in Fukuzawa's words an assertion of an already given fact. It can only be seen this way if contemporary liberal ideology is taken for granted. Since this ideology was not part of the prevalent form of thought at the time of Fukuzawa's writing, I think it fair to assert that his words seem more appropriately characterized *as giving expression to a political disagreement with being itself*.<sup>55</sup>

Thinking this disagreement, however, is not the end of the challenge in addressing Fukuzawa precisely because we cannot ignore the fact that in promoting a very particular ideology of social relations through his contributions to market forms such as insurance, a

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<sup>54</sup> Fukuzawa, *An Encouragement of Learning*, . 1.

<sup>55</sup> To state Fukuzawa's ideas were radical at their time of emergence does not mean I necessarily agree with the ideals he put forth. As will be the case with my writings on a great deal of the pioneers, entrepreneurs, and capitalists to follow, I mean only to emphasize the radical nature of their political work, not any kind of agreement with the ideologies they promoted.

form we will later see was used to protect, not the interests of all according to egalitarian principles, but the interests of an elite (*shizoku*) class, he was at the same time one of the most conservative forces of a new ideology that took hold of the disparate elements of capitalist production already available thanks to the circulation of commodities across both rural and urban space, the presence of the futures market in Osaka, and the rise of merchant capital in the latter half of the Tokugawa period.

Though my above assertion of Fukuzawa's dual role in the promotion of an as yet indeterminate future may seem obvious to some, I state this in order to set the stage for developing a different kind of history of life insurance and the introduction of the concept of life than is usually given. I would argue any study of life insurance, life, or mutual aid involves nothing more than a study of variations on collective potentialities. In order to loosen these potentialities from their determinate position within a progressive history's retroactive prognostications, or their collapse into modernization theory narratives that would see the Meiji *ishin* as the product of an external intervention, I aim to show that, as with Fukuzawa's own writings, the Meiji *ishin* emerged precisely out of this tension between the continuation of already present forms that had to be reordered such that a fundamental transformation could take place. Fukuzawa's promotion of insurance was a promotion of an ideal that had no place at the time, because the shift from a feudal to a modern capitalist system did not only involve a simple transformation of social relations through the implementation or importation of a few economic, industrial, and political technologies. In charting life insurance's development from its roots in the *mujin-kô*, to its initial failed attempts by men such as Yasuda Zenjirô and Wakayama Norikazu, through to its radical successes by the Meiji, Nippon and Teikoku Life Insurance Companies, I aim to show that

the industry's successes depended upon a radical *reorganization* of reality itself right down to changes in the constitution of time and space and the social practices that cultivated and maintained a particular state of being, but that this reorganization of being could only be one based on already available material. To put this in brief, it is not through a divide between outside and inside that this transformation could take place. It is solely as a function of the reordering of relations that themselves are all exterior. Thus, the relevance of the equation given at the top of this chapter, that presence does not mean equivalence, is given real historical expression.<sup>56</sup>

These transformations were what made a particular understanding of life (*seimei*) possible, a life that could be made to adhere to an individuated body and produce value through its individuation. Put differently, Fukuzawa Yukichi's promotion of the insurance form through his writings and teachings was yet one more extension of his disagreement with the state of being that surrounded him. The concept of insurance, despite its similarities to the *mujin-kô* form, was truly a concept of utopian proportion in the original sense of the term – a topos that doesn't exist. The time and space for insurance did not exist at that time, but had to be made to exist via radical changes to the operation of government, and social relations. Life was the product of these changes, and became the means by which the capitalist state of being could bury its own radical origins while at the same time disavowing its ties to what it would later codify (and we will see this precisely in its attempts to recodify the older mutual aid associations as feudal) as not only old and out of date but fundamentally antagonistic to its newfound state of being.

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<sup>56</sup> I owe a great debt to Mark Driscoll for showing me the relevance thinking the Meiji ish in this manner as both continuance and break.

By showing how these changes were implemented, my aim is not to laud the work of state builders at the heart of the Meiji oligarchy, but to open up a space for thinking a politics of action that existed for state builders as much as it did for rioting farmers, anarchists, and radical anti-state forces. I want to re-open a thinking of a politics that preceded life. Because to practice politics at this time was to practice a disagreement with the time, space, and social relations of the present, to challenge the conditions of possibility of thought and practice and then do the impossible - implement real action towards the transformation of being itself. This did not occur over the space of an already established national territory of individuated bodies joined loosely by ambiguous transcendent categories. This occurred in the whirling turmoil of an event that cut through all social relations and pulled the multiplicity of being into the full light of day. This is not a story of success, however. This is a story of how things go wrong precisely when all is right.<sup>57</sup> By maintaining the tension between the continuities of the past with the transformations of the *ishin*, we can begin to see through the development of the life insurance industry that life became central to a full-scale foreclosure on multiplicity itself to produce a a market centered state of being that disavowed all differences while it simultaneously recoded them as division, individuation, and commodification.

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<sup>57</sup> I take this sense of capitalism's inherent crisis from Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead : The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

*Chapter 3.*

The *Mujin-kô*<sup>58</sup> and  
a Vital Breach of Trust

**I. The Problem of Ideology**

One of the most apparent obstacles to overcome when attempting to put together a history of the life insurance industry centers on a matter of ideology. Most historians find themselves trapped between the Scylla and Charybdis of indigenous and international origin stories. The historians funded by the industry are no exception. In fact, since the predominance of histories on life insurance in Japan are produced by the companies themselves, while the major resource for historical material – the nine volume Meiji Taisho Compilation of Historical Materials (*Meiji Taisho hoken shiryô*) – was put together under the supervision of the Life Insurance Association of Japan (*Seimei hoken kyôkai*), the main challenge for any researcher not invested in the promotion of any one company, or indeed the

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<sup>58</sup> The term *mujin-kô* can be translated as “mutual aid association,” though literally the characters read “an association of inexhaustible resources.” It is synonymous with the term *tanomoshi-kô* (lit. association based on the trust joining mother and child). See footnote 20 in Chapter 2 of this dissertation for more details.

industry itself, involves managing the two pronged problem of managing one's way through the ideologically determined space of the various corporate histories while simultaneously attempting to slip out from the bind that would hold them to dialectically determined origin stories.<sup>59</sup> To manage these problems effectively, we should, first, not be so hasty as to dismiss the histories written by insurance companies on the sole ground that they are ideologically driven. Such a strategy of engagement forces one into assuming that there exists a non-ideological position that can be taken with regards to the organization of historical materials. French philosopher Louis Althusser's ideas on ideology prove useful here. He argues, that ideology, like Freud's unconscious, is eternal and "omnipresent, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history."<sup>60</sup> Ideology itself resists historicization, because ideology operates as an omni-present phantasm to historical production. This is not to say ideology, however, has no relation to history. As Althusser emphasizes, "ideology has no history, which emphatically does not mean that there is no history in it (on the contrary, for it is merely the pale, empty and inverted reflection of real history) but that it has no history of its own."<sup>61</sup> Ideology's non-history is the starting point for determining a history of ideology, because it forces those taking up its history, not to make a study of any one particular ideology amongst ideologies, but to inquire after the

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, there is the plethora of texts published every year aimed at revealing the various hazards of selecting the wrong policy, or criticizing the industry as a whole for its predatory ways. These, however, are even more limited in their scope of criticism, since most are organized according to self-help determinants. Their ideology is one of consumption, and their purpose is to move bodies to purchase books based on consumer needs and fears. Furthermore, since most of these titles are aimed at appealing to insurance consumers in the present, few engage with the industry's early history of development. For these reason I have chosen not to include these in my study of the industry.

<sup>60</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *On Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2008). 35.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 34

very conditions of possibility that frame all social relation that has given rise to this ideology and the *histories* it produces. Which is to say, there is no non-ideological position in relation to history, but only the concealment of one's ideological position through an appeal to false objectivity. At the same time, stating all is ideologically determined does not mean one is forced to condone the blatant reproduction of corporate ideologies that a company history provides. Althusser's account of ideology only forces us to practice history differently, not to abandon history altogether.

Our mistake would be to think ideology's ubiquity offers us little choice beyond selecting either a path towards relativism – “if everything is ideology, then my ideological position is equally justified” – or assimilationism – “if I have to pick one, I pick this one.” The realization of the ideological nature implicit to any selection of narratives in history should push us up against the very limits of writing history itself: its horizon of possibilities and the impossibilities that are placed out of reach for thought. Ideology as a theory in general provides the conditions of possibility for thinking the social conditions in their entirety of any historical narrative, and as such provides the opportunity to explore what cannot be thought within the rigors of a particular regime of knowledge. It is from this vantage point that I have taken up the *mujin-kô*, or mutual aid association, as “origin” to the life insurance industry. A consideration of the *mujin-kô* in relation to life insurance opens us up to dealing with a series of limits delineating the possibilities and impossibilities for thinking life, its historiography, and the very nature of being itself.

## **II. The Corporate Histories**

### **1. The Narrative of Importation**

Yui Tsunehiko and Tatsuki Mariko, editors of one of the major resources used by historians of life insurance, the *Compilation of Historical Materials on the Formation of Modern Life Insurance (Kindai seimei hoken seisei shiryô)*, argue that it is a mistake to link the history of the *mujin-kô* to life insurance. They write,

Of course there have been primitive mutual aid and Funeral Preparation Societies (*sô sai shûdan*) such as the *mujin*, *tanomoshi-kô*, and *mokugyo-kô*,<sup>62</sup> but there is no reason to seek out the origins of modern life insurance in these. This would be equivalent to making the difficult assertion that the origins of the modern life insurance business that began in England could be traced back to the Ancient Greek and Roman funeral societies such as the *elanoi*, *thiasoi*, and the *collegium funeraticia*.<sup>63</sup>

Strangely, Yui and Tatsuki do not pursue this line of critique any further. They do not deal with the obvious distinction separating the *mujin-kô* from ancient Greek or Roman mutual aid societies: the *mujin-kô* were not so far removed in time or space from the establishment of life insurance. Where the *elanoi* and *thiasoi* were forms preceding English life insurance by over a thousand year time gap, the *mujin-kô* continued to persist in the Meiji era even

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<sup>62</sup> The *mokugyo-kô* is a society formed to collect monies to pay the cost of funeral services. The Chinese characters of the term read literally Wood-Fish-Association. The services involved the banging of a wooden fish shaped drum around which all the mourners for the deceased would gather.

<sup>63</sup> *Kindai Seimei Hoken Seisei Shiryô [Compilation of Historical Materials on the Formation of Modern Life Insurance]*, ed. Yui Tsunehiko and Tatsuki Mariko (Tokyo: Meiji Seimei Hoken Sôgô Gaisha, 1981). 4. The *elanoi* were organizations based on reciprocal contribution. In Homer, the *elanos* is a feast, much like a pot-luck, in which members of the feast each contributed to the overall meal. The term was also used to indicate credit-based societies that offered loans to members of the society. Whether these were interest bearing loans, or mutual aid societies, is a matter of debate. Edward E. Cohen, *Athenian Economy and Society, a Banking Perspective* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997). The *thiasoi* were revel bands, usually of women, who gathered for the purpose of celebrating “the festival of one of the gods (esp. Bacchus) with dancing and singing.” (“*Thiasus/Thiasos*,” in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*). They were known to practice the *sparagmos*, “the tearing of living victims to pieces and feasting on their raw flesh (ômphagia),” (“Greek Religion, Archaic Period,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Literary scholars may recognize the *thiasoi* from Euripides’ tragic play *The Baccae* in which Agave, daughter of the king of Thebes, joins a *thiasos*, and in her wild revelry kills her son, Pentheus, mistaking him for a mountain lion. Meanwhile, the *collegium funeraticia*, as the term suggests, were burial associations much like the *mokugyo-kô* that were organized to help finance funeral services.

while the life insurance industry took off. They also at times competed for the same space.<sup>64</sup> Yui and Tatsuki ignore these problems with their argument, and thus sever Japanese life insurance's origins from any indigenous connection. They would see life insurance as something imported from without, and tie its past to its early traces in Portuguese dictionaries such as the Halma Dutch-Japanese dictionary published in 1796<sup>65</sup>, which carried a translation for the term *verzekering* (Dutch for 'insurance,' which was translated as 'ukeai' into Japanese). They find remnants in Chinese sources with brief, though inadequate mentions of insurance, such as those given in the multi-volume chronicle of world geography, *Hǎi guó tú zhì* (*Illustrations from the Maritime Nations*) compiled by Wei Yuan starting in 1842, then translated into Japanese as the *Kaikokuzushi* in 1851.<sup>66</sup> Thus on the debate dividing life insurance's origins between its roots in the importation of Western economic thought and in its traces with indigenous forms, Yui and Tatsuki seem to fall determinedly on the side of importation.

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<sup>64</sup> For a detailed discussion of the *mujin-kō*'s persistence in the modern era and its transformation in the 1950s into the mutual savings bank see *Shin'ichi Gotō, Mujin Sōgin Gōdō No Jissbōteki Kenkyū [an Empirical Study of the Correspondence between the Mujin and the Mutual Savings Bank]* (Tokyo: Nihon Kinyū Tsūshin sha, 1994). Through this history and others similar to it, we can see that the *mujin* of the Meiji era is nothing like the *mujin* of previous eras in that its very time and space was transformed to accommodate more modern conceptualizations of socio-economic relation. Still, the fact remains, the *mujin-kō* of the Meiji era were the direct descendants of the *mujin-kō* of the Tokugawa period and before, and share too many similarities to be completely severed from their past manifestations. The point is not to show how either of these forms were similar or different to past forms; my point is to show how similar phenomena persisting through time can become fundamentally different dependent upon the wholesale transformation of social relations; it is not the forms that changed, but *being* itself that framed the limits of possibility for understanding the operation and relevance of persistent forms.

<sup>65</sup> Since the Portuguese at the time, as the editors note, were not themselves familiar with insurance, and did not have an insurance network in place, awareness of insurance could only come via their dictionaries. (*Kindai Seimei Hoken Seisei Shiryō [Compilation of Historical Materials on the Formation of Modern Life Insurance]*, Meiji Seimei Hyaku Nen Shi. 11.)

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 5

It is tempting to attribute Yui's and Tatsuki's adherence to an importation model of insurance to an undisclosed corporate bias. Their compilation was part of a larger three-volume set commissioned by the Meiji Life Insurance Company (Meiji Life, for short), and this would suggest they were compelled to write this history as a means to legitimize and secure Meiji Life's place as pioneer in the life insurance industry. As the story goes, Meiji Life was the first successful life Insurance Company whose very survival was attributed to the importation of western technologies such as the life tables, and population statistics. Other attempts at life-insurance-like ventures preceded Meiji Life such as Maruya Shôsha's<sup>67</sup> implementation of death insurance regulations (*shibô ukeiai kisoku*) to its business portfolio in 1874, Wakayama Norikazu's Nittô Life Insurance Company (*Nittô hosei gaisha*) in 1879, and Yasuda Zenjirô's Five Hundred Name Mutual Finance Group (*Kyôsai gohyakumei sha*) established in 1880, but the former two did not survive the economic boom's and busts of the early Meiji years, and Yasuda's insurance company only survived thanks to the implementation of the same technologies that made Meiji Life so successful.<sup>68</sup> As long as we stick to a modernization theory model of progress for the Meiji era in which Japan is characterized as a nation that had to "catch up" politically and economically with the rest of the world, Meiji Life remains the pioneer in the industry. Any attempt to tie life insurance to more "indigenous" economic forms such as the *mujin-kô*, *tanomoshi-kô*, or *mokugyo-kô*, would threaten to displace Meiji Life from its place at the head of the industry. More importantly, this would also put the narrative of capitalist progression into question. If we

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<sup>67</sup> *Maruya shôsha* was the predecessor to the book distribution company *Maruzen*. Not coincidentally, its founder was Fukuzawa Yukichi's disciple and one of the founding members of Meiji Life, Hayashi Yûteki.

<sup>68</sup> I will go into a more detailed analysis of the reasons behind why Wakayama's venture failed and Yasuda's thrived in the following chapter.

consider that Yasuda's Five Hundred Name Mutual Finance Group was just as successful as Meiji Life in the long run (following its transformation into the Yasuda Mutual Life Insurance Group), and was established a year before, a different narrative is allowed to enter this history. The Five Hundred Name Mutual Finance Group (KGMS, for short) gains in legitimacy as the pioneer in the field only if the importation model is abandoned, since, it was the first to make a successful attempt at establishing a modern company based on the basic principles of mutual aid that are fundamental to life insurance, but it did not do this initially through the implementation of the kinds of western technologies that would eventually allow the industry to thrive.<sup>69</sup> The KGMS, in fact, is often characterized as the model of mutual aid the insurance industry had to overcome in order for it to thrive. Because it did not carry with it the Western economic technologies that made Meiji Life successful, it is often branded as a "pseudo-insurance" (*ruiji hoken*) endeavor that spurred on the proliferation of insurance like businesses that threatened the stability of the industry as a whole. As we will see in the following chapter the form of pseudo-insurance bore a striking resemblance to the *mujin-kô* of the era previously, and the instabilities it introduced into the Meiji era tell us something regarding the greater logic of social organization by which a capitalist state operated. For now, however, I mean only to point to KGMS' status as pseudo-insurance to illustrate the ideological logic at work in these corporate histories.

Meiji Life is not posed as the pioneer for the industry out of strict company interest. The ideological roots of this narration of modernization in the industry reach much deeper than this. Counter to expectation, the one-hundred-year commemorative volume for the

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<sup>69</sup> Appropriately enough, in 2004 Meiji Life and Yasuda Life merged to become the Meiji Yasuda Life Insurance Company.

Yasuda Mutual Life Insurance Company (or Yasuda Life), the later manifestation of the KGMS, does not follow a narrative that would place its pioneering effort at life insurance as legitimate origin to all modern life insurance companies, but provides a similar narration to the histories financed by Meiji Life. Yasuda Life histories even acknowledge Meiji Life's status as primary pioneer in the industry.<sup>70</sup> More surprisingly, despite the similarities between the *mujin-kô* and Yasuda Life's original company, the KGMS, no mention of the *mujin-kô*, *tanomoshi-kô*, or any other mutual aid form from the feudal era is made in its company history. For the historians of Yasuda Life as well as for those at Meiji Life, the life insurance industry was the product of a break away from the feudal economy of the pre-Meiji regime, and any attempt to jump back beyond the Meiji Ishin<sup>71</sup> of 1868 is suppressed through the exaltation of enlightenment ideals and modern principles. As is written in the opening words of the *One-hundred-year History of Meiji Life*:

At the same time that the Yokohama Port was opened in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the Ansei Era (1859), contact with the Western Countries was re-engaged; however, at the time our country was still a feudal society led by agricultural production while England had already completed its people's revolution a hundred and fifty years earlier, and was a hundred years into its era of mechanical industrialization. Even France in the latter years of the eighteenth century had already had its people's revolution, as America realized its independence from English rule. While Japan was opening its ports, France was progressing through its own industrial revolution, and America, by virtue

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<sup>70</sup> This is not surprising as a brief survey of the life insurance histories of most other companies including those of Asahi Seimei, Chiyoda Seimei, and Fukoku Seimei reveals this narrative positing Meiji Life as the original pioneer of the industry as the standard form. See *Asahi Seimei Hyaku Nen Shi [the One-Hundred Year History of Asahi Life]*, (Tokyo: Asahi Seimei Hoken Sôgô Gaisha, 1990), *Chiyoda Seimei 90 Nen Koshi [a Concise History of Chiyoda Life's 90 Years]*, (Tokyo: Chiyoda Seimei Hoken Sôgô Gaisha, 1994), *Fukoku Seimei Gojûgo Nen Shi [the Fifty-Five Year History of Fukoku Life]*, (Tokyo: Fukoku Seimei Hoken Sôgô Gaisha, 1982).

<sup>71</sup> I choose to avoid falling on one side of the reform vs. revolution debate regarding the Meiji Ishin of 1868. Consequently, instead of translating *ishin* as either revolution or restoration, I leave it in its Japanese form. As I argued in the introduction, I think it better to think of the years of change following the arrival of Commodore Perry's black ships as the time of an event.

of its mass production system, was gathering the world's attention to its own industrial excellence.

Then, as all are familiar with, our country lost its extraterritorial rights and tariff independence, and was coerced into accepting political inequality before the highly developed industrial powers of Western Capitalism. We took these excessive blows to our economy again and again. Yet, at the same time that we opened our ports, we were also importing modern systems and technologies from the Western countries. As a result, the people were given a great inducement to act... Naturally, we were not the only ones to import the modern system of life insurance. The Equitable Life Assurance Company, the first modern life insurance company, had already had its inauguration in England by the 12<sup>th</sup> year of the Hôreki era (1762), so by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many life insurance companies founded on mathematical principles had already been established [all over the West]. In America, the establishment of the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York marked the first stage of development for the American industry in the 1840s. It faltered during the Civil War (1861-65), only to revive after the war. Meanwhile, as our ports were opened, our country was introduced and began implementing these life insurance systems through the promotion of knowledge and foreign industries. With this as its foundation, the modern life insurance business got its start [in Japan], and its first success was Meiji Life.<sup>72</sup>

We can see here the rehashing of the basic doctrines of modernization theory establishing the ideological limits by which progress and development of the life insurance industry was understood. The narration is standard for most characterizations of Japanese progress based on the modernization model: Japan was a late-comer to capitalism and consequently had to import most of the technological and structural advancements needed to transform itself into an advanced nation. The life insurance industry was just one more of these modern systems that helped pull it from its backward ties to feudalism to become the success story of the Orient. One might initially wonder how this form of narration benefits Japanese companies, since modernization theory seems more fitted to legitimizing European and American hegemony in all things modern – Japan and all other latecomers could only ever be imitators to Western economic supremacy. I think it would be misguided to pursue this question,

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<sup>72</sup> *Meiji Seimei Hyaku Nen Shi*. 3-4.

however, since the key point for most writers of life insurance commemorative histories is not that they are writing histories for *Japanese* companies, but that they are writing on behalf of Japanese *companies*. Their narration of the rise of a modern life insurance form fits in with the greater narrative of capitalist advancement throughout the modern world. In order to maintain a narrative legitimizing the stability and necessity of a market based economy that privileges the production of capital above all else, Meiji and Yasuda Life must be willing to give over some of their chauvinistic inclinations by accepting Japan's latecomer status to the greater capitalist project. Of course, considering the writing of these hundred year commemorative volumes took place during the height of Japan's boom period in the 1980s, the sting to national pride was remote. Japan was poised to take over the top spot of the world economy, and the latecomer narrative was quickly being replaced by *nihonjinron*esque stories of its unique essence that allowed it to rise as world economic power. For the historians at Meiji and Yasuda Life, the uniqueness of the life insurance industry in Japan could be traced back to Japan's unique ability to assimilate the enlightenment principles developed in the West in a manner that surpassed the West's understanding of its own ideals. Fukuzawa Yukichi, a key figure of the Meiji Enlightenment takes on a central role in these narratives as the father of insurance thought.<sup>73</sup> Ironically, Yasuda Zenjirô, the founder of the "pseudo-insurance" company KGMS, provides an explicit expression of these enlightenment ideals as is chronicled in Meiji Life's one-hundred-year commemorative history. Making the clear distinction between Western and Japanese insurance endeavors in the initial rules of agreement for the KGMS, Yasuda wrote "From the beginning we organized a corporate

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<sup>73</sup> As he is the key figure in the histories of most, if not all, other life insurance companies.

union of members that privileged giving and mercy as first principles and in this we differed slightly from the life insurance companies of the West.”<sup>74</sup> The distinct flavor of Japanese enlightenment seems key to understanding Japan’s success with the western concept of life insurance.

## 2. The Indigenous Narrative

A strange inconsistency emerges within this narrative of Japan’s enlightened importation of life insurance technologies when we move to the centennial history of a third company: that of the Nippon Life Insurance Company. Despite its clear adherence to the same claims of capitalist modernity that framed the histories of its competitors, Nippon Life has no problem acknowledging the place of the *mujin-kô* and *tanomoshi-kô* in its intellectual lineage. In fact, this lineage functions to reinforce the same narrative of Japanese uniqueness that the company historians at Meiji and Yasuda Life promoted through their acclamation of enlightenment thinkers such as Wakayama Norikazu, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and Yasuda Zenjirô. This inconsistency begins to make sense when we remember that ideology, at least as Althusser understands it, is not synonymous with belief or opinion. Like Freud’s unconscious it provides the very conditions of possibility framing all of social relation and thought within its particular sphere of operation. In the case of life insurance histories, this unconscious becomes the being of capital itself. Only by reading these varying and often conflicting characterizations of life insurance’s development, can we begin to make out the horizon of possibility enclosing thought on its concepts of mutual aid, and marketization.

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<sup>74</sup> *Meiji Seimei Hyaku Nen Shi*. 17.

Only then can we begin to explore the function of ideology at the heart of a particular practice of history around the concept of life.

The one-hundred-year history of the Nippon Mutual Life Insurance Company (Nissei) provides an example of an indigenous narrative tying Japanese capitalist modernity to its own unique past. In both Japanese and English versions of Nissei's one-hundred-year commemorative volume, the *mujin-kô*, or "mutual aid organization" as given in English, is encountered in the first few pages of the volumes. In the English version, the history the *mujin-kô* is given a very brief, idealized treatment. The mutual aid organizations of the Tokugawa period are characterized as rural-based systems "similar to those of life and fire insurance,"<sup>75</sup> organized either by the Shogunate, in the case of the *gonin gumi* system (five-person groups who, according to Nissei historians, provided non-monetary mutual aid to all classes), or "agricultural experts and wealthy persons in rural communities" who were "particularly active in collecting donations of money or produce to be used to help the poor."<sup>76</sup>

In the Japanese version of this history, the *mujin-kô* is given a little more consideration. Insurance historian, Kobayashi Tadashi, is directly referenced, though the interpretation of his work is organized to fit the aims of Nissei's ideological program.<sup>77</sup> In

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<sup>75</sup> *The 100-Year History of Nippon Life*, (Osaka: Nippon Life Insurance Company, 1991). 3.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> The strict tension these corporate histories must try to balance between company interest and historical accuracy is best expressed in the address given in the preface to the English language volume by Nissei President Itoh Josei. In the final paragraph of his two-page address, he writes "We have tried to be factual and to view our company's history objectively, and we have tried to clarify the course of Japan's economic development." This statement, somewhat ironically, follows immediately after his candid promotion of the company's corporate aims. In the

fact, where Kobayashi is more nuanced in his treatment of the ethical implications of placing the *mujin-kô* in relation to insurance, the historians at Nissei blatantly appropriate this history to promote their own insurance-centered interests. In his *Nihon hoken shisô no seisei to hatten*,<sup>78</sup> Kobayashi Tadashi takes pains to outline an intellectual history of insurance that stretches back to the middle ages. He outlines the development of mutual aid forms in India, Tibet, China, and Korea, and uses these to inform his historical understanding of Japan's own sense of mutual aid which finds its greatest and most complex expression in the *mujin-kô* of the Edo period. Though Kobayashi tends towards idealizing the function of the *mujin-kô* during the Edo period, he still manages to introduce the reader to some of the problems inherent to any attempt to marry mutual aid to monetary systems of exchange. Instead of acknowledging these complex issues that Kobayashi raises in his treatment of the *mujin-kô*, the Nissei historians overwrite this complexity to make the insurance industry seem better suited towards the provision of mutual aid. They write,

With these *tanomoshi-kô* and *mujin-kô*, membership and payments are fixed, members are forced to pay their installments at regular intervals, while a bidding or lottery structure in which chance determines the distribution of payments is used. In this, they are similar to insurance. Where they differ from insurance has to do with the nature of the payments (premiums). With insurance, there may be defaults on payments at an individual level; yet, policyholders may still receive a larger payout

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paragraph before, Itoh writes, "Contemporary Japan is entering a period of intensifying globalization... Under these circumstances, the socioeconomic role of life insurance companies will become increasingly important. They must ensure that Japanese society will enjoy genuine affluence and that the Japanese people will savor true happiness. In addition to responding to social needs by expanding the network of trust in our company and providing customer-oriented service, it is most important we establish a firm managerial foundation." (ibid. viii) Apparently, the President of Nippon Life Insurance does not see the possible conflict of interests that could result from placing "objective historical research" in the hands of those who feel it necessary to ensure affluence and establish a firm managerial foundation. The history that follows reflects this ignorance.

<sup>78</sup> Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*.

than the sum of their premium payments. On the other hand, with the *tanomoshi-kô* and *mujin-kô*, the difference between the sum of money collected from individuals, and the money that is paid out is simply profit. This is due to the fact that those who receive the payout early, are made debtors while those who take the payout later, receive it is a one kind of savings.<sup>79</sup>

Strangely enough, we find this contradicts the *mujin-kô*'s uniformly beneficent image painted in the English version of Nissei's history of mutual aid. This is not a direct contradiction, as the difference separating the two accounts can be attributed to the fact that the Japanese version of the history provides a more detailed account of the different mutual aid types that were prevalent in the Tokugawa period. Where the English version gives only a cursory two-page description of the general form of mutual aid in the Tokugawa period, the Japanese provides more than twice that in specific detail on the types of mutual aid that were available. This, however, pales in comparison to Kobayashi's own 200+ page overview of mutual aid in the pre- to early modern eras. Regardless of these differences in the English or Japanese versions of Nissei's history, what seems central to this history is the emphasis on state-sanctioned forms of mutual aid. That is, the above-mentioned general usurious *mujin-kô* types, those types that were most often found operating outside of the control of the Tokugawa Shogunate, are written in contrast to the kinds of mutual aid organizations that found legitimacy through association to the state. As in the English version, mutual aid in the Japanese version is handed down thanks to the benevolence of a few "agricultural experts and wealthy persons." Specifically, these men are Miura Baien, Ohara Yûgaku, Ninomiya Sontoku, Dasai Shundai, and Kaiho Seiryô.<sup>80</sup> Despite the complexity of relations linking

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<sup>79</sup> *Nihon Seimei Hyakunen Shi [the 100-Year History of Nippon Life]*, (Tokyo: Nihon Seimei Hoken Sôgo Gaisba, 1992). 6.

<sup>80</sup> These names are the Tokugawa era thinkers Kobayashi deals with in his history of insurance thought. See the chapter "Keiseika no hoken shisô" (The Insurance Thought of Statesmen) in Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 149-256.

these five thinkers and their intellectual legacies to state ideology, in the hands of the corporate historians at Nissei, their contribution is reduced to that of “statesmen” (*keiseika*) working “rationally” to provide the ground (*ukezara*) upon which the life insurance industry would be built.<sup>81</sup> History and its names are put in the service of the industry itself as *telos*.

Thus, for the historians at Nissei, mutual aid is distinctly a charitable affair aimed at maintaining a strict hierarchy between the haves who must be compelled to aid the have-nots. This structure of thought then provides a secondary function: it allows the Nissei historians to bathe the founders and promoters (all uniformly wealthy men) of Nissei in this charitable light while erasing their more sinister links to usurious practices in the Edo era. As detailed in the centennial commemorative volume of Nissei’s history, the founding members could not have successfully established the company without the initial investment capital and corporate connections provided by the Kônoike family headed by Zen’emon Kônoike. After showing initial reluctance to head the newly established Nippon Life Assurance Company Ltd. in 1889 due to conflicts with his own family sake brewing business, Zen’emon Kônoike finally agreed to take on the role of acting president, and the company thrived. The success of the company is attributed directly to his involvement. As is written in the commemorative history,

...after much discussion, the governors of Shiga, Kyoto, and Osaka prefectures convinced Kônoike it was important, because of his social nature, that an insurance company be headed by a person known and trusted by the public, a person who could

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<sup>81</sup> “It can be seen how the organization of rational thought was crossed by the varying perspectives given by the above mentioned Edo statesmen on insurance ideas; yet, we must appreciate once more the historical significance this basis served in the establishment of a system that resulted from the deepening of [insurance’s] practical thought, coupled with the hurried introduction of modern Western life insurance technologies and ideas in the Meiji era.” (*Nihon Seimei Hyakunen Shi [the 100-Year History of Nippon Life]*, 7-8.)

pull together the entire Kansai financial community to make the undertaking succeed... There was no wealthier family in Japan when the NLA (Nippon Life Assurance Company) was being established, and NLA gained a tremendous amount of social credence by having Zen'emon Kônoike as president.<sup>82</sup>

This is a far different picture of the Kônoike family and its social influence than is provided by Edo era perspectives such as that given by Buyo Inshi, a *kokugaku* proponent writing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in his *Observations of the Times (Seiji kenmonroku)*. As Tetsuo Najita notes in his own work on the *mujin-kô* and mutual aid,

Inshi was mainly concerned with the expansion of the new money economy, controlled by reckless, risk-taking merchants who spawned the cities' pleasure and theatre culture. These merchants were unregulated by formal laws and untaxed, and even though they did not hold official positions, they were, in fact, higher in status than those who did. Among the more prominent and visible merchants, Inshi singled out Osaka's largest finance houses such as Kônoike, Hiranoya, and Tennôjiya. These houses, he noted, were driven by greed and took high-risk gambles to feed their profit motive. Their relentless pursuit of wealth and their conspicuous consumption had become a threat to the country's well-being.<sup>83</sup>

Since the very idea that Nissei's existence and success depended upon collusion with a profit-motivated merchant family whose legacy of usury stretched back over a century went counter to the image Nissei wanted to provide to investors, this history necessarily had to be expunged from its records. After all, Nissei prided itself on being one of the first mutual fund companies (*sôgo gaisha*) in the insurance industry built upon principles of mutual aid and social welfare. The idea that its first president and central contributor may have been tied to less than benevolent economic practices could not be tolerated.

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<sup>82</sup> *The 100-Year History of Nippon Life*. 25.

<sup>83</sup> Tetsuo Najita, *Ordinary Economics in Japan, a Historical Perspective, 1750-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). 85.

We are given two possibilities for relating the *mujin-kô* to insurance through the corporate histories provided by life insurance companies:

- The *mujin-kô* is a key practice that laid the economic base for the development of life insurance.
- The *mujin-kô* is separate and irrelevant to the development of life insurance.

These positions within the history of life insurance, or even within the larger history of the rise of capitalist modernity in Japan, are variations on a theme. Each perspective on its own does not provide the full view of the history of economic or social relations as they transformed during the Meiji era. Our mistake would be to think that placing these two positions in dialectical opposition would provide an overarching view. What would it mean to seek a dialectic resolution to the opposition between indigenous and exogenous influences on Japan's rise to success as a modern capitalist nation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? What would this resolution provide except one more narrative trapped within the horizon established by an already imagined capitalist modernity? Our critique within history would fall short thanks to the absence of a critique of capital and the market system itself. This as we will see in the works of Kobayashi Tadashi, and more so with Mori Kahei, is fundamental to understanding the *mujin-kô*'s historical relevance to the political economy of the Tokugawa period and the traces it left behind following the Meiji Ishin. It is also essential to our understanding of life and its introduction into modern systems of thought. We could even go so far as to argue that the debate quietly fought over origins amongst life insurance industry historians functions to dispel any attempts to think beyond capital, since, on either side of the debate, the end result is a history of social and economic relation that could not exist outside the operation of capital. As mentioned in the introduction, my aim in this work is precisely to breach this ideological limit.

We could stop here. We could make the absence of a critique of capital at the heart of life insurance history our out for thinking the relation of the *mujin-kô* and life insurance and then follow this trajectory to determine the shape our own particular critique of life. I think this would be a mistake for two reasons. In the first place, intervening at this point on the debates between company historians with a critique of capital would be premature. Bringing in our critique now would be the equivalent of mistaking, to use Heideggerian terminology, the ontic manifestations of the problem with the ontological. Put simply, we would be launching our arrows at phantoms. Revealing the tension between the history provided by company historians and that of those who would critique capital itself only provides the first step in pulling aside the illusions that a capitalist political ontology has placed before us. We must probe a little further into the historical links joining and separating the *mujin-kô* and life insurance before we establish our point of intervention. Kobayashi Tadashi and Tetsuo Najita will help us in doing so, and it is to their work I turn in the following section.

Secondly, I am not convinced a critique of capital at the level of consciousness is enough. Where Althusser establishes the enemy of thought to be the ideology of the state apparatus, I would write “state being” itself as the central antagonist to my historical narrative. In this I am arguing that we must always understand Althusser as writing ideology as the productive factory of a particular reality. Any attempt to interpret his notion of ideology<sup>84</sup> as a matter consciousness is misguided. This for me threatens to read Althusser

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<sup>84</sup> Considering Althusser’s theorization of subjectivity as that which emerges as a structural effect of a particular, historical organization or relations, as is the case with his notion of interpellation, we can see how important it is to refrain from thinking his ideology as a matter of mere consciousness.

through the phantasms of a phenomenological approach, and does not provide a profound enough entry point into thinking impossibility. Thought, for me, is not a matter of consciousness, but one of ontology, and it is in the pursuit or rethinking of thought that we may come up with a more radical critique of modernity and capital than a critique of ideology as nothing more than false consciousness would entail. To put it bluntly, this kind of critique of capital is not *radical* enough, nor is a critique of modernity that takes the subject as already constituted.<sup>85</sup> If we are to found thought in a practice of ontological proportions, then we must ground our critique at this same level.

Thus, the point can no longer be simply to take up another negational, or dialectic position to an already established conflict. Or rather our negations must aim at opening up thought to its possibilities rather than pointing out oppositional alternatives. Ideology organized around notions of consciousness thrives off this kind of binarism, because conflict is predicated on an already established regime of engagement. It should come as no surprise

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<sup>85</sup> As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have pointed out, capital's key strength is its ability to decode or deterritorialize flows. Capital, through its generalized axioms, has little trouble dealing with these kinds of variations or antagonisms at the level of consciousness or subjectivity, because its productive forces are mobilized through the portion of energy that the deterritorialization of these bodies and subjects emits. (See "Savages, Barbarians, and Civilized men," in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol 1*.) How else can we explain the shift from the socialist revolutionary fervor of the 1960s to the Yuppie-dom of the 1980s? The point is not that we need to come to a greater sense of consciousness or awareness of the ties in history that bind us to the immiseration of the working classes. Since the financial meltdown of 2008, millions are aware of the markets immiserating tendencies. The question is why do these millions continue to tolerate "reformist" agendas such as those provided by President Obama, liberal commentators, and conservative pundits? I would argue it is because there is little room to think anything but reform. Empire, as Hardt and Negri, aptly pointed out a decade ago, has no outside (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).) This does not mean that we should line our wagons up behind the reformist train. It should require that we make our critiques cut deeper. We need to begin thinking the transformation of being itself to establish new limits of possibility that eject capital's more deleterious machinations into the realm of the impossible. As the operation of capital and its state being established its lines of impossibility to thought through its careful work, so must we reorganize being to make capital's more privative and immiserating tendencies impossible. We must, to use the words of Deleuze and Guattari, make ourselves a new Body without Organs. (See "November 28, 1947: How do you Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). 149-166).

to us that Tatsuki Mariko, the company historian for Meiji Life's *Compilation of Historical Materials*, the very same historian that dismissed the *mujin-kô*'s relation to life insurance, is the writer for the *100-Year History of Nippon Life*. As though the oppositional spaces for subjective understanding were laid out in advance of the subjects themselves, historians find it a simple matter to flip back and forth from one side of the oppositional divide to the other. The contradiction is not at all surprising or debilitating to the overall project, regardless of whether Tatsuki's conversion had to do with her change in company allegiances or an advancement in the study of life insurance itself. The point for us should be that recognizing these oppositional positions flashes a larger regime of thought according to which the horizon of thought is set. In this the dialectic is useful to us. Yet, we should not simply use this new sense of consciousness to plot out our space within the confines established by this horizon of the possible. We must seek out a fundamentally different path beyond this horizon by doing the impossible: by holding this new consciousness in hand as we erase it from thought while we pursue an escape path taking us to a wholly different organization or image of thought.<sup>86</sup>

One means to do so would be first to redefine this narrow realm of debate by inquiring after its absences, their significance as real presence, and the relevance they pose for thinking not only the relation of the *mujin-kô* to the development of the life insurance industry, but of the relation of both forms to the reproduction of the historiographical tropes

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<sup>86</sup> As may be apparent in this passage, I am not as averse to making use of the dialectic as Deleuze and Guattari may have been, but rather believe it can be useful when put in combination with Deleuze's serial logic. Seriality as developed in Deleuze's earlier works such as the *Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition* provides a fundamentally different logic of relation meant as alternative to dialectic logic. For a consideration of seriality in Deleuze see R. Gilliland, "Transformations in Deleuze and Heidegger: Serial and Thematic Repetition," *Philosophy Today* 49 (2005). 138-144.

that continue to persist today in thought around the history of capitalist development in the modern era. Which is to say, our first object of critique is not, in the end, a particular phenomena within history – life insurance or the *mujin-kô* – but history itself, because this provides the foundation for both the knowledge and the practice of a particular brand of thought. Only by overcoming a particular practice of history, can we begin to define the outlines and impossibilities in thought surrounding the modern concept of life, which will, in turn, provide pathways for rethinking our escape path towards a new political ontology that will not adhere to what I consider the privative and anti-democratic tendencies of a modern market<sup>87</sup> based system of governance.

### III. History's Horizon

#### 1. Kobayashi Tadashi

Kobayashi Tadashi, himself once a vice-president and section chief in charge of personnel and training at Meiji Life, links life insurance through its mutual aid principles (*sôgo fujo*) to the various economic practices of the Edo era. These mutual aid practices were implemented at the local and domainal level to offset the contingent crises that were the constant companion to an economy based on agricultural production. Where the historians at Nissei only touch briefly on these connections, Kobayashi spends close to half of his six-hundred page volume pursuing the history of mutual aid in Japan as it pertained to the development of the modern insurance form. Not only does this allow Kobayashi to trace the insurance form to its intellectual roots in the *mujin-kô* and other mutual aid practices

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<sup>87</sup> This is not to say that I think markets in and of themselves are bad, only that we should be wary when markets begin to be used to centralize control over mass populations of bodies.

proposed by the likes of Kaiho Seiryô, Ohara Yûgaku, Miura Baien, Dasai Shundai, and Ninomiya Sontoku, (the “statesmen” mentioned in Nissei’s one-hundred-year history), but it also provides him justification to link insurance to other mutual aid forms such as the *bikô chochiku* (or reserve fund for famine relief), and the *sansô* (the three storehouses: the *jôheisô*, *gisô*, and *shasô*) systems which were storage practices the state mobilized to guard against periods of famine and drought. Kobayashi then uses these mutual aid forms to provide space for thinking the transformation of the initial company based insurance endeavors of the early Meiji years into the larger national endeavors spurred on by such men as Wakayama Norikazu, and statesmen Taguchi Ukichi and Ôkuma Shigenobu. It is to their credit, Kobayashi would argue, that the state was able to create a universal insurance program that, despite many failed attempts, found its final successful manifestation in the postal insurance system that continues to persist today.

Strangely enough, despite Kobayashi’s connections to the insurance industry, he is not as quick to characterize the industry as uniformly beneficial as are his intellectual counterparts at Nissei or his professional colleagues at Meiji Life. This may be attributed to his move to the academy in 1985,<sup>88</sup> which provided him the distance necessary to uncouple his history from corporate interests. Writing as an academic, Kobayashi was not victim to the same pressures under which a corporate environment would have kept him. He uses this freedom, however, to explore the insurance industry’s flaws only to limited advantage. As mentioned previously, Kobayashi is a major proponent of the indigenous narrative of

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<sup>88</sup> Kobayashi has held dual positions as Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Commerce at Chiba University and the Department of Economics at Hosei University since 1985.

Japanese-style insurance. This is not to say he doesn't acknowledge the importance of the imported technologies from the West in the years following the Meiji Ishin. Rather, he attempts to find a balanced view of these dual influences by showing how mutual aid was not completely absent in the years before the emergence of insurance. It merely took different forms. The major and most diffuse of these forms in the Tokugawa period was the *mujin-kô*. In contrast to the state-centered view of the *mujin-kô*'s relevance to modern economics given by the Nissei historians, Kobayashi engages with the *mujin-kô* form in a more rigorous fashion. Using archival material of *mujin-kô* contracts taken from village sources, and tapping the seemingly unending fount of secondary academic resources concerning the economic circumstances of the Tokugawa era, he cannot but draw a more complex picture of the *mujin-kô*'s uses and abuses throughout the period than is provided by his corporate colleagues. Studying these material traces, he cannot but come to acknowledge the dual nature of the *mujin-kô*: its dystopic dimensions that made it easily appropriated by the merchant class for usurious and profiteering ends, and its utopic dimensions which allowed for real aid in times of crisis for those who were too poverty stricken to provide for themselves. Unlike the historians at Nissei, Kobayashi acknowledges the beneficial aspects of the non-state *mujin-kô*, which provided for those who were burdened with heavy tribute payments. He is strongest in this area, and provides a detailed case history of the use of the *mujin-kô* form to aid villages in the Owase region following the years of the Tempo famine (1833-36).<sup>89</sup> Thus, Kobayashi distinguishes himself from the Nissei historians by opening up the history of insurance – and by association the industry itself – to possible critique. If

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<sup>89</sup> The Tempo famine took place in the years between 1833-1836 and is oft cited as a key moment in the gradual decline of shogunal rule. I will deal with this in more detail in the pages to come.

the *mujin-kô* form was as open to profiteering as it was, then it follows that the insurance industry might have inherited these same dystopic potentialities.<sup>90</sup> More than this, Kobayashi asserts that the profit motive driving the modern insurance industry was the very thing that killed any potential the spirit of mutual aid had to carry over from the *mujin-kô* form. In the final pages of his work, he laments,

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<sup>90</sup> For any historian perusing through material on the early decades of the insurance industry's development, one cannot ignore these dystopic dimensions that constantly threatened to taint the industry as a whole. Researchers and industry leaders were in constant debate over how best to keep the industry's more deleterious social effects from spreading, a debate which ultimately led to the creation of the insurance law under the commercial code in 1899. A look at the first issues of *The Journal of Insurance (Hoken zasshi)* provides us with ample evidence that the question of profiteering in the industry and its social effects had become a central concern. The very first article in the first issue of the journal written by lawyer and politician, Minobe Shunkichi, confronts the problems in the industry directly. Noting the industry's radical success since its inception over a decade before, Minobe stresses the need for state regulation to reign in the kind of blatant profiteering and fraudulent practices of "pseudo-insurance" companies that threatened to spoil the industry's reputation for all. He writes,

The people of our nation, taken individually, can be seen to display a complete clumsiness when dealing with the business of insurance. They make light of it and only imitate its external form, while not studying its internal nature. Without concern for the nation, without reflection, businessmen run about wildly and the populace is dazzled into excitement by them. Of late, the populace is becoming somewhat more aware by having to face the problems of insurance and the day when we try to establish legal restrictions is not far off. (Shunkichi Minobe, "Hoken Zasshi No Hakkô Wo Shukusu [Celebrating the Inaugural Publication of the Journal of Insurance]," *Hoken Zasshi* 1 (Sept. 1895). 4-13)

These concerns are reflected in an article in the same issue by lawyer Ishida Kôtarô writing on his "Observations on Laws Concerning Criminal Punishment in Insurance" (Kôtarô Ishida, "Hoken No Keibatsu Hôteki Kansatsu," *Hoken Zasshi* 1 (Sept. 1895). 14-22). Focusing in on the problem of establishing a relationship of trust between the policyholder and the insurance company, Ishida calls for the intervention of the state to secure this trust through its legal apparatus. Listing issues of fraud in insurance that range from the forging of certificates of health by policy holders to the falsifying of reports by insurance companies, Ishida emphasizes the need to follow Germany's and France's lead in establishing laws that require all companies receive consent from the government before establishing a business. In this manner a national system of surveillance could be put in place to maintain the relationship of trust between the industry and the public. In later issues of the journal, Awatsu Kiyosuke, continually confronts the problems of fraud and profiteering in the industry in several articles whose themes range from inquiring after the use of capital in insurance (in Kiyosuke Awatsu, "Hoken Gaisha No Shihonkin Wo Ronzu [Debating Insurance Company Capital]," *Hoken Zasshi* 3 (1895). 1-13) to distinguishing profit-oriented insurance from non-profit insurance (in Kiyosuke Awatsu, "Hisharishugi Hoken to Ha Nanzoya [What Is Non-Profit Insurance?]," *Hoken Zasshi* 4 (1895). 1-10) to inquiring after the scope of contingencies that should be covered by insurance (Kiyosuke Awatsu, "Hoken No Ôyô Serarubeki Han'i Wo Ronzu [Debating the Proper Scope of Application for Insurance]," *Hoken Zasshi* 4 (1895). 1-12). In each article, Awatsu persistently criticizes those insurance companies that either pursue profits outright without any care for the larger social impact their profiteering might cause, or use the charitable face of insurance to hide their corporate interests. Nissei itself falls under his critical eye when he takes up the debate concerning the nature and importance of capital to insurance as a whole. Criticizing Nissei's attempts to turn mutual aid into a profit-oriented business, Awatsu points to its business policies as one source of the "spread of poison over society" in Awatsu, "Hoken Gaisha No Shihonkin Wo Ronzu [Debating Insurance Company Capital]." 8).

From the start, the spirit of mutual aid was standard for insurance thought, but with the advent of a modern insurance system, individual equality and self-help efforts (*jijodoryoku*) became central principles. That is to say, with a modern insurance system operating according to the clearly determined calculation of probabilities based on a plethora of rules (*daisû no kisoku*), no single individual could be aware that when they paid their premiums they were also behaving in a manner that was allowing for the aid of an innumerable number of others. Rather, the system is based on the fact that each individual uniformly pays with his own interests at heart. To be sure, we shouldn't see the changes [in the Meiji era] as conditions that allowed for the sudden emergence and development of insurance thought of its own volition, but they constituted a transformation for insurance thought as it was reflected in a society in which insurance was simply one other system. The transformations in society, its social climate, and social environment that surrounded this system – those transformations external to insurance – were the factors, which brought about this change. On the one hand, the insurance system itself expanded to a colossal degree, and this can be attributed to the pursuit of profits and gains that had little to do with a sense of camaraderie that would give rise to mutual aid (*nakama ishiki no sôgo fujo*). As a result, the sense of mutual aid amongst participants to insurance was extinguished. It seems it has been left to the insurers, and the supervisors of the insurance companies to ensure the survival of the spirit of mutual aid and its sense of camaraderie. Yet, they focus on taking the accumulation of premiums entrusted to them by policyholders to invest them and extract marginal profits that are then returned to these same policyholders. In the midst of this kind of business management, is it possible to become aware of one's participation in a mutual collective of millions joined through their contingent dangers? And yet, because of this, all of those on the side of insurance, those that are aware of this mutual connection, have turned insurance into a passionless collective. This is due to the fact that without the strict calculation of probabilities, the business itself cannot exist... Insurance thought in Japan splits into two, and its essence before and after the introduction of modern insurance mathematics is as different as oil and water. Maybe this is going too far, but we can say that thanks to the process of expansion that has led to the success and prosperity that is celebrated by today's insurance industry, the non-profit orientation of the early Meiji founders who asserted "we must not keep our focus on things such as profit" (*rieki no gotoki ha ganchû ni okazu*), has vanished without a trace.<sup>91</sup>

Kobayashi's is a trenchant critique of the modernization of mutual aid, and one cannot ignore the sense of nostalgia he expresses for the good old days of the early Meiji and Tokugawa periods. As Harry Harootunian has thoroughly remarked regarding critiques of modernity by

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<sup>91</sup> Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 584-5.

thinkers in the interwar period,<sup>92</sup> however, we must be wary of this kind of nostalgia for the past. Is this not the same longing for a past that plagued the desires of those involved in the conference on Overcoming Modernity of 1942? A closer look at Kobayashi's work seems to indicate this is so. Instead of using the legacy of mutual aid to call for a radicalization of economic principles that would push us beyond the ideologies of modern capitalism, Kobayashi falls victim to the belief the modern enlightenment principles that fueled the creation of the life insurance industry at the beginning of the Meiji era were somehow distinct from the greater project that saw the implementation of the capitalist mode of being.

In the final summary of his chapter on the “statesmen” of the Tokugawa era who laid the ground for thinking the principles of mutual aid that would be taken up by the pioneers of life insurance, Kobayashi makes “rational wisdom” (*gôriteki shii*) his protagonist in his nostalgic look back on the early years of the Meiji and the men who brought enlightenment to the Japanese archipelago.

How was the problem of merging the pragmatic ideas of these statesmen to rational wisdom dealt with in the Meiji era? This rationality was not simply grasped as it was. There is little doubt that it was born amidst a system organized around scientific thought and its technologies. Without these, the prosperity of Meiji learning, the advancement of technology, and rapid modernization would not have been possible. There is no doubt that this rational wisdom formed the basic foundation that allowed for the easy acceptance of Western insurance technologies (insurance mathematics, the calculation of probabilities) through the work of such enlightenment thinkers as Fukuzawa Yukichi and Wakayama Norikazu.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity : History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>93</sup> Kobayashi, *Nibon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 242.

At the same time that Kobayashi condemns modern life insurance for losing sight of its mutual aid origins, he continues to uphold the enlightenment principles of rational thought that were promoted by those very men who helped establish the ideology by which this profit motive would operate. Enlightenment and the profit motive are put in strict opposition, where the lure of the market is made vulgar while rationality is made sublime. Enlightenment ideology, for Kobayashi, takes on a transcendental tone, and as such is uncoupled from its roots in modern capitalist relations. The rational wisdom of mutual aid thinkers in the Tokugawa period such as Ninomiya Sontoku, Kaiho Seiryô, and Ôhara Yûgaku, transcends the break that was the Meiji Ishin to allow for their emergence, *mutatis mutandis*, in Meiji era enlightenment thought. This transcendental line is the very means by which Kobayashi's sense of nostalgia can operate. He must abide by a particular understanding of the mechanism of time. He can only be nostalgic for the mutual aid ideals of the Tokugawa and early Meiji if some kind of strata of temporal consistency is made to link the two together. At the base of Kobayashi's argument for this consistency is, I would argue, a belief in the unity of being. Kobayashi is quick to acknowledge the differences separating the Tokugawa from the Meiji period, yet these differences can only be thought in relation to the consistent ground of "rational wisdom." Things may have changed, sometimes in radical form, but being, and our understanding of the relevance of the temporal consistency of that being on a transcendental level, must remain unified. We must be able to think the Tokugawa period and the Meiji era in history together. This, as we will see, constitutes a paradox in our very understanding of the being of history itself.

In order for Kobayashi's critique of the life insurance industry to work, he must draw his lines of consistency across history to mobilize a sensibility – the sense of mutual aid

achieved via a rational image of thought – of loss, nostalgia, and possibility for renewal. Ironically, it is this consistency of history and its traces that allows for the bifurcation of thought regarding modernity and capitalism. Modernity, its rationality and logical principles, become strangely un-modern, while capitalism is made too modern to the extent that any attempt to appeal to a logic outside of capitalism, its alienations and vulgarizations of human relation that became the markers for modern experience, is phrased as an attempt to “overcome modernity.” Thus, we find ourselves trapped in a logical paradox that would have us wish to escape that which has produced the ideals mobilizing the desire to escape. The rational image of thought, that is the product of modernity through the work of Kant’s critiques of reason, and Descartes’ appeal to rational doubt – the fundamental bases for the enlightenment ideologies that were taken up by Meiji era enlightenment thinkers – pushes us to desire an escape from the products of this image: capitalist modernity and its easy tabulations of profit and loss. Thus capitalism and modernity are made both synonymous and antonymous. In order to unravel this strange coupling, we will need to probe more deeply into the logic organizing the historical connections linking Tokugawa feudalism to the emergence of the modern capitalist state in the Meiji era. This will require we take on a critique of historiography itself.

## **2. Tetsuo Najita**

Kobayashi is not the only one who falls victim to this paradox. Tetsuo Najita, strangely enough, takes up a similar transcendental position in his own work with the *mujin-kô* in *Ordinary Economies in Japan: a historical Perspective, 1750-1950*. Though it seems strange that such a strong proponent of the critique of capitalism in Japanese studies would find a point of concurrence with an enlightenment enthusiast such as Kobayashi, it is

precisely because they find their point of agreement that I think contemporary critiques of political economy that do not take being as their ground of engagement are no longer adequate for thinking necessary but impossible alternatives to contemporary issues. In Najita's case, the line of consistency linking the ordinary economies of the *mujin-kô* to our own era is not the rational image of thought, but instead a transcendental humanist ethic. Najita mobilizes this ethic at the very end of his work when he writes, "[Mutual aid] is thoroughly informed by the underlying principle of helping others in an emergency and by the well-known idea of *kyôsei*, or *kyôson*, the mutuality of life and existence and hence the interrelatedness of all humanity."<sup>94</sup> In this, I find Najita's work more hopeful in that he very deliberately attempts to mobilize notions of ethics as implicit to the money economy of the Tokugawa period, and in doing so provides the means to think contemporary economics in a fundamentally different manner. Najita also attempts to write this history of ordinary economies as a narrative existing beyond the normal reach of history. "Since the subject of ordinary economies is extensive, the narrative has no linear development to trace, and so it might be tempting to state that here there is no 'history' to convey." At the same time, his appeal to universal humanist principles seems to throw him back into the very same paradox trapping Kobayashi's work. Najita cannot extricate himself from the usual narrative reflex that is the practice of history. Though in the quote given above he seems tempted to acknowledge there is no history for the *mujin-kô*, he is compelled to capitulate to the rigors of his field in the following sentence: "what follows [in this work] argues otherwise, that there is indeed a discourse grounded in history, and, accordingly, that it is worthy of narrative

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<sup>94</sup> Najita, *Ordinary Economies in Japan, a Historical Perspective, 1750-1950* . 238.

attention.”<sup>95</sup> By writing the consistency of being across the surface of a rational or humanistic history creates a limit in thinking radical change, since this consistency seems only capable of mobilizing a reformist line of thought with regards to contemporary economic problems. These calls ask that we only become more rational in our dealings, or that we try to be more ethical in our stance towards the reproduction of market principles. Najita’s position offers greater possibilities if we are to take his economic ethic to radical extremes, but there is nothing that fundamentally guarantees the radical product of this ethic. Which is to say, critical interventions on the present should not be mobilized merely from an epistemological, logical, or ethical perspective. Modern capitalism has trained itself over the past two centuries quite adequately in managing these kinds of attacks on its logic. The present state of global capitalism stands testament to this, while all calls to make traders on Wall Street and other financial districts around the world a more ethical group are countered through a championing of the “freedom of the market,” and the condemnation of any kind of state intervention. Even still, a return to Keynesian economics does not seem adequate to solving the endemic problems of a market-based society. What seems needed now is a critique of capitalism that takes both the market and its ties to state formation simultaneously in hand.

### **3. The Conundrum of History**

It is all too tempting to argue, along with Kobayashi and the corporate historians at Nissei, that the history of the *mujin-kô* and its relation to life insurance is one marked by consistency. History moves in its chronological progression from one collective form to the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 16.

next and modern progression finds its sign in the complexity of a life insurance model that required the development of refined economic technologies, and clear, scientifically determined codes of operation. The complexity of calculations needed to understand its life tables, and its connection to the larger economic world run via interest rates, and long term investment plans seem to put to shame the very simple, easily applied *mujin-kô* form. Yet, as the modern argument must go, the life insurance industry is not complicated merely for the sake of appearing as such. It has to be so because it deals with a larger number of variables – it cannot function without large sums of data concerning the infinitesimal habits of populations. The *mujin-kô* form is local, communal, similar to the kinds of rotating savings and credit associations (RoSCA) that are normally associated with societies in “developing countries.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, if we were to take a progressive modern view of its history, we would be forced to put the *mujin-kô* in its rightful place alongside the less developed economic schemes of the past. It is simpler. It is not amenable to application on larger populations.<sup>97</sup> It provides local solutions to local problems, and only opens itself up to corruption when forced into any grander economic scheme.

It would seem any attempt to engage with the *mujin-kô* on modern ground necessarily commits the sin of presentism. After all, the sense of time, space, and relation inherent to the *mujin-kô* is not modern, but has its own multiple origins that took root in the Tokugawa,

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<sup>96</sup> Timothy Beasley, Stephen Coate, and Glenn Loury, "The Economics of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations," *American Economic Review* 83, no. 4 (Sept. 1993). 792-810.

<sup>97</sup> In fact, as both Najita and Gôto *Shin'ichi* note, the graduation of the *mujin-kô* from minor economic practice to major economic player required it implement all the modern technologies that would allow for its transformation into credit unions in the post-WWII era.

Muromachi, even as far back as the pre-Heian eras.<sup>98</sup> I mention this, not to insight debate concerning the legitimate origins of the *mujin-kô*, but rather to point out a single paradox that seems to evade most historians dealing with artifacts, institutions, histories that precede the implementation of those technologies that gave rise to modern historical consciousness: a sense of time and space as indefinitely extensive. This is the paradox of writing a history of that which precedes historical consciousness itself.

Stefan Tanaka provides ample evidence in his recent work, *New Times in Modern Japan*,<sup>99</sup> that time for the Meiji state and those under its rule was anything but consistent when we take into consideration the very real actions the state took to change time so that Meiji clocks would run concurrent to the Western clock. Meanwhile, Karatani Kojin has made a similar argument concerning the different historical consciousnesses that come as effect to the alternation between the linear time of the Christian calendar and the cyclical time of the Era based system.<sup>100</sup> Anyone attempting to do research in the Meiji era is quite familiar with the kind of split personality with which one must wrestle when trying to organize history according to both calendars. Writing that the development of life insurance came in the early Meiji 10s provides a fundamentally different view on one's historical narrative than does a consideration of life insurance in the 1880s. This diffracted historical

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<sup>98</sup> Ikeda Ryûzô was the first to find textual examples of the *mujin-kô* in the first year of the Kenji era (1275) as cited in his oft-cited Ryûzô Ikeda, *Kôhon Mujin No Jissai to Gakuçetsu [the Reality and Theory of Mujin Texts]* (Tokyo: Zenkoku Mujin Shûkaijo, 1930). Textual examples of “kô” as collective practice (the basic form that gave rise to the *mujin-kô*) can be found as far back in time as the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Suiko's reign (606) in the *Fusô ryakki (A Brief History of Japan)*. As mentioned previously, however, we must be wary of treating presence of these textual traces as equivalents to the *mujin* forms that emerge in the Tokugawa era.

<sup>99</sup> Stefan Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>100</sup> Kojin Karatani, "The Discursive Space of Modern Japan," *Boundary 2* 18, no. 3 (1991). 191-219.

sensibility is implied in Karatani's more well-known work, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, in which he writes the historicity of modern literature as concealed in inversions creating a historical consciousness that would rather trace Japanese literature along a timeline expanding indefinitely back in time than wrestle with the far more complicated problem of temporal disjunction that was the experience of Meiji subjects and rulers.<sup>101</sup> This position is echoed by those following Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm who has argued how the invented nature of traditions were used to legitimize rule in the modern era.<sup>102</sup> Hobsbawm's arguments made their way into scholarship on Japan through the work of researchers such as Tomi Suzuki, Haruo Shirane, and Takashi Fujitani.<sup>103</sup> The Meiji era seems rife with this inclination to invent traditions. In fact, the Meiji era provides an ideal space for thinking this invention of tradition precisely because the Meiji *ishin* can act as a clear moment of historical rupture severing Japan's modern literary, political, and economic forms from their feudal or pre-modern forms.

Even the field of Japanese studies itself seems organized around this break. History and literature departments split themselves along a line that would have modern literature, history, economy, etc. emerge consequent to the social reforms implemented after the Meiji Emperor was returned to the seat of power in 1868. Meanwhile, the pre-modern is taken as everything before then. This split, of course, is not without its problems. Depending on how

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<sup>101</sup> Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. Brett de Bary (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>102</sup> *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>103</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy : Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, *Inventing the Classics : Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

much weight one places on the appearance of commodities and money transactions in the Tokugawa era, the line dividing the modern from pre-modern can shift. Thus, many would divide Japan's timeline according to modern, early modern, and pre-modern rather than use the simple binary mentioned above. In either case, history is figured according to an understanding of temporal cohesion that allows us the ability to think these relations between periods. Yet, we cannot forget those speaking from the modern perspective, such as Karatani Kojin, Stefan Tanaka and Takashi Fujitani, who warn us that thinking in this manner brings with it its own distortions. The time linking the modern to that which came before is not uniform. This begs the question: how deep are the ruptures dividing modern history from its pasts.

This brings us to the conundrum at the heart of modern historiography on this thing we term "Japan." How do we write a history of Japan that attempts to bridge the gap separating its modern temporal and spacial existence from its "pre-modern" self if the very means by which we access this pre-modern form takes modern time and space as its *apriori* for understanding this movement between periods? Seen from a different perspective, it seems too convenient that the invention of tradition can only be taken into account after the fact of invention. We can only see the invention of tradition through the lens of its invention, and as such the argument has the potential to seal itself off from all attacks by creating a tautology:

- How do we know this tradition was invented?
  - Because it did not exist in the form given to it by modern consciousness.
- What did this tradition look like before modern consciousness?
  - We cannot know because the consciousness itself was invented, and we continue to live under the lens of invention.

In pointing out this tautology, I do not mean to discount the rigorous work of those who have revealed the invented nature of our traditions. It would be a mistake to read this tautology as indication that we should return to the good old days of positivist history that did not complicate the chronological progression of history with the rigors of “theory.” The inevitable and necessary reply to this kind of argument must always be: empirically determined history is not without its theory. Rather, those that adhere to it are in danger of becoming mere ideologues of a theory they refuse to acknowledge.<sup>104</sup> This is not to discount the importance of empirical determinations in the practice of history, but merely to open historiography up to a broader range of possibilities than a *wholly* empirical treatment would involve.

Instead of using the above given tautology to discount the critique of modern historiography, we should rather take it more seriously. The invention of tradition, along with the notions of time developed by Karatani and Tanaka, have provided the means to encounter a real and fundamental impossibility marking the limit of historical consciousness. Rather than backing away from this impossibility we should throw ourselves into its disorienting embrace, because disorientation is the breeding ground of thought. Modernity, especially the form hurriedly implemented by the Meiji oligarchs, marks a turning point for thought, and in our encounter with its limits, we can begin thinking the unthinkable, because to think beyond the historicity of modern forms should be to think the impossible. Yet we must always take care in not thinking the break in antagonism to its continuities. This is

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<sup>104</sup> John Maynard Keynes “once remarked that those economists who disliked theory, or claimed to get along better without it, were simply in the grip of an older theory” in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory : An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). xi. I would assert this applies to the field of history as well.

precisely what I believe the *mujin-kô* as economic form, or what Testuo Najita has termed an ordinary economy, provides as potential for thinking history; yet, it can only do so when placed in paradoxical relation to life insurance. Thus, thinking these two forms, while understanding the paradox that thinking them must promote for historical consciousness, places us immediately and deliberately in a space of impossibility or contradiction, because we must both think their relation as a means to think their non-relation. We must think them precisely as an expression of the break and its continuities. This will be made clearer once we get a better sense of how the two forms work.

#### **4. How does it work 1: Some problems**

What would it mean to say that the *mujin-kô* form of the late Tokugawa period had nothing to do with the *mujin-kô* of the Meiji era, despite their nearly identical formal traits? What use would it be to say that the *mujin-kô* form, despite all its similarities to life insurance, did not express its being in the same manner as that being given by the insurance industry, not because the forms changed, but *because the being of the two eras themselves were linked by a relation of non-relation?* Are we to side with Yui Tamura and the other corporate historians that would disavow any connection life insurance may have to the *mujin-kô* in order to hold onto an enlightenment narrative of life insurance's uniqueness? As mentioned above, I don't find this to be a compelling argument for the very reason that the *mujin-kô* and life insurance find resonance in their mobilization of mutual aid. At the same time, I do not aim to ascribe any kind of transcendental humanism to the *mujin-kô* as Najita, Yui, or Kobayashi do for fear of reinscribing the very mechanics of the modern capitalist narrative into the tools I wish to use for charting my path of escape from capitalist modernity. Under the assumption of a consistency in being joining the Tokugawa period to the Meiji I

am left with little choice but to side with these two propositions neither of which I find attractive or useful to thinking my critique of life. With a conceptualization of being as multiple, however, I am offered the possibility of thinking the impossible: of thinking the *mujin-kô* and life insurance together while at the same time thinking them apart. *As forms of practice* the *mujin-kô* and life insurance can be thought together through a relationship of difference. It is this difference that will provide our lens into understanding the political ontology that had to be implemented in order for life to be made thinkable as a modern transcendent concept.

That is, we must pursue the how of the *mujin-kô* not to understand better how its form works across the chronological consistency of history, but, on the contrary, to come to understand the lack of consistency that is the constant companion to its consistency. It is this rupture of consistency that must be thought today if we are to produce in consciousness and practice the potential to think radical difference in our politics, our economies, and our political ontologies. To reinforce Fredric Jameson's terms of the impossible, we must not only think the impossible, but also begin to perform it as the action of thought.<sup>105</sup> This requires we tie our history to its roots in political ontology. The histories of the *mujin-kô* and life insurance forms provide ideal material for thinking this impossible in relation to being, or, at the very least recuperating some of being's own inconsistencies and indeterminacies.

#### IV. The Mujin-kô

##### 1. Between Form and Practice

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<sup>105</sup> See Fredric Jameson, Fredric Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?," in *Archaeologies of the Future, the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005). 281-295.

We immediately face the conundrums of consistency the moment we attempt to make the *mujin-kô* thinkable. In their works on this mutual aid form, Mori Kahei, Kobayashi Tadashi, and Yui Kennosuke give shape and consistency to their object of study by referencing the *mujin-kô*'s structure given by Japanese legal historian Nakada Kaoru in his work, "The Origins of the *Tanomoshi-kô*" (*Tanomoshi-kô no kigen*). This outline is not provided by Nakada, however, to describe the kinds of *mujin-kô* that proliferated during the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate, but describes the *tanomoshi-kô* that emerged nearly half a century earlier in the Muromachi era. As Yui Kennosuke writes,

The *tanomoshi-kô* of the Muromachi era (1338~1573) can be said to have been organized roughly according to the same form as those that occur in the present. According to Nakada Kaoru's research, the *tanomoshi-kô* of that era took the following form:

1. Each *tanomoshi-kô* had either a single person or group as original founders (*hokki'nin*); these were called either *oya* or *oyakata*.
2. The founders would recruit members from similar backgrounds [*dôshisha*] and create a large gathering for the *kô*; that is, this would be a group centered affair [*shûchû to suru*]
3. Each member of the *kô* would enter into a contract with the founder; this could be called its rules, laws, stipulations, or legal code [*kishiki, hôshiki, okibun, mata ha shikimoku*]
4. The group would meet at determined times, and at each meeting members were required to contribute funds; these donations were called *akezeni* (*zeni* premiums), *akeashi* (*ashi* premiums),<sup>106</sup> or *kakemai* (*rice* premiums).
5. With each meeting, the gathered *akezeni* would be lent out to a single member of the group according to lottery or bidding rules. One bought either a lottery ticket or bid in notes; in either case the money paid or money received after a successful bid was called the "pot" [*toriashi*].
6. Once a member received the pot once, they lost their right to bid or take part in the lottery, and from that point onwards they continued to bear the duty of contributing to the pot; these contributions were called overpayments [*torisugi*]
  - a. The money for overpayments was secured via collateral or a guarantor

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<sup>106</sup> *Ashi* was another term for *zeni*; see Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 69.

7. Once each member received the pot via bid or lottery, the group would come to a close; it would be said to be full [*man*]<sup>107</sup>

What we should note immediately is that the structure of the *mujin-kô* is not given through a series of texts, objects or signs, but through a series of practices. What we should further note is that these practices are irreducible to any individual involvement. The combination of views of the *mujin-kô* from each member's perspective will never provide a fully constituted understanding of the whole. Each member can only bear witness to a single line of flux and flow of chance as they wait for their turn to take home their accumulated winnings. The mutual character of the *mujin-kô* can only be understood from a collective standpoint. Thus individuation emerges *consequent* to this collective action. This point will become important when we consider the shift towards life insurance. For now, I would simply like to emphasize the nature of the *mujin-kô* as practice, since this forces us to ask the question, how can a practice transcend the time and space of its engagement? Aren't practice and form diametrically opposed in terms of their point of contact with the world? Where a practice must be absolutely specific to the bodies, spaces and times it mobilizes, form is that which lifts off this immanence to travel its transcendent line across time, space and specificities. How then are we to characterize the *mujin-kô* as a form or a structure, if it is constituted by a series of practices?

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<sup>107</sup> Kennosuke Yui, *Tanomoshi-Kô to Kono Hôritsu Kankei [the Tanomoshi-Kô and Its Relation to Law]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1935). 9; also see Kobayashi, *Nibon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 69-70 and Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]." 18; in the latter case, Mori goes to the source directly quoting, not Nakada but the *Tashiro bunsbo* and *Tanomoshi kiyaku* texts of 1347 provided in Ikeda, *Kôhon Mujin No Jissai to Gakuzetsu [the Reality and Theory of Mujin Texts]*.

Mori Kahei's comments following his summary of the structure of the Muromachi era *mujin* illustrates for us the degree to which a few simple practices can be bent and twisted to fit a multiplicity of purposes.

The structure differs in no great way between the modern and the Muromachi era *mujins*. However, with the progress of the eras, things such as the frequency of payments increased, the amount of money involved grew, the fixed method for selecting pot recipients changed to a bidding structure (*seritori*), people organizing *mujin* for commercial purposes began to emerge, lending practices that turned *tanomoshi* into securities emerged; though the numbers of its uses was various, the structure remained essentially the same.<sup>108</sup>

As is indicated in Mori's text, the *mujin-kô* in different contexts and times can be put to a variety of uses, some of which are opposed to one another. The best example would be the differences separating the *mujin-kô* that proliferated in urban spaces during the Tokugawa era from those that were more prevalent in rural spaces. As both Kobayashi and Mori note, the *mujin-kô* that emerged in Osaka and Edo, especially during the latter half of the Tokugawa era, were for the most part profit-oriented endeavors. The *oya* (or leader; lit. "parent") organizing the *mujin-kô* or *tanomoshi-kô* would be merchants using the weight of their capital to pressure less advantaged clients either into debt or servitude. There were several ways that merchants could alter the *mujin-kô* form to make it amenable to their profiteering aims. Before we can consider these, we need to understand a little more of its basic aspects as given by *mujin-kô* historians.

## 2. Lottery vs. Bidding *Mujin*

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<sup>108</sup> Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]." 18

In all *mujin-kô*, regardless of the aims of the members involved, there were two mechanisms for determining who received the accumulated funds at each meeting. These were the lottery and bidding mechanisms. In a lottery *mujin-kô*, as the name suggests, members would pool together their money each meeting and determine the pot-recipient via lottery. In its ideal form, members would eventually take out just as much money as they put in, since the lottery winnings of each meeting would total the combined contribution each member. Thus, if I were to participate in a *mujin-kô* of ten members with each contributing five *mon*<sup>109</sup> per meeting for a combined pot-total of 50 *mon*, then we would meet the same number of times as there are members in our group: 10. In contributing 5 *mon* over 10 meetings, my total contribution to the *mujin-kô* equals 50 *mon*, the same amount I would receive when my name came up in the lottery. The basic reasoning behind this ideal form is that the sudden injection of funds at an unspecified time provides members extra funds to invest in things they would not normally be able to afford were they to depend on their own resources. The advantages of this form are that it is, in its ideal form, difficult to use towards usurious ends. That is, any profit derived from the lottery *mujin* by its *oya* would be immediately apparent to the members involved. This is not necessarily the case with the bidding-*mujin*.

Though the bidding-*mujin* has multiple variants, its simplest structure is exemplified as follows: ten members gather to create a *mujin-kô* of ten cycles with the *kakezeni* (premium

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<sup>109</sup> Though any attempt to determine a standard measure of relations between monies seems impossible considering the variations in values that cut both temporally and spatially across the Tokugawa realm, for the purposes of simplicity I will borrow from Tetsuo Najita's equivalences as cited in *Ordinary Economies*. He writes, "the conversion rate for gold is 1 ryô = 4 bun; 1 bun = 4 shu. A lower currency level (*zeni*) is 1 mon = 10 bun; 1 bun = 10 ri (base 10 rate). One ryô is equal to 1000 mon." (Najita, *Ordinary Economies in Japan, a Historical Perspective, 1750-1950*, 81)

or contribution payments) amount agreed upon for the course of the *mujin* at 5 *mon*. Bidding begins with the total sum of their contributions. As with the lottery-*mujin* above, the pot would be valued at 50 *mon* at each meeting. Those in need of the pot would begin bidding to take the pot at less than its established, combined value. One member would bid to take the pot at 48 *mon*, another at 45 *mon* (alternatively bidders could compete over how much money they would give to association members over the course of the *mujin-ko*'s span). Eventually all bids would be taken and the pot would be sold to the lowest bidder. Thus the winner of the bidding contest would take home a pot valued at less than its agreed upon amount. The difference between the agreed upon amount, 50 *mon*, and the actual amount taken, say, 40 *mon* in the first round, would function as an interest payment of 10 *mon* paid by the winning bidder to all other members of the *kô* or association. This would not be a direct payment, but would be paid out over the course of the next meetings. Because the first bidder is now forbidden from bidding on future pots – all members are only allowed one pot per *mujin* cycle – each payment will be a payment of principle plus interest into the pot. In the next round of bidding, only nine members are left to bid over the value of the pot. Because the bidder with the most need was most likely eliminated in the first round, bidding would not be as aggressive, and the pot would go for a higher price. Say in this case, the pot would sell for 43 *mon*, instead of the 40 *mon* from the meeting before. The difference between the first and second pot-values would act as the interest payment for the first bidder. As the meetings continue, the intensity of bidding reduces as both need and number of competitors over the pot grows smaller. Those with the least immediate need, usually including the *oya* founding the *mujin-kô*, simply have to wait out all the bidding until the pot can be taken at its given value. Because of the reduced payments they had to make into the pot from the meetings

before, the difference between the cumulative amounts they paid into the pot, and the given value of the pot they take home in the final meetings of the *mujin-kô* act as profit. The chart on Table 1 (see below) illustrates the relationship between those taking the *mujin* at the beginning and those that wait out the bidding and take it in the final stages. For reasons of simplicity, I have regularized the value of each pot per meeting to make this relationship easier to determine. The shaded area cutting a diagonal line across Table 1 marks the value of the pot received by each member (subtracting their own contribution into that meeting's pot amount). As we can see from this table, the earliest bidder pays the greatest interest on his payments into the *mujin-kô* coming away seven *zeni* the poorer, while those who manage to wait until the bidding has stopped take away a total of three *zeni* in profit.<sup>110</sup>

As we can guess from this structure, compared to the structure of the lottery *mujin*, it has the advantage of being able to address the needs of members in the time frame these needs emerge, since it is the degree of need that determines the aggressiveness of the bidding, which in turn is used to determine who received the pot at each meeting. Unfortunately, this also opens those involved to greater exploitation since those without need profit directly and proportionately off of the desperation of those in financial straits. Furthermore, the *oya*'s culpability in extracting profits from *mujin* members is somewhat obscured by the desires of those participating in the *mujin* out of need.

The above illustrations only provide general schemata for understanding how the lottery and bidding structures are used to determine pot-recipients. The actuality of the

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<sup>110</sup> An alternate bidding structure is given in Najita (81) in which the bidders bid, not on the value of the pot, but on when they receive the pot.

Table 1. Form of payments and payouts for a *mujin-kô* based on a bidding system

Member	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Meeting										
1st	36	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4	-4
2nd	-4.2	37.8	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2	-4.2
3rd	-4.4	-4.4	39.6	-4.4	-4.4	-4.4	-4.4	-4.4	-4.4	-4.4
4th	-4.6	-4.6	-4.6	41.4	-4.6	-4.6	-4.6	-4.6	-4.6	-4.6
5th	-4.8	-4.8	-4.8	-4.8	43.2	-4.8	-4.8	-4.8	-4.8	-4.8
6th	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	45	-5	-5	-5	-5
7th	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	45	-5	-5	-5
8th	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	45	-5	-5
9th	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	45	-5
10th	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	-5	45
Total	-7	-5	-3	-1	1	3	3	3	3	3

*mujin-kô* and their structures are much more complicated than this. To innumerate the number of variants would push me beyond the scope of this chapter, so for the sake of time and space, I will restrict myself dealing with variations in only a few features of the *mujin*.

### 3. Profiteering: *Kakezeni* Variations

Mori Kahei begins his analysis of the early modern (*kinsei*) *mujin* of the Edo period by distinguishing Edo-style *mujin* from Osaka-style *mujin*. “It is said that in the Osaka and

Kyoto areas the bidding *tanomoshi* (*nyûsatsu tanomoshi*) are given preference, while in Edo there are more lottery based *tanomoshi* that do not follow the rule of lowering *kakezeni* throughout the duration of the *kô* (association).”<sup>111</sup> He goes on to deal with a few basic facets of the *mujin* and their variations. These features include the structure of *kakezeni* (or premium payments), the frequency and distribution of meetings, the task of securitizing *kakezeni* payments, the structure of the pot (*torikin*), securitizing the pot, *mujin* admission or ancillary fees, and cessation periods. I would like to look at one of these features – the structure of the *kakezeni* – to help us understand how slight variations in the practices of the *mujin* associations can radically alter its function.

In terms of the *kakezeni*, Mori provides ample illustrations of the types of variants in *kakezeni* distribution that occur throughout the Tokugawa period. Mori provides the chart shown in Table 2 (see below) for the *Wagagun, Saraki Village Mujin* as a prototype illustrating how premium payments were distributed in a basic *mujin-kô* structure. The chart provides only a small segment of data taken from a *mujin* with a much larger membership (the earnings to contribution ratio indicates that the *kô* included a minimum of 35 members), but it illustrates what Mori notes as an historical example of a typical (*tenkeiteki*) *mujin* with uniform *kakezeni* payments (at 600 *bun* per meeting) and a uniform pot value (of 20.8 *kan*).<sup>112</sup> We should further note that as guarantee against their payments, each member provided their crop yields as collateral. As a lottery form this not only acts as a simple

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<sup>111</sup> Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]." 142

<sup>112</sup> The given standard equivalent, understanding again that such standards were not stable in the Tokugawa economy, is 960 *bun* per one *kan* as cited in the Izuru Shinmura, "貫 (Kan)," in *Kojien, dai roku ban [6th Edition]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2008).

Table 2. Wagagun Saraki Village Mujin Pot Value Chart (Bunsei 3 ~ 6; 1820-23)<sup>113</sup>

Lottery		Pot value (in kan)	Kakekin per meeting (in bun)	Collateral			Pot Recipient
Year	Month and Day			Rice fields (ta; in kari or bundles)	Cultivated land (hatake; in jokari or large bundles)	Money (daka; in ishi)	
Bunsei 3 (1820)	June 13th	20.8	600	n/a	100	330	Kisuke
3	Nov. 25th	20.8	600	n/a	200	n/a	Jinbee
4	Feb. 25th	20.8	600	n/a	200	n/a	Kousaku
4	June 25th	20.8	600	n/a	200	n/a	Shigesuke
4	Nov. 25th	20.8	600	n/a	200	n/a	Soubee
6	Feb. 25th	20.8	600	50	n/a	900	Ainosuke
6	Nov. 25th	20.8	600	n/a	200	n/a	Kurakichi

prototype against which more complicated structures can be compared, but it also provides the basic structure for what Mori terms the Edo-style *mujin*.<sup>114</sup>

Without further information regarding the Saraki Village *mujin* it is difficult to determine whether it was a legitimate mutual aid society or one organized around the production of profits. A look at the structure of payments and earnings for the *Chôtatsu kô* (provision association) of Kire Village in Osaka of the same time period, however, provides a better illustration of how the *mujin* form could be used for profiteering. Table 3 (see below)

<sup>113</sup> Reproduced from Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]."146

<sup>114</sup> Mori provides a further example of this type of mutual aid association using the *tanomoshi-kô* founded in the same year, Bunsei 3, in Southern Iwane Village in Isawa gun (Iwate prefecture). This *tanomoshi-kô*, as with the standard Edo style *mujin-kô*, shows the same uniformity of *kakezeni* and pot-values. See Ibid. 82.

provides the basic information regarding this *mujin-kô*. As with any profit-making endeavor, such as the one illustrated in Table 3, the question we must inevitably address is how those contributing to the endeavor could be compelled to give more money than they took out, so that profiteers could skim off the excess they sought. This is the central question that Karl Marx wrestles with in his work on capital when he asks how profits can be derived in an exchange between buyer and seller that seems to be based on equivalencies. It seems peculiar to think that both buyer and seller could come away equally satisfied, while the seller is the only one exiting the relationship with more money ( $M'$ , as Marx terms it) than he initially invested. How is this possible? Marx finds his answer in labor power.<sup>115</sup>

If we look closely at the role of labor power in the production of capital, I think another fundamental question can be found hidden beneath Marx's analysis of the flows of capital. It is to Deleuze and Guattari's credit that they highlight this central issue when they take up Marx's in relation to Freud in *Anti-Oedipus*.<sup>116</sup> Instead of asking how capital is produced, they ask how one mobilizes desires that do not, counter to standard capitalist ideology, contribute to each individual's benefit? How does one make subjects desire their own subjection?

Desire can never be deceived. Interests can be deceived, unrecognized or betrayed, but never deceived. Whence Reich's cry: no, the masses were not deceived, they desired fascism, and that is what has to be explained. It happens that one desires

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<sup>115</sup> See "Chapter 1: The Commodity" for Marx's introduction of the notion of labor-power, and "Chapter 4: The General Formula of Capital" for Marx's theorization of capital via the production of  $M'$  ( $M$  + surplus value) in Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1976).

<sup>116</sup> See "Savages, Barbarians, and Civilized men," in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol 1*.

against one's own interests: capitalism profits from this, but so does socialism, the party, and the party leadership.<sup>117</sup>

Table 3. *Chôtatsu kô Registry (Bunsei 11, April, 1828, Middle Kire Village)*<sup>118</sup>

Meeting	Participants (people)	Kakekin (ryô)	Pot		Structure			lottery	winners
			First ballot	Ballots 2~14	Ballot 15	Ballots 16~19	Ballots 20~30	Total winners	Single Ballot winners
1	270	1	10	2.1	5	2.1	12	30	2
2	270	1	11	2.1	5	2.1	13	30	2
3	270	1	12	2.1	5	2.1	14	30	2
4	270	1	13	2.1	5	2.1	15	30	2
5	270	1	14	2.1	5	2.1	16	30	2
6	270	1	15	2.1	5	2.1	17	30	2
7	270	1	16	2.1	5	2.1	18	30	2
8	270	1	17	2.1	5	2.1	19	30	2
9	270	1	18	2.1	5	2.1	20	30	2

This is the key question to any profit-making venture whether it be lead by a merchant, capitalist, peasant, or socialist party leader. It is with this question in mind that we need to analyze the above data, not so that we can gain a sense of how the *mujin-kô* in Kire Village worked, but to come to understand how the desires of contributing members were cultivated and shaped to fit profiteering ends. This is an especially important question for the *mujin-kô*

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 257

<sup>118</sup> Reproduced from Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]." 148. This *mujinkô* lasted two years and three months with meetings occurring every three months.

and life insurance, since both economic endeavors in their ideal forms are meant for aid and not profit; yet, both were used by many to earn profits in such a manner that the profiteers *did not need to depend upon a production cycle to cultivate these profits.*<sup>119</sup>

Taking the above table as outline to a structure of desire, we can see how members were made to participate in an association that was not aimed to satisfy the interests of the group as a whole, but to satisfy the individual interests of the *oya* organizing the group. First, a quick calculation will show us that the total amount of *ryô* put in collectively by all members did not equal the same amount doled out in pot winnings. With 270 members contributing one *ryô* per meeting over the course of 9 meetings, the total earnings for the *mujin-kô* equaled 2430 *ryô*. Though the amounts for pot winnings increased over time for first ballot winners, and ballots 20 to 30, only the last meeting's winnings exceeded the 270 *ryô* contributed to each meeting. The first meeting provided 182.7 *ryô* in winnings, while the final meeting provided 278.7 *ryô* in winnings for a total combined payout of 2076.3 *ryô*. The profit earned off the *mujin-kô* by the *oya* thus equaled 353.7 *ryô*. Further calculation shows that though each member was guaranteed a pot winning that exceeded their contribution to each individual meeting, only 100 members of the 270 participants would receive winnings that exceeded their overall 9 *ryô* contribution.

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<sup>119</sup> That is, production was not a matter of the traditionally conceived modes given in standard Marxist analyses of manufacturing cycles and modes of production, exchange, and distribution. As we will see later, production occurs in the life insurance industry through the reproduction of populations and regimes of knowledge. The question of desire will push us even further as we consider how particular affective orders needed to be reproduced in order to sustain a particular form of capitalist state being. It is in the production and reproduction of this particular affective order that both laborers and life insurance policy holders found their point of convergence—both were victim to the whims of a state being that had them individuated before it allowed them to find their way back into collective existence. Or to put it in Anti-Oedipal terms, both were the site of a constant deterritorialization that enforced their reterritorialization into the capitalist state of being.

It would be a mistake to argue participant ignorance as the main mechanism driving profits for these kinds of endeavors. Considering the prevalence of the *mujin-kô* and *tanomoshi-kô* all over villages and cities held together under Tokugawa rule, the notion that members could be enticed into a *mujin-kô* without knowing to some degree the probability of their potential return seems a false one.<sup>120</sup> As with lotteries in the contemporary age, it is less surprising that people buy tickets without knowing the odds of their winning than it is that they do so knowing full well their odds at winning, for example, a 6/49 jackpot is close to 1 in 14 million. It is in pursuit of an explanation of this latter fact, that we can better determine the mechanism of desire by which the profit motive is fulfilled with lottery associations.

The structure of desire that a lottery style *mujin-kô* expresses is one of individuated antagonism. A profit can only be derived from this structure if the interests of each individual member trump the collective sense of interest governing the whole. Put simply, in a lottery structure, I must desire the loss accrued by another member, if I am to take the chance at taking home more than I invested. This larger wager against the loss of another, then can create profits for those in charge of the greater collective flow of monies, since the

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<sup>120</sup> It is taken for granted in all texts dealing with the *mujin-kô* that these types of *kô* (or associations) were ubiquitous across both urban and rural spaces. As Yanagida Kunio writes about the Meiji era, "There is almost no town or village in Japan that does not have the cooperative organization called the *kô*" (in Kunio Yanagida, *Japanese Customs and Manners in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo: Ôbunsha, 1957). 301). Despite this ubiquity, scholarship on these types of associations in English are few and far between. John Embree makes brief mentions of them in his work John F. Embree, *Suye Mura, a Japanese Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Meanwhile Robert Deckle and Koichi Hamada have described the *mujin-kô* in their article, Robert Deckle and Koichi Hamada, "On the Development of Rotating Credit Associations in Japan," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 49, no. 1 (Oct. 2000). 77-90. Only Tetsuo Najita has written work in English that deals with them in any detail in monograph form. This dearth of scholarship prompts Najita to lament, "I should note here that even though it was widespread as a social practice, the *kô* is not considered an important component of Japan's civilization or its modernity...Even though the *kô*'s history and presence are not self-consciously concealed, they are rarely publicized." (Najita, *Ordinary Economies in Japan, a Historical Perspective, 1750-1950*, 18)

group leader (the *oya* in the case of the *mujin-kô*) who guarantees all contributions made to the *mujin-kô* can prey on the ambiguity inherent to this sense of mutual antagonism. Once I have determined I am willing to wager my success against another's loss, the amount of that loss becomes proportional to my own potential earnings and not to the earnings of the collectivity as a whole. That is, I do not have to care about the overall profits an *oya* may be making at the expense of the larger collective so long as I feel my individual interests are being satisfied by the potential of a high return on my investment. The greater the proportion of winnings to contribution, the more I am willing to risk a personal loss, and a loss to others. Furthermore, as the number of participants increases from one *mujin-kô* to the next, each member's sense of connection to the larger collective whole reduces as does their care for the well-being of the collective. In the lottery *mujin-kô*, the merchant makes this space of separation between members of the collective the source of his profits.

The individuated nature of the antagonisms inherent to the lottery type *mujin-kô* are best illustrated by the *torinuki* or *torinoke* (take and leave) style of association in which members who win the pot are no longer responsible for payments into the association. These types of *mujin-kô* were the closest to pure gambling that the form allowed, since the ratio of contributions to winnings were purely based on one's luck in the draw. If a member won early, their winnings far exceeded the amounts they put in, while those that were left behind saw their potential earnings shrink with each passing meeting.<sup>121</sup> Thus, this type of *kô* depended on a set of social relations in which being lucky meant leaving the unlucky behind to sort out their own economic problems.

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<sup>121</sup> The *Torinuki Fukujū kô* (The Take and Leave Long Life and Happiness Association) is an example of this type of *mujin-kô*. See Mori, "Mujin Kinyūshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]." 150

The profit motive of the *mujin-kô* from urban sectors were further complicated by the implementation of bidding mechanisms for determining pot recipients. Where the ideal form of the bidding structure given above illustrates how profits could be derived purely off the interest accumulated from early bids, we can now see how a dual structure of profits could be derived through control of the *kakezeni*, the pot earning potentials, and the distribution of payments. Thus, where a lottery structure would calculate its profits based purely on the difference between the money paid out to pot winners against the money put in by all members, a bidding structure created a two-fold means for extracting profit. On the one hand, the *oya* could set the maximum bid of the pot such that it did not equal the total amount contributed by all members. This created pure profit for the *oya* regardless of the degree of bidding that occurred. At the same time, this profit could then be magnified by virtue of the interest that accumulated off those that lowered the pot amount through their bids. In this way the individuation of members was deepened across two vertices. First, members were forced into a situation in which they had to desire the misfortune of others as the constitutive desire founding their own feelings of self-interests. At the same time, this antagonistic desire was more apparently mobilized through competitive bidding, as members directly fought with other members to gain access to the pot at each meeting.

What is key to this understanding of the *mujin-kô* as it was put to use by profit-motivated merchants, should be our recognition that the antagonisms separating the members joining these associations were not naturally determined as an Adam Smith or a Thomas Hobbes would have us believe. Self-interest and competition were not the naturalized result of some inherent quality of man. They were the very material effects of a particular organization of social relations that were put to profitable use by the merchants and usurers

of the era. This will become more apparent when we consider the structure of the mutual aid societies that emerged under this same form in the rural sectors in the Tokugawa era.

### E. The Janus Face of Mutual Aid

Though from the very beginning (if its origins stories are given any credence) the *mujin-kô* was prone to being used for exploitation, it was also, as Tetsuo Najita, Kobayashi Tadashi, and Mori Kahei argue, an economic form whose simplicity made it amenable to the needs of commoners faced with crises they could not overcome on their own. The *mujin-kô* was always characterized by this Janus-faced nature. As Mori Kahei notes, the abuse of the form by the wealthy and powerful was not specific to any one era. Even in pre-feudal times, the powerful used the *mujin-kô* to exploit the less fortunate.

That is to say, the temples, manor lords, and their administrators who constituted the ruling class, on occasion, enforced the creation of “*tanomoshi-kô* to which they themselves didn’t contribute but used for the purpose of exploiting the wealth of farmers.”<sup>122</sup> The rulers would force farmers to contribute payments, while they took the accumulated funds without adding their own contribution. As a result it became a main concern of the people (*minshû*) to eliminate these *mujin* that were used as a means of pure exploitation.<sup>123</sup>

In this period, as in the period to follow, the problems of the *mujin-kô* became so prevalent, the Muromachi state had to intervene with an Imperial proclamation to cancel all debts (*tokuseirei*) incurred through these exploitative actions.<sup>124</sup> This proved disadvantageous for

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<sup>122</sup> Quote taken from Kaoru Nakada, "Tokusei Hatsugen No Nendai Ni Tsuite [on the Age of the Emergence of Debt Cancellation]," in *Hôsei Shi Ronshû, Dai San Kan [Essay Collection on the History of the Legislation System, Vol. 3]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994). 5.

<sup>123</sup> Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]." 15

<sup>124</sup> Prohibitions against the *mujin-kô* were a common feature of the Edo era as well, especially within the urban centers where, as we have seen above, the *mujin* were more likely to be organized by merchants seeking a profit than like-minded individuals determined to develop relations of reciprocity. Ibid. 233.

those engaged in *mujin-kô* for the sake of mutual aid, since the state had no means to distinguish exploitative *mujin* from aid-oriented *mujin*. Mori Kahei goes on to address this fundamental problem in recognizing the *mujin* under the generalization of state mechanics.

Yet, not all of the *mujin* at this time were used as means by the ruling class to exploit those beneath it. There was also a proliferation of *mujin* financing that took root amongst villagers that was aimed at providing aid to those in impoverished circumstances. With the application of the Debt Cancellation Order, which considered all *kakekin* (premium payments) as losing investments (*kakeson*) and all pot-winners as profiteers, these types of village-centered mutual aid focused *mujin* vanished from practice.<sup>125</sup>

As we have seen above the exploitative nature of the *mujin* continued to proliferate amongst the wealthy classes of the Edo period, especially in the urban districts, but as Kobayashi Tadashi is quick to point out, in the hands of those not ranked according to patrilineal hierarchies or organized according to the requisites of power, the *mujin-kô* also continued to be the financial expression of reciprocity amongst equals.

The *Tanomoshi-kô* cultivated a surprisingly modern and rational ideology of charity that allowed for commoner self-sufficiency (*minshû jiji seido*), and in the latter period of the early modern era it took on a soul of mutual aid, and cooperative care for those in the agricultural class.<sup>126</sup>

Confronted by the Janus-faced nature of the *mujin-kô*, we cannot but wonder what lies at the heart of its bipolarity. It is in pursuing its divisive nature that we begin to understand the problems the *mujin* as a collective practice poses for historical consciousness itself. To pursue this line of inquiry, we need to explore in a little more detail the conditions that made the mutual aid *mujin* possible. Kobayashi Tadashi's case study of the Owase

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 15~16.

<sup>126</sup> Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 67

*mujin-kô* that appeared in the years of the Tempo famine will prove useful in illustrating some of the features of this type of practice.

### 1. The Owase *Mujin-kô*

By 1838, thanks to the Tempo famine that spanned the years of 1833 to 1836, the population of the fourteen villages of the Owase area within the Kishû domain suffered a 160% decrease over a two-year period, the number of individuals over the age of 8 decreasing from 7470 to 6366.<sup>127</sup> Because these were mostly fishing and farming villages, production yields were directly linked to the number of laborers available. Consequent to the radical reduction in population within the villages, a few of the villages, in particular Noji village, and the Osone and Hayata inlet villages (*ura*), began to fall further and further behind on their tribute payments to the Tokugawa Shogunate. The Owase *Mujin-kô* was formed to remedy this situation. One hundred and sixty members representing the various families within the villages of the domain joined the *mujin-kô*, each member agreeing to contribute roughly one *ryô* on the first meeting, followed by lesser contributions in the meetings to follow. Some of the wealthier groups contributed more than one *ryô* on this first day. As a result, the overall pot on the first meeting grew to 172 *ryô*. Each *ryô* contributed on the first meeting entitled the contributing member to one share of the pooled resources over the course of the *mujin-kô*'s existence while each share entitled members to one quarter of the pot. All members agreed to meet every month between the years 1838 to 1845 for a total of 43 months. It was agreed that the pooled funds would be split into four shares or *kabu* to be redistributed at each meeting. Thus, if all contributions were kept equal, each

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 69-120 for a more in-depth analysis of the Owase *Mujin-kô*.

contributing shareholder would receive his equivalent investment into the *mujin-kô* as long as he continued to contribute over the full 43 months. All things, however, were not kept equal, and there were specific reasons for this.

The central problem for the village members in Owase was a matter of pot recipient selection. As mentioned above the two major variants for determining the selection process were the lottery structure and the bidding structure. As the lottery structure depended too heavily on chance in the determination of who received the pool at each meeting, the Owase *mujin-kô* could not put it to use. The *mujin-kô*, after all, was designed to provide immediate aid to the three debt ridden villages of Osone, Hayata, and Noji. Thus, a bidding structure of selection was used instead.

The bidding structure allowed those who were in the greatest need of aid an immediate means for securing the pool of *ryô*. As we saw above, the members of the Owase *mujin-kô* would bid against the known value of the pool by under-bidding its expected value. The difference between the anticipated amount and the actual amount given by the lowest bidder would be made up by the winner of the bid over the course of the *mujin-kô*'s run. Consequently, the members of the Owase *mujin-kô* were well aware that the money used to fuel the *mujin-kô* was not equivalent in value from one member to the next. Value was specific to the production potentials of and resources available to each member's village. Those that had the greatest resources available to them had the leverage to wait out the bidding structure until demand for the pool was reduced to zero. They could then avoid being forced to underbid the value of the pool and consequently avoid paying high interest rates on the amount achieved while at the same time profiting off the interest paid by those members who bid earlier. Knowing this, the members of the Owase *mujin-kô* implemented

economic technologies to counter-act the potential exploitative nature of their mutual aid association. Instead of keeping the monthly contributions stable over the course of the 43 months, members of the association agreed to reduce the anticipated total contributions by 4 *ryô* per meeting. Where on the first month total contributions would equal 172 *ryô*<sup>128</sup> to be broken into four 43 *ryô* shares, the second month would see that total number reduced to 168 *ryô* broken into four 42 *ryô* shares. As we can see from this, by the time the *mujin-kô* reached its 43<sup>rd</sup> month, the total contributions would drop to zero.<sup>129</sup>

Aptly enough this structure of payments reflected an inversion of the more prevalent Osaka-style payment structure of a profit-oriented *mujin*. Where the Owase *mujin-kô* included a decrease in payments matched against a shrinking pot sum, the structure of payments and payouts more prevalent in Osaka showed a trend towards cheaper payments with an increasing pot size. An example of this type of Osaka-style *mujin-kô* could be found in the *Den'en Tsumitate mujin-kô* of the Kansai area that began its meetings in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the Ansei era, or 1856. Table 4 (see below) shows the relation of *kakezeni* (or premium payments) to pot values over the course of fifteen meetings. As we saw with all urban *mujin-kô* payment structures, the reasons for organizing payments in this manner were affective in nature. By affect I do not just mean emotion, though the affects and passions are related. In this I am borrowing the term affect from the work of Benedictus de Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze in which the term has more to do its Latin sense in which “affection” is a matter of modulation. In Spinoza bodies are ordered according to their potential to affect and be

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<sup>128</sup> Note that association expenses were subtracted from this total. The 172 *ryô* is a gross total.

<sup>129</sup> Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 107

affected<sup>130</sup> while a notion of suffering – what Deleuze calls “a force of suffering”<sup>131</sup> – is determined through the passive side of affection. Bodies experience the passions as suffering when they are made victim to an external modulation. They are affected. The reason for this suffering is a matter of adequation. If a body suffers under modulation in a passive manner, it is not adequate to itself, and thus finds its own being threatened. These notions of affection are useful in thinking the *mujin-kô* in that they provide us a means to think social relation in terms of collective potentialities rather than individual ones.

Though the main challenge for most profit-oriented *mujin-kô*, as it was for the mutual aid societies, was how to motivate people to join, a secondary problem was how to ensure members continued to return each meeting to contribute. Pot winners could be compelled through the establishment of contracts and, as Tetsuo Najita points out, a sense of ethical responsibility with regards to money,<sup>132</sup> but these could be conceived as external forces compelling members who already agreed to join. The point is why would members join in the first place. Why would they willing put themselves in passive relation to these contracts and rules. Furthermore, what of those who had not yet won over the course of the *mujin-kô*. What held them in place when there was nothing holding them to the association? The structure of payments as seen in the *Den'en tsumitate kô* worked to resolve this problem. It ensured interest in the *mujin-kô* did not wane, since a member's major contribution came at the first meeting, while the ratio of required contributions to possible returns decreased over

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<sup>130</sup> See Spinoza, "The Ethics."

<sup>131</sup> See Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. 221-222.

<sup>132</sup> See the chapters “Other Visions of Virtue,” and “Commonsense Knowledge” in Najita, *Ordinary Economies in Japan, a Historical Perspective, 1750-1950* (1-59) for a discussion of merchant ethics in the Tokugawa period.

time. Put simply, members were compelled to continue with the *mujin-kô* because the potential return on their total and immediate investment increased the more meetings they attended without achieving a win. In the *Den'en tsumitate kô* we can see that the initial recruiting of members was further reinforced with the promise of a large pot on the first meeting.

Were we to compare the above *mujin-kô* to the Owase *mujin-kô*, which saw a decrease in payouts coupled with a decrease in *kakezeni* contributions, we might begin to wonder what the appeal the Owase *mujin-kô* held for those participating in the association. After all, according to its structure, at some point the amount of accumulated payments for those who waited out the bidding wars on the initial pot winnings would begin to equal more than their total investment. In fact, those waiting out until the final days of the *mujin-kô* would be operating at a near perfect loss. Thus, from an affective point of view, it would seem that the structure of the Owase *mujin-kô* was organized in antagonism to what could be conceived of as the individual interests of the members involved. Members accepted subjection or passive affection to a system that did not guarantee a return for their investment. What then kept the members of the association together?

By implementing a decreasing pot as feature of the Owase *mujin-kô*, the members of the association eliminated the potential for wealthier members to take advantage of poorer members since those in greatest need would be able to secure the pool while at its highest value and would then see their future debts reduce gradually over the course of the association's existence. Meanwhile, the wealthier members were given no incentive to prey

Table 4. *Den'en tsumitate kô* table (3<sup>rd</sup> year of the Ansei era, 1856)<sup>133</sup>

Meeting	Pot value(kan, monme)	Takezeni (monme)
1	4.2	150
2	1.5	145
3	1.5	141.2
4	1.5	137.4
5	1.575	133.6
6	1.575	129.8
7	1.575	126
8	1.65	122.3
9	1.65	118.4
10	1.65	114.6
11	1.725	110.8
12	1.725	107
13	1.8	103.2
14	1.875	99.4
15	1.95	0

on the poorer members since the interest rates that normally resulted from bidding were neutralized by a shrinking pot value. In this manner, the Owase *mujin-kô* was not simply a means for moving equivalent sums in temporal segments, but involved an element of true aid

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<sup>133</sup>Reproduced from Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]."149. Mori uses this kô as prototype illustrating how the Osaka-style mujinkô was organized.

that could only be maintained if all members agreed as a whole to trust one another over the full course of the *mujin-kô*. Members did not subject themselves individually to a system of pure passive affection. The collective as a whole was the body across which the order of affection was being written. The glue that held this particular *mujin-kô* together, in contrast to the binding influence of self-interest that kept the urban *mujin-kô* in circulation, was collective interest.

At the same time that the Owase *mujin-kô* was designed to help those in need, it also provided some incentive for members to join. Unlike most *mujin-kô*, however, the incentive was aimed at the interests of the most needy, since those who expressed their need for aid through aggressive bidding were not punished with high interest rates. The gradual reduction ensured those who needed the resources the most received them at the earliest possible time while those who had an excess to spare could contribute to the overall health of the villages in the area without accumulating too great a resentment from having to support those in need. After all, each member determined through bidding when it most wanted to take a pot from the *mujin-kô*. As a consequence, the Owase *mujin-kô* managed to balance the ideals of mutual aid against the inequalities inherent to a money system. It could not do this if it took individual interest as its ground of social relation. Nor could it do this if it derived its sense of collective experience from the individual experiences of each member. It could only create this system of mutual aid if at the very heart of its practice was a sense of *apriori collectivism* not reducible to individual interest. In a word, the *mujin-kô* of the rural areas,

such as that seen in Owase, were the expression of a single principle of social relation put into constant and material practice: trust.<sup>134</sup>

What else could hold such a mutual aid association together except a sense of trust assumed amongst all members? This was not the kind of trust that could be solidified in contract negotiations, though even the Owase *mujin-kô* pot-winners were compelled to sign contracts that ensured their continued contributions through collateral guarantees. Neither was this the kind of trust that could be guaranteed through state policy or law. As Mori Kahei, Tetsuo Najita and Kobayashi Tadashi all agree, the mutual aid brand of *mujin-kô* did not operate in accord with the financial policies of the Tokugawa state. In fact, the *mujin-kô* were more often than not formed because of the failure of the state to protect peasants against nature's capricious temperament.<sup>135</sup> The mutual aid societies of the Tokugawa era operated outside of state regulation, and were the product of an "ordinary" or "people's" economy which itself grew from the ground up from a desire for economic independence amongst the agricultural communities that made up the greater part of the Tokugawa realm.

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<sup>134</sup> I think it important to emphasize that this trust is not a matter of emotional relation. It is an affect, and by affect I mean, following Spinoza's understanding of the term as given in his *Ethics*, the potential for bodies to affect and be affected. This is not a trust given between individuals who must wager their humanity against the vicissitudes of their own loneliness. The trust of apriori collectivism is a principle of social relation that manifests itself in practice and expresses this practice in collective, not individuated form. It is not something that one yearns after or seeks out. It is important that we keep out any humanist configuration of our understanding of trust as this threatens to smuggle in a concept of the individual human whose feeling and emotions emerge from some mystical, individuated interiority. We should also avoid reading trust through the dichotomy separating concepts of *gemeinschaft* from *gesellschaft*, since both of these take the individual as atom of communal organization, and simply vary the means by which the individual implicates itself in communal organization. The point of apriori collectivism is that it promotes a logic of social relation that does not refer to the individual. The individual comes *aposteriori* to apriori collectivism, and trust is the expression of this collectivity before individuation. I explore this in more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>135</sup> Najita writes, "The persistent theme in this history is that the commoners refused in various ways to sink below the limits of human endurance and, instead, formed contract relationships that provided lines of self-governance that were not covered by formal politics. These lines are the netting that commoners used to save themselves from the Tokugawa system of taxation..." (Najita, *Ordinary Economies in Japan, a Historical Perspective, 1750-1950* 16).

Collectivities of trust thrived in the indeterminate spaces that the state could not reach. There was a trust that could only be experienced as a principle emergent from collectives held in specific temporal and spatial proximity to one another, because it was a trust born out of the immanent experience of contingencies that defined the character of each collectivity. The Owase *mujin-kô* could not have emerged anywhere else. Its very definition was formed based on the specific requirements of those involved at the time that these requirements emerged. Consequently, it, along with all other mutual aid *mujin-kô*, was organized according to a finite temporality that only moved to satisfy the requirements of all members according to the number of members involved and did not push its existence beyond this. After forty-three meetings, the *mujin-kô* disbanded. The trust implicit to its operation was not elastic enough to extend itself beyond this time and space, because it was a trust designed according to very specific limits and indeterminacies.

If we are to abide by the origin stories of the *mujin-kô* given by the likes of Mori Kahei, Kobayashi Tadashi, Nakada Kaoru, and numerous other economic historians, then the very condition of becoming for the *mujin* was determined through the offices of this trust. The *mujin-kô* were originally religious associations that developed thanks to the strong bond of trust that defined the temple collective. These *mujin-kô* were not marred by the scar of contracts, which ensured continued participation through collateral guarantees. These were unnecessary to a group united by religious conviction. Neither were members placed in opposition to one another to bid on the misfortune of others. The members of the religious *mujin* operated under the agreement that they were a collective first, and a collective which could not operate according to the interests or charity of any single member, but functioned under the participation of the whole to produce the excesses necessary to secure a unified

well-being. This *apriori collectivism* found its expression precisely in this practice that was the *mujin-kô* itself, not its form. The temple *mujin-kô* were organized primarily for two purposes: to pay for the sudden requirements for temple upkeep or renovation that could not be covered through the normal economic workings of the religious collective or to provide the excess of funds needed to send a member or several members on a pilgrimage to a distant temple or religious site. As this practice developed in the temples, it then proliferated amongst the villages to adhere to a variety of different needs and desires. Instead of associations aimed to support temple upkeep, the *mujin-kô* emerged as labor associations, and potluck groups. The Thatched Roof Associations (*kaya mujin*) were based on a rotating system of labor in which the members of a community would pool their resources and labor to fix the thatching of each member's home.<sup>136</sup> There was no question of compensation for work done. There was no need for an exchange of cash to ensure a balance of equivalencies between estranged members. There was simply the collective and its needs as a whole, and thanks to their proximity to one another, and to the specific resources available, they were fully aware of everyone else's needs. The community's needs were their own. A full cycle of this association came to its fulfillment when all members of the collective had their roofs thatched. The Rope Weaving Association (*jôsaku kô*) combined the labor of a community to produce rope that was changed into money. This money was then used as a pot to be distributed amongst members in *mujin-kô* fashion.<sup>137</sup> Alternatively, rice and wheat *mujin-kô* were formed based on an exchange of staple foods that could be used either to provide needed sustenance to group members in times of famine or drought, or to pay tribute

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<sup>136</sup> Mori, "Mujin Kinyûshi Ron [the Economic History of the Mujin]." 122

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 126

payments that could not be covered through individual crop yields. In all of the above cases, the collective efforts of the association were seen to provide excesses not possible if each individual member was left to their own devices. The apriori collectivism of a *mujin* based on an unspoken, but necessary principle of mutual trust would always provide gains exceeding those that could be calculated through a sum of its parts.

For the historian of the *mujin-kô*, however, this principle of trust poses a paradox. Trust left no trace of its ideal form, because its ideal form was not a form at all. The trust of mutual aid could only be achieved in the practice that was the *mujin* itself. As intensive and immanent to the acts that gave it expression, this kind of trust then evades inscription. Contracts, legislation, economic records, meeting minutes, all the historical records that make the *mujin-kô* thinkable to historical narrative, are the sights of a betrayal of its essence. After all, what is a law except that which must exist when the substance of a relationship is not guaranteed? When a fundamental trust amongst the members of a collective is absent? What is a contract except the record left behind consequent to the establishment of a relation based on a perspective of individual and not collective interests? Indeed, what is the statement that formed the trace of these contracts but itself the trace of an absence marking the space between people? We speak, we write, we record, only because there is no guarantee that we will be heard.

Trust, however, does not operate according to this logic of the statement, the contract, the law. It is that which fills the spaces and times when no statement, law, or contract is needed. More than this, trust, from the perspective of apriori collectivism, practices an ideal whose horizon of possibility sits upon a world in which these other elements become unthinkable. Where the contract and its market made trust unthinkable, or at the very least

unnecessary in modern social relations, so does trust and its reciprocity hold open the potential for a world in which the statement's inherent terror – the fundamental terror of not being heard, of being excluded from a socius or collective – is finally averted.

Mutual aid, and the *mujin-kô* that was its expression in material terms, is a practice with no form, because all aspects of its form hold within it the trace of this terror: that no one will come when the call for aid is voiced. As a form removed from its origins within the particularities of collective practices that resisted temporal and spatial extension – the affective order of a trusting relationship cannot move across transcendent lines; it can only be immanent to its conditions of being – the *mujin-kô* could be reformed, manipulated to operate in exact opposition to its collective nature. The apriori collectivism of mutual aid was shattered by the cry of the profit-motivated merchant, and estrangement rushed in to fill the spaces to speak a new axiom that would mobilize the rush towards modernization: that the truth of the merchant was the abiding truth of all existence. We are inherently alone, he says. We live alone, we die alone. We have only ourselves and our own interests. His voice scars existence, and then makes of existence this scar. And the delicate whisper of trust that created the whole that was always greater than its parts, is drowned out by this merchant's voice whose echo would be later found in the creak of the spinning-jenny, in the roar of factory kilns, and in the blare of the train whistle.

*Chapter 4.*

The Historical Ontology  
of the Tokugawa State

**I. Being as Disagreement**

**1. Historical Paradox**

Up to now I have made some headway into thinking relations between mutual aid, life insurance, and the *mujin-kô*. I have tried to provide sufficient cause to link the *mujin-kô* to a concept I have termed *apriori collectivism*, and have in turn given some explanation as to the nature of relations linking the *mujin-kô* and its brand of mutual aid to the rise of capitalist modernity. In spite of all of this work, I have yet to establish any necessary connections that would ground my analysis of life insurance and the *mujin-kô* at an ontological level. If I am to argue that capitalist modernity implements its own form of state being that is ontologically distinct from the feudal state of the Tokugawa era, then it would seem to follow that this transformation must be based at its very core on necessary connections, and not merely analogous ones. Which is to say, by showing the ideological limits of historical statements concerning the *mujin-kô* and its ties to capitalism and life insurance, I have provided enough to establish an argument that can mobilize an ideological critique of the history of life insurance and the rise of a particular brand of life-concept, but I

have yet to provide anything to guarantee that my statements are anything but ruminations on the ontic, and not ontological nature of a particular brand of market-based society.

The conundrum at the heart of being makes itself apparent in history once we attempt to account for the paradoxes in the historiographical processes that were pointed out in the previous chapter. The invented nature of modern traditions thus provides for us not just a space of conundrum, but a starting point for understanding historiography's relevance for the auto-critique of modern social relations. Before we pursue this, however, we need to distinguish the two faces of history: the side facing being's multiplicity, which can never be accessed, but is forever expressed, and the side state of being in which the multiplicity of being is given distinct expression. In the former case, history provides the potential to speak the universality of being by giving voice to moments that strike a resonance with something more than the concrete distinctions of things and their place. This "universal" history, contrary to its definition given from the side of subjectivity, is contingent and capricious. It flashes in ruptures and breaks that shake state being from its hold over all its manifestations, and leaves us disoriented as we search for a new means to reintroduce ourselves into a more stable state of being. Universal history reminds us constantly that history is in the making, not merely something lost to the past. It speaks itself in a voice immanent to its conditions, and is a constant force in the practice of historiography to unravel a given narrative, and by unraveling it returning it to force and meaning.

The history of state being on the other hand is the history with which we are most familiar. It organizes thought according to the rigors of the given social character and returns thought to the image of itself. The shaman writes his history in signs over the earth, and it is the earth that returns to him in mystical transformation. The despot organizes the order of his

paranoid power by inscribing his name over the expanse of time: his is a history of lineages, and the great deeds his forefathers enacted to ensure the legitimacy of his power. His single historical line of power returns the world back to him in a narrative of lineages. Meanwhile, modern man establishes a history of individuation. The despot is dispersed amongst the population so that each individual can be compelled to draw his own freed narrative line either to be left to dangle in death or be forced in to convergence over a grid of quantitative relations. Time and space become this quantifiable grid of history, and they return the history of sovereign individuality back to each isolated self.

These two histories of being do not emerge in isolation, but are always necessarily mutually inclusive. What is the history of the shaman's mysticism, if there is nothing to rend the earth apart and assault his being with the force of that rending? What would the despot be without his paranoiac concern for those zones of indetermination he knows are not encompassed by his history of lineages? How would modern history promote itself if each date, each fact, and each text was not also the site of a history of counter-facts, alternative periodicities, and counter-arguments? History must always speak the voice of disagreement, because of its intimate concern over the nature of being itself. At the same time, being must always be a matter for the history books, because the relation of state to multiple being can only always be made expressive through the historicity of their relation.

Modern social relations provide a unique convergence of historical powers to make these relations thinkable, precisely because of the efforts in modern thought to conceal its historicity, and the ontological implications this historicity has for all of thought. Unlike the periods that came before, the modern era provides the space of auto-critique precisely

because of its attempts to make state being the only being thinkable to social relation. The modern period is the only period that wished for its own end of history.

## 2. The Paradox of Value in the Tokugawa Era

Before I discuss in more detail what the above ruminations on state and multiple being have to do with life insurance in the Meiji era, I think it necessary to begin in the Tokugawa era to bring to light the paradoxes that will help us understand the nature of reforms to being that Meiji modernization involved. In particular I would like to focus in on a single paradox: the paradox of unity and the nation under feudal rule. To get a sense of this paradox, we must first develop a somewhat broad sense of some trends in Tokugawa scholarship. In particular, it only seems appropriate I deal with those trends that use material on the latter half of this era to come to a determination as to the nature of the change that was heralded in with the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate, if in fact this can be characterized as a change. In the context of work done by Japanese scholars, we can begin with the battle over history to determine the nature of this change with the debates engaged between two groups known as the *Rônô-ha* school of Marxist scholarship and the *Kôza-ha* group. This debate is central enough to discussions of Tokugawa historiography that Harry Harootunian opens his work on the intellectual history of nationalist discourse in the latter years of the Tokugawa, *Towards Restoration*, with a summary of the opposing position of the two groups. He writes,

In the prewar debate over the nature of Japanese capitalism, historians tried to answer the question whether the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was a revolutionary event. Among the central combatants, the so-called Lecture Group (*kôza-ha*) saw nothing particularly revolutionary about the Restoration whereas the Labor-Agriculture Faction (*rônô-ha*) saw in it the beginning of a bourgeois democratic revolution...

both groups, as the voluminous proceedings of the debate reveal, plundered the Tokugawa period for material and evidence to support their views...<sup>138</sup>

This debate amongst Marxist historians was not the only attempt by scholars to appropriate the history of the Tokugawa era to make claims over the nature of Japan's development into a modern capitalist nation. It did, however, lay the ground for the proliferation of debates for the decades that followed. Mary Louise Nagata provides a more extensive overview of these trends in the preface of her work on labor contracts in the Tokugawa period.<sup>139</sup> She, like Harootunian, begins with the debates between *rônô-ha* and *kôza-ha* historians, focusing in on the exchanges between Tsuchiya Takao and Hattori Shisô over the degree to which non-feudal elements existed in the Tokugawa era. This debate came to a head in the mid 1920s when the two historians focused their arguments on issues concerning the presence of manufacturers in what is known as the "Manufacturer's debate."<sup>140</sup> This debate was then carried over into the post-war era. In the years following Japan's loss to the Allied powers, historians came to a general agreement "that Tokugawa society was feudal, but their question now was whether it was *truly* feudal, or a transitional stage to capitalism."<sup>141</sup> Nagata goes on to narrate the introduction of modernization theory into these debates in the 1960s as an attempt to impose positive interpretations of feudal and capitalist development in contrast to the more critical writings of the prewar Marxists. In the 1970s commercial developments in

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<sup>138</sup> From "Preface" in Harry D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration : The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). xxv.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Louise Nagata, *Labor Contracts and Labor Relations in Early Modern Central Japan, Changing Labour Relations in Asia*. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.3. For the two sides of this debate see Shisô Hattori, *Hattori Shisô Zenshû*, vol. IV (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1973), Takao Tsuchiya, *An Economic History of Japan*, trans. Niell Skene Smith (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1977).

<sup>141</sup> Nagata, *Labor Contracts and Labor Relations in Early Modern Central Japan*. 3. Italics in original.

the Tokugawa era became a point of focus, as monograph studies on “the Mitsui businesses, the Omi merchants, and the Kikkoman soy sauce breweries, attracted attention.”<sup>142</sup> In the 1980’s the notion of proto-industrialization as developed by Franklin Mendels in 1972<sup>143</sup> was taken up by Tokugawa historians to characterize the presence of non-feudal elements. Meanwhile, Japan’s sudden economic rise amongst the world powers gave historians the chauvinistic impetus to break from use of Western theories to explain Tokugawa relations, giving them the conviction to argue that the Tokugawa era “now called early modern, should stand on its own.”<sup>144</sup> Thus the term “feudal” was eschewed by historian Iwahashi Masaru,<sup>145</sup> while Hayami Akira appropriated Western terminology to give the Edo period a distinctly Japanese essence by arguing for “an ‘Industrious Revolution’ as a counterbalance for the Industrial Revolution...during the Tokugawa period.”<sup>146</sup> Nagata ends her survey of these debates concerning the nature of the Tokugawa era in making the apt observation that,

In short, the historiography of Tokugawa Japan, particularly with regard to economic and political development, was long characterized by comparisons to models derived from European history. The models changed and developed over time and the fit, when applied to Tokugawa Japan, has never been a comfortable one. In recent years, a new trend has been to allow Tokugawa history to stand on its own merits rather than insist upon judging it by outside models. The historiography of Tokugawa Japan shows how easily interpretation is influenced by contemporary politics. At the same

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 5. Nagata provides the following sources for this trend in scholarship on the Edo period: Mark W. Fruin, *Kikkoman: Company, Clan and Community*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Yasuoka Shigeaki, *Mitsui zaibatsu shi*, (Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1985); Watanabe Morimichi, *mi shi nin*, (Tokyo: Kyōikusha, 1986); Ogura Eiichirō, *mi shi nin no keiei*, (Kyoto: Sanburaito Shuppan, 1988).

<sup>143</sup> Franklin Mendels, "Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrialization Process," *Journal of Economic History* 32, no. 1 (1972). 241-261.

<sup>144</sup> Nagata, *Labor Contracts and Labor Relations in Early Modern Central Japan*. 6.

<sup>145</sup> In Iwahashi Masaru, “Tokugawa keizai no seidoteki wakugumi,” Hayami Akira and Miyamoto Matao (eds), *Keizai shakai no seiritsu, 17–18 seiki*, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988/1992), 85–128.

<sup>146</sup> Nagata, *Labor Contracts and Labor Relations in Early Modern Central Japan*., 6.

time, this historiography also testifies to the relevance Tokugawa society had and continues to have for modern Japan.<sup>147</sup>

Nagata's criticism towards the use of Western models to characterize the Tokugawa era, and her emphasis on allowing the Tokugawa to stand on its own does not take into consideration what would seem to be fundamentally limiting assumptions on the work of this era. Despite her concern over the selection of a proper methodology by which to characterize the Tokugawa era's relevance to the modernization of Japan, she, along with the scholars she cites, seems unwilling to let go of a particular paradox this concern has them uphold: that modernization and the very production of a *modern* historiographical sensibility was not present at the time of the Tokugawa's reign over the Japanese archipelago. Without an acknowledgment of this fact at the level of historiographical practice, the field of Tokugawa studies seems forever destined to fluctuate back and forth between the two poles of a teleologically driven narrative: the Tokugawa was already modern, the Tokugawa was not yet modern.

As much as I am willing to acknowledge these are important questions – as mentioned in previous chapters, my task is a different one: to find a means to find balance in the paradoxical space that requires we adhere to the needs of the present while simultaneously giving ourselves over to the material being of that which is not our time. As mentioned above, this makes the practice of history a practice based on empirical matters that touch on questions of being itself. Yet, if at the heart of being we find its historicity, and if we accept that this historicity is not determined through a unity of forms, but through fundamental differences, then what would it mean to write a history that located itself at the

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 7.

point where the universal multiplicity of being and its particular expressions found articulation? Would it not be to find difference in the past, rather than the past's consistency or contiguity with the present? This is not to state that the historians mentioned above do not attempt to manage this space in their own way. History cannot but be a matter of expression and as such is always managing the universal and particular, but I would ask how the image of the Tokugawa era would change were a little more of its temporal alterity allowed to flavor our characterizations of the past.

In the last few decades, there have been a few historians that have taken seriously the presence of multiplicity at the heart of their historical projects on this era, not the least of which have been the above-mentioned Harry Harootunian, in his preface to his 1970 work *Towards Restoration*, as well as kokugaku scholar Susan Burns in her work *Before the Nation*.<sup>148</sup> In the former, Harootunian revisits his work on Edo era nativist learning and its influence on the intellectual legacy leading up to the Meiji Ishin twenty years later to add a supplementary preface acknowledging the limitations of his original work. These acknowledgments reflect the changes in historiographical practices brought about by Michel Foucault's introduction of notions discourse, and difference into the field of history, along with Louis Althusser's work on contradiction and overdetermination which, combined, compel Harootunian to admit:

Yet what I failed to see when I wrote the book is that the constitution of this spatial terrain was not simply the product of loyalist activities. Rather, it was created by several simultaneous discourses representing different social audiences, whose immediate concerns frequently "fuse" into what Louis Althusser described as a

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<sup>148</sup> Susan L. Burns, *Before the Nation : Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan, Asia-Pacific* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

“ruptural unity.” Together, the several discourses signified the overdetermined representation of a vast social and public space.<sup>149</sup>

This acknowledgment allows him to deepen the differences separating the various discursive practices that determined the space from which the Meiji ishin would emerge, and downplay the sense of consistency joining those forces that propelled Tokugawa state power towards its dissolution. It is not in my interest to go into the details of Harootunian’s compelling arguments in his preface or in the work itself, but rather I want to draw out one interesting line of thought that emerges in his return to *Towards Restoration*. Harootunian does not mobilize discursive difference merely to acknowledge a small oversight in his work, but rather pushes this oversight further to re-articulate an altogether new understanding of the space of discourse that was the topic of his 1970 work. Harootunian introduces a consideration of difference into this space and suddenly the implications of the work to follow are transformed as the question of consistency amongst communities and voices under Tokugawa rule which is problematized in the work itself, is given real paradoxical expression. The loyalist voices of the *sonno jōi* movement written in contrast to the Mito school nativists influencing the restoration of the Emperor in the mid-nineteenth century are suddenly placed within the context of a true clamor of collective expression that made up the historical space of the restoration. As Harootunian writes,

This new space was now occupied by differing voices claiming the right to speak on, participate in, and even act on issues affecting the lives of groups of people about whom official discourse had remained silent by designating them, according to Aizawa Seishisai, simply those who “do not know but must obey.” Here, the terms of legitimation shifted from cosmic and natural principles to human agency,

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<sup>149</sup> Harootunian, *Toward Restoration : The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan*. xvi.

performance, and above all else, the necessity of production derived from the practice of daily life.<sup>150</sup>

Once difference is allowed to enter into the history of this key moment at the end of the Tokugawa shogunate's rule, suddenly a question is highlighted in the play of differences. What is the history of this collective buried under the standard histories of Tokugawa state rule?

When we shift our focus in Tokugawa history to concentrate on the space, not of rule, but of “those who do not know but must obey,” a weird inconsistency emerges in the very flesh of history. This inconsistency is repeated time and time again in the historical monographs of the Tokugawa era, but it is rarely given anything more than a cursory consideration because of the threat it poses for the very practice of historical writing itself. The inconsistency is repeated across the field by such diverse historians as Stefan Tanaka, Harry Harootunian, Thomas C. Smith, Takashi Fujitani, Toyama Shigeki, Marius Jansen, Harold Bolitho, etc. It is a deceptively simple inconsistency that often is summarized in a sentence or two. Uchida Ginzô was possibly one of the first to draw attention to this inconsistency when he “emphasized Japan’s *fragmentation* into some 260 domains, each under the control of a *daimyo*.”<sup>151</sup> Marius Jansen acknowledges this inconsistency in his introduction to the third volume of *The Cambridge History of Japan* when he remarks, “the domains were substantially autonomous in internal administration; each had its own army, its own administrative system, and its own capital city... the lords and their domains were not taxed by the shogun, who, as *primus inter pares*, was restricted to the revenue of his own

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. xvii – xviii

<sup>151</sup> Nagata, *Labor Contracts and Labor Relations in Early Modern Central Japan*. 3. Italics are mine.

holdings.”<sup>152</sup> Harold Bolitho in the same volume would reinforce this image of fragmented Tokugawa political space in his essay on the Tempô crisis in order, not to narrate the gradual unification of political power under the Tokugawa Bakufu, but to accentuate its gradual disintegration. He writes,

These daimyo (or their bureaucracies) governed their own domains, collected their own taxes, and maintained their own armies. As vassals of the shogun, they were obliged to give him whatever assistance he might require, no matter what the cost to themselves, and so should they prove negligent or miscreant, their lands and rank were to be forfeited. At least, this was how it worked in theory. By the Tempô era, however, two hundred years of inactivity had seen the authority of the shogun and his government decline and the de facto independence of the daimyo grow.<sup>153</sup>

Meanwhile, Takashi Fujitani provides the most compelling summary of the differences plaguing Tokugawa rule in the introduction to his work *Splendid Monarchy* when he writes,

During the Tokugawa period, the official discourse on ruling stressed that both society and polity were to be maintained by the accentuation of social, cultural, and even to some extent political differences, not by an ideology of social, cultural, and political sameness. Society was stratified into functionally interdependent but sharply distinctive horizontal estates or statuses – primarily samurai, peasants, artisans, and merchants. The duty of the ruling elite, the samurai, was to see that rigid status distinctions were maintained so that the organically related parts of the body politic could function harmoniously... the political order was institutionally separated into largely autonomous domains, or *han*.<sup>154</sup>

A consideration of this fundamental difference at the heart of Tokugawa rule must give us pause. If each *han* was given its own sovereign right to collect taxes, develop its own armies, and design their own form of governance, then is it possible to think of the “space” of Tokugawa rule as thinkable at all? The danger in assuming that space itself, and each

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<sup>152</sup> *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5: The 19th Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 1.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* 131.

<sup>154</sup> Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*.

space's adherent temporality and system of value creation under feudal rule, is somehow accessible to thought threatens the danger of presentism. By assuming we can jump from one domain to the next and write their differences according to a logic of similitude in which all similarities define themselves against the full body of the Shogunate's rule, we assume that the spatiotemporal operations of the era can be made contiguous with those of the modern era. Yet, as so many Meiji era historians have shown, not the least of which are Stefan Tanaka, E. H. Norman, and Niwa Kunio, space and time were the specific targets of so many of the Meiji state's policy reforms in the years following 1868. Thus a strange inconsistency infects the works of historians, all of whom agree to the fragmented nature of Tokugawa rule. Despite their consensus on the presence of these sovereign spaces, historically they are compelled to write these spaces of difference as though they could be inscribed onto a uniform body of knowledge. The most apparent effect of this attempt to tame difference by the instantiation of a uniform body of inscription is in the attempts to make *han* existence somehow consistent, instead of merely contiguous, with state being. Time and time again, village life or Bakufu dynamics are taken as microcosm illuminating the nature of existence and social relations as they were experienced by Tokugawa subjects. Counter to this trend, I would ask, why not acknowledge a fundamental difference that need not be disciplined into thinkability through categories of knowledge? Why not leave that difference to function as such and see how it effects the very possibilities for thinking the past?

Susan Burns allows for difference to sink in at the level of communal imaginaries in her work that attempts to “catch a glimpse of a moment before the nation.”<sup>155</sup> Instead of political spaces, Burns looks to the textual traces of these differences as she attempts to open up a space to think beyond national, or unified notions of communal organization. Eschewing any consistency tying *kokugaku* or nativist scholars either in spatial or intellectual determinations she writes,

The scholars I examine are not members of the same “school,” that is, disciples of the same teacher, nor does a single privileged site such as the “village” thematically link their work. Rather, they represent disparate forms of *kokugaku* that... were not directly implicated in the Bakumatsu movement to bring down the Tokugawa Bakufu.<sup>156</sup>

Thus, Burns manages to touch on this fundamental paradox at the heart of existence within the Tokugawa by putting into question the very category that is usually given as the condition of possibility for writing this period: the nation itself.

In this same manner, I think this paradox is essential to understanding the rise of life and life insurance in the Meiji era, because it is through the expurgation of these non-national, non-state spaces that were necessarily existent under feudal rule that allowed for a concept of life and its practice to be made possible under modern state rule. It was through the creation of a consistent body of political and economic inscription through modern state policies – the body that is read back into the Tokugawa era to force its consistency with Meiji modernity – that life was made thinkable. Only when we accept the impossibilities and

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<sup>155</sup> Burns, *Before the Nation : Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan*. 15.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* 11-12.

indeterminacies that were inherent to political stability under Tokugawa rule will we be able to access life's thinkability under a modern state of being.

### III. The Reform of Time and Space: Zones of Indetermination

#### 1. Accessing Impossibility

How do we access this impossible past? Ironically, it is in the very practice of drawing consistencies across different eras that efface all possible encounter with this fundamental difference. In the case of histories that write the Meiji and Japanese modernity as *telos* to the Tokugawa era we lose all site of the pockets of inconsistency and traces of the incommensurable across space and time, because our eyes become too focused on the fetish of textuality before us. The Meiji era, however, provides for us the perfect allegory to break us from our scopophilic habits. When we acknowledge the Meiji Ishin and the time that proceeded from it as an *event*, in the sense that it marked a time and space of ontological transformation within the collective existence of those organized under a particular rule, we are given the tools to make the traces of difference from the past speak their impossibilities. Past work on the Tokugawa and Meiji eras that attempted to derive consistency across their differing times, provides the very backdrop against which we can begin to outline the inconsistencies separating the two periods.

Simply to state that the *han* under Tokugawa rule were given the sovereign right of self rule is not enough to efface the full body of consistency blocking us from encountering the difference separating the Tokugawa from the Meiji era. Pointing out the temporal alterity of practices at the level of the village economies as I have done with my brief study of the *mujin-kô* in the previous chapter is not enough to solidify a sense of difference paradoxically

linking the one era to the other. To uncover this breach that occurred at the level of being, we would not only require proof that the very substance of space and time themselves were transformed during the instantiation of the new state, but that this new spatiotemporal order led to a new organization of bodies and practices operating within the realm of state being. Fortunately, with the history of the Meiji era, we have available to us ample proof that the Meiji state was engaged in establishing just this kind of fundamentally different state of bodies and practices. The traces of this can be found in several places, but I will focus only on a handful, as a full-scale account of all the transformations implemented by the Meiji state would take me well beyond the scope of this project. Instead, I will look at the establishment of the Land Tax Reform (*chiso kaisei*), and the instantiation of a centralized monetary system that were fundamental aspects of the Meiji state's attempts to modernize. Before I do so, however, I think one last return to some considerations from the last chapter will help highlight the degree to which change separated the two periods.

## **2. Proximal Mutual Aid**

In Chapter 3 we encountered some of the formal characteristics of the *mujin-kô* while at the same time discovering a fundamental problem in understanding the nature of these formal features. At the heart of the *mujin-kô* was a binding element of trust that was specific to the community that came together to put the mutual aid association into motion. Were we to focus solely on the characteristics of the associations themselves, or if we were to place them within the specificity of their individual contexts to derive a sense of their particular and irreducible differences we would write them into relativistic irrelevance. At the same time, were we to read their differences serially against a backdrop of some assumed consistent order given by Tokugawa rule, we threaten to efface the fundamental texture of this very

difference that defined the nature of trust that held the associations together. Thus we are caught in a double bind, but we must see this double bind as productive more than limiting. Instead of mobilizing this binary to produce some unitary form, however, I think it more useful to use it towards revealing some indeterminate areas in our knowledge of the associations.

If we begin to look carefully at some of the formal characteristics of the *mujin-kô* we begin to see consistency in the inconsistencies that emerge between the associations and their specific place amidst the *han* and *mura*, and their place in relation to the state order. As mentioned previously, with regards to the latter, the *mujin-kô* were predominantly an economic form that operated outside of state supervision, and sometimes worked to fill the economic spaces that the Tokugawa state itself could not fill. Thus, we can see already two different economies persisting within one state of rule. This is nothing new, of course. Even in a capitalist economy there are varying levels of economic order. Monopoly capital creates its own economy of distribution and production of relations that lift off the surface of the general economy while uneven development amongst economic registers establishes the condition of possibility for the accumulation of capital itself.<sup>157</sup> In every state order there will be differing levels of economic order. The question is what makes the non-state order of the *mujin-kô* specific to its age? To answer this, we need to push our consideration of its formal characteristics a little further.

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<sup>157</sup> Historian Ouchi Tsutomu provides one of the best considerations of the fundamentally distinct nature of monopoly capital as it functions to resolve some of the problems that emerge with the cycles of crisis that capital is predisposed to repeat. In Tsutomu Ouchi, *Nôgyô Kyôkô* [*Agricultural Crisis*] (Tokyo: Yûhikaku, 1954).

Not only did the *mujin-kô* operate parallel but separate to the state order, it also functioned according to differing systems of value. If we look back on the *mujin-kô* considered in the previous chapter we begin to notice the variety of exchange material used to measure the standard by which the pot would circulate. The labor-intensive associations such as the *jôsaku* or Rope Weaving *mujin* or the Thatched Roof *mujin* measured their values in available labor and resources. Meanwhile, the more currency-oriented *mujin* varied in the form of the currency itself. The *Wagagun Saraki Village mujin* circulated according to *kan* and *bun* as it measured collateral in bundles of rice, and wheat, supplemented by money given in *ishi*. The *Den'en Tsumitate-kô* measured its value in *monme* while associations like the Owase *Mujin-kô* would measure pot-values in *ryô*. We could make the assumption that these differing standards of value were merely divisions segmenting a stable given order of value that transcended all space and time of the era, but there is nothing that stands as proof that this is the case. In fact, all evidence seems to point otherwise. The basic measure of value established through the Shogunate was the rice standard. Tribute payments from all the differing *han* would come back to the daimyô in this material and perishable form whose value could not but fluctuate with the fluctuations in agricultural production. A poor crop yield in one *han* was not a guarantee that rice values would increase for a different *han*. Only if the two *han* were engaged in exchange across borders would the rice values of differing crops be made to move according to similar rhythms of value. Of course, the state itself functioned as one point of articulation at which all *han* economies found their expression of value in rice, but these expressions were further complicated by the presence of two economic figures: the *ryôgae* and the *hansatsu*.

Where the *ryôgae*, whose task was to mediate between the coin economies and the rice economy that cut through the various spaces of value creation, would seem to stand as testament to the fact that standards of value did in fact operate according to some stable and consistent measure, if we consider the profit motivation that is the condition of possibility for the very existence of the *ryôgae* we cannot but conclude that in fact their existence points to fundamental cracks separating the various systems of exchange under Tokugawa rule. The very fact that a mediator had to appear in order to manage the transfer from one form to another, and that a profit could be derived from this exchange provides proof that the economic body of feudal rule was not one given by consistency, but written according to vast incommensurable differences that could be made commensurable at cost. It is to Karl Marx's credit that he pays heed to the ambiguous space in which money and the exchange of commodities first take hold with mercantilism when he writes:

The exchange of commodities begins where communities have their boundaries, at their points of contact with other communities or with members of the latter. However, as soon as products have become commodities in the external relations of a community, they also, by reaction, become commodities in the internal life of the community. Their quantitative exchange-relation is at first determined purely by chance. They *become exchangeable* through the mutual desire of their owners to alienate them.<sup>158</sup>

There is little doubt that commodity relations existed in the Tokugawa era; yet, to state that this commodity economy had already produced the full body of capital inscription or even that it exists as the first sign of a development towards this full body of inscription would be to put the historical cart before the horse. Yes, we cannot deny the presence of what seem to be the roots of a capitalist economy, but we must also acknowledge these roots existed without any determination that they would become so. In order to understand the

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<sup>158</sup> Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. I*. 182. Italics are mine.

relevance of the ambiguous space that the money-changers or *ryôgae* held under feudal rule, we must do the impossible by both thinking the trajectory to which their practices would lead in the capitalist era, while at the same time thinking the complete absence of this history at the time of these practices. Thus if we return to the statement made by Marx above, our impossible stance allows us to begin to see the traces of indeterminate zones that defined practices at the boundaries between communities, between exchange relations that needed to be made into spaces of exchange in order for commensurabilities to emerge. If we simply look at these exchange practices at the boundaries as mere preface to the internalized objectification of labor that provides the motivating kernel of capital reproduction, then we completely efface the ambiguous space that determined practices at the time of their existence as boundaries to be overcome. Ambiguity becomes a mere instrument to move our thought to considerations of more consistent modes of being. We should rather stop to give these ambiguous spaces between communal boundaries their due, because they were an immediate and material presence that gave rise to the very economic practices we've been discussing up until this point. Ambiguity gave rise to indeterminate zones between exchange systems that made the *ryôgae* possible. When we take into consideration the simultaneous existence of the *hansatsu* at this time, and place it in relation to the *mujin-kô* practices, a broader picture of these zones of indetermination and their very real presence as temporal and spacial ambiguities persisting in the flesh of feudal rule begins to take shape. These zones of indetermination provide insight into the very ordering of bodies in the time and space of the Tokugawa era, and as such provide a means to understand the brand of state being that founded the production of subjectivities, and provided the conditions according to which power could flow over these subjects.

It is not the *hansatsu*'s actual value or circulation that is relevant to our consideration of the nature of existence under the Tokugawa shogunate, but rather the degree of sovereignty in terms of economic freedom that each domain under the Tokugawa shogunate was allowed. If nothing else, the *hansatsu* provide an indicator of a very simple, yet profound fact: that each *han* was given the freedom to produce its own standard of exchange. Each domain was given the reins in terms of the production of exchange relations. The relevance of this one fact is not given, however, through histories of the function and circulation of the *hansatsu*, nor is their relevance even found by a consideration of the existence of the *hansatsu* themselves. Rather, it is the trace of economic sovereignty at the heart of the *han* that is relevant and finds its best expression, not in the Tokugawa era, but in the first few years of the Meiji era when the Meiji state attempted to coordinate the market economy with state power by unifying the circulation of monies and currencies.

#### **IV. Making Meiji Modernity**

##### **1. The Takanawa Negotiations**

The Takanawa negotiations of 1869 provide a key moment in history to help us understand the kinds of problems faced by the Meiji state in its first few years of rule in creating a market centered economy that worked according to a single exchange standard: one universal equivalent. It also provides telling insight into the state's very real and material machinations in securing its sole right to legitimize this universal equivalent. Which is to say that money as it comes to take on its dominant and unitary form under a capitalist market economy is not the consequence of any natural evolution that sees the exchange of commodities turn into the circulation of coins that then are naturally cast aside for the one

great, and Godlike equivalent of money itself. The existence of the money form is merely the trace of the larger mechanism of state power that acts to secure the regulation of the circulation of money via the banks and legal mechanisms. The state must physically, and sometimes brutally establish the very body upon which the smooth circulation of money and exchange takes place.

Niwa Kunio provides a detailed account of the nature and development of the Takanawa negotiations when writing the bureaucratic history of the establishment of capitalist relations via the land tax reform laws of the Meiji era in his monumental work, *Chiso kaisei hô no kigen*.<sup>159</sup> We should not read any coincidence into the fact that Niwa begins this work with a chapter focused on the problem of counterfeit coins (*aku ganka*). In the first few pages of his chapter on the counterfeit coins, Niwa establishes the significance of the problem of counterfeiture noting that it did not merely result in the Meiji state's realization of its need to centralize control over the money system, it also changed the very course of the state's policies towards the *han* themselves, and spurred on the Meiji state's promotion of the *hanseki hôkan* or the return of land and people to the Emperor in 1869. This was the first step that would eventually lead to the complete eradication of the *han* system of land tenureship with the *haihan chiken* only a couple of years later.<sup>160</sup> Niwa provides a quote from the Ôkurashô's (Ministry of Finance) own *Outline on Meiji Currency*

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<sup>159</sup> Kunio Niwa, *Chiso Kaisei Hô No Kigen: Kaimei Kanryô No Keisei [Origins of the Land Tax Reform Law: Formation of an Enlightenment Bureaucracy]* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobô, 1995).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* 7-8.

published in 1884 (Meiji 18) to show how significant this problem of counterfeiture was for the Meiji rulers.

In its final days, the old Shogunate had exhausted its resources... In order to supplement its finances it turned to the large-scale production of substandard (*retsui*) two bit and one bit coins (*nibuban itchibuban*). A large number of the *han* then followed suit producing their own private currency. At the beginning of the Meiji Ishin the government was unable to prohibit the production of this private currency (*shizō*) by the *han*, and at this time the *han* of the Tohoku and other *han* began their own production of one and two bit silver coins and two bit gold coins on a large scale to cover military expenses. In this manner, the creation of counterfeit currency in the form of counterfeit two bit coins resulted in the widescale increase in circulation of these coins amongst the people to the extent that thirteen or fourteen different varieties of coins made it into the coffers of money-changers in Osaka, Kyoto, and Edo, as well as other cities. Seventy to eighty percent of these were counterfeits...<sup>161</sup>

A translation difficulty emerges when dealing with the very nature of these two-bit coins, since the term “counterfeit” as understood in English hides the real ambiguity around the nature of the coins at the time of their production. This is not a translation problem between two languages, but rather a problem of translating between historical contexts. The terms used by the Ministry of Finance in the decade following the problem are *retsui nibuban* (sub-standard two bit coins), *nisegane* (counterfeit coins) and *gangi kahei* (counterfeit currency). Niwa himself sticks to the term *ganka*. The character linking all these terms together is that of *nise* (贋), which translates simply as counterfeit or imitation. The use of this term by the Ministry of Finance over a decade later to indicate this problem hides a deeper problem that faced the Meiji state at the time of the Takanawa negotiations, and one that Niwa keenly uncovers. As Niwa shows, this particular issue of counterfeiture struck at

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 8-9.

the very core of the state's legitimacy to determine who had control over the reproduction of currency, and thus over the modern economy as a whole.

The counterfeit coins became a site over which a delicate play of power had to be managed by the man tasked with resolving the issue: the future head of the Ministry of Finance itself, Okuma Shigenobu. From January 7<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of 1869, then Lieutenant Governor of External Affairs (*gaikokukan fukuchiji*), Higashikuze Michitomi, was sent letter after letter from the diplomatic representatives of France, Italy, America, England, and Germany all demanding that the Meiji government deal with what to them seemed to be a breach of law with regards to the production of currency. Leading the charge of objections was British diplomat Sir Harry Smith Parkes. The British government, along with the rest of the foreign powers in Japan, would no longer tolerate the losses accumulating from having to deal with trade in counterfeit two-bit silver and gold coins. They demanded action be taken. The government, seeing its own interests at stake in this problem, did take action by sending a new representative to deal with the issue. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month as the letters continued to come, Okuma was sent to replace Higashikuze, and took on the dual role of representative in dealing with the issue of counterfeit coins while also acting as Lieutenant Governor of External Affairs. Two days later, he was further promoted to the role of treasurer.<sup>162</sup> As Okuma was soon to realize, this problem of counterfeiture was not a simple issue of a breach in law, though there was a legal basis according to which the foreign powers were basing their complaints. After all, the *kaizei yakusho* (revision of the 1858 treaties) signed between the foreign powers and the then failing Tokugawa Shogunate expressly stated that the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 14-15.

production of counterfeit currency would be outlawed. This stipulation in the treaty, however, turned out to be meaningless as both governments of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the leaders of the Meiji state took it upon themselves to reproduce currency en masse to deal with the costs of the battle for power that was then taking place. Thus this particular issue of counterfeit currency seemed to open up a parallax view between an economic world perceived by the foreign powers, and the economic picture assumed by Tokugawa and Meiji state rulers. How could the reproduction of coins be seen as counterfeit if the reproduction of currency was being handled and legitimized through the state? The problem, however, went deeper even than this. Taking their cue from the Tokugawa state, the *han* themselves began reproducing the coins to cover their own independent and “private” trade in military weapons with the foreign powers. The Tokugawa state had no means to curtail the practice of reproducing sub-standard gold and silver coins by the *han*, because it had already set a precedent in its governance over the *han* to allow each the freedom to produce its own currency. Put simply, the Tokugawa economy was not unified, but consisted of discrete zones of trade defined by their individual and sovereign right to produce their own currency. Thus, the stipulation against counterfeit production had no real meaning when applied to the state of economic practices that were in place under Tokugawa rule at the time of the signing of the *kaizei yakusho* of 1866, and could therefore be ignored. Since each *han* owned the legitimate right to control its own currency and currency production, there was no central figure of currency against which the charge of imitation could be waged.

The reason the Meiji state took interest in this problem was because, ironically enough, the interests in this matter of the foreign powers coincided with its own.<sup>163</sup> In order to solidify its hold over the various domains and quash whatever remnant ties the old order had to the Tokugawa regime, it had to print its own image of legitimacy over the land and people which it now governed. The Meiji powers soon discovered that a mere change in the figurehead of the nation was not enough. They would need to transform the very nature of economic existence through a reordering of what were considered the sovereign rights of each state under its power. The issue of counterfeiture became a key means to wrestle control away from the individual *han* and centralize its hold over state sovereignty through the economy. Okuma Shigenobu became aware of the opportunity the issue of counterfeiture opened up almost immediately.

Strangely enough, even the foreign powers seemed aware of the parallax view that emerged in relation to this issue of counterfeit currency, since their main objection to the production of sub-standard two bit coins was not that the imitations were deemed valueless once they were revealed as counterfeits. They were not angered that they were accumulating losses by having to throw out coins. On the contrary, they participated in the circulation of the coins fully aware of their nature, and only questioned whether the “Mikado” was aware of the situation, and whether the central government was going to take action against it.<sup>164</sup> That is, the complaint against this currency was organized around the manner in which it was devaluing the coins of the internal economy against the currency standards used outside the

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

country in the form of the Mexican dollar. Sir Harry Parkes expressed this concern in a letter to his wife in April of that same year.

... Lately, this problem of currency has made quite the stir. It is now common knowledge that Japanese currency has become debased. As you know, a hundred dollars should be the equivalent of three hundred *bu*, but these days it has fallen in value to four hundred *bu*. Trade has truly taken a beating, and has gone into hibernation.<sup>165</sup>

The problem of counterfeiture for the foreign powers was the loss that resulted from inflation that the circulation of the coins was creating within the country. This should indicate to us the degree to which this problem had spread amongst the domains: the number of counterfeit coins had grown to such a degree that they were driving down the overall value of coinage in trade. When foreign traders thus went to exchange their earnings off trade in the internal economy into the Mexican dollars that functioned as an international standard they found themselves operating at a loss due to the accelerating problem of inflation.

To provide a sense of the degree to which the counterfeit coins were being produced, Niwa offers first a chart (see Table 5 below) illustrating the amounts of two *bu* gold coins, one *bu* silver coins, and one *shū* silver coins that the government itself was producing in Tokyo and Osaka in breach of the Treaty of 1866 during the period spanning April, 1868 to February of 1869, still one month following the receipt of the first letter of complaint from the foreign powers, and only five months before the Takanawa Negotiations took place.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.18, as quoted in F. V. Dickins, *Paakusu Den, Nihon Chūzai No Hibi [the Biography of Sir Harry Parkes, His Days in Japan]*, trans. Takanashi Kenkichi (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1984).

Table 5. Counterfeit Coins Produced by the Government<sup>166</sup>

	Gold Two- bu coins	Silver One-Bu coins	Silver One- Shu coins	Totals
Tokyo	2,068,424.2	300,508.2	1,171,400.0	3,540,333.0
Osaka	1,741,219.0	766,325.0		2,507,544.0
Totals	3,809,643.2	1,066,833.3	1,171,400.0	6,047,877.0

Niwa then goes on to list the *han* involved in the “private” production of the counterfeit coins. These included the five *han* the government were willing to acknowledge as perpetrators during their negotiations with Sir Harry Parkes and the other foreign diplomats (Aizu, Sendai, Satsuma, Chikushi, and Aki), along with those that were not revealed: Akita, Nihonmatsu, Kaga, Kôriyama, Kurume, Sadohara, Kôchi (or Tosa), and Uwajima. A look at the placement of the *han* indicates they were strategically located in the Tohoku and Kyûshû areas in which the Boshin war of 1868 took place.<sup>167</sup> If this is not enough to indicate the widespread nature of the problem of counterfeit coins, one need only compare the estimated amounts of known coins in circulation against government bills. As Niwa writes,

In contrast to over 48 million ryô in bills put out by the Dajôkan (Grand Council of State), the amount of counterfeit coins in circulation that fell into foreign hands is said to have reached 30 million ryô.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Chart taken from Niwa, *Chiso Kaisei Hô No Kigen: Kaimei Kanryô No Keisei* [Origins of the Land Tax Reform Law: Formation of an Enlightenment Bureaucracy]. 9. All values are given in *ryô* equivalents.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 9

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 7

When confronted by the foreign powers with this pressing problem, Okuma's reaction was swift and decisive. He used the excuse of counterfeit production to reconfigure the entire state of the Japanese economy by planning to shift control of the production of money from the *han* to the central government. In order to do this, Okuma sent notices to the *han* on February 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1869 declaring the government would set up exchange offices in Tokyo, Yokohama, Kyoto, Osaka, Nagasaki, and Hyôgo at which anyone with money they thought was false could exchange it for government sanctioned currency.<sup>169</sup> This, from the stance of the foreign embassies, however, was not enough. When pressed by the foreign powers to harden its stance further on counterfeiters, the Meiji state sent a notice to the foreign embassies on the 30<sup>th</sup> of the same month declaring that it would punish those who did not abide by its policies. This notice, however, was sent strictly to appease the embassies, as an accompanying notice to the *han* leaders informing them of their punishable offences was not sent out. Okuma understood too well the balance of power he had to negotiate between the *han* leaders and the foreign powers, and was not prepared at the time to infuriate a large number of the *han* leaders with a summary dissolution of their economic rights. Instead, Okuma had to manage carefully the tension between internal peace and external strife, using the latter to bolster the former. As he wrote in his diary of this problem, he needed to “use the outside to gain command of the inside, to borrow the face of foreign strife to plan the reform of internal order.”<sup>170</sup> This balance of power was further complicated by the fact two of the major contributors to the production of counterfeit coins by the *han* were Satsuma and

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.24, as quoted in *Okuma Haku Sekijitsu Tan 2 [an Account of the Past by Count Okuma, Vol.2]*, (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1981).

Tosa, two of the four *han* whose leaders then constituted the Meiji leadership.<sup>171</sup> This conflict of interests inevitably lead to a showdown amongst individual members who had to split their allegiances between the Meiji state and their affiliate *han*. This created the strange situation in which members such as Okubo Toshimichi and Saigô Takamori, former Satsuma *han* leaders and Meiji state rulers, were forced to send complaints of counterfeiture against their own *han* interests.<sup>172</sup> The tension between their dual roles created segmentation within the Meiji state itself. This is best exemplified in the separate paths these two men took in dealing with their dual roles: Okubo decided to side with the state and became one of the main proponents in the modernization of Japan, while Saigô Takamori chose to hold to his allegiances to Satsuma, a decision that would eventually lead him to face Okubo on opposing sides of the Seinan war in 1877.

What I think is important we take from a consideration of the causes and effects of the Takanawa negotiations is a sense of economic differentiation that existed between the Tokugawa state (and the Meiji state in its early years) and the various *han* that fell under its rule. Of course, it would be going too far to state that each individual domain under the daimyo rule functioned in *complete* independence from the Shogunate. The Shogunate still held the rule of law, enforced the *sankin kôtai* system amongst the daimyo, and ensured the recruitment of corvee labor for the maintenance of its roads and state structures. At the same time, we need to acknowledge the existence of indeterminate zones that cut across the body

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<sup>171</sup> The Meiji leaders were also referred to as the *sa-tchô-to-bi* leaders, the Chinese characters of which indicated the names of the four *han* running the country after the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate: Sa-Satsuma, Chô- Chôshû, To-Tosa, and Bi- for Hishû (consisting of Hizen and Higo).

<sup>172</sup> Niwa, *Chiso Kaisei Hô No Kigen: Kaimei Kanryô No Keisei* [Origins of the Land Tax Reform Law: Formation of an Enlightenment Bureaucracy]. 62 – 76.

of Tokugawa power. These zones hid themselves in the very fabric of economic and political existence during the reign of the Tokugawa shogunate, but were suddenly made apparent when the Meiji state attempted to reorganize the political and economic constitution of the land and people under its new rule. These changes, such as the reorganization of the money system, which eventually was organized through the implementation of the national banking system, were not mere reforms to already existing structures; nor were these changes the product of a radical break with the material practices of the past. There is a danger in severing the practices of past eras too cleanly from those that recur in the eras to follow in effacing traces of the real inconsistencies that erupted at moments of transformation like the Meiji restoration. At the same time, we cannot reduce the nature of transformation to the actions of a few men. Rather they are the means according to which we can access the erasures and creations which are the stuff of transformation itself. The Meiji *ishin* was neither a reform nor a revolution. As the single issue of the production of counterfeit coins suggests, it was a moment of transformation whose fundamental change is made apparent through the trace left behind by the minuscule and material actions of men. The effect of the accumulation of their desires and compulsions, however, was not reducible to these actions, but became the practices of a state of being, a practice that would eventually lift off the face of action and begin reproducing itself as the modern state of Japan.

## **2. The Land Tax Reform**

If we look further into the social policies instituted by the Meiji government in these essential first few years following the return of the Emperor to his seat of power, we can see a similar trend to the one mentioned above occurring at all levels of Meiji rule. In particular, with the land tax reform, the dissolution of the *han*, and the creation of the family registry, all

indeterminate spaces were effaced, replaced with quantifiably reproducible equivalencies that could be measured then counted. Once the land, people, and economy under Meiji rule were made infinitely fungible, the extensive logics of life, and its labors could be inscribed into the bodies produced from the quantification of existence.

Kondô Tetsuo gives extensive detail on the obliteration of specificity of land cultivation with the introduction of the Meiji state's new land tax regulations in his 1967 work on the land tax reform, *Chiso kaisei no kenkyû*.<sup>173</sup> As with Niwa Kunio, Kondô treats the land tax reform as fundamental to the re-organization of power under Meiji rule, and locates it amidst a series of reforms that changed the very substance of economic and political structure for the state. Kondô, however, does not focus on the bureaucratic problems faced by the newly formed government, but instead pursues the contradictions faced by farmers who had to abide by the changes in policies inflicted by the Meiji oligarchy. Another government reform he closely links to the land tax reform is the dissolution of the feudal lords under the han system: the 1871 *Haihan chiken* [dissolution of the han, and establishment of the ken]. In this, the Meiji state was keen to accomplish two main objectives. As Kondô writes, “the main challenges for the land tax reform were: first, how to dissolve the *han* system in order to centralize power, and once this was done, how to dissolve the power of the individual feudal landholders and determine a means to centralize the tribute payments, or feudal land rent to be given to the central government.”<sup>174</sup> In focusing in on these two points, Kondo emphasizes the problem resultant from allowing the *han* sovereign rule under the Tokugawa

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<sup>173</sup> Tetsuo Kondô, *Chiso Kaisei No Kenkyû: Jinushi Sei to No Kanren Ni Tsuite* [a Study of the Land Tax Reform: Its Relation to the Tenant Landlord System] (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1967).

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 12.

shogunate, but does so only to indicate the government's own concern over this problem as is made apparent in such comments made in government documents as that written in July of 1870: "what is required is the establishment of a uniform system of levies for the whole nation."<sup>175</sup>

If we study this above statement in any detail in its original enunciation, we can see that two worlds seem linked together over the surface of its ambiguities. Whereas in English the concept of "the whole nation" implies an already given space of national sovereignty with no ambiguities separating the various spatial distinctions given by the sense of national cohesion,<sup>176</sup> the characters given in Japanese offer up a greater sense of the ambiguities linking space together. The "whole nation" in the 1870 passage is given by the term *zenkoku* (全国), which in contemporary Japanese implies the same sense of national cohesion that its English translation offers. During the Meiji era, however, the term of the second character, *kuni* (国), was inflected with a different sense as this was the character used to indicate both nation and one's home of original upbringing. Thus, its meaning did not naturally link to a national imaginary tied to the whole of Japan, but more likely indicated the individual

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>176</sup> Note, however, how in a nation such as the United States, this sense is constantly haunted by the very term of its own linguistic fragmentation. The US is often understood as exemplary of national sovereignty because of its successful history of breaking from the British commonwealth. This history, however, strangely effaces the broken sense of its original cohesion – it is after all the *United* States. This does not, however, make the US distinct from any other nation. Canada has its provinces, China and the United Kingdom provide complicated maps of counties, Kingdoms, principalities, and autonomous regions. What is distinct in this period of the Meiji era, was the degree of independence each state held in relation to a newly formed central government – one that wanted to efface all the ambiguities that the previous state had allowed to persist as necessary aspects of its rule.

sovereign spaces given under Tokugawa rule.<sup>177</sup> The nature of these spaces, the values produced in them (both literally in the sense of economic valuations as well as figuratively in the local cultural sense), and the bodies that emerged consequent to the production of collective unity, were not guaranteed by centralized cohesion. This provides a further ambiguity in reading the above quote, as the combination of the term *zenkoku* with *kin'itsu* (uniformity) threatens to absorb some of the meaning of the phrase “uniform levy system” to itself. In the Japanese, this entire phrase is written as “*zenkoku kin'itsu no fuka hō*” (全国均一の賦課法). Depending on how one takes the meaning of *zenkoku*, the term *kin'itsu* can be read to attach either to *zenkoku* (whole nation/all nations) or *fukahō* (levy system).<sup>178</sup> As a result, the sense of what needs to be unified bleeds in this statement to include both the states under Meiji rule as well as the levy system by which they will be brought together. That is to say, an inherent ambiguity emerges at the heart of the sense of what needs to be unified; an ambiguity that at the time did not need any resolution since the desire to centralize the levy system was at the same time a parallel desire to produce a unified nation. This was due to the position occupied by the Meiji state rulers who, as we saw with the Tosa and Satsuma leaders, while faced with determining where their allegiances held following the Takanawa

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<sup>177</sup> This is further complicated by the presence of the *kokugaku* scholars who attempted to appropriate the term of *kuni* to express the kind of national cohesion that would emerge once the Meiji state had completed its project of unifying all states under its central control. Thus the term was flexible in its designation fluctuating between its local use in designating a person's *ban* allegiances, while also being open to the creation of a larger national imaginary. It is most likely precisely because of this ambiguous sense that *kokugaku* scholarship from the Tokugawa era was so key to the development of a national ideology in the Meiji era. For scholarship on *kokugaku* there is a wealth of material in English including Burns, *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan*, Harry D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen, Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), J. Victor Koschmann, *The Mito Ideology: Discourse, Reform, and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), Peter Nosco, *Remembering Paradise: Nativism and Nostalgia in Eighteenth Century Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>178</sup> This ambiguity is further reinforced by the dual nature of the particle “no” (の) which can indicate both a possessive (“the nation's uniform levy system”) or a subject (“the nation in its uniformity [requires] a levy system”).

negotiations, fluctuated themselves between allegiances to the nation (*kuni*) they were trying to build and the state collectives (*kuni*) of their upbringing.

As indicated by the problem of counterfeiture given above, the main issue faced by the Meiji state was not one simply of taking over the already unified territory that was to become modern Japan, but rather it was to create this unity out of a loosely held together realm of states through the establishment of a central government. From a historian's perspective this does not seem to be too contentious a statement, and does not stray too far away from most histories of the early modern and modern history of Japan or indeed from any history of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The question that seems often overlooked by histories that attempt to find consistency between the two eras is the question of how deeply the differences between sovereign states reached, and how different then was the production of bodies of practice given by each state. The land tax reform provides proof that these differences reached as deep as the given sense of space organizing the location of bodies and their connection to the wider national space of governance. In a standard history, the differences between states might only be seen as variants playing across what is otherwise a territory of assumed consistency. As we are beginning to see, this is not the case, as the very means of measuring value and distributing that value within states was not consistent across *han*, but had to be made consistent through the establishment of a national monetary system. Meanwhile, bodies that were originally located in a more local structure of sovereign power needed to rearrange their practices to reproduce a uniform collective body that transcended old lines of division. This enforced an abstraction that created its own abstractions at the very heart of the agricultural communities it was meant to organize. Kondô provides extensive details concerning the contradictions these abstractions in land reform created.

The connection between land, power, and money begin to take shape as we consider the reasons for which the Meiji state implemented its changes. As though the vast set of policies implemented by the Meiji rulers were each part of a larger puzzle, we can begin to see how each piece has its designated place in the larger scheme of necessary connections. The land tax reform, as Kondô and Niwa both argue, cannot make sense without the implementation of a centralized money system. Where Niwa begins with the problem of counterfeiture, Kondo points us in the direction of two graduated reforms that helped the *han* leaders (daimyô) make the transition from rice stipends to money stipends. With Okuma Shigenobu gradually reforming the money system to deal with the issue of counterfeiting, the major step of which was with the symbolic and material return of the land and people to the Emperor from the daimyô with the *hanseki hôkan* of June, 1869, a series of reforms were implemented from this point to further re-organize power. As Kondo writes,

With the *hanseki hôkan* a dissolution of the coalition of feudal clan rule took place, and a large scale concentration of power could be pushed forward. Building on this, the central government chased out the old *han* system. If we trace this chronology, we see the following:

1869, June	The duties of han leaders are reordered ( <i>shomu henkaku</i> )
July	The bureaucracy is reordered ( <i>kansei no henkaku</i> )
December	A new system of retainer salaries is established ( <i>rokusei no seitei</i> )
1870, Sept.	A transformation of the <i>han</i> system is achieved <sup>179</sup>

As Kondô notes after outlining the above, the key policy that led up to the land tax reform was the establishment of a new system of stipends. Under this system, daimyô were no

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<sup>179</sup> Kondô, *Chiso Kaisei No Kenkyû: Jinushi Sei to No Kanren Ni Tsuite [a Study of the Land Tax Reform: Its Relation to the Tenant Landlord System]*. 13.

longer paid directly with rice payments (*rokumai*), but were instead given payment through stored rice (*rinmai*) all controlled through the central government. This, however, was only the first stage in the transfer of economic power from the daimyô to the Meiji oligarchy. As Kondo notes,

It was impossible to turn this feudal class, which itself was organized according to a feudal form of land ownership, into property owning landlords through half measures. As long as the old shogunal system that saw a feudal class maintain control of production and land rent through its concentration around the castles operated as the main principle (*gensoku*), the stipend system would also continue to operate as a general rule (*gensoku*), and so here was an aspect of social relations that made it very difficult to change from a feudal land system to a form of property landownership. However, by enforcing a change to the shogunal system which saw the daimyô in direct control of their land and rent (*jikata chigyôsei*), a basis by which a real transformation could occur was set in place. It could be said that the establishment of the new salary system (*rokusei no seitei*) provided just this kind of opportunity.<sup>180</sup>

By centralizing control over the stipends, and creating an abstraction at the level of the very form of these payments by making the daimyô accept bills (*rokken*) instead of actual rice, the Meiji rulers enforced a distortion into the stipends that over time would allow them to tear the whole *han* system apart. This laid the ground for shifting the rice system over to a currency system in order to stabilize payments. Following on the declaration within government that “what is needed is a uniform levy system for the whole nation” in 1870, the *Dajôkan* (The Council of State) implemented two policies. First, in January of 1871, it declared that all taxation on the *han* would be equalized. This was soon followed by a further declaration that all tribute payments formerly made via rice would be made in currency. Thus, the first steps towards monetizing the taxation system were put in place. With the monetary system simultaneously being taken over by the Meiji government, this

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

monetization of payments in the agricultural sector would ensure the government gained control over all territories.

With the dissolution of the *han* through the *haihan chiken* on July 14<sup>th</sup> of 1871, the Meiji government was able to push aside a major obstruction to its bid for power. Tributes were now transformed into taxes paid to the government, and the daimyô were no longer the sovereign rulers over their individual states. The Meiji government took over economic control of the various states, and began erasing all indeterminate zones dividing economic space with a uniform monetary system, and a uniform mode of taxation through the establishment of property relations. Over the next year, it would cancel the rice bill payments system, establish a bill payment system by which to pay taxes, pass ruling to allow for the cultivation of land by individual landowners, and repeal the law that prohibited the selling of land. Thus, if we focus on the Meiji government's need to disband the sovereign powers of the various *han* in order to re-organize control over all space and bodies under its rule, the simultaneous reforms to both land and tax find their point of intersection.

At this point it may be useful to ask what tied together the various shifts in power and organization in this accelerated attempt by the Meiji rulers to modernize their realm of rule. What was the dominant mode of being that allowed the Meiji state to maintain consistency and longevity in its rule? The answer, in this case, lies in the question. What distinguished Meiji from Tokugawa rule was the establishment of consistency itself in space and time. Where the Tokugawa state differs, as is revealed in the real battles the Meiji state waged to transfer power to itself, was not in its longevity – even now, the history of modern Japan has not overtaken the Tokugawa's record of two hundred and fifty years of “peaceful” rule – but in its consistency. The Meiji state was not content to allow the daimyô sovereign control

over each state in exchange for a paltry return in Shogunal fealty. In order to compete with the economies external to its rule, it knew it had to make the entire space and time of its realm accessible to state power. It could only do so by making all of space and time consistent through an act that dispersed all former relations so that a new form of organizational logic could begin its operation.<sup>181</sup> At the heart of this consistency, however, was not a center, but rather a particular logic: one of extension.

I think I should note at this point that it is a mistake to put too much emphasis on notions of centralization in characterizing the Meiji state's attempt to maintain power. Though it did have to centralize the production of money momentarily through the establishment of a national banking system, this was only a temporary measure to set the market economy on its feet so that the economy could operate independently of direct government involvement. Thus, it should also seem fundamentally contradictory to think a state run according to free market principles would operate according to a centralized structure, since state and market operated as dual forces organizing all of relation. As we are beginning to see, the rise of the Meiji state is not a process of centralization aimed at the greedy accumulation of power by the government, but rather a nuanced dance in shifting the balance of power to ensure the security and stability of government. By establishing consistency in the organization of economic space without any trace of indeterminacy amidst this space, the Meiji state created an abstract spatiotemporal realm across which it could extend its reach without encountering the kinds of obstructions or resistances that a real

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<sup>181</sup> One could go along with Deleuze and Guattari to state that , there needed to be an act to deterritorialize the old feudal codes and practices in order for the reterritorialization of relations under a market system. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol 1.*

difference in valuation or operation would have supplied. Once the state established a consistent space of relations over its entire realm of rule, it would no longer need to hold all power at the center. Quite to the contrary, once it established this consistent field of social relation built on a logic of permanent extension, it could pass on all sovereign rights to the market and the populace. The market itself becomes the symbol of this abdication of control.

We should not be fooled, however, in granting any natural status to the reality of extension and consistency that was implemented by the Meiji state. There was no universal basis upon which consistency was built. Only the maintenance of state power acted as the guarantee for all consistency. A return to Kondô's analysis of the land tax reform shows us in detail the kinds of abstractions that this logic of extension enforced over the bodies of those more closely tied to the immanent relations of place and time.

For Kondô the land tax reform was based on four fundamental principles:

1. Land valuations were fixed according to calculations of yield.
2. The tax rate was fixed for all land at 3% of the given value of the land.
3. This tax rate did not change dependent upon seasonal yields.
4. With those owning more than 2,000,000 yen in taxable commodities, the tax rate was reduced to 1%.<sup>182</sup>

In order to align the taxation policies with these principles, the government was required to do a survey of all territories in order to determine the then given value of land. This would seem to establish a rational basis according to which land value was calculated, but as Kondo

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<sup>182</sup> Kondô, *Chiso Kaisei No Kenkyû: Jinushi Sei to No Kanren Ni Tsuite [a Study of the Land Tax Reform: Its Relation to the Tenant Landlord System]*. 18

notes, these valuations were set according to a given limit that directly served the needs of the Meiji state.

At this time, the government, in terms of its resources, had only the land tax to depend on. Moreover, in order to manage the *han* debts it had incurred (*hansai shobun*), establish a military structure, as well as manage the daimyô payments (*chitsuroku shobun*), and promote agriculture and industry, it could not afford to decrease any of its incoming earnings. Thus, the government strengthened its economic base during the establishment of the land tax reforms, and in its process of modernizing through the transformation of the old higher class feudal lords into property owners, it had first to ensure that its “goal not to decrease income from the old system” was met. Thus, the land tax reform laws were designed to realize this goal.<sup>183</sup>

In order to ensure these goals were met, all land was placed under a single rule of measure, and the results of the land survey were only used as abstract measures whose main purpose was to ensure stability of uniform rules. The Meiji state managed to maintain a stable income by establishing its calculation of land values based on several fixed, abstracted measures. Kondô focuses on four such measures: the treatment of all crops as single crop fields, the fixing of rice prices in the estimation of yields, the establishment of a 15% estimated overhead cost for fertilizers, and fixing assumed interest rates on owned and rented land. With the standardization of all these measures, the relationship between what the government assumed was the value and yield of the land became abstracted from the actual, varying productivities of specific fields.

In terms of the government’s establishment of a one-crop standard to measure yields on multi-crop fields, the estimated value of the land was unable to reflect the kinds of variations that would emerge dependent upon how variable crops performed over the seasons.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 19

Thus the actual value of yields was in constant contradiction with estimated yields of multiple crop fields.<sup>184</sup> In terms of rice prices, there was no fixed rule on what standard of measure was used to establish prices in the first years of the land tax. In 1874, the Meiji state resolved this by determining prices according to an average given by looking at the previous five years, but because there was such a variation of prices across markets that were victim to the flow and flux of actual growing conditions, the state was given the leeway to select which rice prices in which markets it could use for its own calculations. As Kondô notes, in response to the problem of a lack of standards to measure rice prices, the Ôkurashô on March 7<sup>th</sup> of 1874

... decided “the price of rice determined via survey will be calculated based on the average values of current prices for each given locale (*kakusho*) from the ten months before the reform is undertaken.” On May 5<sup>th</sup>, this “rule calculating average rice values” was set in place. However, on May 12<sup>th</sup>, in response to the decision given in a supplement to the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Reform Law to fix 5 years of land prices, on June 10<sup>th</sup> “the study of current prices [would] be given by the average over the last five years of market values for tribute payments transferred to currency”... On March 19<sup>th</sup> of 1875 this five-year period was established as the five years spanning 1870 to 1874, and this was made uniform for the whole nation.<sup>185</sup>

When the prefectures questioned the state as to which markets, and from what area of space were these five years of averages to be calculated, the Meiji state determined that “the establishment as to the level of jurisdiction [according to which rice prices were calculated] will be limited according to the lowest common price of rice.”<sup>186</sup> Kondo comments further stating,

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 22

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

Thus, a policy with regards to rice prices was established that was based on the principle of five-year averages from Meiji 3 to Meiji 7 for prices given in a single jurisdiction. This principle made it simple for the calculation and manipulation of the estimate in land tax for the prefectures at the same time that it provided an operation by which the land tax could be increased according to low local rice values that fell below the average rice price.<sup>187</sup>

Land values could be inflated through this manipulation of rice prices. The value of the land was determined through the value given by the amounts in tribute payments paid over the given five year period, but if the market value of the rice that determined yields on the land were kept to a sub-average level in the various prefectures, then the yields on the land could be inflated to provide the state with the highest possible return on its new land tax payments. Thus, differentiation across spaces in terms of the estimation of land and rice values was manipulated to reinforce the state's objective to maintain its income levels. Despite all the attempts to establish a more equitable system, the calculation of value was simply a pure abstraction. As though creating a Borgesian map that would replace the given realities that subsisted beneath its abstractions,<sup>188</sup> the Meiji state sent out its surveyors to establish a virtual map of unified space, only to unify that space through the manipulation of its inherent inconsistencies.

In terms of fertilizer, the fifteen percent estimate of fertilizer overhead costs that could be deducted by farmers from the overall yield left the cost of replacing tools for the cultivation of land out of all calculation. Furthermore, it did not take into account the differential in costs for land upkeep that resulted once the state took back the unclaimed land

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> This is the map given as example in the opening pages of Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). 1-2.

that was formerly shared as communal land by the surrounding farmers and whose resources were often used towards the care of commodity producing fields.<sup>189</sup> Lastly, the interest rates set for landholders and tenants had no rationale according to which it was set, and could only be accounted for through consideration of the Meiji states objective to maintain the income of the previous regime.<sup>190</sup> In all of the above cases, we can see how a logic of extension linking all space together as though it were a unified mass worked to abstract land and yield values such that the state could maintain a steady flow of income that was used to secure its hold over the population under its rule. A state that wanted to make its rule consistent over all land under its supervision could not but adhere to these kinds of abstractions, because it would have been impossible to maintain an accurate account of all the variations immanent to land, weather, and agricultural practices that blended together to give forth the fruits of agricultural labor. This, of course, was more manageable when each domain was allowed its own sovereign right of self-rule, but once all land was returned to the Emperor, all immanent relations defining land and yield were replaced by a transcendent tax rate, and imprecise measures. Land under the land tax reform was made a measurable and quantifiable product of state supervision, but the quantities produced from state determined measures became the constant reminder to the farmers cultivating the land of the inequities and inconsistencies that had to be quashed in order for the state abstractions to hold.

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<sup>189</sup> Kondô, *Chiso Kaisei No Kenkyû: Jinushi Sei to No Kanren Ni Tsuite [a Study of the Land Tax Reform: Its Relation to the Tenant Landlord System]*. 29. Also E.H. Norman mentions the effects of this reclamation of communal land in E.H. Norman, "The Agrarian Settlement and Its Consequences," in *Origins of the Modern Japanese State* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1975). 243-273.

<sup>190</sup> Kondô, *Chiso Kaisei No Kenkyû: Jinushi Sei to No Kanren Ni Tsuite [a Study of the Land Tax Reform: Its Relation to the Tenant Landlord System]*. 30-31.

## V. The Tokugawa State of Being

So far we have explored the details of two key moments in the transition from the feudal organization of social relations under the Tokugawa Shogunate to the modern system of governance under the Meiji state. In both cases, the Meiji state had to take material and deliberate action to smooth over space plagued by incommensurable differences in order to implement its own modern organization. In the case of the Meiji state's initial efforts to unify its monetary system under one form of money, we saw that the very impetus of this move arose from the disparities in economic production that divided what were formerly the *han*. Thanks to the right of each *han* to control its economy, the territory ruled by the Tokugawa Shogunate was less a national unity, than a mosaic of sovereign states held loosely together by feudal rule. In the case of the land tax reform, we saw how the Meiji state had to implement its own virtual definition of land and productivity in order to unify all space according to quantifiable standards of value measurement. Read backwards onto the Tokugawa era, the need to implement these standards indicates that such unified measures were lacking. What seems key in thinking these transitional moments between the two periods is the manner in which they reveal the very real and concrete indeterminacies that functioned as a necessary presence within the Shogunate's realm of governance. Indeterminacy in space, economy, and time was not an unwelcome after effect of contradictions or flaws in its system, but was a necessary presence that allowed the feudal system to function.

This necessary indeterminacy then becomes essential in thinking the presence of the *mujin-kô* and their proliferation during this era. Without an account of the level of sovereignty afforded each *han* in the production of its systems of value, and without

consideration of the substantial differences in social organization that were part and parcel to a world of bodies that were kept in more immanent relation to their space of occupation and the contingent factors of weather and land formation, the *mujin-kô* seem like mere aberrations floating untethered over the open historical space of the Edo period. If we are to take indeterminacy as a necessary element in the operation of social relations during the Tokugawa era, then the *mujin-kô* lose their contingent character and become the necessary expression of the play between indeterminacy and power. We are then provided with necessary reasons for the existence of such aspects of the *mujin-kô* as its fixed membership, its cyclical temporality, and its place outside of the state tributary system.

Fixed membership becomes a necessary requirement rather than merely a descriptive one to the form of the *mujin-kô* once we acknowledge the degree to which each local space of domainal rule was given the sovereign right of self-government. This then forces us to accept that in the non-spacial, but concretely determinable boundaries dividing each *han*, a zone of indeterminacy persisted such that the movement of bodies across boundaries was not a mere matter of individuated selves passing across open space. Bodies did not move across territory on horses, palanquins, or even on foot with the same ease they would under Meiji rule. The *sekisho* or checkpoint stations between the *han* are only the most obvious expression of this inconsistency in domainal space. What we learn from the necessity to implement a virtual smooth space according to which the land tax and property relations operated under Meiji rule is that the space of immanent relation was far more uneven. Agricultural communities not only determined their relation through their affiliation to the specific practices of domain culture whose internal circulatory system of value and exchange was not necessarily contiguous with those of other domains, but these communities were also

allowed the freedom to form around the specific contingencies that work with the land required. These immanent sets of relations could not but have created swaths of trust across bodies whose number was not itself extensive, but fixed and intensive. Thus, division between domains was existential as well as physical. How could a mutual aid association tolerate inclusion of a body that was not fashioned according to the same practices, the same temporal rehearsals, or even the same acts of valuation by which other bodies abided? That kind of difference would threaten the very fabric of the social bonds that were the *apriori* to these groups. The trace of this *apriori*, thus, becomes, paradoxically, the contract, the ledger, and money itself, since these could only emerge as supplement to a practice that didn't require them.

The temporality of this fixed membership, it then follows, also had to be flexible to the kinds of radical change to which agricultural existence was constantly victim. An economic form that spanned centuries was unthinkable for communities whose contingent existences changed almost daily. Furthermore, without the numbers in membership to sustain the group over lifetimes, the nature of the economic relation itself was unsustainable since death would forever offer up its geometric transformation to a group whose consistency was determined by the specificity of intensive social relations. The indeterminate moment marking the death of each *mujin-kô* also afforded communal flexibility in accommodating radical change either in local needs or in available membership that emerged consequent to an existence charged with the intensity of contingencies beyond prediction.

These inconsistencies or indeterminacies we see operating at the very heart of social existence in the Edo period should indicate a real limit in our ability to access a sense of this period. The trust of this past is not the trust with which, as we will see with the emergence of

life insurance, we are familiar under a modern state of being. The very order according to which bodies are organized is radically different down to the very space and time of its organization. This should tell us that our very experience of existence is fundamentally different. Because we can only access the past through the traces of its erasure, we can only guess through an impossible act of thought at what form existence took for those bodies caught in the interstices between state and domainal power. Contracts, money, statements of any sort seem the scars left behind whenever this trust was breached. Guarantees in language, law and economy had to be put in place when a bond of trust amongst communal members could not be guaranteed by their mode of existence. The state had to ensure these breaches of trust took place, *otherwise it would be threatened by its collective power*. Because its mode of self-reproduction depended upon an extension of power from a determinate center, it constantly needed to repeat the signs of these breaches. Domain leaders were put in constant circulation from the capital to the villages through the *sankin kôtai* system ensuring they never developed too strong a bond of trust with their subjects. The ruling class was kept from adhering too closely with the peasant class through the very establishment of the class system. Meanwhile, this same ruling class was encouraged to keep its distance from the villages, and governed from the castle towns. Bureaucracy and its affiliate mechanisms of law and contract became the guarantee on a permanent breach of trust between ruler and subject.

At the same time, the Shogunate's grasp on its subjects was never strong enough. The territory of its rule was fundamentally agricultural in nature. Bodies were tied to land, and thus had to define social relation primarily with reference to this land and its immanent and intensive dynamics. The Tokugawa state thus could only be a paranoid one, sending its

spies (*metsuke*) back and forth over the Tokkaidô or Nakasendô roads, while keeping the families of its closest members held captive near the paranoid center, because its mode of power necessitated the creation of a map of closed territories which the state could only access in limited form. Beyond the center, their realm was defined according to indeterminacy – the indeterminacy of multiple sovereign spaces, the indeterminacy of immanent existence. What should surprise us as we look back upon this time from our modern perspective is the fact that this paranoid system of governance worked, and was able to sustain itself, despite the existence of so many unknowns, for a period of over two hundred and fifty years. A world of indeterminacy was not one of chaos, but only of a different order. It was a state of being that was pocked by multiple modes of existence. It was a state of being that could not but accept the multiplicity of differing systems of value, social organization, and exchange. Yet, it was a state that had to embrace its own paranoia, and off-set this paranoia through draconian measures such as the *kirisute gomen* law which allowed samurai to cut down peasants without need to legal recourse.

There are two main ideas I mean to pull from this understanding of Tokugawa state being. The first is that state being is not continuous with state power. This seems the case when we consider how much of existence under the Shogunate was left outside of the state's control. This entire system of existence, however, was itself unified – unified by virtue of its differences. I do not mean to argue that the space under shogunal rule was completely broken down such that each domain worked as though the Tokugawa government did not exist. These were not wholly separate states. The Tokugawa Shogunate ruled over these states with a set rule of law, and a distinct economic and political system that cut through each state. The tribute system and the *sankin kôtai* ensured that all power accumulated in

Edo, and all subjects knew their place in the status based social order. I only mean to point out the subtle, and impossible divisions that this system of governance had to tolerate in order to allow for agricultural production and the bodies tied to this mode of production to persist.

The second concept that emerges from our consideration of this state being, is one of a radical and agency-driven historical difference separating the modern organization of spacial, temporal, and social existence from that which preceded it. In Meiji and Tokugawa history, more so than in any other European or American one, this sense of difference between periods is exceptionally marked because of the hurried manner in which modernization was implemented. The fact remains, however, that this mode of existence was something that was *implemented*. It did not rise naturally from a shift of social relations, but resulted from the microscopic management of social relations by the likes of men like Okuma Shigenobu. At the same time, the shifts that took place were not reducible to the acts of *individual* men. Considering the predatory nature in which the Meiji state and the shizoku class insured the security of its own positions of power through the instantiation of such things as the land tax reform, and the creation of a universal standard of money, it seems more appropriate to state change was enforced according to a new class dynamic, but one that was already putting itself in place in the period before the *ishin*. The expression of the differences separating the world of the Tokugawa from the Meiji becomes even more pronounced when we begin to consider the manner in which the *mujin-kô* form itself was reorganized to fit the new conditions of existence implemented through state control of the market and the bodies that peopled it. In the production of this new existential order the form of trust itself was transformed. This transformation became further expressed in an

antagonistic attitude by the life insurance ideologues to this same *mujin-kô* form. With the implementation of a new reality came a new sense of right and wrong, and the *mujin-kô* became the enemy of this emergent economic rationality. A *mujin-kô* that was nothing more than a set of practices of varying times and spaces, became the mark of feudal remnants as the life insurance market and its circulation of capital made itself into the modern body of social relations.

*Chapter 5.*

## The Historical Ontology of the Meiji State

### **I. The Failures of Life Insurance**

Before we consider how the practices of the *mujin-kô* became the enemy of modern economic rationality for life insurance ideologues, we should spend some time with the industry's early failures, since there is nothing more telling about the limits of possibility for a particular system of organization than its failures. Success, especially ones written within a narrative of progressive development as is usually given in the life insurance histories dealt with previously, creates blind spots that are often covered over by ideologies of natural course or natural progression. Failures, though they often find themselves discarded in progressive histories as artifacts of natural selection, are defined by these blind spots, and so provide greater possibilities for probing into the conflict of vying practices and formal conflicts that had to be smoothed over in order for these blind spots to function properly. Thankfully, the history of the development of modern life insurance is not lacking in its fair share of failed endeavors. By focusing in on a few examples, I hope to give a better view into how the successes of life insurance, that took the form of Meiji Life in particular, as well as Nihon, and Teikoku Life, to form the big three of insurance companies in the Meiji era, depended on the readjustment of economic practices to fit the new time and space that was an

emergent modern Meiji state.

### 1. The Nittô Life Assurance Company

The first example given in life insurance histories of a failed attempt is Wakayama Norikazu's Nittô Life Assurance Company (*nittô hosei gaisha*). This is also often given as the first official attempt at establishing a modern system of life insurance, because it was based on Wakayama's careful study of the economic systems of the west with a particular focus on US taxation and insurance. Wakayama Norikazu was born in Tenpô 11 (1840), and was one of the leading figures in the introduction of new knowledge into Japan from America, and Europe. He studied Dutch studies under Ôgata Koan, Fukuzawa Yukichi's famed teacher, though Wakayama entered the school six years following Fukuzawa. He became a teacher himself, and eventually moved into work for the government following the Meiji Restoration. In 1871 he was moved from the Ministry of Popular Affairs (*minbushô*) to the Ministry of Finance (*ôkurashô*). He was a member of the Iwakura Mission and landed in New York in 1872 where he stayed until 1874. He studied the US economic system with a special emphasis on taxation, and returned to Japan to work under Ôkuma Shigenobu in the taxation office, and stayed there until his resignation from government in 1877. He was a strong proponent of protective economic policies and wrote several works including *Western Agricultural Practices* (*taisei nôgaku*), and *On Protective Tariffs* (*hogokanzeiron*). Following his time in government, Wakayama decided to try to put some of the principles he'd learned in the US to the test, and on December 12th, 1879 he put in his official application to establish the *Nittô hosei gaisha* (Nittô Life Assurance Company). This was an insurance company that included all the technologies that would make later insurance

companies a huge financial success. Because of Wakayama's careful study of the life insurance companies in the United States he understood the necessity of the life tables, a reserve fund, and a variety of life insurance products. He did not organize it around the already familiar form of the *mujin-kô* as Yasuda Zenjirô would later do, but derived its financial structure strictly from his examination of western insurance companies. Despite his careful attention to these details, however, his insurance endeavor never saw the light of day thanks to a lack of investment from outside sources. The reasons for this are telling. One could argue that he was too idealistic.

During his stay in the US Wakayama was witness to a tempestuous era in American life insurance history. As insurance historian, Kobayashi Tadashi, writes,

At the time of Wakayama's arrival to the US, the American life insurance industry had already been baptized into new life by Elizur Wright's life table reforms, the Massachusetts Non-Forfeiture Laws had been passed, while Tontine forms had begun to emerge. Though some American insurance firms had begun promoting overseas business, the 1870's saw a rush of life insurance bankruptcies while there was an overall reduction in net amounts derived from already existing insurance policies... From 1868 to 1905 the American life insurance encountered a series of large scale reforms including the advancement of American insurance firms into the European and Canadian markets, as well as the introduction of Canadian insurance in the US, the emergence of mutual finance and pay-as-you-go insurance schemes, and the establishment of Industrial Life insurance in 1868; meanwhile the insurance market itself entered an era of bankruptcy and economic recession as competition amongst companies grew fiercer and instances of treachery and misconduct in business and sales were brought to light.<sup>191</sup>

Thus, witnessing first hand the dangers and possibilities of a burgeoning life insurance industry during this tumultuous period in American insurance history, Wakayama could not but be aware of the pitfalls any promotion of such an industry on Japanese soil threatened to

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<sup>191</sup> Kobayashi, *Nihon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai [the Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought]*. 337-338.

open up. At the same time, he could not ignore its phenomenal potential for the accumulation of capital resources. While working under Okuma Shigenobu, he was also made accomplice to Okuma's own attempt to institute a national scale insurance form through the proposal for a Famine Relief Fund (*bikôhochiku*). Boggled down with an inflation crisis caused by the Seinan War, and wrestling with continuing problems around the land-tax reform, as well as having to battle free market proponents such as Taguchi Ukichi over the legitimacy of creating such a fund, Okuma was forced to table the proposal.<sup>192</sup> Such a large-scale relief fund would have to be left in the hands men in the private sector. Wakayama took it upon himself to be one of the first of these men. It is no surprise that Okuma provide full support behind Wakayama's endeavor even going so far as to lay down a twenty thousand yen government loan to act as the company's reserve fund.

Though in its final guise, the Nittô Life Assurance Company would attempt to emerge on the financial scene as a mutual finance corporation, this was not Wakayama's original plan. Having studied the advantages and disadvantages of both the mutual finance group and the joint stock company, Wakayama originally designed Nittô as a mixed principle company. The reasons for this he gave as follows: where on the one hand a joint stock company provided a sound basis to build a company, accumulating the large sums of capital required to get a life insurance company going in a short period of time proved difficult. At the same time, though a mutual finance company could pull in the capital from a larger group of policy-holders, the contingent dangers of dealing with such a large client base made for unstable financial standing. With a mixed principle company, Wakayama could assert,

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<sup>192</sup> See "Okuma Shigenobu no hoken shisô" [Okuma Shigenobu's insurance thought] in *ibid*, 312-336.

We have several financiers (*zainushi*) who provide the funds necessary to cover the policies of policyholders; meanwhile we also have the premiums contributed by policyholders and consequently any problems with financing are spread amongst a larger base and thus are not so great a deal. Furthermore, with fixed rates of profit coming in each year to be distributed amongst all members, this system seems a better system than the other possibilities [of the joint stock or the mutual finance group].<sup>193</sup>

Unfortunately, Wakayama's ideals based in protective economic policies proved the downfall of his insurance endeavor. He did not make his a profit-oriented company precisely because he had seen the dangers that the profit motive proved for just such an endeavor in the US insurance market. With his history of work in the government sector, which left him short of the kinds of business connections in the private sector he needed to start his business, Wakayama discovered his idealism was not enough to get the Nittô Life Assurance Company off the ground. In the newly emergent market driven world of the Meiji 10s, he had only the profit-motive to interest investors, but this was the very motive he knew was dangerous to the ideals he was attempting to uphold. As a result, his company failed due to lack of investment.

## 2. The Five Hundred Name Mutual Finance Group

On the other side of the spectrum of failure, Yasuda Zenjirô, who, as an aside, turned down Wakayama's invitation to invest in the Nittô Life Insurance, had no difficulty attracting investors to his insurance scheme, but failed to structure this support on the economic principles that were central to life insurance success abroad. In the 13th year of the Meiji era, only a few months following Wakayama's failure, the father to what would become the Yasuda zaibatsu, established the Five Hundred Name Mutual Finance Group (*kyôsai gohyaku*

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<sup>193</sup> *Meiji Seimei Hyaku Nen Shi*. 12.

*meisha*, or KGMS). Unfortunately, Yasuda, unlike Wakayama, was unfamiliar with the specifics of the life insurance industry. He did not understand the relevance of the death table or the medical examination or the necessity of actuarial technologies to offset the problems that arose from bodies trapped in their own cyclical time. Consequently, he fell back on more immediately available forms. Using the *mujin-kô* as his template, Yasuda attempted to reproduce the kinds of capital accumulation of which he knew the western life insurance corporations were capable, while at the same time depending on the formal methods those around him found most familiar. His lack of knowledge almost proved detrimental to the future of the entire industry.

Using his connections to the financial world, Yasuda brought together 500 wealthy investors to pool their resources to produce what had the appearance of a life insurance scheme. Amongst the founding investors were Yasuda himself, Narishima Ryûhoku, head of the *Chôya* Newspaper, Koyasu Takashi, one of the founders of the *Yomiuri* Newspaper, Ginbayashi Tsunao, prefectural governor of Saitama ken and president of Hokuetsu Railways, and Kawasaki Hachizaemon, a board member for The Third National Bank. This was not a group linked by the necessity of communal trust to combat the vicissitudes of random catastrophe, but an economic urban upper class linked together by mutual self-interest born from an excess of wealth. Each member was asked to contribute 6 yen as an initial membership fee, and then provide two yen in premiums upon the death of any one member. Considering the average daily wage for a worker in a spinning factory at this time was 10 zeni,<sup>194</sup> carpenters, masons, and blacksmiths made between 45 to 50 zeni per day,

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<sup>194</sup> One zeni is equivalent to 1/100 of a yen.

and typographers worked for only 35 zeni a day, it becomes apparent that only the wealthy could afford participation in Yasuda's scheme.<sup>195</sup> When a member died, the surviving members of his family were then allowed to take out an accumulated fund of 1000 yen from the group to offset whatever needs they required for providing proper burial rites or ensuring the families survival through this difficult period.<sup>196</sup> The fixed membership number and fixed payments at periodic intervals gave the scheme the look of a *mujin-kô*, a form that would have been familiar to the investors. At the same time, this endeavor did not follow the time of the *mujin-kô*. Yasuda had no intention of disbanding the group after a fixed period. There was no overall period of indeterminacy during which the whole structure could purge its excesses and rearrange membership. The KGMS abided by the rules of extensive time. It couldn't but abide by extensive time precisely because it was attached very specifically to the individuated times of each member's life, and not to the time of agricultural cycles or weather patterns. Members lived and died in a strata of abstracted extensive time that matched the virtual extension of space upon which their individuated lives were plotted. Which is to say, the body of each member was forced into carrying the brunt of cyclical time's indeterminacy and excess so that the corporate group could guarantee its own extension beyond the excess of its own excesses.

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<sup>195</sup> Wage statistics taken from Mikio Sugitani, *Nibon Chinrôdô Shiron: Meiji Zenki Ni Okeru Rôdôsha Kaikyû No Keisei* [*Historical Debates on Japanese Wage Labor: The Formation of the Early Meiji Era Laboring Class*] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1974). As quoted in Yasuhisa Satô, *Shihonshugi to Kindai Seimei Hoken Gyô* [*Capitalism and the Modern Life Insurance Industry*] (Tokyo: Chikura Shobô, 2003). 17.

<sup>196</sup> Figures taken from Kobayashi, *Nibon Hoken Shisô No Seisei to Tenkai* [*The Emergence and Development of Japanese Insurance Thought*]. 383.

At the same time, this was not a tontine in which membership dwindled as each member passed on, leaving the final surviving member to collect the large pool. As each member died, new members were introduced into the group. Thus, the number of members was kept fixed, much like a *mujin-kô*, but unlike the *mujin-kô* the individual places occupied by the bodies of the members acted as revolving doors letting only single bodies in as single bodies exited out the back door into death. Where the *mujin-kô* overturned the entire group in order to allow for the introduction of new members, thus dispersing the weight of change away from any single member, Yasuda's Finance Group placed the weight of change on each member. Extensive time became the monarch establishing all laws within the logic of Yasuda's corporate form, and it used the individuation of life to reproduce assimilation at its borders. Unfortunately for Yasuda, the scope of this assimilation was not adequate to offset the differentiations that continued to persist within the group itself. The bodies that were bearing the weight of time's extension were too differentiated in their own cyclical temporalities to maintain the stability of the extension. The indeterminacy of death rushed in to assault the group.

Put simply, members of the group began to die, and they died as most did, out of synchronization according to the time set by their own specific and local existence. As a result, the financial group began to fail as members began to die at random, sometimes in groups, sometimes at inopportune moments in the lives of the surviving members of the group. This created several major problems that lead to the failure of the venture. On the one hand, because of the random frequency according to which members were required to pay their premiums, larger and larger numbers began to default on their payments, thus putting a strain on the reserve fund that consisted of the monies accumulated through the

initial membership fee. Those members who entered the group in good health and survived much longer than other members also began to feel resentment for having to pay a larger amount of premiums compared to those who entered old, and in poor health. They expressed this resentment through their own default on payments. The excess of their excess became too great, and they chose to stop contributing. Furthermore, as there was no medical examination required for entering the group, the structure opened itself to exploitation of the decrepit over the healthy. Lastly, the revolving door on membership began to stick as the flaws in the venture began to become apparent to those involved.<sup>197</sup>

Thus, although Yasuda found no problem in the initial stages in motivating others to support this project, as time moved on he found it harder and harder to motivate members to join when others passed on, as well as to motivate continuing members to pay their premiums. By Meiji 25 (1892) the group's financial difficulties became too difficult to bear.

Moved by the enforcement of the new commercial code and also in response to the changes in companies that were occurring around it, the KGMS revised its regulations in Meiji 25. At the same time, this revision was a further response to the fatal flaw inherent to its levy system of imposing dues. It became apparent, however, that it wouldn't be possible to solve this fundamental problem and maintain the system as it was. The fault had already begun to make itself apparent through problems in keeping membership replenished and managing compensation for those defaulting on their premiums. If we look at the state of shifts in members based on records of the time we discover a five or six year period of stable progression, but by the company's seventh year in Meiji 20, though the number of deaths were at 10 and the number of new members at 19, the number of vacancies in the group had risen to 58. Following this, in Meiji 21, the number of deaths reached 18, while recruitment of new members only reached 13, putting the total of vacancies at 65. In Meiji 22, deaths were at 7, and recruitment at 8, giving 65 vacancies. In Meiji 23, deaths were at 15, recruitment at 5, and vacancies at 63. In Meiji 24, deaths equaled 12, recruitment 1, and vacancies 68. And finally in Meiji 26, with only a single death, and 14 recruitments, vacancies still

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<sup>197</sup> See *Yasuda Seimei Hyakunen Shi [the One-Hundred Year History of Yasuda Life]*, (Tokyo: Yasuda Seimei Hoken 1980). 38-47 for details regarding specific figures on amounts of defaulted payments, and numbers of members.

stood at 50.

Meanwhile with regard to amounts on defaulted payments the following figures are available:

Meiji 16, 1144 yen

Meiji 17, 1800 yen

Meiji 20, 552 yen

Meiji 21, 1202 yen

Meiji 22, 1332 yen

Meiji 23, 1388 yen

Meiji 24, 770 yen<sup>198</sup>

Constantly having to overcome these large sums of defaulted payments, the accounts of the Group were put under pressure. A change needed to be instigated in the structure of the company were it to continue. Realizing this, Yasuda disbanded the KGMS, and, borrowing ideas developed by Yano Tsuneta, a medical doctor turned insurance innovator, established the Meiji era's first mutual life insurance fund – the Yasuda Mutual Life Insurance Company. The differences to its predecessor were distinct. Membership was no longer fixed at five hundred members, but open to indefinite expansion. Members did not enter into a policy equally, but now had to take a medical examination to determine their estimated time of death. Death tables were then used to organize the various contingencies that cut through the lives of Meiji subjects, and premiums were calculated based on the numbers these death tables provided. As a result of these fundamental changes, the bodies entering into the insurance fund were made sites of knowledge which now could be placed in

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* 85-86.

synchronization. The company thrived, using the ever-expanding pool of resources accumulated off the ever assimilative pull of its expanding borders. As with the other life insurance companies, it began to reproduce more and more capital through larger and larger investments into state projects such as railroad, mining, and military expansion. Yasuda's company joined the new hierarchy that structured the new market order where bodies were gradually being placed into synchronization with market fluctuations as the flow of capital began to move according to a principle of indefinite extension. This in turn allowed the corporation itself to synchronize its investments with state and capitalist projects. The market as a whole came to operate according to a single, extensive principle that encompassed both time and space. The new times of modern Japan, to borrow a phrase from Stefan Tanaka,<sup>199</sup> and the new space of money were forced into synchronization with the market.

### III. The Problem of Pseudo-Insurance

The *mujin-kô* and the inherent trust to which its practice hinted provides a means to understand this new order of being. The *mujin-kô* as a set of practices cannot but be reactive in the sense that it emerged consequent to the flux and flow of unpredictable weather and cultivation cycles. If taken as an agglomeration of individuated bodies, that is, if the human body is taken as the kernel of organization for the association, then this can be seen as nothing more than the expression of passive victimization. Individuated bodies suffered the contingencies of violent storms, drought, floods, etc. If we shift our focus away from the individuated bodies within the *mujin-kô* and consider the association itself as body, suddenly

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<sup>199</sup> Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan*.

a different understanding of collective organization is made possible. As a collective not reducible to individuated bodies, the *mujin-kô* inverts the passivity of individuated experience to produce a body whose action is adequate to itself. Granted there will, for all bodies forever be a fragment given over to passivity. The collective itself must necessarily react to the elements of earth, wind, and land, but if apriori collectivism opens the possibility of articulating collectivity through these elements, then this passivity transformed to activity. The body organized around land finds its cause in the very fluctuations that are considered internal to its organization – farmers are merely the productive site of an active relation organized around the growth cycles and weather patterns for a specific plot of land. This land, as we saw with the requirement to virtualize land through a system that generalized its nature over a large area in order to turn it into a quantifiable mass to be taxed, is not in itself infinitely extensive. Rather, the land defined according to the finite relations holding it to farmer, plough, wind pattern, fertilizer efficiency, etc. does not extend beyond these relations, and as such is a body immanent and autonomous to itself. The *mujin-kô* as expression of that immanent relation then functions as a regulatory mechanism that acts with a surfeit of adequate action determined through these inherent relations and not as a result of relations given through exteriority. The farmers existing within this body, as themselves internal expressions of a greater collectivity, do not give over their subjectivity to this collective in the same manner one might typify the reduction of the self to the aims of, say, a fascist state in which “the fasces,” or collective aggregation, demands the sacrifice of individual desires to the will of the whole, but rather bodies function by a subjective experience operating according to a wholly different set of conditions than can be understood through a modern lens. This apriori collectivism that does not take the individuated body as

its kernel of organization, but places subjects in “geometric” relation in the sense that the subtraction of anyone member would involve the fundamental transformation of the collective body itself much in the same way that the removal of a single side on a geometric figure transforms the very nature of the figure itself, changes the dynamic by which active action can be thought by opening up an immanent potential within collectivity that can undermine or operate as alternative to the conditions of subjective individuation.

Apriori collectivism’s alterity to capitalist modernity becomes immediately apparent when we consider the radical antagonistic relation capitalism has with the expression of these immanent relations. We saw signs of this antagonism with the Takanawa negotiations of 1869, and the land tax reform, as the indeterminate zones allowed to persist under Tokugawa rule were wiped clean by the extensive quantifying logic of modern space and time. We see it given even greater expression with the development of the insurance form, and I think it necessary to spend some time considering the ideological and then ontological character of this expression in order to fully layout the image of this antagonism.

Even before the establishment of Yasuda Zenjirô’s KGMS, *mujin-kô* type associations were being written as the counter figure to the modern insurance form. These can be considered the first real experiments to marry indigenous practices of mutual aid to new knowledge on insurance in the new spatiotemporal order of the Meiji era. The results of this experiment would eventually become near catastrophic for the modern economic order. By the Meiji 10s, knowledge of insurance had expanded beyond the rudimentary understanding given in Fukuzawa’s work of 1867. A translation of Paul Mayotte’s “On

Japanese Home Insurance” (*Nihon kaoku hoken ron*) was published in June of 1878<sup>200</sup> followed almost immediately by a translation of Theophilus Parsons’ *Marine Insurance Law* (*Kaijôhoken hô*).<sup>201</sup> The Ministry of Finance began investigation into the structure of fire insurance in 1879. Its two year “Inquiry into Fire Insurance” was published in July of 1881 in two sections, the first listing problems posed by fire insurance mechanisms, and the second providing a draft of legislation that could be used to regulate fire insurance.<sup>202</sup> The Tokio Marine and Fire Insurance Company was established during the course of this study in 1879. Meanwhile, lectures on French Commercial law were taking place as early as 1874. These included a section on French insurance law.<sup>203</sup> By 1879, the ground seemed to be set for the introduction of life insurance. This introduction, however, did not emerge as active embrace of life insurance’s fundamental principles, but was forged through a criticism of illegitimate attempts to create life insurance companies based on the more familiar practices that the *mujin-kô* had already trained into bodies. In a strange inversion of the origin story, the fake came before the original, and pseudo-insurance became the motive for the creation of modern life insurance.

One of the first criticisms that emerged at this time was one directed simply at the lack of life insurance ventures. In an article published in the *Yûbinpôchi shinbun* (Postal Newspaper) on December 17<sup>th</sup> of 1879, the author bemoans this lack. “What I feel is most

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<sup>200</sup> *Meiji Taishô Hoken Shiryô [Historical Materials on Insurance from the Meiji and Taishô Eras]*, ed. Tamaki Tamesaburô, vol. 1, Book 1, Section 4 (Tokyo: Seimei Hoken Gaisha Kyôkai, 1934). 48-87.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 88 – 138.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. 1, Book 2, Supplemental material, 36-87.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. 1, Book, Section 3, 13-16.

regrettable,” the author writes after lauding the proliferation of fire and marine insurance, “is the absence of anything modeled after the life insurance business.”<sup>204</sup> Immediately following this, the author lauds life insurance as understood according to the European model in order to criticize the more local groups of associations designed around fixed memberships and random payments.

These days, I hear there are people in the suburban districts (*fuka*) setting up businesses that gather together five hundred individuals under one company and provide a small amount of money to each members’ family after their death. Even though these types of companies are imitating life assurance (*jinmei ukeai*), and are built on moral ground, not only should we not give the title life assurance to groups whose form is greatly different from the kind that is found today in Europe and the United States, we should see in them a likeness to Anglosaxon companies of ancient times whose utility was of limited extension.<sup>205</sup>

The moment life insurance began to emerge on the scene in the Meiji era, it brought with it a sense of its primitive past that validated its modern sensibilities. The *mujin-kô* or forms of similar type like the tontine organized around a set membership immediately became old-hand, out of date, or worse yet, unenlightened. Because of the introduction of life insurance from American and European sources, modern sensibility entered Japan in this inverted form – by writing its present as past in anticipation of a not-yet realized ideal. The importation of modernity, and its consequent scrambling of the temporal order of any sense of modernity’s naturalized origins should be finally laid to rest in consideration of the Meiji state’s experience of modernization. There was nothing natural about the implementation of capitalist modernity.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, Vol. 1, Book 1, Section 5, 54.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

Yasuda Zenjirô's KGMS as we discover was only one company amidst an entire plethora of what was soon to be termed "pseudo-insurance" (*ruiji hoken*) businesses. On December 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1880, only days after the announcement of the establishment of Yasuda's KGMS, a short article in the Tokyo Yokohama Mainichi Newspaper expressed concerns about the dangers just such a company invited. The article reads as follows.

Recently we have heard tell of the *Kyôsai gohyaku meisha*, a company that rewards the families of deceased members five hundred to one thousand yen. A certain member of the *genrôin* (chamber of elders) distresses greatly over this news. As this person states, the aims of this company may be good, but we cannot say this will not result in attempts by delinquent gangs (*furyô no to*) to murder members of the company in order to get the large one-time payout. Moreover, even if the children of a member do not happen to be one these delinquent types, there is nothing to guard against the cultivation of the natural spread of sloth that comes from knowing one will gain such a large payout. In any case, if such a company were to fail and not accumulate profits, it is said we should think on a better scheme than this and establish a new company in its place.<sup>206</sup>

Again this inverted temporal order is rehearsed in the minds of subjects watching their world transform around them. The mutual aid form threatens its members, and from this emerges a fundamental sense of a breach separating individuals from each other, a breach that produces the desire for some kind of intervention or mediation. How can one trust that one will not be murdered by the members of one's own family if some form of external mediation is not enforced? It should come as no surprise, having seen the gradual exploitation of social relations that mercantilism inflicted upon the *mujin* form that at the heart of the anxiety over the mutual aid form was a question of trust. Insurance with its foreign technologies would emerge to ease this anxiety, but only partially so.

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid 59.

Because the insurance industry was an imported scheme, and not a newly developed economic form, news of its dangers came to Meiji subjects simultaneous to news of its potential. Readers of the Postal Newspaper would have already read of these dangers in an issue from years before detailing a case of insurance fraud that took place in the US involving the collusion between a woman and doctor who fooled companies out of thousands of dollars by faking the woman's death.<sup>207</sup> What could these stories express, except a fundamental sense of alienation and division at the heart of social existence, a sense that inevitably would find expression in the above passage as a belief that greed would overcome the better inclinations of Meiji subjects and lead to murderous results. Insurance, as it turned its focus from the preservation of home or commodity to latch onto life itself, promoted as it reflected the fundamental schism that framed social relation in urban and suburban centers. In order to shore up this breach, such unregulated and primitive associations as the one created by Yasuda Zenjirô would need to be replaced with an insurance system built according to proper economic principles that took into consideration this fundamental absence of trust amongst members. As the issue of trust and its guarantees began to take center stage in discussions concerning the validity and legitimacy of the insurance form, the form of trust that was central to the operation and spread of the *mujin-kô* under feudal relations was evacuated of all potential. The mutual aid form forged according to the indeterminate principles of apriori collectivism in the context of modern social relations became the sign of social decay rather than of communal coherence. The promotion of mutual aid without the intervention of market technologies was seen as morally reprehensible

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, Vol.1, Book 1, Section 5, 3-6.

and dangerous to the functioning of a healthy society. This belief would spread to such an extent it would find its codification in Meiji law with the promulgation of the commercial code, and the insurance laws in 1900. Insurance and its laws would come to perform the impossible by suturing up the very tear in social existence its presence acted to keep open.

Anxiety over the form of insurance itself, as expressed in the December 22<sup>nd</sup> article mentioned above, quickly shifted to adhere to mutual aid now categorized as pseudo-insurance once the first functioning modern insurance company was established in 1881. That is, the appearance of a legitimate insurance business created a better understanding of its falsification. In December of 1881 an article entitled “The Harm of the Mutual Company” appeared in the *Tokyo Economist* (*Tokyo keizai zasshi*) that echoed concerns of a year previous.<sup>208</sup> Its target of critique: the mutual aid companies that had flourished since the establishment of Yasuda Zenjirô’s KGMS. The author of the article indicates the presence of these companies from the outset, bemoaning the proliferation of “companies with the terms *kyôjutsu* and *kyôsai* in their titles.”<sup>209</sup> Unlike the *genrôin* (chamber of elders) member that worried over the murderous or slothful intentions of those family members poised to profit off the death of another, the *Tokyo Economist* concerned itself with far more technical concerns. The problem with the mutual aid form was that it offered no economic mechanism to ensure that members who joined the company wouldn’t be defrauded out of their money. Which is to say, the fault of these companies was that they were not life insurance companies armed with all the proper economic technologies that life insurance provided. Worse than

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 65-66.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 65. *Kyôjutsu* (共恤) and *kyôsai* (共済) are alternative readings for the notion of mutual aid.

this, there was a danger that the faults of these companies would spread to infect the economy of Meiji society as a whole. State intervention had to become a consideration. As the author of the article points out, these mutual aid companies were a huge problem already in the United States, and the government in that case was forced to institute regulations. For this author, regulation, fraudulence, and mutual aid all circulated around one single principle: trust, and it is to this principle he turns in the closing words of his article.

The rise and fall of these companies all rest on whether or not they can be trusted. If a company has trust *it will exist throughout eternity*, but without trust, a company that is born in the day will only die come night.<sup>210</sup>

Trust, as we can see in this article, has transformed under a modern economy. Where the trust of the *mujin-kô* found its expression in a temporality that allowed for its own limitation and end, the trust of the modern company worked on a different temporal line that extended, much like the Gregorian calendar newly adopted by the Meiji state to organize state time,<sup>211</sup> into infinity. If we match this sense of indefinite temporal extension as economic goal with the comparison from the 1870 Postal News article to the primitive Anglosaxon associations that were “limited” in extension, we can see a trend developing in the assumptions of those worried over the health of the Meiji economy. Unlike the mosaic like spatiotemporal organization of the economy of the feudal era, the spaces and times of modern Meiji rule were infinitely porous. The actions of one company could only infect the operation of another if the two worked according to an established economic base. With the elimination

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid. Italics are mine.

<sup>211</sup> The reform of time by the Meiji state to embrace the Christian calendar began in December of 1872 with an imperial edict announcing the change to a solar calendar. For a detailed consideration of the implication of this change see Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan*.

of all variants in space with the land tax reform, the permanent extension of time with the establishment of the Christian calendar, and the gradual centralization of the money system through the banks, the spread of these mutual aid groups and their disease could only become a threat to society, because they operated according to a different understanding of space and time.

As the Meiji Life Insurance Company, established in 1881, began to exhibit more and more signs that the economic technologies brought from the US and Europe could set the ground for a successful capitalist venture the arguments against pseudo-insurance became ever more refined. In an article, again for the Tokyo Yokohama Newspaper on March 1<sup>st</sup> of 1883,<sup>212</sup> two years following the establishment of Meiji Life, a call to regulate *kyōsai* or mutual aid companies is expressed following on the heels of reports in the Tokyo Nichi Nichi Newspaper of a widespread problem in Mie Prefecture of mutual aid companies defrauding clients.<sup>213</sup> In place of arguments concerned over the well being of policyholders plagued by the ill intentions of delinquent family members, or vague worries over the lack of mechanisms for internal governance of these associations, are specific arguments for state regulation over the proliferation of pseudo-insurance. Again the trope of infection is mobilized. Not only are these businesses defrauding members, argues the author of the article, they are posing a threat to legitimate insurance businesses. In order to keep a tight control on these businesses, the state should enforce regulations that would see all insurance and pseudo-insurance businesses register their accounting figures with the government,

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<sup>212</sup> *Meiji Taishō Hoken Shiryō* [Historical Materials on Insurance from the Meiji and Taishō Eras]. Vol.1, Book 1, Section 5, 79-80.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 79

establish a reserve fund to guard businesses from bankruptcy, and enforce regular monitoring of business account books. In the absence of trust amongst members within the group, the state would need to intervene.

In a third article in July of the same year, entitled “Sweeping up the Land of Charity” (*jizenchi wo harawan to su*) this time found in the Chôya newspaper, a more subtle account of the nature of corruption in the mutual aid association is given.<sup>214</sup> People are not naturally corrupt, writes the author. As with their charity towards the animal world, people are charitable with each other. The KGMS was founded upon these principles of charity. The problem arises, however, when greed and desire enter the picture. As companies accumulate money from clients, and clerks working these businesses are put in more control of larger and larger sums of money, the temptation to simply take this money and leave the company increases. The tendency towards greed overcomes the charitable basis of the company, and this trend threatens to empty the pockets of the laymen caught in its wake.

This spate of articles criticizing the KGMS and the spread of pseudo-insurance was not without its opposition. In August 17<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of 1882, the same newspaper that would later publish a criticism of the KGMS provided a detailed, serial installment providing support for the company. The author of the article “Debating Mutualist Associations” (*kyôsai shugi no kessha wo ronzu*)<sup>215</sup> begins by using the KGMS as exemplar of a larger trend that is seeing companies “take up the core principles of Western life insurance”<sup>216</sup> to

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 88-9.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 67-79.

<sup>216</sup> “*Seiyô no raijû inshuransu no ri ni gen'in shi*,” Ibid, 67.

promote mutual aid. The author of the article sees nothing inherently wrong with this, and counter to the criticisms being waged against the long list of “innumerable companies with similar aims,”<sup>217</sup> the author endeavors to take a closer look at the companies themselves to diagnose their legitimacy. After going through a detailed account of the shared features of these pseudo-insurance companies,<sup>218</sup> the author targets member differentiation as the key flaw that leads to the dissolution of most of these otherwise well meaning groups. While, the author near the end of the second article is willing to acknowledge the presence of predatory companies, such as the ones that caused a stir in Mie prefecture, he believes government oversight to be the simple solution to this. The greater problem for mutual aid, and for all of life insurance itself was the problem of holding to principle.

Thus, we can see in these early articles, the trace of a shift in insurance thought that begins to subordinate moral concerns for technological or economic ones. The proper running of a life insurance or mutual aid group has little to do with greed. In fact, as will be later argued by insurance intellectuals such as Awatsu Kiyosuke, and Asô Gi'ichirô, the pursuit of capital and profits is not necessarily a negative issue for life insurance since profits provide the impetus for the formation of these businesses. The key issue for insurance, once it shifts away from its moral concerns, becomes a matter of the creation of a company that will outlive the body of its individual members. The problem becomes one of indefinite extension.

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>218</sup> The author lists the fixed membership number, the equal rights of members regardless of age or constitution, the rights of members to take the payout upon death, the limited life span of the companies (10 to 30 years), the fair distribution of surpluses, and the vague rules governing the groups as the fundamental features that characterize these ventures. This list is given in *ibid*, 69.

The theme of the eternal company will be a key issue in the decades leading up to the establishment of insurance law at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and it is in the “Debating Mutualist Associations” article mentioned above that the logic guiding this principle of permanent temporal extension is most clearly laid out. The author of the article targets one key feature of then existing pseudo-insurance companies that was leading to their corruption or too soon demise. This was not the absence of the life tables. As the author points out, companies that kept their payouts to twice a month or less, could prolong the life of the company indefinitely according to data on the average life span of a Japanese citizen.<sup>219</sup> In fact, because the death rate of Meiji citizenry was so low, some companies had taken to adding a lottery system to provide payouts for periods that did not have a death. In this manner, some companies would guarantee members two payouts per month in order to regularize their financial commitment, and if there were fewer than two deaths that month, the difference was taken up with a lottery. The author of the article argues this creates an imbalance in the population of the group in that over an extended period of time the lottery would create a disproportionate number of old or unhealthy to young and healthy bodies in the group. Death was a very specific mechanism of selection for these companies. So long as all things were kept equal, death would, on average, select the weaker, older bodies for elimination, while leaving the younger, healthier bodies behind. With the introduction of a lottery system that did not make this distinction, young and healthy bodies would be

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<sup>219</sup> The author uses statistics gathered from Meiji 6 to 13 (1873 to 1880) to come up with a 17.9 annual death rate per thousand people. This was considered excessively low when compared to Hungary’s high of 39.6 deaths per thousand. In fact, next to Austria, Japan boasted the lowest death rate in the world. Ibid, 73-4. The author, however takes little account of variations in this death rate across economic strata. As we will see later, life insurance membership was solely an affair for the rich *shizoku* (class of people with samurai ancestry), but calculations in population studies failed to reflect this distinction.

constantly taken out of turn while death continued its careful selection. Over time, this would result in companies composed almost solely of weak, older bodies, and eventually the death rate would rise such that the company would not be able to sustain itself. Death's careful selection would eventually kill the company itself.

Furthermore, there were no rules to further weed out the older members who lived beyond the average life span and had contributed more than their fair share of premiums. In the same way that death worked against the lottery's random consistencies to create an aging and weakened company membership, so it also tended towards the same if those whose life span exceeded the norm began to accumulate over time. Thus, the author suggests an endowment plan to eliminate members that reach a certain age, so they can be replaced by other healthier, younger bodies. If these principles to ensure the fair and equal circulation of bodies in to the company and out through death were not kept strict, the damage to society as a whole would continue. As the author writes,

If a company folds and disperses after ten or twenty years, through what means are its members supposed to find satisfaction? Accumulating four yen over time so that one can plan to accumulate profits off an excess of interest should not be enough to satisfy members. Members, that is to say, we, should hold to an idea of permanence so these companies do not close down after ten or twenty years... This kind of company, regardless whether it comprises of members from the middle class and above and hopes to achieve the good results that will come from true mutual aid, cultivates a heart of good fortune for the people through its method of selection. Should we not investigate thoroughly the principles that make such a company persist on for eternity (*eizoku*), contrary to intention, we will be left to regret deeply the fact that such an element was finally allowed to poison society.<sup>220</sup>

The words of this writer would prove prescient for endeavors like the KGMS, as we saw above. By adhering to an indefinite extensive temporal line, these mutual aid companies

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 75.

placed the weight of alteration on the individual bodies of each member. Without a principle of regulation keeping the alteration of bodies through the company in careful balance, eventually the inequalities of death would catch up and kill the company itself. For the author and for everyone else in the industry, the security of the company became of paramount importance. The life of the insurance company, and eventually the industry itself, had to be guaranteed in its extension over all time, and the guarantee of this extension came through the individuation of bodies that would circulate through its infinite existence. With the shift to extensive time individuated bodies tattooed with a life that only knew how to express itself in its measure of death became the means to maintain the existence of the company itself beyond the grip of death. Bodies were carved out in passive reaction to a world of death calculated according to “algebraic,” and no longer geometric terms. Bodies were made to abide solely to a position of reaction towards the greater world around them. Meanwhile, the maintenance, regulation, and even the production of these bodies, became a matter for securing the infinite lifespan of the company. Only the company was allowed to be the active principle in the production and mediation of social relations.

As it soon became obvious to everyone in the life insurance firms, any company built upon individuated life would not be able to maintain itself with a fixed membership. The rotating doors that saw bodies pass through the fixed positions established by companies like the KGMS had to be made mobile and extensive themselves. As economist and law professor Wadagaki Kenzô would write in the of *The Journal of the National Academic Society (Kokka gakkai zasshi)* of July and August of 1888,<sup>221</sup> at the heart of insurance was a

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<sup>221</sup> From the article “Hoken ron” in Ibid, 121-146.

battle against nature, and no single individual was up to the task of defending against the contingencies of nature. Even state institutions were no good in this battle, since “neither depending on the whole of the law, nor relying on the police will be enough”<sup>222</sup> to deal with such a violent master (*bôshu*) as Nature. Scientific principle was the key to winning this battle, and the law of large numbers was the weapon. Where data on a single individual would tell you nothing of a man’s life expectancy, a pool of data drawn from an ever extensive population of men would provide just the right amount of information to create measures of probabilities. Bodies would need to be individuated so they could then be reintroduced back into aggregate collections. Only through this dual movement of individuation/aggregation would life be made quantifiable, and this could only be made possible if the existential ground upon which these bodies were located was unified and stabilized. The quantification of lives under Meiji rule would not be possible under the mosaic like structure of a feudal system. Counting bodies across differing class, and value systems would create too many volatilities in the algebra of death. With the establishment of virtual uniform space that was infinitely porous - through the institution of the land tax reform, and with the stabilization of all market valuations over the smooth body of money – the Meiji state provided the perfect breeding ground to begin producing just such a population of data. Which is to say, we should not look at the production of data that would eventually lead up to the creation, first of a tentative Japanese life table in the hands of mathematician Fujisawa Rikitarô, and then of a standardized industry table with the 1911 Three Company Life Table, as merely a reflective lens that represented a population whose

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid. 122

data was merely there waiting to be tabulated. Rather, *the production of the life tables was also a simultaneous production of the very population it was being used to measure*. The life insurance industry, in order to ensure the infinite extension of its institutions over time, required the production of a normalized population it could constantly swallow up into its individuating/aggregating mechanism. Though it would be beyond the purview of this work to pursue in detail all the social policies that were implemented thanks to advancements in the fields of statistics, medicine, demographics, etc. under Meiji rule at this time, I think it enough to look at the pioneering efforts in population creation of the most influential insurance company of the time: the Meiji Life Insurance Company.

#### **IV. The Creation of a Population**

There were several state policies that allowed for the insurance industry to create this population of individuated bodies that it would put back together in insurable aggregations. The first we have already dealt with in our discussion of the land tax reform. With the stabilization and normalization of land claims the quantification of life was made easier. All companies needed a stable monetarized standard by which to measure the value of products, but with life as a product the only standard by which policy values could be measured was property. Property values, in turn, could only become a standard of measure if the body occupying that property could be alienated from it.

##### **1. Context**

The process of stripping bodies from their roots in the feudal order took place over a series of laws and policies that went beyond the land tax reform. That is, the land tax reform was merely one stage in a full-scale effort to alienate bodies from the old social order that

once held them together. First the Meiji state had to wean the old samurai guard slowly and carefully from their place in this order. With the monetarization of stipends in 1870 and their eventual dissolution through the *chitsuroku shobun* (disposal of stipends) in 1876, the samurai, and all classes beneath them lost their guarantee of future security. Along with this there was also the dissolution of class status itself with the *mibun kaihô rei* (the order to dissolve class status) of 1871,<sup>223</sup> followed closely by the dissolution of the *han* system altogether and the implementation of a prefectural system with the *haihan chiken* of 1872. This set the ground for the implementation of the land tax reform in 1874, which, as we saw previously, normalized all value measures of property. It is no coincidence that at the same time the eradication of all differentiation in land values was taking place, the subjects that could now occupy this space were being carefully accounted for through the promulgation of the *koseki hensei hô* or Law Forming the Family Register of 1874. Under the new registry system a more rigorous count and account of subjects was taken so that subjects and taxes could be put in proper relation.<sup>224</sup> Once the legal outline for these measures was put in place, the Meiji state simply had to wait as the effects of its policies eventually resulted in the gradual restructuring of social relations under its rule. The transformation was not immediate. In fact, the alienation of peasants from their land to produce the surplus population needed to fuel a full on industrial revolution in Japan would take decades to mobilize. As we can see,

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<sup>223</sup> Though the name suggested a complete dissolution of the class system, this was not quite the case as a class divides continued to separate the *heimin* (people) from the *shizoku* (former samurai class). This remnant of the old feudal system was just one of the many reasons the *koza ha* believed the Meiji ishin was not a revolution but merely a continuation of feudal ties into a new era.

<sup>224</sup> Under feudal rule there was a family register, but due to class divisions, it was never considered necessary to get a full account of all members of a family so long as the family itself was accounted for. Moreover, power often afforded one anonymity when it came to accounts of bodies as some higher samurai and their families were kept off the registers. See Niwa, *Chiso Kaisei Hô No Kigen: Kaimei Kanryô No Keisei [Origins of the Land Tax Reform Law: Formation of an Enlightenment Bureaucracy]*.127.

however, the social, legal, and political components for creating the *potential* for an individuated population were put in place through these early policies. It merely took an active force to spread the effects of these laws over the territory of Meiji rule.

The gradual trend to activate this population shift can be seen from a bird's eye view if we look at figures over a period of what insurance Marxist historian Satô Yasuhisa terms the "initial developmental period" (*sôgyôki*) of life insurance.<sup>225</sup> This period spanning the years between 1881 with the establishment of Meiji Life and 1900 which saw the implementation of insurance law under the commercial code, also saw the first shifts in the urbanization of Japan's agricultural class as the economic ground was being prepared for the heavy industrialization that would be spurred on by victory with the Russo-Japanese war and then the annexation of Korea to Japan. As Satô notes, though the shifts are not revolutionary in the sense that they indicated a wholesale extinction of the agricultural class, the very fact of the shifts indicated a radical change in economic focus for the Meiji era. Where *Kôza-ha* historians see feudal remnants operating in the period following the Meiji ishin, Satô rightly notes a qualitative change in the flow of labor that only later reflects a quantitative transformation of the labor market.

Borrowing figures from labor researcher Sumiya Mikio,<sup>226</sup> Satô describes the gradual trend that saw farmers working the land shift to depend more and more on wage labor. This trend was not a sudden shock to the system for the agricultural sector. Forms of wage labor

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<sup>225</sup> See the introduction to Satô, *Shihonshugi to Kindai Seimei Hoken Gyô* [*Capitalism and the Modern Life Insurance Industry*].

<sup>226</sup> Mikio Sumiya, *Nihon Chinrôdô Shiron: Meiji Zenki Ni Okeru Rôdôsha Kaikyô No Keisei* [*Historical Debates on Japanese Wage Labor: The Formation of the Early Meiji Era Laboring Class*] (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1974).

could be found under the Tokugawa regime in the form of *dekasegi* (literally, “leaving [home] to find work”) and the corvée labor the state enforced on peasants in order to promote projects of road maintenance and structural upkeep in the castle towns.<sup>227</sup> In the Edo period, however, this type of wage labor was considered a supplementary means to gain respite from heavy tribute burdens imposed by the state. Farming was still considered the main source of income. Following the land tax reform and the repeal of the law prohibiting the sale of land, landholders were for the first time in hundreds of years made susceptible on a national scale<sup>228</sup> to alienation from the land that had defined their existence and security. At best, they were forced into tenantry due to an accumulation of debts. At worst, they would lose their land, and would be forced to roam the new state realm in search of a means of subsistence. As Satô notes the changes in land policies resulted in a gradual increase of the wage laboring population from 60,000 in 1881 to over 400,000 by the end of this first developmental period of the life insurance industry in 1900.<sup>229</sup> A series of articles in August of 1883 from the *Chôya* newspaper provides a clear picture of the pressure that was being placed on the agricultural sector by Meiji state policies forcing farmers to sell their services on the wage labor market in order to fight off economic ruin. Despite a brief rise in rice

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<sup>227</sup> For a detailed analysis of this type of labor see Thomas C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

<sup>228</sup> Despite the prohibition of the sale of land, merchants and large landholders found other means to gain control over land through debt and collateral mechanisms. Because these land transfers were not formalized through the state, and many of them went counter to the structure of power by placing the lower merchant class in dominant positions over upper class samurai, however, the Tokugawa Shogunate kept its distance from these types of land transfers. As E. H. Norman writes, “Despite the prohibition on the sale of land, various schemes were devised for its transfer and mortgage. Thus, between the simple relations of ruler (feudal lord) and ruled (peasantry) another element – the usurer landlord – had wedged itself” in *E.H. Norman, Japan's Emergence as a Modern State (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973)*. 22. By writing land sale into the legal register and formalizing it through the state, the Meiji state allowed property to crystallize into its fully guaranteed form. Property became a reality influencing social relations, and the alienation of land from owner became an operative mechanism of this reality.

<sup>229</sup> Satô, *Shibonshugi to Kindai Seimei Hoken Gyô [Capitalism and the Modern Life Insurance Industry]*.15-16.

prices in 1880, farmers were under constant pressure that poor land evaluations, and the marketization of their products imposed. All knew the source of this pressure: the land tax reform.

The worries of the farmer. Recently, farmers have fallen under great distress, and though there are those who say the comparatively high prices of rice in the 13 and 14<sup>th</sup> year of Meiji (1880-1) provided a flow of luxuries, this is certainly not the case. First there was the land tax reform. With all the expenses that came out of the survey of the land to the dispensation of property deeds (*chiken*), we saw the beginning of our widespread ruin... Following this rice prices skyrocketed such that by Meiji 12 (1879) one *koku*<sup>230</sup> went from 6 yen to 7 and above, but in the hands of the farmers, it was rare even to sell 4 bags for 2 yen and 50 *zeni*.<sup>231</sup> If we deduct the cost of transporting the rice, we are left with little more than 2 yen, while any profits from this go to the rice wholesalers. In Meiji 13 with rice prices jumping from 10 yen to 11 or 12 yen per *koku*, farmers were lucky if they could sell 4 bags for more than 4 yen. With transportation costs this dropped prices below 4 yen. In Meiji 14 farmers were prepared to sell at the high prices they saw the year before, but instead were forced into restraint as the norm for prices fell below even the 4 yen mark. By Meiji 15 prices had fallen considerably, and we couldn't even get a hand on 3 yen. The 4 yen price mark for rice lasted only 2 years... Needless to say, following the land tax reform, our impoverishment has been taken to extremes. Now rice prices are falling drastically and the flow of money is finally becoming blocked, while all attempts to ask for respite on the heavy tax burden go unheard.<sup>232</sup>

In a following installment in the Chôya Newspaper, this picture of the ruin of the agricultural sector that was at the mercy of fluctuating rice prices, was further reinforced by a consideration of the costs of living for farmers.

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<sup>230</sup> One *koku* is equal to a volume of 181 litres.

<sup>231</sup> The counter indicated here is *tohyô*. The basic equivalencies of measure are as follows. 1 *shô* = 10 *to*; 10 *to* = 1 *koku*. Thus with a 4 *to* bag of rice selling at 2.5 yen, farmers would receive a 6.25 yen return on a one *koku* sale. Thus, the fact that it was rare to see such a return when prices were supposed to be 0.75 yen above this indicates the illusory nature of the quotes given indicating rises in rice prices for farmers.

<sup>232</sup> From an article in the August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1885 edition of the Chôya Shimbun as quoted in Kiyoshi Oshima, *Nihon Kyôkô Shiron Jô [on Japanese Crises, Volume 1]* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 1975). 16-17.

If we were to attempt to express the costs of living for an independent owner of a 4 to 5 *han*<sup>233</sup> plot measuring one *chō* by one *chō*,<sup>234</sup> we take the land costs for one *chō* as 600 yen, and the rice yield from this land to be no more than 60 bags (*hyō*), while the edible rice from this offers a 30 bag yield. If we subtract 2 bags to be given to the shrines and Buddhist schools, etc., this leaves us with 28 bags with one bag equaling 1 yen 80 *zeni* if sold on the market. This gives us 50 yen and 40 *zeni* in currency. From this we still need to subtract 6 bales (*da*)<sup>235</sup> of fertilizer at a total cost of 39 yen. Then we add to this deduction the land tax, the prefectural tax, and the village costs of 27 yen. On top of this we need to take off costs of hired hands, 8 yen, and the costs of farm tool upkeep at 2 yen. If we put all this together it gives us a minimum total of 76 yen, which means when we subtract this off the original 50.4 yen income we are left 26 yen short. With this in mind, the family must go out and supplement this with day labor work or work in the mountains, but even still there are the day to day miscellaneous expenses. These are difficult to supplement even by working for other farmers, and we must then mortgage our land and fall into debt...<sup>236</sup>

Eventually, large property owners would be able to take advantage of this situation to accumulate larger and larger holdings as the property market gradually stripped workers from the land and left them to roam as a surplus population to be plugged back into an industrial sector that was gradually growing hungrier for labor power. This image of the distressed farmer buried in debt found its counterpoint in the cities where workers were left to float from job to job, and a culture of wage labor began to set the norms for social behavior. The expression of this floating population would find its best expression in the opening paragraphs of what is considered by some to be Japan's first modern novel whose title would itself hint at the nature of existence for most held under the privative forces of modern

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<sup>233</sup> This *han* (反) is a unit of measure, and is not to be confused with the *han* (藩) indicating a domain.

<sup>234</sup> A *chō* (町) is a length of measure equaling approximately 109 meters. On *han* (反) is square measure equaling roughly 0.245 acres.

<sup>235</sup> A *da* (駄) is the equivalent of what one horse can carry, and is given as roughly 36 kan where 1 kan equals 3.75 kg.

<sup>236</sup> Oshima, *Nihon Kyōkō Shiron Jō* [on Japanese Crises, Volume 1]. 16-17.

capitalism. Futabatei Shimei's *Ukigumo*, or *Floating Cloud*, begins outside Kanda gate as a stream of wage laborers trudge home.

It is three o'clock in the afternoon of a late October day. A swirling mass of men stream out of the Kanda gate, marching first in antlike formation, then scuttling busily off in every direction. Each and every one of these fine gentlemen is primarily interest in getting enough to eat.<sup>237</sup>

## 2. Decentralization

If anything, the above provides for us a context in which we can come to understand the success the life insurance industry had as it took hold of this developing population of subjects who were gradually being stripped from their feudal ties to land and labor, as their nature as a population was being given definition. What we should further note about this gradual urbanization and industrialization of the workforce is that it did not function simply according to a centralized organization of state power. Yes the state's taxation policies functioned very similar to the centralized tribute system of the feudal era, which was very much characterized by a centralization of power. The *sankin kôtai* system, the class hierarchy, and the tribute system could not but be seen as an order of power that had a distinct center from which all authority emerged. This is not, however, the manner in which power and authority were organized under the Meiji state. Quite on the contrary, by looking at the manner in which the Meiji oligarchy worked tirelessly to disband the old hierarchies, flatten out the differences that split up their space of rule through the virtualization of land values, and the unification of the money system – all of which aimed at erasing the spaces of indeterminacy that a central authority could not but create, we should rather state that the

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<sup>237</sup> Taken from Marleigh Ryan's translation of *Ukigumo* in Shimei Futabatei and Marleigh Grayer Ryan, *Japan's First Modern Novel: Ukigumo of Futabatei Shimei* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967). 197.

Meiji state's turn towards modernization was an act to *decentralize* control. The success of the life insurance industry as a private enterprise can only make sense by virtue of this decentralization of power.

The shift from Tokugawa to Meiji power dynamics can be seen as a movement from technologies of governance that emphasized compulsion to those that cultivated a particular order of affection. Which is to say, collective subjects were not forced into subjection to rule by a military superclass, but instead *were made consonant with a notion of individuated bodies* that curved back on themselves in such a way that they couldn't but end up desiring their own subjection – could not but occupy a space of passive affection - to a decentralized state of existence. Subjects became their bodies, and their bodies became the location of the state's act to individuate subjects. After all, the Meiji state did not depend solely upon the police or military to physically remove subjects from their land so as to make room for the larger landholders. Force was used, but as it was reinforced by the rule of economic law. Power no longer rolled downhill from the Shogun to the daimyo to the hatamoto etc., but spread itself laterally. The most significant sign of this lateral dispersal of power was the rise of the merchant class from its lowly status in the old hierarchy to become of equal and sometimes greater status than the samurai that once sat at the top of the feudal order. The second sign of this was the gradual decline of the samurai as they were stripped of their stipends, and uniformly divested of their hierarchical status by being lumped together under the term *shizoku*. Granted, the fact that the samurai were afforded a separate class distinction from the *heimin* (regular folk) consequent to the dissolution of the old order indicates some of the old hierarchy was still kept in place. But this new hierarchy lost any of its meaning in relation to a central authority as the government gradually gave power over to the market as

determinant of class position. Which is to say, had the Meiji state been interested in centralizing power to itself it would simply have held to the draconian measures to keep order according to which the Tokugawa state functioned. If we consider how delicately Okuma Shigenobu had to balance the power of the various *han* and their lords against the foreign powers in order to resolve the problem of counterfeit coin circulation in the early years of the Meiji era and the kinds of divisions this created within government itself, it seems absurd to think the Meiji government's rise to power as one of a centralized state. Rather, the task of the Meiji state as we have seen over and over again was to breakdown all the old codes of power implemented under Tokugawa rule, and turn this break into a productive impetus to mobilize the implementation of its new order.

The dissolution of the *han*, meant the implementation of the prefectures. The eradication of the *hansatsu* and the mosaic of value production became the smooth body of a unified banking and monetary system. The obliteration of the stipend system, and its link to land valuations, became the modern taxation system based on private property. Meanwhile, the dissolution of the hierarchical tree of status placed subjects in a better position to compete with one another through the market. With the establishment of a Family register which ensured each body became unified to an individual subject through its naming, it became easier to survey these new competitive forces. What unifies these policies is not some mechanism to turn power to center itself on the Meiji state, but rather it is their instantiation of independent rational systems that would work continuously to decode any variants that emerged to threaten the porous and infinitely fungible space of the market. Competition

amongst economic powers had to be held to the strict rules of this new time and space.<sup>238</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their writing on capitalism, have aptly termed these rational mechanisms “axioms.” If we are to take the mathematical definition of the axiom to heart, then we would define an axiom as that which establishes its own independent system of evaluation without reference to any other system. It is “a self-evident proposition, requiring no formal demonstration to prove its truth, but received and assented to as soon as mentioned.”<sup>239</sup> Which is to say, an axiom hides its origins by providing a perfect rationality according to which any test of the axiom could be measured. It is these axioms that worked through Meiji space and time to organize subject-bodies into their proper affective order such that no external enforcement was required except as reinforcement to a more widely accepted market rationality.

With the instantiation of a particular time and space of organization, bodies had no other recourse but to adhere to two fundamental axioms according to which all other determinations could rationally flow: these were the dual axioms of extension and individuation. In terms of land, peasants were individualized in their ownership of land. Once given the deed they no longer had any collective recourse outside of state mechanisms to protect this land from the contingent factors that were the constant, immanent presence for any farmer. The property owner’s fortune rose and fell based on his own actions regardless of his connection to any larger collective unity, and more often than not his actions were not enough. This individualization could only occur, as we saw with the virtualization of land

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<sup>238</sup> As I discuss below examples in court cases over life insurance disputes provide more than an adequate picture of the nature of this time and space.

<sup>239</sup> "Axiom," in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

values, if all land was made indefinitely extensive over the surface of the Meiji realm. Individual plots of land could not become property without also becoming the objects of competition, because the quantification of space was also the quantification of production values of land. Gone were social relations that saw small landowners work in independent zones outside of state machinations where collective efforts to cultivate the quality of landholdings became the norm. Now landholder was pitted against landholder in a bid to see who could outlast the pressure of contingent weather cycles and fluctuating rice prices longer. In this same manner labor itself was gradually loosened from its old ties to feudalism and broke free to roam an open space like floating clouds. There was no need for direct state intervention in the production of the surplus population that secreted from the work of this dual axiom. The axioms themselves became accepted norms according to which all subject-bodies operated. The capacity for bodies to influence one another was redefined through these axioms, because these axioms redefined the nature of body itself turning potential collective bodies into necessarily individualized and competing subjects. Thus was born the market, and market governance.

## **V. Abe Taizô and the Training of Potential Individualization**

### **1. Class Interests, Egalitarian Ideals**

While the gradual individuation and extension of land and peasantry was taking place in the agricultural sector of the Meiji state giving rise to a migration of floating bodies to the urban, industrializing cities, a different kind application of the axiomatic was taking place in these spaces to prepare the ground for the capture of these bodies so they could find their place in the new order. The dissolution of the samurai class did not, as most state and market ideologues believed, create equality amongst all classes. Rather, from the dissolution of the

*han* and the samurai ties to the feudal order, a new class of merchants and *shizoku* was created that was positioned to restructure the axioms of extension and individuation to develop a market logic that would work in their favor. Instead of adhering to a central authority which had under feudalism only tended towards ambiguating social relationships by providing space for the cultivation of indeterminacy, this group of men working outside the state, but still under the umbrella of its legal and economic protection, created a network of power focused primarily on making clear and visible the quantification of relations, so that its measure of power could be secured through an axiomatic that buried the origin of an inherent mathematical inequality. In this new hierarchy of social relations bodies and things took on a whole new level of clarity such that their quantifiable reality could not be contested by even the most discerning of eyes.

It seems no coincidence that an oft quoted passage from the diary of the most prominent of life insurance pioneers, Meiji Life's co-founder and first president, Abe Taizô, makes the clarity of its vision of this new reality clear. Describing the not-for profit ideals that instigated the creation of the first modern life insurance company, Abe makes clear the mutual aid roots of his company.

According to our thoughts at the time, the life insurance company was not something that needed capital. Being men of the world who had yet to unravel what insurance was, we saw that without capital, on the contrary, we had no way of protecting ourselves from not being driven by feelings of fear. Consequently, we collected together the capital costs needed of 100,000 yen, and as a group [we] attempted to put together this company with an objective of creating mutual aid, while hardly ever letting profit settle itself at the center of our view.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> *Abe Taizô Den [the Biography of Abe Taizô]*, (Tokyo: Meiji Seimei Hoken Sôgô Gaisha, 1971).134.

The rationality of this company was clear to all men involved. With capital and profit kept outside of the “center of [their] view,” Abe Taizô and his insurance colleagues went on to create one of the most profitable industries of the Meiji era and any era afterwards. Thus in studying the life insurance industry and its development we are not faced with the image of greedy, sweaty palmed men looking only to promote their own self-interests. On the contrary, the success of the life insurance industry was guaranteed solely through the acts of well-intentioned men who only wanted to secure guarantees against immiseration for their families and the families of the people around them. Thus, in order to properly come to a critique of the particular version of life that they promoted we must necessarily place any attempts to moralize aside, since all moral arguments fail against the clarity of vision promoted by these men. Rather, we should ask how, despite all good intention, these men could create an industry that itself was based on a fundamental process of stripping subjects from their roots in collective activity such that these very same subjects could be mediated back into relation through a market designed to promote and reproduce inequality and class division rather than dissolve it.

The first stage in understanding what appears a strange contradiction between mutual aid aims and the production of profit in life insurance involves an understanding of the affective mechanisms by which life insurance pioneers such as Abe Taizô came to promote the industry. It bears noting that the men involved in this first endeavor (and in fact in all three of the successful life insurance endeavors of this era) were not ones coming from the old peasant, artisan or *eta* classes. As mentioned above, while the dissolution of classes through the *mibun kaihô rei* and the severing of the samurai from their economic security through the cancellation of stipends did undermine the status of the samurai class, what was

not dissolved by these policies were the social connections maintained by the newly branded *shizoku* and their close ties to the merchant class. All of the initial founding members and first shareholders of Meiji Life, a list of men that included Abe Taizô, Shôta Heigorô, Hayashi Yûteki, Obata Tokujirô, Koizumi Nobukichi, Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nakamura Michita, Nishiwaki Teijirô, Asabuki Eiji, Sugimoto Shôtoku, and Hida Shôsaku all necessarily had to be from either the merchant or *shizoku* class because the initial valuation of a single stock, at one hundred yen, was well over what any other class of men could provide. The breakdown of stock investments of these initial stockholders is as follows:

Fukuzawa Yukichi	1000 yen (10 shares)
Obata Tokujirô	3000 yen (30 shares)
Abe Taizô	3000 yen (30 shares)
Koizumi Nobukichi	10,000 yen (100 shares)
Shôta Heigorô	30,000 yen (300 shares)
Nakamura Michita	30,000 yen (300 shares)
Nishiwaki Teijirô	7000 yen (70 shares)
Hayashi Yûteki	5000 yen (50 shares)
Asabuki Eiji	5000 yen (50 shares)
Sugimoto Shôtoku	5000 yen (50 shares)
Hida Shôsaku	1000 yen (10 shares) <sup>241</sup>

With a minimum investment of 1000 yen it was impossible for anyone outside of the merchant or *shizoku* class at this time to purchase their way into life insurance. As we go further along in our analysis of the creation of this first endeavor we discover more proof that,

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.128.

despite the idealistic intentions to provide mutual aid for those in need, the company was strictly intended to protect the interests of the newly emergent monied class.

We discover early on in the Abe Taizô's biography that the original moment giving rise to the creation of Meiji Life was an incident that took place in the years following the dissolution of the old samurai domains or *han* under the *haihan chiken*. As Abe recollects,

As I count back in years, I recall it was in Meiji 5 or 6 when a member of our circle of friends died, and there was a meeting of all his friends and acquaintances. Talk eventually turned on the problem of aid for the surviving family. I often met with this group to discuss matters. At the time what was especially on our minds was the dissolution of the feudal system, and the new government that was being laid out. Up until then the *shizoku* had not felt the sting of economic hardship thanks to the hereditary stipend system. If our stipends were going to vanish and should a family lose one of its pillars to death, in all honesty, it couldn't be said that the family would be left in dire straits, but this was not simply an issue with the *shizoku*. This kind of thing was happening throughout society (*seken ippan*), and we were witnessing it before our very eyes more and more. We couldn't but feel our distress over the situation grow.<sup>242</sup>

There could be no clearer statement of the kind of potential a life insurance endeavor offered following the breakdown of the old status based system. Realizing they had no more recourse to the old stipend system offered under the Tokugawa Regime, the *shizoku* class had to reform its relations to secure their new status as floating economic particles in a growing space of market competition. A life insurance company provided the perfect expression of this newfound need to pool resources. Yet, despite Abe's emphasis that the worries of the Meiji Life founders were not centered on the aristocratic class, but were meant to extend to all people throughout society (*seken ippan*), life insurance would not become a matter for anyone but this upper class strata of merchants and *shizoku*. Only when this newly formed

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 100.

upper class had secured its place at the helm of the industry would it begin to spread the security of insurance to the industrial working classes. The reasons for this, however, were not ideological or moral. It is possible that all the insurance ideologues of the time were sincerely interested in expanding the insurance industry such that it could be used to cover all citizenry from all classes. The problem from the outset, however, was that the kind of capital needed to offset the probability of payouts to the kind of low premium policies affordable to the lower wage laboring classes required a massive population of life insurance policy holders. This was impossible at the time precisely because life insurance was a relatively new economic technology that had few who understood its merits. Bodies needed to be trained to understand their financial need for this kind of economic mediation into a larger community. A population needed to be created, and until this population was created life insurance would only be a matter for the upper classes who could afford the high premiums required to keep a company of small membership afloat.

We should not be surprised when looking at statistics from Meiji Life's first few months of activity that all members came from this upper crust of capitalists. Satô Yasuhisa provides a chart breaking down the list of policyholders for Meiji Life by occupation following its first year of success. The following takes into account all occupations for the 1,026 policyholders that were brought into the business between the period of July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1881 to July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1882.

Public Officials	152
Police Official s	2
Professors	4
Newspaper Reporters	11

Merchants	263
Geisha	1
Marine personnel	6
County officials	20
Doctors	22
Lawyers	4
Farmers	16
Non-employed	105
Army personnel	5
Educational personnel	11
Teaching staff	47
Company Employees	340
Craftsmen	17

Though the above list includes seemingly non-upper class categories from the feudal age such as geisha, the non-employed, farmers, and craftsman, once these occupations are considered alongside the average premium costs, it becomes apparent that a new class system had already established itself in these early decades of the Meiji era. No policyholder from a *lower economic class* could have afforded to pay for premiums that would provide the kind of coverage they would need. Which is to say, with the reorganization that came with the *mibun kaihô rei*, status was no longer being divided according to rank, but according to income. Thus, the government's attempts to equalize opportunities so that an accumulation of wealth across a broad spectrum of occupations could be stimulated was already proving successful by the second decade of the Meiji era.

If we compare average wage earnings to premium costs for whole life insurance policies (which accounted for 70.4% of policies sold in the first year of Meiji Life's business),<sup>243</sup> the inaccessibility for average wage earners becomes apparent. A sample of premium costs established for Meiji Life in 1881 are given as follows:

*Premium rates per 100 yen of coverage for Whole Life insurance (jinjô shûshin hoken) rated according to Age*<sup>244</sup>

Age (years)	Premium rate (yen per annum)
15	1.56
20	1.77
25	2
30	2.29
35	2.66
40	3.15
45	3.84
50	4.76
55	5.99
60	7.66

Average wage earnings according to occupation are given in the following table.

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<sup>243</sup> See Chart 1-10 in Satô, *Shibonshugi to Kindai Seimei Hoken Gyô* [Capitalism and the Modern Life Insurance Industry]. 28

<sup>244</sup> Taken from *Kindai Seimei Hoken Seisei Shiryô* [Compilation of Historical Materials on the Formation of Modern Life Insurance]. 320-1.

Table 6. Trend in Wage Earnings (Daily earnings in *zeni*)<sup>245</sup>

Year	Carpenter	Stonemason	Blacksmith	Typographer	Spinner (Gunma)
1873	33.3	70	n/a	20	9.5
1877	45	45	50	35	10
1882	50	70	60	53.5	20
1887	50	75	65	53	21.5
1893	50	64	65	53	21.5

If we take the highest earner of these wage laborers, the stonemason in 1887, and calculate an annual wage with a five-day work week and no time off for holidays, the maximum possible yearly earning equals 195 yen. Assuming costs of living eliminate half these earnings, this leaves 97.5 yen for extra costs. Assuming a worker wanted to leave enough for his family to survive ten years following his death, a base insurance policy with a thousand yen payout for a worker 30 years of age would equal annual premiums at 22.3 yen, thus requiring an 11.4% reduction in overall income for the year and roughly a 23% income cut for money above costs of living. At the other end of the spectrum a Spinner of the same age in 1882 could be expected to take a yearly 57% reduction in full pay to cover insurance costs. He or she would not be able to cover these costs if living expenses were calculated at half salary earnings. Thus, investments in life insurance policies for wage laborers would put such a great pressure on their earnings, and the risk of having to deal with fluctuating inflation that

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<sup>245</sup> Satô, *Shibonsbugi to Kindai Seimei Hoken Gyô* [Capitalism and the Modern Life Insurance Industry]. 17. With statistics from Sumiya, *Nihon Chinrôdô Shiron: Meiji Zenki Ni Okeru Rôdôsha Kaikyû No Keisei* [Historical Debates on Japanese Wage Labor: The Formation of the Early Meiji Era Laboring Class]. 136.

the Matsukata administration was engaged in getting under control at this time ensured that only wealthy subjects would be able to afford investment in life insurance policies.

It does seem a possibility, though slight, that stonemasons could have deemed the rate of return in terms of security for his or her family on an unforeseen tragedy worth the cost of premiums. Yet this was not the only determinant by which policyholders were selected in the early years of the industry's development. There was also an issue of creating a population that first understood the need of this kind of protection, and also a basic understanding of its mechanism of operation. The spread of knowledge was absolutely necessary for the creation of a marketable population. A key figure in the creation of this population is Abe Taizô, the president of Meiji Life, himself. In the preface to his biography, the challenge in spreading life insurance knowledge in these early years of the industry is made clear. As the biographer writes,

The venerable Abe<sup>246</sup> was the founder of our nation's first life insurance business... At the time, however, this was an era in which knowledge about insurance was almost completely absent, and so the President himself had to tour the entire nation, and inclined all the power of his body to spread insurance knowledge, and recruit new members. Thankfully, this President's first efforts with his company bore splendid fruit, and ten years later the company solidified itself as the foundation for the life insurance industry.<sup>247</sup>

Though this quote overstates the lack of insurance knowledge at the time of the establishment of Meiji Life, it seems legitimate to state the laboring classes would not have been the target of Abe's cross nation recruitment campaign. These laboring classes might, however, have

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<sup>246</sup> Throughout the text Abe Taizô is referred to using the honorific term okina (翁) to indicate the author's deference to him. Since translation of this deference into English would prove awkward – English not having an equivalent – I will simply refer to Abe Taizô through his family name, Abe.

<sup>247</sup> *Abe Taizô Den [the Biography of Abe Taizô]*, 1.

been aware of the growing spread of knowledge with regard to insurance technologies. As mentioned previously, the Tokio Marine and Fire Insurance Company was established in 1879, two years before Meiji Life. Meanwhile, various texts on insurance had either been translated or written and published in journals and newspapers by the time Meiji Life emerged on the scene, so insurance knowledge was not completely absent. More specifically, it had been taken into the custodianship of a few specialists interested in expanding their influence. The challenge for this group of men was in taking the knowledge cultivated by the few to create a knowing population that could ensure the indefinite life of the industry. Thus, in a way, we could say that the above statement concerning the absence of insurance knowledge both overstates the problem while at the same time understating the significance of the problem faced by Abe Taizô. While it is not true that insurance knowledge was completely absent, it was not simply a matter of spreading this knowledge so all could benefit from its mutual aid principles. Rather, the very order of affections needed to be reorganized in order for subjects to begin operating in concordance with the affective requirements of life insurance. This was not an immediate process, but one that required a reconfiguration of the land, and of the bodies that roamed this land. It was a process that had to be helped along by the industry itself. What will be most telling for our purposes in narrating this process of recoding will be the pattern according to which it spread as this pattern will indicate to us a shift in the manner in which sovereignty worked within the new grid of political economic relations.

## **2. Abe and the Sovereign Company**

What is most marked in the narrative of the spread of life insurance and life insurance knowledge for the Meiji Life Insurance Company is how much of it depended upon the work

of a single man. If all historical and biographical accounts are true, Abe Taizô worked tirelessly traveling from one city to the next establishing connections, signing contracts, and developing a system of branch offices all over the Meiji state's realm. In his first outing, traveling only with a single aide, and a single medical practitioner to administer the medical exam needed to diagnose the health of future policyholders, Abe spent 159 days on the road pressing the corners of space to promote his company. A diary entry proves telling of the manner in which Abe conceived of his travels. He writes,

June 13<sup>th</sup> From the life insurance company we toured Hakodate and then Ôu. In order to *implement* insurance (*hoken wo jisshi suru tame*) Dr. Kuwata Kôhei and company aide Suzuki Kô accompanied me. We left at 4:40 p.m. from the Shinbashi railway station and arrived in Yokohama...<sup>248</sup>

As we can see from Abe's sense of the nature of his journey, he did not think of his task as one to spread knowledge, in the sense that that knowledge was already available to common sense. He terms this an "implementation" or "enactment" (*jisshi*) of insurance. Abe did not conceive of his task as one of simply spreading an already given reality, but in implementing something that had only been developed in theory amongst the founders of Meiji Life. His was a task to implement a truth that required the reordering of bodies to accept their place in the life insurance system, and he brought with him a medical practitioner to aid him in this endeavor.

The rest of his itinerary proves telling of the lengths and breadths to which Abe traveled with his aide and doctor in tow. Together the three spread as far as transportation routes could take them.

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.147. Italics are mine.

...At 7 we boarded the Mitsubishi company steamship the Kokonoe Maru. On the 14<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 in the morning we set sail from Yokohama and on the 16<sup>th</sup> at 3 p.m. we arrived in Hakodate

- June 26<sup>th</sup> We left Hakodate at 12 at night taking the Mitsubishi company's small steam ship, the Naniwa Maru; at 7 a.m. on the 27<sup>th</sup> we reached Aomori.
- June 29<sup>th</sup> 2 p.m. we leave Aomori and arrive in Hirosaki for two nights.
- July 1<sup>st</sup> Leave Hirosaki; arrive in Akita on the 3<sup>rd</sup>
- July 9<sup>th</sup> Leave Akita; arrive in Yamagata on the 12<sup>th</sup>
- July 18<sup>th</sup> Leave Yamagata; arrive in Sendai. From Sendai we head for Ishimaki on the 26<sup>th</sup> and return back to Sendai on the 27<sup>th</sup>
- August 1<sup>st</sup> Leave Sendai; return to Tokyo with Suzuki Kô. Dr. Kuwata hears news of cholera outbreak in Tokyo in the news and parts from us at Utsunomiya leaving for Nikkô

(After touring Hokkaido and the regions of Tohoku to recruit insurance members, the President heads for the various regions of Hokuriku in September)

- Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> To tour on life insurance company business from Echigo to Hokuriku, I leave Tokyo at 6 in the morning accompanied by company medical examiner Yamane Masatsugu and aide Bokuya Jikichi; we set up lodgings at Kumagaya station at night
- October 3<sup>rd</sup> Go over Mikuni peak; on the 4<sup>th</sup> arrive in Echigo Koshigun Nagaoka
- Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> Leave Nagaoka taking a small steamship down the Shinano river and arrive in Niigata.
- Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> Leave Niigata; stay two days from the 19<sup>th</sup> with Kasahara Katsutarô in Katamachi located in Echigo's Nakubikigun
- Oct. 21<sup>st</sup> Arrive in Naoetsu; At 9 in the evening on the 28<sup>th</sup> we board the Aikawa Maru steamship and head for Fushiki.
- Oct. 29<sup>th</sup> Arrive at Fushiki bay at dawn; and reach Kanazawa in Kaganokuni by the 30<sup>th</sup>
- November 2<sup>nd</sup> Leave Kanazawa; arrive in Echizen's Fukui on the 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> Leave Fukui; Cross Tochinogi pass leaving Ouminokuni's Yanagase; take a steam train From Yanagase to Nagahama and find lodgings in Nagahama by sunset.

- Nov. 16<sup>th</sup> Take leave of Nagahama, and exit Minonokuni via Ogaki, taking a small ship in Ogaki at sunset to go down the Kiso river; arrive in Kuwana by sunset of the 17<sup>th</sup>
- Nov. 17<sup>th</sup> Board Mitsubishi company's Ko'ura Maru steamship from Yokkaichi
- Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> Arrive in Yokohama in the evening; return home in Tokyo by 8 p.m.<sup>249</sup>

What we immediately notice from Abe's travel itinerary is the presence of the Mitsubishi company steamships helping him move across space. This comes as no surprise once we discover that Abe himself served as President for Mitsubishi. Moreover, one of the main meetings that spurred on the establishment of Meiji Life was a *bônenkai* (year end party) thrown by Mitsubishi during which Shôta Heigorô with Abe's aid wrote a draft of the official request to government to establish the company. We will consider these cross company allegiances later. For now, what is compelling from Abe's itinerary is the degree to which he was able to travel without hindrance, and the means by which he did so. To gain a sense of the significance of these two facets we need only look backwards in time with regards to the length of his travels, and forwards for a consideration of the significance of his mode of travel.

In the narrative of Abe's own rise to prominence as a proponent of Meiji era enlightenment thought through the import of foreign technologies, we note that in his early years of education, he was forced to disguise himself as a medical student in order to manage the boundary restrictions that separated one domain from the next. As a young man born to a family of doctors, Abe became quite familiar with the limitations to which medical practitioners could rise under Tokugawa rule, and shirked his family profession in favor of

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<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.* 148-9.

pursuing Confucian studies.<sup>250</sup> The reasons for this were simple. Hearing of the stirrings of uprisings in the capital that resonated across communication lines along the Tokaidô highway for which his hometown in the Yoshida domain functioned as a main stopping point, Abe was aware that those at the heart of these uprisings were learned men, and decided to be such a man himself.<sup>251</sup> He chose to join the nearest school of repute in his area, but was initially obstructed from joining the school.

I thought I had better join a school of Confucian studies. During the Man'en era (1860-1861) I aimed to visit Saitô Setsudô's school at Isei no Tsu, but at the time, thanks to an incident that took place on the Totsu river, not only were all those not part of Tsu city kept from entering, but all foreign residents in the city were forced out. Saitô's school did not have a single student. Furthermore, the once crowded classes of Doi Gôga were empty, and thus as an outsider I was unable to join Saitô's school. At this time an acquaintance of mine, Hashimoto Issai, was enjoying work in Tsu city as a doctor. With his help I was able to enter the city under the guise of an Isei chemist, and became a student of Saitô's under this disguise.<sup>252</sup>

From here, Abe would follow the path many of the ambitious of his generation did. He saw the opportunities that a study of foreign cultures and languages offered and began looking into Dutch studies. Discovering that the ports were peopled mostly by English speakers he turned to the study of English and came to Fukuzawa Yukichi's school as a result. Here he would meet the men and make the connections that would help him turn Meiji Life into an economic success.

Contrasting the difficulty Abe faced in his initial years simply in crossing a single border to take lessons at a school located in Isei against the unchecked travels he would make

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

later on in his life to promote the interests of Meiji Life, we can see that a transformation in the nature of travel across space itself had taken place in the years that separated these two experiences. By 1881 gone were the barriers that had hindered Abe before as he traveled from Hokkaido to Echigo, Nigata, Aichi, Kanazawa, and Yokahama. The very design and flow of travel under Tokugawa rule, which moved in centralized fashion from the Shogunal headquarters in Edo out to the various domains along the five central routes of the Tokkaidô, Nakasendô, Kôshû kaidô, Ôshû Kaidô, and Nikkô Kaidô, had already begun to reform as trade routes between all major and minor cities began to open up under Meiji rule to allow for the more easy flow of money, commodities, and bodies.

The most emblematic of technologies that enabled the easier flow of trade across Meiji space was the railroad system. In Abe's itinerary we note the still minor presence of trains in his travels. At the time, the railroad industry was still in its infancy. Originally under government control, expansion of the railroads hit an economic obstruction in the early years of the Meiji era forcing the government to privatize the railroads in order to stimulate their expansion. Private railway companies would not see any real development until 1881, the same year as the establishment of Meiji Life, through the efforts of Japan Railways. From this point onwards the railway industry would begin its ascension of success. Stimulated by an 1887 government edict to promote railway development, the rail industry expanded as more and more companies began investing in their development.<sup>253</sup> The growth of both the railways and stock investments in the industry is illustrated in the following table.

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<sup>253</sup> See Oshima, *Nihon Kyôkô Shiron Jô* [*on Japanese Crises, Volume 1*]. 42 for a summary of the rise of the railroad industry.

Investment into railroads provided the perfect industry in which to cultivate the capital gains of the insurance industry. Not only was it one of the most stable growth

*Table 7. Outline of Private Rail Company Development*<sup>254</sup>

Year	Track laid (in miles)	Capital invested (in 10,000 yen)	Stocks (in shares)	Investors
1881	138	85	116,330	5,597
1882	174	69	119,500	9,527
1883	182	256	119,314	4,138
1884	182	516	236,590	3,365
1885	221	683	239,090	3,338
1886	266	827	239,090	3,197
1887	294	902	239,090	3,100
1888	407	1,499	432,147	5,179
1889	588	2,989	1,033,300	10,850

Industries in which to invest its growing premium-based capital accumulations, it was also an industry whose success had a direct influence on the success of life insurance. As rail systems grew, so did the ease by which men such as Abe Taizô could move across space to create the knowing population it needed to stimulate its business. At the same time, this new arrangement of bodies traveling in space also became indicative of the new expression of

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 44.

sovereignty that was enunciated by an alteration in flows that was no longer centralized around the state's seat of power, but instead began to circulate between manufacturing centers and distribution routes. In the case of life insurance, this alteration of sovereign flow moved from the main office of the life insurance center and the branches that were established in various locations all over the country. These branch offices were established in order to maintain and continue to expand the connections provided by Abe's initial penetration into new market spaces. Establishing his first branch office in the Yokohama Maruzen Exchange Center on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1881, Abe worked tirelessly to ensure Meiji life maintained a presence in all the spaces he visited. After his first year of work he had established branch offices in 18 cities: Hakodate, Aomori, Akita, Yamagata, Sendai, Nagaoka, Niigata, Naoetsu, Fukui, Hamamatsu, Nagoya, Yokkaichi, Tsu, Ôtsu, Kyoto, Wakayama, Usuk, Saiki. These, along with the main offices would provide the base from which a fleet of traveling insurance salesmen would come to spread itself over all of Japan. The nature of the relation between salesman, branch office, and main office in the life insurance industry would become a point of great contestation in terms of where the sovereign right of the company to accumulate premiums from its clients resided. This point would spur on the penning of several articles in the main purveyor of insurance knowledge from 1895 onward, the *Journal of Insurance*.

The nature of the relationship between main and branch office to traveling salesman would also become a point of legal contestation in the courtrooms. On February 7<sup>th</sup> of Meiji 32 (1899), Nichinô Yûtarô would bring suit against The Shinshû Life Insurance Company for its failure to provide payouts on a policy. According to the records of the case, Nichinô Yûtarô took out a one thousand yen policy on his father Nichinô Risaburô in mid-December

of Meiji 30 (1897), but did this through the mediation of a traveling salesman. Following his father's medical exam, the son made the first premium installment on the policy through the salesman, but before this money could move from the salesman's pocket to the vaults of the main branch, Nichinô Risaburô died. In Shinshû Life's defense, its lawyers attempted to argue that Nichinô's policy was not valid at the time of Nichino Risaburô's death, because the money from the first payment was made to a representative of the company who did not have the authority to accept money on behalf of the company. Economic sovereignty, they tried to argue, resided solely with the main branch. The delicacy of this issue is indicated by virtue of the fact that it is one of a minority of legal cases, which saw its decision reversed on appeal. Initially the court ruled that the salesman did not represent the company, and thus Nichinô was not entitled to the insurance payout. This was overturned on first appeal (*shishin*), and reinforced on final appeal (*jôkoku*) on the basis of testimony given by the salesmen himself, Katsuta Enjirô and the examining doctor who both agreed the contract was formalized and approved by the company.<sup>255</sup> The details of this case are not as important as the map of economic and political relations it charts. The fact that it appears as a case tried in a court of law points to the real presence the state had in the affairs of businesses run under its jurisdiction. Yet, the role of the state in this case is not to enforce the creation of new lines of sovereign distribution, but merely to adjudicate on the proper management of sovereign lines being created by the companies themselves. In the case of Shinshû life vs.

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<sup>255</sup> See “22. Nichino Yûtarô tai Shinshû seimei hoken kabushiki gaisha jiken (shishin) [(Opening) Case of Nichino Yûtarô vs. The Shinsû Life Insurance Company], “23. Nichino Yûtarô tai Shinshû seimei hoken kabushiki gaisha jiken (kôso) [Case of Nichino Yûtarô vs. The Shinsû Life Insurance Company (first appeal)],” and “24. Nichino Yûtarô tai Shinshû seimei hoken kabushiki gaisha jiken (jôkoku) [Case of Nichino Yûtarô vs. The Shinsû Life Insurance Company (final appeal)]” in *Hoken Hanrei Shu [a Collection of Legal Precedents for Insurance]*, ed. Kôtârô Shida and Kiyosuke Awatsu (Tokyo: Yûhikaku Shobô, 1903). 107-119.

Nichinô Yûtarô the state only upheld the claim that a traveling salesman was an extension of the sovereign economic practices of the company he represented. The state did not enforce the movement of the salesman from the main office out into the open space of Japan as it had under Tokugawa rule with the *sankin kôtai* system. The companies and their salesmen carved their trajectories over the smooth face of the market economy. The state only had to ensure the links connecting body to company to customer were kept in rational order.

## VI. The Map of Modern Life

Once we take up this map of economic and spatial relations established by Meiji Life and the railroad system on which it relied, we can see that the change from Tokugawa feudal relations to Meiji market relations was not merely a shift in power, but also constituted a fundamental shift in the locus of that power. Despite rhetorical and legal accounts that centralized power in the hands of the Emperor, the actual space of economic practice was one that de-centered the original locus of shogunal sovereign power and created a space of vying sovereign entities that would compete economically across the newly flattened and open space of Meiji rule. Companies and their executives became the sovereigns of their economic domains, but these domains were not solidified in space. Bodies were made to circulate through a space that was constantly being opened up by an ever-expanding railroad and transportation network. This expansion, despite its rocky beginnings, would expand so quickly and reach so deeply into the very consciousness of Meiji subjects, that it would produce its own cultural by-products eventually making “those territories without a railroad company feel disgraced.”<sup>256</sup> Meanwhile, companies would ride the rails as they vied with

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<sup>256</sup> Oshima, *Nihon Kyôkô Shiron Jô* [on Japanese Crises, Volume 1]. 44.

each other to dominate overlapping zones of the market. This is not immediately obvious in the first years of the life insurance industry when Meiji Life first began to carve its pathways through this new market space, but it would become more and more obvious as new life insurance behemoths such as Teikoku Life, Nippon Life, and Yasuda Mutual began to compete over shares for the market. Over the first decades of what Satô terms the “period of development” for the industry, hundreds of main and branch offices would mobilize thousands of bodies to battle over insurance clients. Company profits would rise and fall depending on the flux and flow of these battles. As this economic battle continued to expand, the industry itself was given shape and then reified with the establishment of its own institutional entities including the *Journal of Insurance (hoken zasshi)* in 1895, the *Institute of Actuaries in Japan (nihon akuchuarii kai)* in 1899, and the *Insurance Medicine Association (hoken'i kyôkai)* in 1898. As the industry grew, so did the population under its control. Inevitably, as the number of wage laborers began to slough off the gradually declining agricultural sector to accumulate in the urban centers, the life insurance industry began to target this sector of the population with the lowered premiums it could now afford thanks to the massive amounts of capital raised. Which is to say, wage laborers could only be taken into the system once the industry itself had solidified its hierarchy of economic relations and secured the livelihoods of executives running the industry.

To return to Abe Taizô's initial promotion of the insurance business, we need to examine two last elements to understand how bodies were reoriented into a particular modern affective order such that life insurance could rise off its surface. First, I think a further look into what activities Abe engaged in during his travels bears some attention. That is, we need to take account of what it meant to implement (*jisshi*) rather than spread knowledge on life

insurance. How did Abe create the bodies his company would need to maintain over the decades to come? If there remains any doubt as to the active nature of his involvement in creating knowledge and the bodies that would house this knowledge, Abe provides further evidence in his diary of the productive, and not reproductive, nature of his work.

In terms of the society of this era, insurance had yet to be understood; insurance thought didn't exist in the least, which made the recruitment of policyholders difficult. Ultimately, there was no relying on measures that appealed to common sense, and if I wanted to make people understand the essence of insurance, I had no choice but to persuade with all my vigor those that were considered the new intellectuals of the day – the Prefectural Mayors, the various government administrators, judges, educators, bankers and the like.<sup>257</sup>

Abe had no recourse to a given understanding of insurance. As he remarks, there was no “common sense” (*jinjō ichiyō*) to which he could appeal, and if he “wanted to make people understand” (*ryōkai seshimen to hosseba*), he would need to appeal to the thinkers of the day to get them to reproduce the knowledge for those that relied on their teaching and judgment. The upper strata of society would need to create the very foundation of common sense upon which others would come to rely. Abe's work with insurance was an act not just of promotion, but creation.

The question still remains, however, as to what this new knowledge consisted. Understanding by this point what type of world of individuation and extension lay at the heart of life insurance, we have a strong sense of the kind of social relations of which the industry itself became the message. Manifestations of this message could be found taking all types of form for Abe and his traveling insurance team. One emblematic expression of this message was the medical exam itself. Bodies that only recently understood their relation to

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<sup>257</sup> *Abe Taijō Den [the Biography of Abe Taijō]*. 149.

medicine through the Chinese medicine provided by traveling doctors were now confronted by the new knowledge of modern Western science. Their bodies became the grid of possible illness, and the medical exam quantified and temporalized an existence that did not necessarily understand itself in these terms. Bodies became tattooed with life, but an individuated life whose future prospects were measured according to statistics drawn from large populations. A glimpse at one section of a copy of a medical examiners survey gives us a sense of the type of body new insurance subjects were asked to occupy.

1. Name, Age, Status, Occupation
2. Place of birth, current residence, and time spent at current residence
3. Birth date, age at death, health status, and name of illnesses for grandparents, parents, siblings, and children
4. List the presence or absence of the following in parents or any relative related to parents by blood: presence of Tuberculosis amongst blood relatives; pleurisy; cerebral hemorrhage; carcinoma; neurosis; epilepsy; gout; blindness; diabetes; rheumatism; heart disease; syphilis; Hansen's disease; alcohol poisoning; etc.
5. Age of marriage, age of spouse, their condition of health and their age at death; names of diseases, and the date of death
6. Any present illnesses or abnormal conditions<sup>258</sup>

Thus bodies were made to locate themselves in a grid that divided up healthy bodies from unhealthy bodies designed according to the symptomization of abnormality. This abnormality was reduced to a narrative separating the interiority of bodily relations from exterior contingencies that could instigate disease according to genetic or infectious causes. The healthy body was thus made the constant reactant to exterior relations that split it off from relation to the world of its surroundings, and the family in which it found itself. The irony in this should not escape us – at the very same time that bodies were forced into disjunction based on their care for their family members, these same family members were

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<sup>258</sup> In *Journal of Insurance*, Vol 58, Meiji 33 (1900), August 30<sup>th</sup>, 24-27. This is only the first 6 entries of a list that exceeds 20 questions concerning the patient's health history.

disjoined from their family as exterior cause to genetic transformation. Collectivities were not even allowed within the family unit without the creation of this individuation by extension. One can only speculate as to the manner in which this refashioned the affective orders that governed families before and after the Meiji Ishin. What remains clear, however, is that the medical exam that was the constant companion to any life insurance policy agreement ensured the client signing the contract was made a subject now tattooed with a new awareness of a particular logic of life that further reinforced his conscious individuation amongst an already individuating social sphere. Insurance policy holders were made to fear for their lives in order that they become aware of their lives. They were made passive in relation to a world of possible disaster and disease.

If this weren't enough to scare life into bodies, then the calculation of expected life span through the use of a life table would be enough at least to provide a sense of their limited extension. "Don't worry," these tables would say, "you will die, but the company will continue beyond your existence to ensure the safekeeping of your family." Of course, this was only offered if the prospective client was willing to contribute to the process through premium payments. Little did they know that as time was given permanent extension through the practice of a company whose existence was given as unlimited, so was time itself broken down into its individual parts while premium payments were made to operate according to the strict quantification of this newly extended time of the company. If any single issue in life insurance law could be said to dominate the legal suits brought against policyholders by life insurers or vice versa, it would be the issue of the measure and quantification of time. Over and over policyholders would be forced to rely on the state to adjudicate this measurement of time, as insurers charged policyholders with the crime of not

paying their premiums. In *Hata Shigeo vs. the Dai Nihon Life Insurance Company*, *Tomita Yukio and Tomio Take vs. Nihon Life*, *Ishikawa Shiotarô vs. Shokkô Life*, policyholders were refused policy payouts thanks to defaults on premium payments that went beyond the leniency period for late payments.<sup>259</sup> It did not matter that the bulk of these defaults occurred during the time of a loved one's death, during that period when the geometry of death rearranged all considerations of time, space, and family within a single collective. Universally extensive time was made to penetrate into these lives to remind them of their duties to the time of modernity. Meanwhile if policyholders dared commit the crime of miscalculating the age of the body covered by the policy, they were met with swift legal action.<sup>260</sup> Though cases dealing with the default of payments beyond the leniency period tended to fall in favor of policyholders, most if not all court cases brought against policyholders who had declared during their medical exam the wrong age, if even by a few months, were judged in favor the life insurance company. The reasoning for this latter tendency was clear: the declaration of a wrong age had economic repercussions since the policyholder's premium rates were set based on age. Though a default on a single payment may have been forgivable, the repetition of a discrepancy throughout a contract became grounds for nullifying all agreements, regardless of the dedication or care to deadlines clients gave to their contract.

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<sup>259</sup> See “4. Hata Shigeo tai Dai Nippon Seimei Hoken Gaisha Jiken (shishin) [(Opening) Case of Hata Shigeo vs. The Dai Nippon Life Insurance Company],” “7. Tomita Yukio, Tomita Take tai Dai Nippon Seimei Hoken Gaisha Jiken (shishin) [(Opening) Case of Tomita Yukio and Tomita Take vs. The Dai Nippon Life Insurance Company],” and “13. Ishikawa Shiotarô tai Shokkô Seimei Hoken Kabushiki Gaisha Jiken (shishin) [(Opening) Case of Ishikawa Shiotarô vs. The Shokkô Life Insurance Company]” in *Hoken Hanrei Shu [a Collection of Legal Precedents for Insurance]*. 11-53.

<sup>260</sup> If one remembers the warp of time that occurred due to the readjustment of clocks following the implementation of the Christian clock in 1873, then one begins to understand how older members of the population could have been more susceptible to miscalculating their age without being aware of the mistake.

In all of the above, the message given in timelines, contracts, and medical exams was made clear: in a collective of bodies joined through their individuation only money was to be trusted. This was not a message restricted to life insurance itself, but was one that rang its distinct call through the bones and being of a state that was in the process of becoming real. Its message found expression in the land tax reform and repeal of the laws prohibiting the sale of land, policies that began stripping bodies from their former social ties under the guarantee of a given hierarchy. It resonated in cries from the samurai when their stipends and all former economic security of their continued prosperity and survival were severed from state guarantees. It rattled and rasped over the body of money that came to fill all these empty gaps with its pervasive, yet impermeable body. On all fronts subjects, be they peasant, merchant, samurai, or artisan, were made to carve their subjectivity out of a world of expression that spoke only one ineluctable message: alienation. Bodies were individuated so that money and the market could guarantee their return to sociality, and life insurance relied on the greatest fears which could compel bodies to accumulate to its mediating mechanisms: the fear of death, the fear that no one would care for one's loved ones when they died.

## **VII. Who Creates?**

It seems a common precept for the life insurance histories promoted by the industry itself, or even by most economic histories promoting the advantages of freedom and equality to which the enlightenment of capitalist society gave birth, that the odds in a market society are equally stacked against the rich as they are for the poor, against the large landholders as it was for the small landholders. Did not Abe himself face unwieldy odds in implementing an entire industry on his own? Was not the success of Meiji Life the direct result of his individual efforts as he toured relentlessly from one city to the next collecting clientele and

establishing the basis for his company? If we abide by the individuating logic of biography, then this would seem to be the case. Yet, it takes hardly any effort of consideration to notice the cracks in this narration of Meiji Life's success. As we learned early on, Abe was not alone in his endeavor to promote the industry but was constantly surrounded by members of the Meiji moneyed elite. The original stockholders of the company read like a who's who of the business world during the Meiji era. If we trace the lineage of their relation we discover that a majority of the men that founded this first life insurance company were all members of the same association: the Kôjunsha. Established in 1880 by Fukuzawa Yukichi, the Kôjunsha was Japan's first social club. Based on a principle of "exchanging knowledge and the inquiry into worldly affairs" (*chishiki o kôkan shi semu wo shijun suru*), and established to promote enlightenment ideals, the Kôjunsha included members from all walks of business life. Through the Kôjunsha and Fukuzawa's school, Keio Gijuku, Abe made his original connections to the Maruzen company that would house his first branch office, to the Mitsubishi executives that would provide his passage via steamship all across Japan, and to Shibusawa Ei'ichi, the first executive to sign a corporate contract providing life insurance for all members of the First National Bank. As is noted in his biography, Abe's visits to the various cities on his tour were usually preceded by letters of introduction sent by members of the Kôjunsha including Fukuzawa Yukichi himself urging businessmen and politicians to join Abe's newly founded business endeavor.<sup>261</sup> If this kind of support was not enough, there was also the support of media as all major newspapers including Fukuzawa's *Jiji Shinpô*, the Tokyo Nichi Nichi Newspaper, the Yomiuri Newspaper, and the Postal

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<sup>261</sup> A copy of one of Fukuzawa's letters is reproduced in *Abe Taizô Den [the Biography of Abe Taizô]*. 150-1.

Newspaper published article after article promoting and critiquing this new technology called life insurance. Thus, the success of this first company was not the result of efforts by a single man, but the fruit of a collective effort by a class of powerful men who used their connections in the business world to promote their own mutually concerned interests. As mentioned above on studying the initial clientele of the industry, life insurance was used as the economic glue used to recombine the interests of a once obliterated class. Members were enjoined to place themselves in the position of passive acceptance of their place in modern relations, but they did so initially so they could gain a hold over all of existence and ensure every body under the sun played by the rules of a reality that kept their interests protected.

So long as the market was allowed to mediate social relation, the dominant class of wealthy landowners, aristocrats, and merchants were made the adequate producers of this reality while everyone else became their victims made to suffer under an system that provided anyone without money little outlet for the anxieties that became everyone's primary condition of existence. While some freedom was allowed bodies within this new order to pass between registers – money and individuation did provide their own flexibilities for managing social relations – the line dividing actor from reactor solidified itself into the minds, bodies, and objects of this new existence. A new and modern political ontology found its voice through the schisms that continually attacked the apriori collectivisms and indeterminacies that persisted in the era before. This apriori collectivism was then made to adhere to a different logic of cohesion, splitting its interests, not across the indeterminate landscape of a paranoid feudal territory, but over the enlightened world that crystallized through distinct divisions, clear alienations, and a lucid distrust that gave real definition to everything under the sun. Instead of dividing collectives according to the micro-

indeterminants of land and sky, apriori collectivism was replaced by a division amongst divisions that set a clear line defining those actions which would be consequential to the operation of state being – that is, those creative, consequential actions that found their adequacy through a reproduction of the logic of division that was their origin, and those which would operate purely as exteriority meeting exteriority: in the unmediated realm of inconsequential actions performed by a majority population subjected to its own subjection by virtue of its own particularized and alienated body of reproduction.

This reality would eventually give rise to its own subjective illusions: the division of public and private, the emergence of the aesthetic realm, and its accompanying inconsequential, and paralyzed affect-space of inner life. It is to the history of the development of these inconsequential affective zones in the aesthetic realm that I now turn.

*Chapter 6.*

# The Political Potential of Aesthetic Expression

## I. The Cultural Turn

### 1. Polymorphous Perversity

So far we have seen how the Meiji oligarchy lead by the former Satsuma, Chôshû, Tosa, and Hizen domain leadership worked to implement their own state of being that came complete with a new sense of time, space, and social relation. We also saw that this was not a wholesale transformation that occurred immediately following the Meiji Ishin, but was one that required the capture of bodies in temporary feudal relation as the ground was prepared to accumulate the capital needed to enforce a full on industrial revolution that would make the Meiji state a modern one centered around a capitalist mode of production. The shift to a capitalist state of being, although an accelerated one when compared to the development of capitalism in Britain, France or Germany, required time to establish itself as the political ontology for all subjects. The times of this development are not uniform. Though one might argue that the shift to the stage of true industrialization based on a system of wage labor

came with the annexation of Korea in 1910,<sup>262</sup> we could also state that this heavy industrialization didn't blossom into its full form until the Japanese economy found real vitalization through the mass influx of capital it received exporting products to the Western nations during the first world war. Alternatively, if one were to look at the history of Japanese capitalism as one tied intrinsically to the development of the national imaginary as Benedict Anderson would characterize it,<sup>263</sup> or the solidification of the triptych nation-state-capital as Karatani Kojin<sup>264</sup> would have it, then the victory over Russia in 1905 and the consequent display of pomp and pageantry surrounding Japan's military successes that drew a unified nation together following the war seems adequate marker for thinking the moment of transition to a fully capitalist nation state.<sup>265</sup>

Yet, before we begin periodizing this incarnation with too much haste, we should take a moment to consider the practices inherent to capitalism itself. If capitalism is at heart a system in which a particular mode of production has made itself the dominant mode for the reproduction of all social relation, then the above periodizations might prove useful in our

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<sup>262</sup> Uno Kôzô, an influential Japanese Marxist, divides the stages of capitalist development in Japan using 1910 as the date marking Japan's turn towards its final, imperialist stage of capitalist development. See Kôzô Uno, *Principles of Political Economy, Theory of a Purely Capitalist Society*, trans. Thomas Sekine (Michigan: 1980).

<sup>263</sup> Where capitalism is not merely defined according to its political economy, but also through its cultural production in the form of print capitalism and linguistic unification. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London ; New York ;: Verso, 2006).

<sup>264</sup> Where nation, state, and capital are deeply intertwined through the internalization of boundaries that allow for the reproduction of unified alienation that is necessary to the capitalist mode of competitive production. See Kojin Karatani, *Sekai Kyôwa Kuni He - Shihon = Neeshon = Kokka Wo Koete [Towards a World Republic. Overcoming the Triptych: Capital-Nation-State]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2006).

<sup>265</sup> What seems characteristic of this pomp and pageantry is the fact that it drew record numbers to view the spectacles that celebrated the completion of the promise the Meiji oligarchy promised its people: to match the West in military might. Thus, the hundreds of thousands that came to watch the Victory marches celebrating the end of the Russo-Japanese war indicate a shared desire to participate in the unified spectacle of national cohesion.

narration of its development. Once the traces of its economic form are shown to be fully set in place – the shift to heavy industrialization, and the expansion to its imperialist form - we can say with certainty that a particular stage of capitalism has been achieved. These views of capitalism, however, threaten to reduce it to matters of a purely economic nature. Since the post-war turn towards the critique of culture, we can say with some degree of certainty that the capitalist mode of production was focused on the reproduction of more than just commodities. To return to Louis Althusser's work, capitalism created its own ideologies, and from these were born its subjects and their means of organizing themselves in relation to the world of their own experience. If we are to distance ourselves from the more orthodox views that would see the economic base of a capitalist mode of production as the foundation for the production of its superstructural aspects such as its cultural, educational, or moral institutions, then we are left with a real quandary as to the "proper" narration of capitalist development. In the Meiji case this is further complicated by the hurried nature of the implementation of this economic form as it necessitated the recodification of previous forms of domination as older or "feudal" so they could function simultaneous to the marketization of social relations. Capitalism was not a uniform order in its times, modes of production, or cultural expressions. Rather, it would seem better to characterize it as inherently uneven in terms of its relation to its own economic principles, and polymorphously perverse in its desires to be an economic, cultural, and ideological force. How does one periodize this kind of perversity if its multiplicity allowed it to operate according to different times of proliferation?

Capitalism is not just an economy, a mode of production, or shared imaginary. It is the space of a permanent disagreement. Karl Marx, one of the most astute critics of the

history of capitalism, provides a means to understand the nature of this conflict. Under a certain reading of Marx one could see being as that which comes to its unities through the *aufhebung* of the conflict between classes. These ties to a form of German idealism under G. W. F. Hegel, however, threaten to hold Marx too close to the notion of a historical progression and leave him open to appropriation to the old Hegelian historians that placed their progression, development, and totality before the material. There persists even today in Marxist historiography this longing towards a reconciliation of disagreement and conflict to create a future world free of the contradictions of capital. This treats the difference at the heart of the material as something external to materiality itself and so something to be resolved. Capitalism in all its metonymic expressions of its own internal schisms need only find within itself the proper mechanism of *aufhebung* – via the resolution of the contradiction inherent to class distinction – and all of being will be returned to the beautiful unity of man, labor, and life.

I would argue for a different reading of Marx's work, one that tends more towards the polemical. In fact, I would say Marx's entire oeuvre is written in such a consistently polemical style, that one is hard pressed to find any logic of reconciliation within it. Rather than read this polemical style as some sign of the character of the man himself, we should read this as a reflection of his deep-rooted appreciation of the productive capabilities of disagreement. This requires reading Marx in which the contradictions that found the relationship between capitalist and wage laborer are not ones to be easily resolved for the production of some utopian imaginary. In this I agree with Jacques Rancière when he characterizes the disagreement between classes as ontological at heart, and not merely

social.<sup>266</sup> Thus, I would sever Marx from any progressive Hegelian project, and as such sever his work from a *teleological progression* that constantly threatens to revert Marxism back to the mere extension of German idealism. If being itself is inherently a disagreement, our utopias must never be these beautiful resolutions. Rather, *communism* was Marx's tactical expression of his disagreement with a particular state of being he was in the process of critiquing. Communism was a practice in thought and not an ideology - a practice aimed at the creation of creation, a practice of *active* affection, a practice in the expression of the multiplicity of being. Marx did not stop in his critique of capital with a reactionary position that would have made his critique an expression of mere resentment towards the bourgeoisie. Marx understood that at the heart of the battle between wage laborers and capitalists was a battle over control of the act of creation. Communism was adequate to his critique in that it imagined a world of creation in which the collective itself was adequate to its own affection that lead to a creative existence. As Marx writes at the beginning of *The German Ideology*,

. . . as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement : Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>267</sup> From Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1972). 124.

When a laborer has his or her sphere of activity “forced upon” her, she is no longer adequate to her act, and thus acts in passive reaction to exteriorized forces. In this we can call this relation affective, if, as mentioned in a previous chapter, affects allow us to think the potential for bodies to affect and be affected. As long as the collectivity from which our bodies are expressed as labor holds these bodies as inadequate to the act of labor itself, creation, that is, labor, will only ever be the expression of our impotence. We are always and only held in a potential relation of passive affection, and experience this as suffering. The wage laborer’s acts are all formed on the condition that he or she have nothing but their labor power to sell to survive. Labor loses its collective creativity and dies as the power to labor itself is turned into a commodity. Communism as the expression of a polemic against this form of existence, provides the image of a collective in which “society” is only a regulative operation maintaining an expression of activity that is allowed to move according to difference itself. Bodies are no longer fixed to a particular state of creative being, but become polymorphous in expression so they can better accommodate the disagreement of being that emerges consequent to any stabilization of existence. This must forever be a polemical issue, if disagreement is taken as fundamental to any expression of being, and consequently must never be taken as the image of any actual form of collective existence.<sup>268</sup>

Instead of asking what this collective form would look like, it would be better to work towards a system of thought that could accommodate the historicity of a present expressed

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<sup>268</sup> This is where I take issue with Alain Badiou in his promotion of a Communist idea (see footnote 26 in Chapter 1). Communism, I fear, has become too bogged down by its historical content, and so, along with Marx, we must begin speaking communism, not in its historical guise, but in the guise as Marx wrote it – as the future given name if only as a matter of expedience. The unnamed idea. We must learn to speak communism without communism.

through the polemic. What state of being would be flexible enough to accommodate the *sturm und drang* of being's inherent multiplicity?

## **2. What Disagreement?**

With this sense of affects in relation to the disagreement of being in mind, we can now turn to the history of life and the market narrated in the last chapters to ask the question: where is the disagreement in this history of life? If life and the market can be seen, through our history of the life insurance industry, to share a logic of extension and individuation that pressed into the very ontological constitution of bodies, we must ask where was the disagreement with the time and space of this state of being, and how was it articulated during the long historical process that the Meiji oligarchs followed to implement a capitalist ontology? To ask the question of disagreement is to account for capitalism's polymorphous perversity. The history of capitalism's ontological development is very specific in that it is the only state of being that takes the multiplicity of being as its main target of assault, and in doing so creates, as Marx argues, the very means of its own dissolution. Yet, capitalism did not dissolve, and has stayed with us even today. We need to account for this. We must ask how it managed to make itself so resilient to its own interior critique? How did it make itself so adept at restraining the multiplicity of being in order to establish its own sustained state of being? The answer finds itself in the question. Capitalism's polymorphous perversity was the solution to its ontological problems. By decentralizing itself over an extensive grid of individuation, capitalism made itself infinitely flexible to any of its own internal critiques and over time learned to use these critiques for its own reproduction. To do this and ensure its prolongation over time, capitalism as we see it in the Meiji case, had first to wrestle multiplicity itself from being to become the dominant form of its own polymorphous

perversity. To do this, the state had to secure the compartmentalization of bodies such that they would no longer pose a threat to the markets own dominant perversity. As Karatani argues, state and capital do not operate in distinct separation from each other, but are each the condition of possibility of the other.<sup>269</sup>

Bodies had to be hierarchized according to their access to the adequacy of their actions. Bodies became hierarchized in terms of those that would always hold the potential to affect, and those that would be placed in passive affection. Marx is best known for studying the effects of this “affective order” by terming those closest to the source of adequacy capitalists and those on the far side of inadequacy as the proletariat. All under capital are allotted their fair share of suffering, but only the wage laborer must wager his very life to buy his share of adequacy. We should always keep in mind, however, that capitalism itself as an order of affection keeps itself as the only truly adequate relation, since even those allowed to act through the production of capital can only do so as long as they operate according to the axioms of extension inherent to the capitalist affective order. Capital must always create more capital, and capitalists are never allowed to stray from this logic of creation. They are punished from straying through a loss in profits, and consequently a loss in their ability to create larger amounts of capital. This is not a natural order, and, as we see in the early decades of the Meiji era, the affective organization of bodies in relation to capital had to be put in their proper order through social and economic policies. When these failed, the state resorted to brute force. Or we should say more precisely, capitalism’s perversity

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<sup>269</sup> Karatani, *Sekai Kyōwa Kuni He - Shihon = Neeshon = Kokka Wo Koete* [Towards a World Republic. Overcoming the Tryptic: Capital-Nation-State].

was always organized towards its own failure precisely so that brute force could find constant legitimation.

### **3. Polyphony**

Creation inevitably takes on a cultural tone as the production of capital required the reorganization of practices in space and time. We have spent some time studying how the affective order organized bodies in economic relation with our analysis of the rise of life insurance. It would be a mistake, however, to think that this reorganization of the economic order is somehow more fundamental than those realms of collective organization traditionally conceived of as exterior to economic practices. Rather, our analysis up until now has allowed us to locate the affective underpinnings of capitalist modernity precisely so we could shed light on the more fundamental nature of its cultural and aesthetic aspects. If the affects provide us with anything, they provide a means to see how the cultural and aesthetic realms of production were just as fundamental to the maintenance of a modern capitalist ontology as were its economic expressions. In fact, from the perspective of the affects one could say that aesthetic and economic expression do not differ in kind but only in expression. In its attempts to suppress the multiplicity of being as its main target of attack, the capitalist state of being had to learn to make itself polymorphously perverse to deal with being's multiplicity. Consequently, the history of the development of capitalist modernity would be the history of the gradual diversification of this perversity. In the Meiji case we see this diversification with stark clarity as the shift to heavy industrialization of the 1910s can be seen as the final expression of the market's ability to deterritorialize those codes it itself had marked as feudal to produce an accumulation of capital that could sustain the kind of productive capabilities needed for an industrial revolution. Meanwhile, the mass

demonstrations of national cohesion that came with victory over Russia in 1905 with the grand military marches as well as the Hibiya riots<sup>270</sup> a year later become the penultimate expressions of the de/reterritorialization of subjective codes that held bodies in vacillation between their old status based stratifications, and their unified allegiance to the Meiji state.

Which is to say that because capitalism was aimed specifically to suppress the multiplicity of being through a rationalization of space and time, its process of development did not just involve the implementation of a mode of production, but simultaneous to this implementation was its constant need to suppress the multiple expressions of disagreement that being itself had with its particular state of being. These disagreements were themselves polymorphously perverse and so capitalism had to respond by making itself a reflection of that which it so desperately attempted to suppress. The history of capitalist development thus is not a chronological history of uniform progression, but history as disaster management. The expression of multiple being seeped through the holes and cracks of a still developing capitalist modernity and constantly threatened to pull it apart at the seams. It found voices and bodies to give it power as these voices found their expression in whatever was available at hand. When the mechanisms of capitalist modernity were not developed enough to deal with these threats, the state stepped in to quell their diverse cries. The diversity of collective being that found expression in the wake of the Meiji *ishin* was compartmentalized into inconsequential portions and relegated to an impotent private sphere of individual expression,

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<sup>270</sup> The Hibiya riots were riots that took place outside the Emperor's palace in reaction to what was considered a humiliating capitulation of the government to Western influence as expressed in the Treaty of Portsmouth following Japan's victory over Russia in 1905. Unlike the *Seinan* war of 1877 which was fought according to domain alliances, or the disturbances during the years of the protests fueled by the Freedom and People's Rights movement, which were unified by their disunity, the Hibiya riots can be seen as one of, if not the, first major riot of the modern era that saw Meiji subjects protest en masse against the government on behalf of their unified sense of national cohesion, rather than their domain allegiances or diffracted interests.

while the individual was burdened with the weight of contingent breakdown and death so that the corporations, and the state itself could continue on indefinitely. This was a battle that was not held strictly to the corporate or economic sphere, but dipped deep into the very space of the everyday where assembly lines of cultural production churned out the subjects and their subjectivities needed to keep the affective order in a sustainable state. In the initial stages of capitalist development, however, the state, not capital itself, would need to deal in its own way with the polyphony of antagonist voices. It did so, in a manner characteristic of the state, with brutality.

#### **4. The subjection of subjectivity.**

Under a capitalist ontology bodies first had to be trained into their own subjection to the time, space, and hierarchy of the market. While this was going on in the field of economics with the institution of a particular time and space developed through the land tax reform, the extension of space via the railroad system, and the creation of the smooth space of capital via the establishment of a uniform banking system, a further problem arose with regards to the bodies caught in the breach separating the feudal era from the modern one. They needed to come into being such that they could see no other choice but to put their lives in the hands of the new political order. With the manner in which the Meiji state managed to maintain control in the first few decades of the era without making due on its promises given in the Charter Oath of 1868 of “open discussion” of state matters, and equal rights<sup>271</sup> the

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<sup>271</sup> The Charter Oath of 1868 (*gokajô no goseimon*; lit. An Oath in Five Articles) provided these promises in five succinct declarations (taken from W. W. McLaren, *Japanese Government Documents* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1979). 8:

By this oath, we set up as our aim the establishment of the national wealth on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws.

question must be: why did anyone put up with the system that eventually settled in place? The two faces of Fukuzawa Yukichi given in the first chapter become especially pertinent at this point in our critique, because now we must confront the problem of the collective desires that were expressed in his work. With so much promise given by enlightenment ideology to break from the old feudal regime and foster in a world of freedom, equality, and good government, how did the Meiji oligarchy maintain power over a population filled with the hope these promises offered? Takashi Fujitani notes the reaction to this failure in the introduction to his work on the invention of the imperial tradition,

When the Meiji rulers ushered in what they called the restoration of imperial rule, many of the common people looked with great expectation to the arrival of a world renewed by the new regime; but this does not mean that they held strong beliefs about either the nation or the emperor. Rather, they longed for a bettering of their lives, for such concrete benefits as the reduction of taxes or the redistribution of land. When their hopes were shattered – by representatives of the state who attacked their religion and way of life... they reacted immediately and violently.<sup>272</sup>

Subjects under Meiji rule did not immediately abide by the invasive policies passed by the state. How could they when these policies demanded they re-order the very structure of their belief systems, and everyday habits of existence? And yet, this violent reaction did not result in the overthrow of the Meiji oligarchy, and by 1905, violent anti-state movements were

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1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by open discussion.
  2. All classes, high and low, shall be united in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
  3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall all be allowed to pursue their own calling so that there may be no discontent.
  4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
  5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundation of imperial rule.

<sup>272</sup> Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*. 6-7.

made subordinate to mass demonstrations of national unity and grand celebrations of Japanese imperial and military authority. How were these subjects made to desire their own subjection to a capitalist modernity that promised freedom and equality, but provided only immiseration and alienation? What was the nature of these violent disagreements to state authority, and how were they, not only suppressed, but inverted into mass demonstrations of patriotic fervor?

## II. The Political Novel

### 1. Rethinking the History of the Novel

In many histories of Japanese literature of the Meiji era, the political novel (政治小説、*seiji shôsetsu*) is given status as precursor to the modern novel. Its emergence is given at the beginning of the Meiji 10's and ends around the same time the first experiments in novel writing and Tsubo'uchi Shôyô's seminal description of the essence of the novel came to print. Though I do not contest the usefulness of using "political novel" to designate this pupal stage of the novel's development, since this makes thinkable the sets of relations that defined political and aesthetic practice that came previous to a more standardized mode of aesthetic expression, I think it important to consider the assumptions that give this history its thinkability, as I think these assumptions are illustrative of some key problems inherent to the production of thought and politics in Japanese literature itself.

The first assumption is that of the consistency of the history itself. For the political novel to remain thinkable as an historical place marker one must provide some standards by which any work included within its history of development can be recognized as a member of that history's consistent historical line. This implementation of standards, however,

creates a contradiction. The categorical distinction works by analogy - a few given characteristics define what works are most exemplary of a historical moment and which are least, which can be included and which can be excluded. Whether its designation is defined by what it is or what it becomes is somewhat incidental. What is important is that this consistency and its spectrum of analogy remain fixed in place. Yet, literature does not abide by such rules. At the same time that the consistency of a historical periodization are fixed in place to make the encounter with texts thinkable along an analogical line, they are also made disparate upon their specific application to texts. As with most if not all designations within literature of any kind, even with the term literature itself, there is always a sense that these terms are merely used conditionally or even haphazardly when applied to a specific work. Their history of expression is always a diverse one. Tôkai Sanshi, Tôda Kindô, or Miyazaki Muryû did not explicitly set down to write according to the strictures of already established modes of writing. Even their relation to writing, as we will see with most political novelists of the Meiji era, cannot be reduced to the modern sense of writing for an audience who will read silently. Even if they had, the immanent relations of their time and place would not have guaranteed the success of their endeavor. In fact, history may have worked against them to press their brush in unthought rhythms, times, and combinations. Literature requires ink soaked in difference and contingency, else it would lose all allure.

Yanagida Izumi, the literary scholar known for giving the political novel its initial designation as such, is aware of the problems in historicizing a genre of literature that balks at its own historicization, and dedicates most of his essay on the political novel in the

*Complete Collected Works of Meiji Literature (Meiji bungaku zenshū)*<sup>273</sup> to dealing with the issue of periodization. He begins his search for the “origin” (*kōshi*) of the political novel by establishing the novel form itself as only partial condition. That is, though it cannot be said there were novels available in the modern sense previous to Tsubo’uchi’s manifesto on the *Essence of the Novel*, or “at the very least, though one could say there were no works that weren’t novels per se, there were an abundance of novel-like (*shōsetsu rashii*) works.”<sup>274</sup> This partial condition, of course, proves inadequate on its own to establish the consistency amongst works. As the name of the “political novel” suggests, a definition of the “political” must fill a second requirement; yet, even this condition does not allow for a strict determination of the boundaries of its historicity. For,

... moreover if we were not to focus merely on arguments over People’s rights (*minkenron*), but took politics to have a wider meaning including such elements as government policy etc., what would come of this? In Meiji 5 (1872) there is Kanagaki Robun’s *Tako no Nyūdō Uo Sekkyō*. In Meiji 6 (1873) we have his *Sanjō no Chikamichi*. One wonders if either of these could be considered a political novel since they are both related to government policy.<sup>275</sup>

Along with the above possibilities, Yanagida goes on to argue over the legitimacy of including such works as Itagaki Taisuke’s auto-biography, Okamoto Kisen’s *Samidare Nikki*, the novelization Kido Koin’s biography under the title *Hometsudō Hana no Niwa Kido*. All these titles, which fall outside the periodization Yanagida gives for the political novel, could be said to abide to one degree or another to conditions that define the genre. The problem,

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<sup>273</sup> Yanagida Izumi, “Seiji Shōsetsu no ippan [A General Introduction to the Political Novel],” *Meiji Seiji Shōsetsu Shū*, ed. Yanagida Izumi, vol. 1, *Meiji Bungaku Zenshū, Vol. 5* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1966). 415-434

<sup>274</sup> Ibid. 416.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

however, is that, as Yanagida himself notes, “...if we were to take a broader meaning for the political novel, and thin it out, the further we would go back into the past, the further reason we would have to continue moving back. As a consequence, it would be like unbridling a wild horse, and there would be no limit putting a halt to our regression.”<sup>276</sup> In order to stabilize the ambiguities inherent to the conditions giving the political novel its consistency, Yanagida can only but use history as his marker for holding the political novel in its loose, but stable place. He narrates the emergence of the political novel according to the political history of the emergence and gradual suppression of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement (*jiyû minken undo*). Thus, Izumi, working in the politically charged era of the 1930’s with its ever present censoring apparatuses, and gradually strengthening surveillance technologies, cannot but see writing as inherently tied to political action. The political novel for Yanagida becomes the formal expression of an entire movement that sought alternatives both in practice and in writing to the reality that was being put in place by the Meiji state. Thus, Yanagida organizes his history of the novel not according to some internal characteristic of the novel’s themselves, but to contexts within a specific history of political activism. The political novel, like the novels themselves cannot be thought unless tied to their extra-textual conditions; they cannot be thought unless tied to the collective actions they attempted to express. As we will see below, ignoring these conditions threatens to efface the very political project that gave the texts their *raison d’être*.

## 2. Misreading Izumi

Ignoring Yanagida’s deliberate interweaving of literary and political history to give

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid. 422

definition to the political novel, later literary critics end up mislead into focusing on the limits and conditions defining the form as a genre, and deal merely with the question of which authors and novels should be included in the genre. As Yamamoto Ryo notes in his work on *The Japanese Novel*,

Since the publication of the first edition of Yanagida Izumi's *Study of the Political Novel* (政治小説の研究、*seiji shōsetsu no kenkyū*) to the 1960's up until the present,<sup>277</sup> this work has continued to be the primary theoretical work on the political novel. In fact, it could be called the Bible of Political Novel Studies; it not only provides a rigorous analysis from the material side of research, but the relevance of its historical analysis of the texts has not waned with time. Regardless of this, all attempts to emend Yanagida's original study have predicated their study on an implicit assumption of the prominence of the political novelist as origin of thought; consequently, research on the topic has offered little more than arguments over biases of selection in determining which novels can be understood as political novels and which can not.<sup>278</sup>

These critics mistake Yanagida's attempt to reconfigure the place of literature within the Meiji era's political history and end by reading the political novel within a form of thought that followed the establishment of more static forms of literary production. The political novel as genre, consequently, becomes reified as a category exterior to its history. This was not Yanagida's intention. As stated above, Yanagida terms this brand of novel as political precisely to reconfigure our understanding of history and the novel. In the opening pages of his three volume study of the political novel, Yanagida complains of the historicization of modern literature that begins with the establishment of the *bundan* or literary world by the ken'yūsha writers, and which sees everything before it as somehow subordinate or less literary. According to this history of literary development, the political novel ends up treated

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<sup>277</sup> The first publication of the first volume of this three volume work came out in 1935.

<sup>278</sup> Ryō Yamamoto, *Shōsetsu No Ishin Shi: Shōsetsu Ha Ika Ni Meiji Ishin Wo Ikinobita Ka [the History of the Novel's Restoration: How Did the Novel Extend the Life of the Meiji Restoration?]* (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 2005). 66.

as the stepchild (*mamako*) to modern literature – related in figure, but not in blood.<sup>279</sup> The political treatises developed in the novelists associated with the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement (hereon as FPRM) are seen as vulgar from the perspective of modern literature, with their shallow characterizations of character, and their dogmatic adherence to the precepts of “promoting virtue and punishing vice” (*kanzen chōaku*). They are consequently criticized for their lack of subtlety. These critiques mirror Tsubo’uchi Shōyō’s own castigation of the literary forms that had proliferated in the early decades of the Meiji era, which resulted in his call to write a more realistic novel that reflected the complexities of the given world rather than pursue a promotion of ideals. The political novels of the Meiji 10s and 20s seen from the perspective of modern literature can only be seen as substandard forms of literary production. Their politics make them too vulgar to be treated as anything but poor attempts at propaganda.

Yanagida argues this view misses the point. We should not be reading these as political *novels*, but rather as *political* novels. Born from the general dissatisfaction with state policies and censorship laws, the political novel became the necessary venue through which the FPRM could communicate its dissent with the reality the Meiji state was attempting to implement. Like Tsubo’uchi Shōyō, the political novelists shirked the glib irreverence of the *gesaku* writers, and preferred a utilitarian attitude towards literature. The act of writing became an extension of the general concern with politics of the Meiji 10s and 20s, and became the legitimate and only means to organize a collective consciousness that was not the product of state propaganda. As Yanagida writes,

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<sup>279</sup> Izumi Yanagida, *Meiji Bungaku Kenkyū, Dai 8 Kan: Seiji Shōsetsu No Kenkyū* [*Studies in Meiji Literature, Vol. 8: A Study of the Political Novel, Book 1*] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1967). 1.

...speaking of the time when the political novel emerged, it would be best to adhere to notions of political reform (*seiji kairyô*). This notion was linked to the reform of consciousness through literature (*bungaku kairyô ishiki*) such that it was believed that all literature, amongst all novels, had to be political novels, and anything that was not a political novel was not literature.<sup>280</sup>

The political novel was attuned to the political climate of the time, while also being the direct expression of that climate. Its political “vulgarity” thus was not something to be looked down on as those of the post-ken’yûsha period would do. Rather, this form of writing, must be read according to its own historical moment, and as such provides for us a unique perspective into thinking the relationship of politics to aesthetic expression, and the very conditions of possibility that allowed for the production of modern Japanese literature. The political novel allows us a view into what Atsuko Ueda has called the politics of concealment that were necessary to the production of a modern literature that would attempt to conceal the politics of its own reproduction.<sup>281</sup>

### 3. Alternative National Imaginaries

But what are the politics of the political novel? In the decades leading up to the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution, and the establishment of a representative form of government, Meiji state and subject were anything but unified in their understanding of what was meant by the term “nation.” With the declaration of the Charter Oath, the promotion of the enlightenment project lead by Fukuzawa Yukichi and members of the *Meiokusha*, the proliferation of texts such as Nakamura Masanao’s translation of J.S. Mill’s *On Liberty*, and Samuel Smiles *Self-Help* with its famed notions of *risshin shusse* (climb the ladder of

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>281</sup> See Atsuko Ueda, *Concealment of Politics, Politics of Concealment: The Production Of "Literature" In Meiji Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

success), and quotes such as “heaven helps those who help themselves”<sup>282</sup> which jockeyed for position alongside Fukuzawa’s own famed phrase “heaven does not create one man above or below another”<sup>283</sup> to occupy space on the lips of young, ambitious Meiji men, the new world promised by the Meiji state seemed one full of promise for all. As it became clearer and clearer that the Meiji oligarchs had no intention of relinquishing their hold over the reigns of power to pass control of its policies over to the people, and rather began to re-institute and reinforce the kinds of militant laws that were familiar to those living under the feudal regime, a schism opened up between the ruled and the rulers. As the Meiji state attempted to press forward on its version of reality, voices of disagreement emerged at all levels of social organization – from within the government itself to the peasant uprisings against the various social policies that consistently assaulted the non-elite classes with more structurally determined forms of violence such as the land tax reform, and the Matsukata deflationary policies starting in 1881. This was not a unified voice of disagreement. These voices could not be unified as a group, because their very existence was defined in antagonism to the pressure to unify bodies under a single affective order. Thus, what was up for debate between the disparate collectivities that found a still hierarchical organization through the body known as the FPRM was nothing less than the nature of the national character itself.

This is to say that the political novel troubles any narration of the Meiji that would take national consistency as its condition of understanding. Put simply, the political novels of the

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<sup>282</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008).; translated by Nakamura Masanao in 1870 as *Saikoku Risshin hen*.

<sup>283</sup> The famed first line of Fukuzawa Yukichi’s *An Encouragement of Learning*.

Meiji era cannot be thought of as “Japanese” because their points of reference were rarely so unified. To begin, a large number of political novels, including what are considered the most emblematic representatives of the genre, take as their narrative context spaces outside of the Meiji state’s national borders. Tôkai Sanshi’s much discussed *Kajin no Kigu* (*Chance Encounters with Beautiful Women*) begins in Philadelphia and moves through descriptions of the political problems faced by the ex-patriot women Tôkai meets. Yano Ryûkei’s *Keikoku Bidan* locates itself in an ancient Greek past (borrowing loosely from George Grote’s *History of Greece*) as it chronicles various political incidences including the attempt to retake Thebes from the Spartans. Yanagida Izumi himself is caught wondering at one moment in his appended introduction to the political novel in the *Meiji Bungaku Zenshû* if Niwa Junichiro’s rough translation of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Ernest Maltravers* and *Alice* under the title *Karyû Shunwa* shouldn’t be considered the first political novel of the Meiji era in place of *Jôkai Haran*. Should the origin of the political novel itself be located beyond Japan’s borders? Moreover, the ideals fueling the writers of the political novel are often characterized as uniformly foreign: the ideals of individual freedom, equality, and democracy are traced back to translations of J.S. Mill’s *On Liberty*, or Samuel Smiles’ *Self Help*, or works on the French Revolution by Alexander Dumas and Victor Hugo, or in the political fiction of Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Benjamin Disraeli. Christopher Hill provides a succinct summary of the problems resulting from this bounded perspective on the political novel.

The modern canon, taking stylistic innovation as its narrative line, discounts the writers who created the political novel because of their reliance on the styles and plot devices of Tokugawa fiction and European novelists such as Benjamin Disraeli and Alexandre

Dumas père.<sup>284</sup>

These imaginary excursions outside of the time and space of the Meiji state thus create an opportunity to rewrite national cohesion in a manner that did not necessarily adhere to the nation being offered up by this state. As Hill writes,

Meiji political novels were not limited to negotiating social change within one national territory, however. They also explored the relationship between a unitary Japanese history (which they were writing) and the histories of other nations. A prominent example is Tôkai Sanshi's *Kajin no kigu* (1885 – 97), which recounts, among many events, the history of the Carlist rebellion in Spain, resistance to Russian and Turkish campaigns in the Caucasus, the colonization of Madagascar, and the fall of Urabi Pasha in Egypt. These novelists undoubtedly gestured toward other histories to inspire readers with stirring examples like the fall of the Bastille, but in the process they also suggested that the histories of other countries could be abstracted as models for the history of the Japanese nation.<sup>285</sup>

As we will see in the following section, this sense of alternative imaginary spoke its difference at a level even deeper than a sense of national cohesion. Its expression of disagreement and difference with the state of being instituted by the Meiji state was mobilized over a diverse set of aspects linking literature to the political sphere.

#### 4. The Disaggregation of Meiji Literature

Where the above analyses of the political novel by Yanagida Izumi and Christopher Hill open the door on thinking difference amidst the political novel along national and historical lines, work by Kamei Hideo, Maeda Ai, and Atsuko Ueda provide support on this reading of the form's relation to its historical context. What joins all these literary critics is their adherence to a sense of the political impetus that informed the production of literature,

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<sup>284</sup> Christopher Hill, "How to Write a Second Restoration: The Political Novel and Meiji Historiography," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 33, no. 2 (Summer, 2007). 337.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.* 338

and in this they distinguish themselves from those who would stick strictly to a notion of the purity of literature. Because the political novel was, as Yanagida argued, so closely tied to the political climate of its time, a study of its forms and figures would not be well served by severing it from its political valences. Thus, these thinkers used a variety of strategies to think literature in relation to material practices in language, to the body, and across the field of politics itself. Where Kamei Hideo uses the shifts in language that played over the surface of the political novel's text to reconfigure our understanding of subject and object, Maeda Ai offers us a material history of the development of practices in the actual physical reading of literature itself. Atsuko Ueda, making use of a genealogical approach borrowed from Michel Foucault, provides an important caveat to work on modern Japanese literature in noting that its rejection of politics from literary consideration was never a true abandonment of politics, but merely its concealment. In looking at the political novel and its ties to the emergence of a modern Japanese literary form from these various perspectives, we will begin to see how the period of the Meiji 10s and 20s expressed the very disagreement to state being at an aesthetic level. Only by reinvesting the political novel with a fundamental consideration of the nature of political expression the form was meant to mobilize can we begin to understand the reasons for its emergence, and the causes of its disappearance. Before we do so, however, we need to consider some of the conditions that lead writers of the era to use the novel form as its means of expression.

## **5. Shifts in State Violence**

For the decade spanning the Boshin war (1868-69) which pitted those of the samurai class who supported the Meiji Emperor's "return" to the center of power against those that supported the failing shogunal regime, until the Seinan war (1877) in which Saigo Takamori

and his army of followers fought the Meiji's conscript army, the Meiji state was in a constant battle to secure its power over the domains it had seized from the fallen Tokugawa Shogunate. At the same time that we saw the battle for economic control that placed Okuma Shigenobu at the center of battling collectives, Masujirô Omura in the Department of Military Affairs was rushing to secure military control over the Japanese archipelago through the establishment of a conscript army. His attempts were short lived as the furor over this attempt to take over the right to use of force from the samurai resulted in his assassination in 1869. Yamagata Aritomo took his place and successfully pushed through regulations for the establishment of a conscript army that were announced in an imperial rescript on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1872, and then promulgated on January 10<sup>th</sup> of the following year.<sup>286</sup> This did not put an end to the fighting, but it did, along with the repeal of the *kirisute gomen* law in 1871,<sup>287</sup> undermine the samurai's right to use of force. In March of 1876, the samurai lost all their rights in ensuring their status by means of violence as the state, confident in its dominance over the former domain leaders, passed law "banning the wearing of swords entirely."<sup>288</sup> Instead of thinking this as the end of violence under Shogunal rule, however, we should think of this in terms of a shift in the site of legitimated violence. Suddenly, the samurai were no longer the center of military force as the state, consisting of a new class of elites, worked to make itself the sole proprietor over the distribution of violence. The use of force was no longer a right, but became, under the institution of the conscript laws, a matter of obligation

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<sup>286</sup> W. G. Beasley, "Meiji Political Institutions," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 5: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 636.

<sup>287</sup> W. G. Beasley, *The Modern History of Japan* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963). 112.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

organized around state power.

This legal appropriation of violence to state aims was not without its dissidents. As with any law, its stability could not be guaranteed without an act of enforcement. Etô Shimpei and Saigô Takamori provided the most noted instances in standard histories of the era for the Meiji state to display its newly reorganized military power to enforce the rule of law. Reacting to a debate known as the *seikanron* (lit. “debates on the subjugation of Korea”) amidst Meiji administration members regarding whether or not to invade Korea thanks to the Korean government’s refusal to open diplomatic and trade relations in 1873, Saigô and Etô broke with the government to create their own resistance forces in their respective domains. Etô returned to Saga in his home domain of Hizen, colluded with Shima Yoshitake, leader of the *Yûkokutô*, or Party of Patriots, a group openly critical of the government, and incited the Saga Rebellion of February, 1874, a rebellion which he knew would end in his defeat.<sup>289</sup> Saigô Takamori was more patient in his resistance and did not act until 1877, a date that would mark a turning point in the organization and distribution of power relations under the Meiji state. Unlike Etô, Saigô took care to train bodies to resist the government he abandoned following the *seikanron*. Establishing a system of *shigakkô* or “private schools” to train soldiers in his already well-militarized home domain of Satsuma,<sup>290</sup> Saigô built up an army that would overshadow previous rebellions against the state in the years following the Meiji Ishin. Regardless of the reasons that lead up to these two displays

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<sup>289</sup> Steven Vlastos, "Opposition Movements in Early Meiji, 1868-1885," in *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol.5: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989). 389-90.

<sup>290</sup> Steven Vlastos notes that “nearly one quarter of the population of Satsuma were *shizoku* who provided a very large pool of potential recruits to the antigovernment movement.” Ibid, 395.

of state and anti-state violence, what should compel us is the nature of the re-organization of violent acts. Put against the backdrop of peasant rebellions which were the constant companion to Meiji rule, we can see how the shift in the legitimation of violence was no longer moving along lines of status, but was being accrued to a new source – the modern Meiji state.

The Seinan war marked a shift in power relations in that it marked the decadence of violence distributed according to the former rules of governance. This however did not end the reproduction of violence. It would be a mistake to believe this was the first sign of a continued “peace” for the Meiji rulers. Rather, we should see this as the first in a long series of tactical shifts enforced by the Meiji state to institute itself as the sole source of legitimated violence and a move to recode how violence could be distributed. In the wake of the Seinan war the state secured its place as the only legitimate source of military action, and as such solidified the limits according to which any alternative collective force of violence could affect change under Meiji rule.

This was not the end of state resistance, however. This only marked a change in the tone of its outcry. As Nishida Taketoshi has remarked in his history of the newspaper and journal industry in the Meiji era, the Seinan war merely indicated a shift from military assaults on the state to verbal ones.

The defeat of Saigô’s troops during the Seinan war taught that it would be difficult to succeed in military resistance against the government. As a result, the tactic of public debate (*genronsen*) was used to resist the undemocratic social policies of the new

Meiji government and promote awareness of democratic freedoms and rights.<sup>291</sup>

We should not, however, be too idealistic in our reading of this shift in tactics. It is not simply that anti-state forces laid down their swords or weapons in preference for the pen and voice, and Meiji society became more peaceful. This kind of reading of the use of violence under state rule would have us ignore the multiple and proliferous nature of violence accrued to state forces. Rather, what we begin to see is a recodification of violence and its reproduction. The history of written revolt was simultaneous to the differentiations that were occurring in terms of violent anti-state action. I mean only to follow this particular line of written action to connect the political novel to the rise of the modern *shôsetsu*. One major battle of words came consequent to the same incident that fueled the armed rebellions in Saga and Satsuma. Following the *seikanron* Itagaki Taisuke and members of his newly established “Public Party of Patriots” (*aikokukôtô*) drafted a “memorial urging the adoption of ‘a council chamber chosen by the people.’”<sup>292</sup> This would be the first step in nearly a two decade long struggle to establish a representative constitutional government. With the failure of the Saigo’s military coup against the Meiji state, challenges to the state in terms of military tactics had to find alternate courses of expression. Where Etô and Saigô, as representatives of a spurned military class that was trained to express itself in force, resorted to force outright as the means of debate, Itagaki and his political party would begin with debate, in the hopes of organizing collective action in a different fashion. In either case, the state’s appropriation of the legitimacy to reproduce violence was the condition of possibility

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<sup>291</sup> Taketoshi Nishida, *Meiji Jidai No Shinbun to Zasshi [Newspapers and Journals Of the Meiji Era]* (Tokyo: Nihon Rekishi Shinsho, 1961). 46.

<sup>292</sup> Vlastos, "Opposition Movements in Early Meiji, 1868-1885." 402.

for the manner in which anti-state action could be conceived. The act of verbalizing resistance was only a different trace of state repression, one as we will see was constantly marked by the micro-political acts combining the police force with the legislative body of the state. Out of this trace was born the Freedom and People's Rights Movement.

### III. The Politics of Jiyû and People's Rights

#### 1. The Adequacy of Affection

If we perceive this shift in anti-state tactics from an empirical point of view, some problems emerge. First, the material on those that mobilized action forces us to beg the question of intentionality. Most empirical analyses of the causes of the Saga and Satsuma Rebellion, or the appearance of Itagaki Taisuke's "Memorial on the Establishment of an Representative Assembly," seem organized around explaining what motivated these men to take the acts they did. An empirical history then narrates these events by adhering to the first-hand experience of these individual men as expressed through documents, letters, and the variety of primary materials that their actions left behind. Empiricism organizes its acute attention to detail, and gives these details clarity by organizing them around the individuated man as atom of experience.

An affective analysis builds off this empirical methodology, while displacing the centrality of individual experience. Were we to conflate the affects with the emotional experience of individual men, then we inevitably find ourselves trapped in the same questions of intentionality that an empirical method based in phenomenology might offer. Why did Saigô Takamori return to Satsuma following the *seikanron*? What motivated him to establish the *shigakkô*, and then mobilize an army against the state? We are left with little

more than the record of one great man's efforts to move an entire nation. This does nothing more than reproduce a particular cult of the individual. When we shift our view to the nature of violence itself in relation to the affective order, however, a different image is produced.

The affects do not point to the individual experiences of personal feeling or personal impetus driving individual men to action. The affects find their location of expression at the site of bodies, but these bodies are not necessarily human ones. The bodies of the affects and affection are the modulated material given by being. Which is to say, affective bodies are collective in nature in the same manner that being itself is inherently multiple. Put in more concrete terms, the question of the affects in the above situations would not ask what motivated Saigô Takamori, Etô Shimpei, or Itagaki Taisuke to act as they did, since these individuals do not constitute the body of affection. Rather, affective potentials provide a means to think through the reproduction of violence according to its particular historical orderings. The fact of violence, in the relation between passive and active potentials, is not a matter of the state's relation to the violent acts. It is a matter of the distribution of violence. As we have seen above, under the Meiji state the reproduction of violence was redistributed such that the state became its only site of legitimacy. In terms of violence, only the state was allowed access to a share of active affection through legitimate channels. All other forms of violence were necessarily *coded* from the state perspective as passive or reactionary. Paradoxically, this redistribution of violence under state legitimation was not a means to eradicate violence, but only a means to make it the persistent norm. Acts to speak out and not act out against the state were the sign of this persistence. This did not mean that violent anti-state activity came to an end. It only meant it was constantly being recoded. One place of this new recoding became the censorship policies that attempted to make state violence the

code by which all enunciations could take place.

## **6. The Collective Force of Newspapers**

Newspapers provided a new site of at which violence and collective resistance could meet. As Itagaki and his group discovered early on, printed and spoken resistance offered a new realm of engagement to organize resistance under the repressive forms of state control. Which is to say, the conscript army was useless against voiced acts of resistance, if for no other reason than it could not endanger its own legitimacy by overdetermining its acts of suppression against resistance that did not immediately place the dominance of state force at risk. Strategies of an oral and written nature were a more refined tool, yet they harbored within them the potential to decode and recode the subjects that the state itself was attempting to create through its own various institutions and social policies. The continued legitimation of state military violence with the defeat of Saigô's army inaugurated a new age of resistance that moved across the lines of collective *aesthetic* engagement, and made politics operate in accordance with altogether new modes of bodily organization. This forced the state to diversify its acts of violence into military and police forces as the constant production of censorship laws throughout the Meiji period sought to give legitimacy to this alternate extension of state violence.

## **3. A New Collective Medium**

The new Meiji regime was swift to engage with anti-state criticism in print. With the gradual rise of print media to unprecedented new levels of circulation thanks to the new technologies of movable type, it had to if it wanted to maintain its dominance over those under its rule. The danger that ideas would code bodies in a manner that went counter to its

aims was too great. At the same time, it could not ignore the potential newspaper circulation could have for establishing its presence across the newly reorganized and flattened space of its rule. Newspapers, like the school system, could be used to train citizenry about the new order of things. This is not to say, that the notion of a circulating periodical was anything new to the Japanese archipelago. Messages in circulation had established themselves early on in the Tokugawa era. Most historians, according to Nishida Taketoshi, locate the indigenous origins of the circulating periodical with the *kawaraban* in the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century. These were tile block prints used to circulate information regarding gossip concerning the Yoshiwara district or rankings amongst actors in the theatre districts.<sup>293</sup> Due to strict censorship policies of the Shogunate they did not stray from anything more than gossip about the urban pleasure centers or ruminations on the distant past. From the beginning, however, these periodicals threatened to wedge themselves in the space separating state power from the everyday concerns of the greater population. Thus, the military state of the Tokugawa period had to keep strict control over what could appear in these mass communication forms. This could also be a markedly easier task considering the limited circulation of this type of print media. As the Tokugawa's hold over its population began to loosen, however, the content of the periodical began to change, and the locus of control over the content of news began to shift, drawing the public's attention with it.

Even from its beginnings in the early Tokugawa, the circulating periodical gathered attention by placing the viewer in a position removed from the spectacle of war. The first image associated with the *kawaraban* was an image of The Abeno battle published in the

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<sup>293</sup> Nishida, *Meiji Jidai No Shinbun to Zasshi* [Newspapers and Journals Of the Meiji Era]. 1.

*Yomiuri kawaraban* on May 7<sup>th</sup> of 1615.<sup>294</sup> Thus, imagery created a space separate from state violence training readers to recognize the difference between military and domestic existence. This trend continued in the years leading up to and following the Meiji ishin. With the so-called “opening of the ports” resulting in the Kanagawa and Harris treaties in the late 1850s and 1860s, foreigners began importing their own cultural habits into the port cities. More importantly, they imported the spectacle that was themselves along with the means to circulate news of that spectacle. Foreign newspapers became a means to gain access to news from abroad, and while the Chinese and Dutch presence ensured some access to this news throughout the Tokugawa period, it was mostly seen as a matter of mere gossip heard at a distance.<sup>295</sup> With the arrival of Commodore Perry’s black ships and its sign of a shift in the world order, a shift in how foreign encounter was understood gave the foreign presence a renewed importance which see helped spur on the circulation of news. This was begun with the establishment of foreign newspapers. In 1860 the first English newspaper, *The Nagasaki Shipping List and Advertiser*, began its circulation offering information of foreign exchange rates, foreign and domestic events, shipping news and general advertisements.<sup>296</sup> This was followed by the *Japan Herald* and the *Japan Express* in Yokohama. The Tokugawa state was ready to deal with this new source of information having set up in 1854 the Yôgakusho (lit. “the place for studies of the West”) to work on translating news from newspapers to be distributed to those who could read it.<sup>297</sup> As news spread, and its readership increased a

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 4.

market opened up for information, and translation companies began to spread beyond the control of the Shogunate. Alongside the *Yôgakusho*, independent translators began setting up translation companies (*kaiyakusha*) across the treaty ports and urban centers. From this budding news culture would emerge a whole new means for viewing the relation of state to citizenry to foreigner.

What turned the circulation of news into a full-scale industry that could spread itself into the homes of all classes was the spectacle of war. As with the image of the Abeno Battle in 1615, the image of violence drew attention, but this time the stories of battle struck closer to home as all who read became aware that their future depended on the outcome. A segmented samurai class fueled by investments from the merchant class went to battle with the state, and Tokugawa citizenry were given all new access to the details of the events that transpired through the circulation of newspapers. As Nishida writes,

The fact that social disorder, in particular war, has a great effect on the lives and fortunes of common people has not changed from the distant past until now. And so at this time [of the Meiji ishin] we can imagine there was an abnormal increase in a desire for news. In particular, there was an increase in attention centered on government, trade, and economic news. Japan's own native newspapers first emerged in accordance with these trends.<sup>298</sup>

Thus it seems no surprise that in the year that saw the Tokugawa Shogunate fall, a mass of independent, Japanese newspapers written by and for Japanese citizenry began circulating to take advantage of the spectacle of war. Nishida lists fourteen different newspaper companies emerging in the months of April to June of 1868 alone. Though Nishida acknowledges these native run newspapers were informed by the history of the *kawaraban*, he distinguishes them

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 15.

from the *kawaraban* in that they were specifically for citizenry and written by citizenry.<sup>299</sup>

By the time of Itagaki's "Memorial on the Establishment of a Representative Assembly" the ground was well laid for him and his political colleagues to circulate their ideas via this print medium. Not only was the market well steeped in popular newspapers across urban and rural space, but the medium was so effective in reaching a public it was creating as it spread that the government itself was forced to acknowledge the legitimacy of this new space of expression in February of 1869, and began publishing its own periodicals to compete in the industry.<sup>300</sup>

It seems safe to state that the existence of a newspaper industry was the condition of possibility for Itagaki to distinguish his strategy of domestic verbal dissent. What we should note, however, is that this form of dissent was never free of the threat of state violence, but made itself enunciate resistance through the veil of censorship laws that were the constant condition of print expression. Violence was always the condition of possibility for speech. The question again is a matter of how that violence was distributed. Thus, the Freedom and People's Rights Movement was born out of this shift in the distribution of violent suppression, and a more popular mode of resistance and complicity to state censorship laws was determined in the form, not just of the political novel, but of a variety of creative forms of political expression. This mode would prove itself more flexible and confounding to state power than the state initially anticipated. What became imminently apparent to those that attempted to manage this line between violence, expression, and censorship, was the fluidity

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 15-17.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, 24.

of state suppression. In writing the political novel alongside the fluidity of state censorship, I mean only to note one slight addendum to the existing literature, and this can be seen only as a matter of emphasis: that violence and its threat was never external to the production of literature. It was endemic to its very production. It was out of this world of violence that modern literature found its voice, and inner life was the trace that this violence left on those bodies engaged in aesthetic reproduction.

#### IV. A Strange Lacuna in Scholarship on the Political Novel

##### 1. Kamei Hideo

A look over the novels created by some members of the FPRM shows how varied its perspectives and modes of expression were. As Jonathan Mertz notes,

...even when seen on their own terms, the political novels bear so little stylistic consistency from one to another that none can be seen to be representative of much more than itself. Few archetypal elements serve to link these works into a ready and identifiable “whole.” The diction of *Keikoku Bidan*, for instance, holds little in common with that of *Setchûbai*, and both are vastly different from *Kajin no Kigu*. Even within works, most are susceptible to the criticism of “unevenness of style.”<sup>301</sup>

More so than this, the very subjectivity expressed in the texts of the political novel were not stabilized according to standard textual practices. Literary critic Kamei Hideo shows how the language itself of the political novel produces ambiguity in the construction of subjective experience in his work *The Transformations of Sensibility, the Phenomenology of Meiji Literature*. In his unique and characteristic manner, Kamei forces a close textual analysis beyond considerations of mere textuality to mobilize considerations of the politics and

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<sup>301</sup> John Pierre Mertz, "Meiji Political Novels and the Origin of Literary Modernity," (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1993). Ph.D. Dissertation. 16.

historicity of his objects of study. In this he manages to marry two seemingly disparate trends in literary criticism – the close reading movement and new historicism. Phenomenology provides a key methodological tool in balancing these two trends as it opens up a means to read relations between subject and object through their visual intentionalities as recorded within the text itself, so he may use these readings matched against linguistic analyses of the text to create a sense of its politics. Thus, Kamei manages to read history through the text and never as something external to it. This is not a technique that is unique to this particular work, but is a standard practice in many of Kamei's works on Meiji literature. In fact, in the opening pages of his broader work on Meiji literature, *History of Meiji Literature (Meiji bungakushi)*,<sup>302</sup> he distinguishes himself from other literary critics precisely on the basis of his historicist mode of critique. His text-based history, he argues, necessarily forces him to adhere less to a chronological line of inquiry than to a genealogical analysis, in this case, as he attempts to uncover the historically determined habits of readers and authors in their production of subject positions. Thus, we can see in this, his same practice of reading history as interior to a text and linked to linguistic and textual practices. In either his phenomenological or genealogical approach what we discover as a constant theme in Kamei's work is a sense of the flexibility of the subject and its nature not as origin of the text, but its product.

This is never more apparent than in his chapter on the political novel in *Transformations of Sensibility*. Beginning his consideration of the political novel with a critique of I-novel work of the past, Kamei argues that those who saw the I-novel as

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<sup>302</sup> Hideo Kamei, *Meiji Bungakushi [History of Meiji Literature]* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000).

something other than an idealization of the self had fallen victim to a central mistake governing studies not just of the genre, but of modern Japanese literature itself.

The placement of the writer's own image in the role of the protagonist, the characteristic choice of modern literature in Japan, was motivated by the imaginary projection of an ideal self. It did not arise from a desire to confess as truthfully as possible the actual self, just as it was. This fact is still often misunderstood.<sup>303</sup>

As we will see in the following section on Iwano Hômei, one of the earliest proponents of confessional or I-novel fiction, Iwano's production of the individual life as subject depends precisely on this kind of idealization of the self that Kamei writes. For Kamei, as it is for my own work, the political novel provides an essential moment in understanding the idealization of this self as it provides an outline of the process by which this self as an individuated life came into being.

Kamei takes a close look at the writing styles of the political novel to mobilize his sense of the production of subjective experience. He begins by noting the appeal to a particular vernacular of writing that helped political novelists such as Tôkai Sanshi and Yano Ryûkei manage the complicated field of writing practices still plagued with the trace of a feudal consciousness that adhered to notions of hierarchical status. By engaging in writing practices developed through *kanbun* writing closest in approximation to Chinese practices (such as that used in Tokugawa scholar Rai Sanyô's *Nihon gaishi*), political novelists found a means to eliminate the hierarchical honorifics of Japanese feudal language while still maintaining a level of stylistic viability. With the elimination of honorifics, Tôkai and Yano

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<sup>303</sup> Kamei Hideo, "The Transformability of Self-Consciousness: Fantasies of Self in the Political Novel," from Hideo Kamei, *Transformations of Sensibility: The Phenomenology of Meiji Literature*, trans. Michael Bourdaghs (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002). 23.

could practice in form the principle of equality that was a keystone to their political movement. Kamei states,

It must be understood that, in the same way that the kanbun of Rai's *Unofficial History of Japan (Nihon Gaishi)* could not be realized except by excising the honorific expression in the *Taiheiki*, the stylistics of the political novelists negated and thus overcame the status-bound hierarchical (honorific-based) sensibility that characterized the mode of expression in traditional Japanese literature. Furthermore, the epoch-making literary fantasy of international solidarity cherished by the politician-novelists of the People's Rights Movement could not have arisen in the absence of such a style.<sup>304</sup>

Kamei moves from this flattening of the field of subjective encounter, to reveal the ambiguities that emerged in locating the subject of enunciation and action in Tôkai's *Kajin no Kigû* and Yano's *Keikoku Bidan*. For Tôkai Sanshi, who acts as both the writer external to and protagonist internal to his political novel, subject formation is not given in the bounded and stable fashion that would characterize the I-novels of the decades to follow. The subject of enunciation had not become quite so individualized at this point in the nation-state's formation precisely because the nation itself found itself split amongst vying collective voices. This proves itself most apparent in Tôkai's description of his own involvement in anti-state battles following the overthrow of the government. Having fought on the side of the domain resistance in Aizu, Tôkai's own subjective positioning with regards to national, local, and international space is marked by strange elisions and contradictions. When confronted by the narration of international exiles while visiting the US on a research mission, Tôkai expresses his sympathies for his traveling companions and their revolutionary origins. This fosters a recollection of Tôkai's own losses and miseries that resulted from his involvement in the battles over the destiny of the Aizu domain. His sympathy for

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 27.

revolutionary movements across the world, however, do not have him enunciate an anti-national sentiment, but on the contrary culminate in the more paradoxical declaration, “I, too, am a child of the true Japan.” As Kamei discerningly notes, this strange juxtaposition of vying collective associations between international revolutionary movements, feudal domain alliances, and national yearnings makes no sense within the boundaries of a stable subject. Rather, it is by virtue of a fluid subjectivity that finds itself in a period of transformation – where the nation that would ground the subject is not itself a given imaginary, but open to its own utopic and transformative potentialities – that such contradictory enunciations of subjective allegiance begin to offer us a new view into the nature of the political desires of this period. Kamei ends his essay with a clear statement of the stakes implied by such an analysis of the political novel,

To adhere excessively to an I-sensibility and thus lose a sense of tension vis-à-vis one’s own sense of self is to lose sight of an important aspect of self-consciousness. It is to forget the possibility of transformation, be it of self-consciousness or of sensibility.<sup>305</sup>

Kamei, thus, comes to the same determination through close textual analyses of the political novel that we discovered in the field of the political economy; that an essential figure that emerged in the development of modern social relations was the figure of the individuated self, and that in overcoming this self we open up the possibility of transformation.

Strangely, despite Kamei’s careful analysis of texts from his essentially literary perspective, the sense of the political stakes of the novels themselves seem lost in the dense textual considerations in which he engages. That is to say, he is able to show how the subject was not stable in the literary antecedents to Japanese literature, and in this he implies a

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 41.

foreclosure on the side of modern literature for a politics of transformation that is made available through the figuration of an ambiguous self; yet, he stops short of an account of the types of state violence through its censorship policies that could have pushed the subject into its enclosure in modern literature. What seems missing from his account of the political novel is the politics of the text itself. This is the lacuna that emerges from purely textual accounts of the movement from the political novel to modern literature. Without a sense of the stakes – or what Kamei might call the transformational possibilities – at the level of politics itself (in the sense that politics is forever a question of the very constitution of the *polis* or collective relation), it is difficult to account for the drives that enforced the abrupt disappearance of the political impetus that drove the anti-state voices in literature forward.

## 2. Atsuko Ueda

Atsuko Ueda provides a little more substance to a consideration of the shift away from politics and the political novel that allowed for the production of modern Japanese literature. Rather than adhering to standard narrations of the rise of modern literature that would characterize its emergence as a pure abandonment of politics, Ueda shows, on the contrary, that the so-called apolitical practices of modern literature were merely a concealment of the politics at the heart of the modern project.<sup>306</sup> Yet in her attempt to re-politicize the modern project of literary production, she remains strangely ambiguous in terms of her enunciation of what the politics of this concealment are beyond the text. This is a deliberate choice on her part, as she writes

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<sup>306</sup> See Ueda, *Concealment of Politics*.

I not only offer a close reading of this text but examine how the terms interact with various discourses that constitute it. In this respect, this book is not a simple “historicization” or “contextualization” of shōsetsu and “literature,” which assumes a one-dimensional relationship between text and context. This project is predicated on the idea that absence is inscribed in the presence; that is to say, what appears on the textual surface shares its semantic economy with what is left out of the text, hence invalidating the artificial boundaries often instituted between text and context.<sup>307</sup>

Working within the field of literary studies one can understand her aversion to plotting her textual analysis according to a false binarism that would treat text and context as somehow distinct and in this she shares in Kamei Hideo’s sense that historicity does not come exterior to textual considerations, but must be read through close readings of the text. At the same time, her close attention to the text and its traces, regardless of her account of its absences, creates the same lacuna in the account of political energy that drove the project of the political novel forward that haunted Kamei’s work. In sticking too closely to the text one is almost left with a feeling of ambiguity with regards to the violent practices of state suppression that were given expression through its censorship policies. Furthermore, though her aversion to treating history as exterior to its texts is understandable from the perspective of the kinds of empirically determined historicist accounts that *literary* scholarship has bred, to extend this same critique against those working within the field of history itself would be reductive. This would threaten to render all historical analysis reducible to the products only a few empirical positivists have put forth. History has always engaged with the problem of its textuality as scholars such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, the French theorists Ueda takes up in her own work, reveal. The text, however, is never the ground but always the locus of the problem of expression. Foucault’s own response to Derrida’s enclosed use of

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 6.

textuality proves illustrative in this point. Taking nine years to respond to a critique Derrida waged against Foucault with regard to his reading of a passage on madmen in Descartes, Foucault critiqued Derrida precisely on his near reification of the textual trace. Foucault writes,

Derrida, today, is the most authoritative representative of this system, its final radiance. In it discursive traces are reduced to textual traces; events occurring there are elided and kept only as markers for a reading; voices behind the text are invented so as not to have to analyze the ways in which the subject is implicated in discourses; the original is allocated to what is said and not-said in the text, so as not to put discursive practices back into the field of transformation in which they are carried out...This pedagogy teaches the pupil that there is nothing outside the text... this pedagogy gives the teacher's voice that unlimited sovereignty which allows it to repeat the text indefinitely."<sup>308</sup>

The text itself must never be made the ground of an historical encounter, as this would conflate the trace of an inscription with that of which it was the expression. Which is to say, *it is not the text that creates the skin over which the sensation of history travels – it is collectivity itself.*

Yet Ueda never falls victim to the pull of a too textual analysis precisely because she holds in place a strict understanding that literature is always political even when its politics has been effaced: because literature can never be understood outside of collective engagement precisely because the very language of its mobilization is itself a condition of possibility for the enactment of politics. The question we are left to ask with Ueda is still, however, what politics?

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<sup>308</sup> Quote taken from Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991). 121. Original text in Michel Foucault, *Histoire De La Folie À L'âge Classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). 602.

### 3. Mystifying the discursive shift

This tendency in the work of literary scholars such as Kamei Hideo and Atsuko Ueda to push the tradition of close readings towards historicist accounts has had a more general effect of mystifying the source of the political novel's disappearance from Meiji era literature. Where Ueda and Kamei deliberately use genealogical and literary methodologies to determine a line of flight away from the Scylla and Charybdis of pure textuality and brute contextualization that plagues literary scholarship, those following in their wake endanger a reification of even these textual practices to turn discursive analysis into its own mystifying technique. Thus, Jonathan Mertz, despite his important work in providing an entire monograph, the only one of its kind in English, dealing with the political novel, dismisses the violence of state censorship as that which could account for the shift in literature from political ruminations to aesthetic practices stripped of their political valence when he states, "there is little indication that the novels were particularly targeted either before or after the Pacific War [by censorship laws]."<sup>309</sup> This, however, threatens a strange paradox in understanding the nature of censorship and the traces it leaves behind. The main task of censorship is not to mark those works that are considered treasonous to state ideology (though this can on occasion happen). The point is to ensure state subjects refrain from writing treasonous or morally corrupt texts in the first place. The point is that the absent text as the trace left behind on those texts being written indicates the scar of state legitimated violence. Thus to look for traces of censorship itself on the works that were published

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<sup>309</sup> Mertz, "Meiji Political Novels and the Origin of Literary Modernity." 18. Mertz's doctoral work was published in monograph form, with extensive changes, as John Pierre Mertz, *Novel Japan: Spaces of Nationhood in Early Meiji Narrative, 1870-88* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2003).

themselves, as some kind of positivity, seems somewhat misguided. As we will see below, the political novel itself emerged in response to broader censorship laws against speech and public assembly. Just as much as it bore the trace of the censorship laws in the absences that gave it expression, its very politicality was the absent mark of violence that left its trace on the modern *shôsetsu* itself.

Atsuko Sakaki fares better in her diagnosis of the disappearance of the political novel by noting that its waning cannot be accounted for except through an account of “extra-literary” factors. Sakaki uses Tôkai Sanshi’s *Kajin no Kigu* as the subject of her essay on the political novel, and attempts to re-introduce these extra-literary factors into her account of the reception of the text. She begins her essay by noting the strange exclusion of the Meiji political novel from the canon of Modern Japanese Literature despite its huge appeal to readers of the time.

The enthusiasm for such works undoubtedly was due in part to the heightened interest in political issues characteristic of the decade prior to the promulgation of the constitution and inauguration of the Diet. By the same token, there is a general consensus that the subsequent waning of the season of politics meant the end as well of the *raison d’être* of the *seiji shôsetsu*. Without the appeal of extra-literary factors, it has been assumed, political novels were too rhetorical and old-fashioned in style to appeal to a modern audience.<sup>310</sup>

In spite of this auspicious beginning to her essay on the political novel, Sakaki does not go on to provide a more historically sensitive account of this waning, but rather attempts to solve the problem of the genre’s exclusion from the canon. Still, as with Ueda, Mertz, and Kamei, we are left to wonder what these politics were.

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<sup>310</sup> Atsuko Sakaki, "Kajin No Kigû, the Meiji Political Novel and the Boundaries of Literature," *Monumenta nipponica* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 2000). 84.

#### 4. Filling the gap: politics.

What seems strange in this scholarship dealing with the political novel is the absence of an account of the development of print media and the massive state repressive apparatus that was created to hold the influence of print media in check. For an historian of newspapers and periodicals like Nishida Taketoshi the connection seems fairly obvious and straightforward to such an extent that he spends roughly one third of his history of Meiji era print media on the relationship between media and the political organ most closely associated with the political novel, the FPRM. At the same time, I do not disagree with the above narrations in literary criticism describing the textuality of the political novel and the political vitality that found its expression through the FPRM – the end of the movement could not have been possible without a shift in the discursive practices and consequent re-organization of desires feeding popular consciousness – I think that without an account of the very real presence of the state in asserting itself both in repressive and ideological ways over the movement and its ability to express itself we cannot but lose sight of the very nature of politics itself that was at the root of the movement's rise and decline. What were the political stakes of the FPRM if not the desire to express a new figuration of the *polis* itself? How can we account for the vigor and great sense of urgency with which the youth of the early Meiji decades flooded into the political realm if we do not recognize the hope that the Meiji ishin opened up for all in terms of their ability to imagine a world that could be of their own creation? Why did young men memorize from cover to cover such political tracts as J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*? Why did they admire the political geniuses whose biographies filled the pages of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*? Why did they even turn to literature and the political novel itself, if not because of the discovery that mass media could change the nature of their

political reality? Was this not the lesson we are to learn from the anecdote so often repeated concerning Itagaki's encounter with Victor Hugo? As the Atsuko Ueda narrates the anecdote,

Itagaki asked Hugo about effective ways to spread political awareness among the Japanese. Hugo told Itagaki to have them read novels such as his own.<sup>311</sup>

How else are we to account for the proliferation of what have been termed *Miraiki shōsetsu*, or “novels of the future” that attempted to think the *polis* in various guises consequent to the rupture in power that was the Meiji ishin?

The politics of the early Meiji decades was a matter of pure affection as bodies discovered in the wake of the shifts of the Meiji ishin that an account of the adequation of the entire national collective was up for grabs at the same time that the state was closing down on this process to make violence only its own. What did the shift in social relations following the fall of the Shōbunate communicate to those who witnessed it except that change was possible, and that they, as a newly empowered popular force with a means to express itself in a new form of popular media, could become part of that change to create a world, a state, or a nation whose collective action would forever be adequate to those whose collective voice were fundamental to the body as a whole? We could push this question further to ask if this sense of potentiality was allowed to persist precisely as the means through which the state could legitimize its violence, but this would push us beyond the scope of my argument. Suffice it to say, that the surface of the text was always a surface upon which political becomings ordered their traces. Kamei Hideo, thus seems the closest in

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<sup>311</sup> Atsuko Ueda, "The Production of Literature and the Effaced Realm of the Political," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005), 67.

understanding the stakes of the political novel when he reads its texts as the expression of those engaged in matters of transformation. The only point of differentiation I would have with his readings is that where he would mark this as a phenomenological problem, I characterize it as an ontological one.

## V. On Censorship and the Preservation of Peace

### 1. The State Extends its Reach

Censorship in the Meiji era began as soon as the *satchôto* oligarchs came to power. On April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1868 the Dajôkan released Article 358, which required all publications seek state permission before circulating their periodicals.<sup>312</sup> Only a month following the occupation of Edo castle by the Meiji rulers Inoue Fumio and Kusano Mimaki were imprisoned by officials for publishing waka poetry in the Waka Newspaper (*Waka shinbun*) that derided the new administration. Not soon after Fukuchi Gen'ichirô, the editor of *World News* (*Kôko shim bun*), was beaten by authorities and his paper was closed down for an article which declared that the new government was nothing more than the old Shogunate dressed in new clothing.<sup>313</sup> This incident further spurred the government to pass Article 451 in June of 1868 that allowed them the right to stop those presses that did not have permits from selling their periodicals. It also gave the state the right to imprison the owners of the establishments that were selling the illegal newspapers.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Nishida, *Meiji Jidai No Shinbun to Zasshi* [Newspapers and Journals Of the Meiji Era]. 36.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 36-7.

It would not be until a year later that the government would pass positive legislation with regards to newspapers. On February 8<sup>th</sup> it would pass law that would acknowledge the rights of existence of the newspapers, and in doing so acknowledge the state's right to create a school that would train members in managing news information. Along with these acknowledgements the Meiji state also would enforce an ordinance in 8 articles that would help regulate the spread of information by this new print media. These eight articles would allow for state control of the news by forcing newspapers to submit information regarding dates of distribution, titles, location of distribution centers, the names of editors, and the names of contributing writers. It would also include regulation stipulating that though there were no general restrictions on articles (*kiji issai ni tuite ha seigen shinai*), writers could not criticize the government without cause (*midari ni hihyô shinai*), or publish anything false with regards to the military. There would also be no articles causing undue harm to others, and no religious proselytizing. These laws were expanded upon to include a clearer libel clause in 1875.<sup>315</sup>

As with the Boshin war of 1868, the Seinan war of 1877 would further stimulate newspaper sales and circulation. It would also work to legitimate news reportage even further as Fukuchi, the same journalist imprisoned only years before, but was now reporting directly from the battlefield on the Seinan war, was invited by the Meiji Emperor on April 6<sup>th</sup> or 1877 to report directly to the Imperial Household on the progress of the war. This lifted newspapers and their journalists to a whole new level of legitimacy.<sup>316</sup> This newfound

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 45.

legitimacy and increase in readership somewhat ironically further solidified print media's independence from the state. In the wake of this war, and the rise of Itagaki's anti-government party politicking, newspapers became split in their allegiances between pro-Administration newspapers, and pro-People's Rights newspapers.<sup>317</sup> Coverage of the Seinan war and its impetus also stimulated a general understanding of the need for the establishment and protection of people's rights as the display of the state's military might foreclosed on the possibility of changing administrations by another Restoration-like coup d'état should the state become as repressive as its Tokugawa incarnation. Collective action was made a domestic issue with the victory over Saigō Takamori's rebellion, and this action shifted to embody an assembly of powers that linked body to voice to text to the police.

## **2. The New Political Assemblage: Voice-Brush-Police**

Before we can understand the degree to which the state had to diversify its power in order to suppress the polymorphous nature of resistance embodied in the political novel, we need to consider the relation writing had to speech acts in the early Meiji decades as this relationship was not the same as that which emerged under the production of modern literary readership. In fact, the abrupt end of communal acts of reading or speaking aloud which were the hallmarks of FPRM social gatherings marked the turning point when attention on the political novel shifted to the internal ruminations that modern Japanese literature fostered. Literary critic Maeda Ai argues as much at the end of his work on communal and silent reading in the Meiji era when he writes,

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 41.

The end of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement [*Jiyû minken undô*] also spelled the demise of these sites of reading [aloud] as collective activity, and the reading subject shifted to the household or the solitary reader.<sup>318</sup>

Drawing from a series of passages that highlighted the diffuse nature of communal reading practices in the early years of the Meiji era, Maeda argues that the shift to modern literary engagement involved a complete reorganization of the relationship between the body reading and the text given. "Today, we are on the verge of forgetting how reading was very much a communal activity,"<sup>319</sup> he writes. With the introduction of moveable type in the early Meiji years, the ratio between texts and reading bodies inverted such that where previous to this individuals were forced to read aloud because the number of people interested in reading was greater than texts available, following this the market became so flooded with texts, newspapers, and journals that each body could more readily gain access to its own copy. The need to read aloud had lost its mathematical necessity. Maeda indicates this through a passage he cites from Yamakawa Hitoshi's recollections of Meiji life in *Record of an Ordinary Person: the Biography of Yamakawa Hitoshi*.

When I was a youth, reading material was scarce.... And in the countryside, after the demise of bookstores dealing in woodblock prints, there were not yet any new bookstores selling books printed with movable type...When I was in grade school, a newspaper ad piqued my interest in a book on natural history and I took the trouble to order it from Fuzanbô of Tokyo. Unless it was an exceptional case, families did not have their own libraries, and in our own home we just had some works along the lines of *The Analects of Confucius [Rongo]*, *Mencius [Môshi]*, *Selected Tang Dynasty Poems [Tôshi sen]*, and *The Unofficial History of Japan [Nihon Gaishi]*. One winter I borrowed *the Eight Retainers of Satomi [Satomi hakkenden]* from a friend whose family had a copy, and my father would give nightly spirited readings. All of us in the family listened – mother mending clothes, my older sister knitting. Then, a year or two

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<sup>318</sup> "From Communal Performance to Solitary Reading: the Rise of the Modern Japanese Reader" in Ai Maeda, *Text and the City : Essays on Japanese Modernity*, ed. James A. Fujii (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004). 248.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

later, the urge hit our family again , so I went out to borrow the book and we resumed our nightly performances.<sup>320</sup>

This sense of the scarcity of books that provided the conditions for communal reading is a far cry from the situation Tsubo'uchi Shôyô describes in his key work on the *Essence of the Novel*.

Everywhere one sees in print all sorts of stories and historical romances, each trying to outdo the others in originality. Things have come to such a pass that even newspapers and magazines are publishing rehashings of threadbare old novels. As a result of this trend, there are innumerable novels of all varieties in circulation in Japan today--the sheer profusion defies description! One may well say that the present happy reign of Meiji is a period of unprecedented prosperity for the novel...The range and number of books in those days were, therefore, no doubt rather more limited than at present. Today, all that has changed. How extraordinary it is that every novel or romance should enjoy the same popularity regardless of its quality, no matter how poor the tale or how vulgar the love story, whether it is an adaptation, a translation, a reprint, or a new work! This is indeed a golden age for all types of fiction!<sup>321</sup>

Before the turn to silent reading that was made possible through the mass production of texts, families reinforced their communal relationship through acts of reading. The state itself reinforced these communal acts through modes of recitation in its schools, while activist groups like the FPRM used the *enzetsu* or public speech to activate communal bodies of shared intention. The act of communal reading, as the term itself suggest, should thus indicate to us that the shift to individuated, silent reading, was not just a matter of changing the reader's relationship to the act of reading. Rather, the simple shift from speaking to reading texts was a wholesale transformation of the social and political realm itself. The shift to individual, silent reading indicates a shift towards the kind of individuation process we

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<sup>320</sup> Quoted in Ibid, 224. Taken from *Hitoshi Yamakawa, Yamakawa Hitoshi Jiden: Aru Bonjin No Kiroku, Sonota [the Autobiography of Yamakawa Hitoshi: A Layman's Memories and Other Things] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1961). 157-8.*

<sup>321</sup> Tsubo'uchi Shôyô, *The Essence of the Novel*, trans. Nanette Twine.  
<http://archive.nyu.edu/html/2451/14945/shoyo.htm>

saw fueled the life insurance industry, and established the conditions of a market economy relying on individuated wage labor. The acts to sever bodies from their place under Tokugawa rule and recode them under a new form of Meiji rule was an act that continued on in the cultural sphere as even the minute habits of reading practices were infected with this climate of individualization. Even the space of the everyday became a site of the reproduction of state being. This wholesale transformation of the social body is the revelation that makes Maeda Ai's discovery such a profound one. It would be a mistake, however, to characterize this shift from communal reading to silent reading as solely an issue of the market. Though the mass proliferation of texts made possible by new print technologies would change the ratio of texts to bodies, while increased literacy rates through the gradual development of the school system would undermine the necessity to read aloud as more and more individuals became capable of accessing their own texts according to their own individuated schedules, the link joining the communal body to the text would need more than a quantitative increase in texts to transform its assembly.

As Maeda Ai hints in his work, this communal reading body was more than just a domestic organization held to the strict boundaries separating the private sphere of the home from the public sphere of political life. Maeda is not so easily fooled by this kind of bourgeois ideology of the family. Thus he notes "this reading practice is associated with the absence of privacy that some time ago Lafcadio Hearn had identified as being the defining feature of the Japanese family."<sup>322</sup> The private sphere was not something familiar to Meiji subjects in the early decades of the era, but would be something that would come as effect of

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<sup>322</sup> Maeda, *Text and the City : Essays on Japanese Modernity*. 225.

the draconian social measures the Meiji state would enforce to keep political subjectivity from accumulating beyond its control. Communal reading was a public act even within the family. It was one that resisted the individuating forces of the market and the modern form of state being, because it produced the community at the moment of its action. Which is to say, on an affective level, it made the action of the communal whole adequate to the communal body engaged in the reading and listening. At the same time, communal reading opened up the possibility of subverting what could be considered the social norms that were being created under the Meiji state, since the communal act of reading aloud drowned out all sense of social norm to create its own temporary realm of voiced potentiality. What was the voice of a social norm except a silenced body? This is the fundamental nature of ideology – its ability to influence action without requiring a voice. Thus, it seems to follow, that any public act of speech holds within it the potential to rend that ideological silence and create temporary communal spaces of ideological transformation. Which is to say, public voices always held within them a political potential to breach the strictures of state ideology. What Maeda Ai's work on communal reading shows us is even more than this, communal acts of reading point to a completely different social assemblage of relations that transforms the very reality with which we engage. The change from communal reading to silent reading marks a transition that was more than ideological, but ontological in the sense that it reorganized the bodies, their time, and space in relationship to texts. Maeda cannot thus ignore the political implications that these acts of communal reading had for a period in the Meiji era that was charged with the political fervor best expressed in the activities of the FPRM. He cannot ignore the significance communal reading had for the existence of the textual manifestation of the FPRM's aims, the political novel.

It is already well-known that Tôkai Sanshi's *Chance Encounters with Beautiful Women* [*Kajin no kigû*, 1885-97], written in an elegant prose making liberal use of a splendid four-six syllable meter, with Chinese poems inserted in key passages, was a favorite among students for reading aloud... By promoting communal group reading in the inner sanctum of student communities like the school, dorm, boardinghouse, private academies, and associations, the political novel was able all the more effectively to serve as a catalyst in promoting sympathy for the People's Rights Movement.<sup>323</sup>

With the immanent potential of the decoding that speech and reading acts offered, a new force needed to be mobilized to silence its potential revolt. This was the police.

### 3. The State and Public Performance

Possibly the most politically conscious text written on this relation between acts of speech, the political novel, the Meiji state, and the FPRM is a deceptively simple history on the *enzetsu* or public speech written by Hyôdo Hiromi entitled, "Meiji Performances, Political Speeches and the Arts [Meiji no pafô-mansu, seiji enzetsu to geinô]."<sup>324</sup> Through the Meiji state's attempts to curtail the political potential of speech making, we can begin to see how the communal body politic of anti-state resistance forced state legislators to stretch their reach beyond their militaristic engagements and censorship policies to deal directly with a newly politicized realm of aesthetic expression through the dual mobilization of censorship policies and police surveillance. By revealing the difficulties the state had in tracking and suppressing the politics of aesthetic expression, Hyôdo exposes the real dangers aesthetic forms posed for state control and surveillance. He provides a clear view of the real political power of aesthetic expression. Hyôdo does a careful job in revealing the fluidity of this

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 233.

<sup>324</sup> Hyôdo Hiromi, "Meiji No Pafô-Mansu, Seiji Enzetsu to Geinô [Meiji Performances, Political Speeches, and the Arts]," in *Iwanami Kôza Nihon No Bunka Shi 4, Kansei No Kindai, 1870-1910, Nendai 2 [the Culture of Modern Japan, Vol. 4, Modern Sensibilities, Part 2]*, ed. Yoichi Komori (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002). 145-168.

resistance that did not stick simply to the text, but required constant rearrangements of bodies in relation to texts, voices, and creative expression that moved politics to a variety of unexpected venues. Which is to say, Hyôdo makes of politics a matter of creation – the creation of collective assemblages that sought their own adequation through aesthetic expression – and in so doing comes closest to an understanding of the stakes involved in the very nature of political expression. Political expression, because it is a matter of collective expression, cannot but be creative in nature, because it creates its body at the moment that it finds the means to express the desires of that body’s political being. If we match Hyôdo’s essay on political speeches to Maeda’s historical account of the shift towards silent reading, we begin to gain a broader sense of the forces that helped influence this shift towards individuation. That is, we begin to see how the state was again actively involved in creating the conditions for the individuation of bodies by which the market operated in ways that were not restricted to its social policies on taxation, land reform or the banking system. Further than this, the state reached into the very bodies of its subjects to reorder their habits for engaging in social relation through censorship policies and its laws against political assembly.

Hyôdo begins his treatment of state intervention on political expression at the point where we left off with Meiji censorship laws. In the year following the Satsuma Rebellion, the Meiji state implemented law to quash any possibility for a revisitation of civil war; this was necessary considering the high costs of a war that had nearly bankrupted the government’s coffers, and the dangers that Itagaki’s anti-state politicking threatened. Thus, it passed the Law on Public Assembly (*shûkai torishimari rei*) on July 12<sup>th</sup> of 1878. Its first clause reads,

People assembled in public fashion to debate matters or provide tales (*kôdan, rongi*

*suru tame*) of a political nature must, three days prior to the commencement of the assembly, provide details concerning the matters being debated or discussed, the names and addresses of those participating in debates, as well as the location and date of the assembly. Furthermore, the moderator, chair or organizer of the assembly must submit and receive permission for the assembly from the nearest police station (*kankatsu keisatsu sho*).<sup>325</sup>

This law further allowed uniformed policemen to attend registered assemblies to monitor activities and gave them the legal right to shut down any assemblies that could be seen to endanger or “obstruct national peace” (*kokuan ni bôgai ari to mitomuru*). In response to the strict suppression of anti-state political expression, Itagaki himself noted the need to find new ways to communicate to the people the nature of the battle that was going on between those fighting for their rights and the state. Thus, Itagaki narrates the rise of the political novel itself as a form that was born out of the disagreement engaged between state forces and an emergent politicized class of citizens. Itagaki does not, however, narrate this as solely a matter of communicating news to an already politicized mass waiting eagerly to hear more. On the contrary, the act of expression for Itagaki would also need to include acts to *create* the politicized subjects he needed to mobilize his movement. In a speech for a meeting amongst Jiyûtô (Liberal Party) members, Itagaki states,

At this time the suppression of public expression (*genron*) has become terrible, and no matter what form political speeches take, getting the general public to hear our ideas on politics is difficult. Not only this, but because the People’s understanding of political thought is shallow, if we don’t first cultivate it, we won’t be able to fight with the government... Under these circumstances, we need to disguise ourselves as storytellers. What would it mean to pretend to tell war stories, but at the same time slip in the cracks of our stories metaphors and aphorisms that would gradually inspire the general populace with political knowledge?<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 153.

The FPRM was thus faced with the dual task of creating a population at the same time it needed to mobilize this population, and had to do so under cover of metaphor and aphorism. Against this the Meiji state itself was in the process of mobilizing and creating its own subjects through the enactment of social policies in the economic field and the passing of repressive legislation on censorship and public assembly that reached into the sphere of everyday existence. Despite these repressive attempts, or because of them, we can see that the Meiji state, especially in these early decades, had not yet solidified its hold over the populace such that a movement like the FPRM could emerge as counterforce in the creation of a public. As Kamei Hideo showed on the side of the text of the political novel, the social collective itself operated according to a principle of transformation, not stability. With the dual bind of the earlier censorship laws, and the new laws against public assembly, the FPRM was hard pressed to find any outlet for its political program. The political novel offered an ideal escape from this bind while at the same time opening up an understanding of politico-aesthetic engagement that was not altogether new – historical tales had been a constant source of political expression and dissent during the Tokugawa period – but could reach an altogether new population of literate political subjects. In an ironic turn, the new market logic the state had to promote and protect in order to mobilize the kind of capital it required to foster a rich nation, and strong army (*fukoku kyôhei*) also provided the breeding ground for bodies that could access the tools needed to develop whole new collective imaginaries counter to this state program. The market created the basis upon which its own critique could be formed. Newspapers, journals, translated texts, speeches, debates, assemblies, and eventually novels became the means to train these new collective bodies according to these anti-state ideals. The political novel hid its political projects in the non-

national space of foreign history, and young subjects connected to these novels by reading them aloud to those that shared their political interests in designing a world in which the public became adequate to itself just as these temporary reading, speaking, and debating groups found the voice to speak futures that began with their own shared desires, and not the desires of a ruling class.

The state could not tolerate this kind of politico-aesthetic dissent, and continued to put pressure on speech and writing acts. In response, anti-state forces began hiring professional storytellers (*kôdansha*) to narrate their political metaphors and aphorisms as the space of the political assembly changed from the speech hall to the theatre. As Hyôdô notes, dissidents began to flood the theatres and music halls to promote their collective interests.<sup>327</sup> By 1883, as is noted in an article in the Postal News, the police became savvy to this change in political venue and began to survey the arts districts. When these dissidents began to feel the pinch in these new spaces, they changed their *modus operandi* and moved their politics to the street using song to link bodies together in political solidarity. Meanwhile, with the new flood of bodies sloughing off the agricultural sector during the years of the Matsukata deflationary policies, zones of artistic chaos began to emerge in the urban centers: Akihabara, Asakusa, Kanda and other districts became hotbeds of song, theatre, and play. Political dissent found a different mask to wear as it blended itself into these spaces, and mobilized bodies amidst crowds.<sup>328</sup> Street performers became the perfect nomadic form to dissension as politics learned to move through the blindspots of the state's police surveillance. Shifting

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 156-8.

from public speech to theatrical display to political melody to nomadic spectacle the politics of dissent made itself polymorphously perverse by inhabiting the mouths of actors, storytellers, singers, and streetperformers. Meanwhile, students continued to gather to read aloud the texts of the movement and felt themselves moved in the act of reading to resist the pull of the reality they saw unfolding before them.

Despite its efforts, this political movement could not last. The state in the end would be successful in quashing the perverse desires of the FPRM by splitting the difference between its own security and the will of a population that desired some sense of its own adequacy to the governance of state and market. In 1887 the Meiji state would kill the FPRM by cracking down on its activities while partially giving in to its demands. Before the end of the year, the government would announce its plans to institute a representational government based on a constitution following the creation of a draft constitution provided by foreign adviser and legal scholar Hermann Roestler. At the same time, it would promulgate the Peace Preservation Law (*hoan jôrei*) which would place greater power in the hands of the police force to crack down on anti-state dissidents. With both the promise of representational government on the horizon, and the threat of increasingly intense police pressure on the group, the FPRM could not maintain the political fervour it once inspired. By the time of the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution, which was soon followed by the enactment of laws to deal with the spread of political activity in the arts districts, the FPRM was all but dead. Though this would not be the last political battle the now reified modern Japanese state would need to fight against dissidents and political activists, the end of the FPRM does, as so many literary critics and historians have noted, mark a shift in the nature of state and national organization. From the ruins of the political project that attempted to make the people an

adequate source of state action through political representation rose a more staid bourgeois existence in which the concealed political agenda of more conservative forces could curl itself into arguments concerning the nature of a given reality that needed to be better represented in literature.

### **Conclusion: A Series of State Divisions**

If we recall with Maeda Ai's essay above, the world of the communal reader was not one marked by this sense of privacy within the home; yet, with the rise of modern literature we begin to see how this space of privacy emerges not in its own right, but as the scar left behind from the violent tears marring the public domain thanks to state policies on censorship and public peace. Harry Harootunian provides a means for thinking the production of this private sphere in an essay dealing with one of the FPRM's more well-known participants, Kitamura Tōkoku.<sup>329</sup> Much like Maeda Ai, Harootunian locates a shift in social practice that opens up a private space that was absent from Japan's feudal past. Rather, this private sphere is something produced as a consequence of the failure of the political project of the decade previous, and finds its definition by opposing a public sphere that men like Kitamura felt had become too vulgarized by a corrupt form of political consciousness.

What we should add to this narration of the rise of private space is its place in a series of productions resulting from the state's work to overcode and subdivide the feudal relations it was itself coding as such in preparation for the modern capitalist project. With the civil

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<sup>329</sup> Harry D. Harootunian, "Between Politics and Culture: Authority and Ambiguities of Intellectual Choice in Imperial Japan," in *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taisho Democracy*, ed. Tetsuo Najita et. al. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974).

wars in Saga, Aizu, and Satsuma, and the constant attack on peasant uprisings throughout the era, the state was constantly reinforcing the bounded space of a domestic existence such that it would seem as though it had excised the old military code of the samurai. This was simply, however, a shift in the distribution of violence. With its implementation of new taxation policies and the institution of a central money system, it smoothed out the time and space of economic relations allowing for the unimpeded flow and growth of capital markets that preyed on the newly individualized life and labor of an incipient population. These relations were then reinforced in a space that would become the space of culture and aesthetics, as the state through its censorship laws and police force foreclosed on all attempts by bodies to relegate positive affection to a larger active and politically engaged collective whole. All of public space became the site of the evacuation of the affective potential, and created a space instead where bodies had to seek shelter from the punitive brutality of the state. Public space was uniformly a space governed by a persistent state of violent aggression encoded as the bodies of silenced subjects.

What seems important in noting the material oppression of the state is that its force was not merely aimed at obliterating resistance. On the contrary, state repressive forces were productive in that they created a population that would be amenable to the strictures given by a modern capitalist state of being. Bodies had nowhere to turn to outside of the market to activate their political potential through action, and so hid in the only space left them. Robbed of its bite, its voice, and its communal home, the people curled up on themselves and sought solace in an inner space of the imagination that made of its political impotence a *ressentiment* towards all political being. In doing so, it concealed its own wounds to itself by making those wounds a site of production. This was the ideal state for a capitalist ontology,

because this made the individual the source of its own self-reproduction, and turned the greatest political force the state had ever encountered – aesthetic collectivity – into a cultural artefact robbed of its consequential and creative relevance. Modern literature turned its back on its ability to create the *polis* of politics because the risks had become too great. Modern literature left real creation to the state builders and capitalists. Instead, it paradoxically embraced its suffering, its individuation, and impotence to naturalize and ambiguate its suffering against a reality it assumed was impenetrable to forces of change. Pure literature, naturalism, and romantic individualism gave form to this practice of *ressentiment*, as the *bundan* separated itself from a world of politics it now found too vulgar and corrupt for its aesthetic projects. As later artists and writers would discover, however, the inherent politically creative nature of aesthetic expression would buck and kick in its prisonhouse of apoliticality. The real power of aesthetic expression found this *ressentiment* anathema to its very order of being. It cared little for “art” and wanted to engage in the joy of creation with the *polis* as its true medium of expression. Artists such as Osugi Sakae, Mushanokôji Saneatsu, Arishima Takeo, Kobayashi Takiji and the entire proletarian literature movement would continually attempt to activate this potential of aesthetic expression. Literature would spill beyond the confines of its place in state being and continue to try to overturn a too staid reality; however, this history is one I must leave for future considerations.

For now, I am concerned with the state of thought following this initial assault on aesthetic expression. From its wounds achieved in the public sphere, aesthetics would give birth to, as Kitamura himself would term it, the “inner life” (*naibu seimei*) of domestic existence, and it is to this life, as spoken through the works of Iwano Hômei that we turn in the final chapter of this work.

## *Chapter 7.*

# Iwano Hômei and the Individuation of Mystical Demi-animalism

### **I. The Problems of Life**

#### **1. Taisho Vitalism**

What of life? I have tracked a general shift at the level of the aesthetic practice to show how certain possibilities in thinking political action were foreclosed on through state censorship policies, and, more importantly, through a broader shift in the affective order at the end of the Meiji teens – what Atsuko Ueda and others have shown to find expression in a modern literature whose political roots were forcefully concealed by appeals to pure literature.<sup>330</sup> This leaves us with the question: where was the conceptualization of life in this re-ordering of being? While I have spent some time in dealing with the emergence of a concept of life in the political economy of the Meiji era with my analysis of the rise of life insurance, one could argue that the life of life insurance and the life of thought or literature are two distinctly different concepts. From here, then, we could go on to argue that a concept of life in aesthetic terms provided precisely this place in thought which was not reducible to a

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<sup>330</sup> See previous chapter for more details.

national imaginary or practice. Doesn't life itself point to a greater collective existence that could confound the registers of unified political paralysis, and state being? Wouldn't life's vital essence hold within it the kind of political potential for mobilizing action across a different field of understanding than one allowed within the confined restrictions of a domesticated affection?

At first glance, one might be compelled to answer these questions in the affirmative. Yes, life exploded onto the scene precisely at that moment when the political novel was disappearing from literature. Debates on life were seemingly inaugurated by the heated contestation between Kitamura Tōkoku and Yamaji Aizan in the mid Meiji 20s over the relevance forms of literary production had in relation to the life of the people. This trend continued through the works of thinkers and writers such as Takayama Chōgyū, Iwano Hōmei, and Shimamura Hōgetsu. By the time of the Russo-Japanese war, the prevalence of writing on life was so great that contemporary literary critic Suzuki Sadami has termed the years from 1905 to 1923 as the time of *Taisho seimei shugi* – or Taisho vitalism. To illustrate the degree to which writers and thinkers were focused on notions of life, he gives a brief sample of titles published over the years spanning the end of the Meiji to the first years of the Taisho era.

Meiji 45 (1912)	February	Sōma Gyofū's <i>Sei wo Ajiwau Kokoro</i> ("The Heart that Savors Life" in Waseda Bungaku)
	March	Katagami Noburu's <i>Sei no Yōkyū to Geijutsu</i> ("The Demands of Life and its Art" in Taiyō)
	April	Shimamura Hōgetsu's <i>Seimei</i> ("Life" in Waseda Bungaku)
Taisho 1 (1912)	July	Katsurai Tōnosuke's <i>Seimei Chūshin no Shisō</i> ("Life-centered Thought" in Waseda Bungaku)

	Sept.	Watase Tetsushi's <i>Sei no Shinka</i> ("The Evolution of Life" in Mita Bungaku)
Taisho 2 (1913)	May	Katagami Noburu's <i>Sei no Yōkyū to Bungaku</i> ("The Demands of Life and its Literature" in Taiyō)
	June	Kaneko Chikusui's <i>Seimei no Chikara</i> ("The Life Force" in Taiyō)
	July	Osugi Sakae's <i>Sei no Kōjū</i> ("The Expansion of Life" in Kindai Shisō)
	August	Sōma Gyofū's <i>Seimeiryoku no Reikan</i> ("Vitality's Inspiration" in Waseda Bungaku)
	Sept.	Kaneko Chikusui's <i>Seimeiryoku no Kōkan</i> ("Vitality's Sympathy" in Taiyō)
	October	Shirotori Seigo's <i>Seimei no Haiki</i> ("Life's Genuflection" in Waseda Bungaku)
	December	Shirotori Seigo's <i>Shi to Seimei ishiki</i> ("Poetry and the Consciousness of Life" in Yomiuri Shinbun)
Taisho 3 (1914)	January	Osugi Sakae's <i>Sei no Sōzō</i> ("The Creativity of Life" in Kindai Shisō)
	March	Yoshie Kogan's <i>Seimei no Chikara</i> ("The Life Force" in Waseda Bungaku)
	October	Osugi Sakae's <i>Sei no Tōsō</i> ("The Battle for Life" in Kindai Shisō) <sup>331</sup>

This list, of course, represents only a small fraction of the titles dealing with, related to, or focused on issues of life, but provides at least a good sense of the degree to which writers and thinkers were speaking on life during this period.

In his penultimate work on the subject, *Seimeikan no Tankyū* (or *An Inquiry into Life-perspectives*), Suzuki further reinforces the importance of Taisho vitalism by using past

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<sup>331</sup> Sadami, "Seimei" *De Yomu Nihon Kindai; Taishō Seimei Shugi No Tanjō to Tenkai* [Japanese Modernity Read Through "Life"; the Birth and Development of Taisho Vitalism. 24-25

vitalist thinkers to piece together a “new” perspective of life that could inform contemporary debates surrounding issues of ecological disaster, the dangers of bio-technology, and the ethical implications of genetic experimentation. He writes,

In relation to problems in our global environment, of environmental pollution, with the state of the natural sciences, and the sciences dealing with life-forms (*seimeitai kagaku*), we need to find a single perspective from which to study these issues in a unified manner. To do this we need to establish a guiding theme that penetrates beyond natural, social, or even human perspectives. This is the reason that a “life-perspective” (*seimeikan*) has emerged. Which is to say, this life-perspective has begun to acquire an altogether new relevance and status in the contemporary moment.<sup>332</sup>

Thus Suzuki asserts the life-perspective as one that might help us overcome the problems of modernity including its alienations, its contingencies, and its materialist privations imposed on individual existence. It can do so, because historically the concept of life emerged precisely at the moment when the problems of modernity began to rear their ugly head. In an article given the title, “What is Taisho Vitalism?,” Suzuki locates the emergence of the vitalist trend amidst the dual privative forces of war and industrialization.

As the conditions of [vitalism’s] emergence we have the mass casualties and deaths of the Russo-Japanese war, and, following this, the rapid development of heavy chemical and industrial manufacturing. There is also the proliferation of disasters resulting from the cruel working conditions of the laboring class, as well as the acceleration of the division of classes amongst farmers and peasantry following the Sino-Japanese war, and the malnutrition and starvation from famine and impoverishment that resulted. All these we can point to as key conditions...This period was a prosperous one in relation to the clash between classes where conflicts developed over laws regulating the length of the working day, which is to say laws regarding the direct exploitation of “life force” (*seimeiryoku*). Though the promulgation of the factory law that established a twelve-hour working day was established in Meiji 44 (1911), this was a toothless law full of loopholes (*zaruhō*) that could be bent to accommodate the interests of employers. Thus, we mustn’t forget

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<sup>332</sup> Sadami, *Seimeikan No Tankyū; Jūsō Suru Kiki No Naka De [an Investigation of Life-Perspectives; Amidst the Multiplicity of Crisis]*. 28.

these were battles fought over problems of the exploitation of “life,” more so than problems of labor movements and economic exploitation.<sup>333</sup>

In contrast to, or in direct opposition to this vampiric attitude towards life expressed on the factory floor, a concept of life was formed that would “attempt to overcome modern intellectual frames organized around concepts of ‘modern individualism’ and state nationalism.”<sup>334</sup> Life, and the life perspective, under Suzuki’s guidance, might help us chart a path out of modernity and its isolating and immiserating effects in the present, because it has always functioned to do so.

I do not disagree with Suzuki that the concepts of life that emerged in the Meiji and Taisho eras were conceived as means to resist or overcome some of the more deleterious effects brought about by the machinations of state and market forces. Life is treated by all thinkers of these eras, regardless of their political or aesthetic allegiances, with greater reverence than even God or the Emperor in the sense that opinions on its value were uniformly framed in positive terms, whereas critiques of God and the Emperor were not unheard of.<sup>335</sup> Nor do I see Suzuki’s position on life as protagonist to the modern narrative of isolation and commodification as an altogether idealistic or naïve one. He is joined by a number of thinkers and writers, old and new, who offer life as their panacea to modernity’s

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<sup>333</sup> Sadami Suzuki, "Taishô Seimei Shugi to Ha Nanika [What Is Taisho Vitalism?]," in *Taishô Seimei Shugi to Gendai [Taisho Vitalism and the Present]*, ed. Sadami Suzuki (Tokyo: Kawade Shobô Shinsha, 1995). 7

<sup>334</sup> *ibid.* 13

<sup>335</sup> As far as critiques of the Emperor based system go, these have woven their way throughout modern Japan’s history since the Emperor’s restoration to the throne. Such anti-state movements as the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, socialist writers and thinkers of the late Meiji and early Taisho eras, and the Proletarian Literature Movement provide a plethora of critiques of Japanese Imperialism. Critiques of god were perhaps even more endemic to the period since some of the major influences informing discourses surrounding the establishment of a modern system were such evolutionary thinkers as Charles Darwin, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and Herbert Spencer. The question as to what form of god these critiques were aimed at is an altogether different question that would take me beyond the scope of this current project.

(or even post-modernity's) ills. Karl Marx himself kept notions of *species life* and living labor as his heroes in the fight against capital.<sup>336</sup> He is accompanied by a long line of *lebensphilosophers* (philosophers of life) beginning with Arthur Schopenhauer, and moving through Wilhelm Dilthey, the Schlegel brothers, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, and others too numerous here to mention who supported the theorization of an emancipatory life-force or ideal. Most contemporary theorists such as Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler wrote critiques on behalf of life. They are joined by the likes of Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Guy de Bord, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Michel de Certeau, while in Japan they are joined by critics such as Nakamura Yûjirô, Yamaori Tetsuo, and Inagaki Naoki, not to mention the plethora of writers from the era of Taisho Vitalism itself, not the least of which were Nishida Kitarô, Tanabe Hajime, Kitamura Tôkoku, and Ôsugi Sakae. Although I do not necessarily see the above veneration of life as necessarily misguided within the context of the problems each thinker was attempting to unravel, I do find it strange that despite all the ink that has been spilled on the subject, hardly any has been used towards the task of critiquing its conditions of possibility as a concept. More importantly, one has to wonder how celebrations of life, especially those that emerged in the years Suzuki marks as Taisho vitalism, could be so forthcoming in periods when death, with the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars so near to memory,<sup>337</sup> was so prevalent in all of the nation's workings. In the

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<sup>336</sup> "It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man really proves himself to be a *species-being*. This production is his active species-life. Through this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species-life*" from Karl Marx, "Estranged Labor," in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964). 76

<sup>337</sup> These of course are only the most notable instances of the production of death. Lest we forget the kinds of death production colonialism made possible, and the death tolls that heavy industrialization took on a newly minted population.

following pages, we will see that this production of death was not something that operated outside the logic of life, but in fact can be seen, at least in the aesthetic realm, as an operative effect of a concept of life that made the subordination of individuated life to state, national, or universal life thinkable.

To understand how life found its connection to the production of death, we need to pursue the figure of individuated life, not in the political-economic realm, but precisely in the newly emergent realm of the literary trends that prospered in the wake of the FPRM's disappearance, and against the political economic background in which a nascent life insurance industry was gradually expanding in power and influence. I will show that, by no coincidence, at the same time the figure of individuated life was being carved into the bodies of Meiji subjects through the proliferation of medicalized knowledge and economic reforms to land and temporality, this same figure was used to inscribe a strict horizon to thought with regards to literature, philosophy and criticism. Individuated life became the central figure through which all experience, both in the private and public realms (as they were being constituted) could be understood. It marked the horizon of all being, and as such was the means through which state and market could establish their affective order while simultaneously effacing those zones of indetermination and immanence that were characteristic of the era before. This individuated life was then placed in tension with its universal forms such that notions of its worth could be organized in hierarchical fashion. The individuated lives of citizenry were made subordinate to the maintenance of the "life" of a state that needed to be nurtured and maintained beyond the lives of its individual members. Society became something that had to be defended, and at a cost of that which was paradoxically made most valuable while also necessarily expendable: individuated life.

## 2. Language is not enough

To deal with the concept of life within the Meiji era we need to consider expression in its politico-ontological form, and not merely in its linguistic or textual form. The reasons for this are simple. First, language, its relevance for thought and its stability, at the end of the Meiji, was still an issue up for dispute, while those appealing to transcendentalisms in thought had to work to move beyond the mess of linguistic practices that were not yet unified under a single figure of expression. A problem thus emerges when attempting to chart the politico-ontological relevance of expressions of life within texts at the end of the Meiji. As both Iwano Hōmei and Kitamura Tōkoku would argue, language is considered ultimately inadequate in expressing the mysteries of life; it is merely the rough tool they must fall back upon in order to guide our attention to the more fundamental natural wonders that surround us. Were we to take up a purely historical or political perspective on this matter, we would miss the delicate and complex arguments both Iwano and Kitamura were attempting to put forth regarding the limits of expression. The very act of historicizing expression would be equivalent, in Kitamura's words, to forcing the great literary figures of the past to stand under the narrow roof of our too literal home. We would necessarily rob those writers of their fundamental attachment to something more deeply connected to the turning of the world and instead turn "Kankō<sup>338</sup> into a failed statesman" while "Bashō<sup>339</sup> is made a self-hating

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<sup>338</sup> Kankō, the pen name for Sugawara no Michizane (845-903 a.d.), was a Heian era scholar, aristocrat, and man of letters known for aiding in the compilation of the 200 volume *Ruijūkokushi* (*Compilation of Historical Material on the Kuni*) and the 50 volume *Sandai jitsuroku* (*Chronicles of Three Eras*).

<sup>339</sup> Matsuo Bashō is best known as the kami (God) of haiku poetry written during the Edo period. He lived from 1644 to 1694.

hermit, Bakin<sup>340</sup> becomes a minor anti-realist poet, and Saigyô<sup>341</sup> becomes an indifferent man of leisure.<sup>342</sup> Iwano, on the other hand, would make use of Maurice Maeterlinck's mysticism and point us towards the robust silence of a world beyond the vulgarities of linguistic expression. Our political chatter simply misses the point and attempts to turn that which is ineffable – as is the ineffability of Mt. Yoshino's grandeur, or a single tulip's elegance – into a mere object robbed of its living mystery.

Thus, I am trapped in my study of life in the Meiji era between the necessity to critique these expressions of life to reveal the limits of historical and political thought of this era, and the danger of not taking them seriously enough in their condemnation of the very tools by which I aim to study life. My historical or political critique becomes too vulgar in expression when faced with the delicacy of the expressiveness of life. If we shift from considerations of text and language, however, and shift to issues of expression we may find a means to overcome this problem and make the link between aesthetics and political economy without subordinating the one to the other.

### 3. Life and Death

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<sup>340</sup> Kyokutei Bakin (1767-1848) was an Edo period *gesaku* writer best known for his work, *Nansô satomi Hakkenden* [Eight Dog Chronicles], a work written over a period of thirty years detailing the adventures of eight samurai brothers representing eight ethical virtues such as loyalty, honor, duty, wisdom, etc.

<sup>341</sup> Saigyô was born in 1118 as Satô Norikiyo, and is a renowned Japanese poet of the Heian and Kamakura periods. His poetry is included in the Shin kokin waka shû anthology of classical poetry.

<sup>342</sup> Tôkoku Kitamura, *Jinsei Ni Aiwataru to Ha Nanno Iizô* [What Does It Mean to Engage with Human Life?], ed. Katsumoto Sei'ichirô, *Kitamura Tôkoku Senshû* [Collected Works of Kitamura Tôkoku] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974). 229.

A second reason for shifting my approach from a linguistic to an ontological one is that it frees me from abiding too strictly to the rules and relations of language. One of the first links we can finally sever once freed from the binds of linguistic practices is the assumed connection between life and death. In work on life such as those following in Michel Foucault's footsteps, life and death are reciprocally related. Sovereign power is defined against *biopower* as a shift from the sovereign right to make die and let live as opposed to the governmental right to make live and let die. In Japan, an entire field of study has been established at Tokyo University based on an assumed connection between two logically disparate concepts: founded in the last few years as part of the Global COE Program, *Shiseigaku* (life and death studies) was established to further studies on what I consider to be a false relation between life and death.

Contrary to this assumed relationship, I argue that the link between life and death is not necessary, but historical. As such, we need to begin thinking the two concepts as logically distinct. To borrow a term from Karatani Kojin, life and death mark a parallax view within the historical ontology of modern existence. Only life has anything to say about death, and it speaks death at every turn to the extent that life becomes merely another way of saying death. I will argue in the following pages, that the expressive tincture of death under a concept of life changes at particular moments in the establishment and extension of a particular economy of thought, such that someone like Iwano Hômei, writing against the background of the mass of deaths produced in the Russo-Japanese war, had to force death into a symbolic order that was mere surface to the more vitalistic concerns of a mystified life. Key to all concepts of life, as we will see, is the figure of the individuated body. Materially, life found its relationship with death, as we saw in life insurance, only when it took up a

mediative role between the individual and a particular brand of society that was organized around the isolation or individuation of this individual. We will see in the following pages, that life takes up this same role in thought of the era.

Death on the other hand, has nothing to say about life. If we were to strip death of all its mystical associations to religion or philosophy, and approach it simply on its own basis, then we discover that where life and the individual are inseparable, death has nothing to do with individuation. There is no such thing as an internal proof of an individual or individuated death. The reason for this can be seen as a logical one. The only real proof of an individual experience of death can be taken from someone who is dead. Of course we know this to be a perfect paradox, and possibly the only perfectly sound paradox in thought, because it is the only case in which the very condition of possibility of experience requires the annihilation of the very means of both experiencing and expressing the experience. This has given rise to such paradoxical situations regarding acts of bearing witness to atrocities such as the death camps in Nazi Germany wherein the very proof of the camps' existence is nullified by the life of the witness bearing the burden of proof. If these were indeed death camps, the naysayers argue, then the fact of the witness' very existence is living proof that they were not indeed death camps.<sup>343</sup> This is the same logical loophole used by members of the ultranationalist intelligentsia in Japan to deny such acts of atrocity as the Nanjing Massacre, and the mass corralling of women into comfort stations. In the latter case, arguments are particularly sinister since the logic of the comfort women denial takes death as

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<sup>343</sup> This topic is taken up with greater detail in Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Differend, Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Also see Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 1999).

the standard by which violence to women should be measured. Things couldn't have been so bad for women, goes the argument, because they came back in one piece and received remuneration for all their trouble.<sup>344</sup> As egregious as the above arguments may be, they do bring into stark reality the nature of this paradox to thought: we will never find someone who will be able to tell us what it is like to be dead or to prove by bearing witness that a death took place, because in order to do so they would have to die. Only their dead body bears the burden of proof. *As such it places the very logic of death beyond the pale of linguistic possibility. The dead body should point to us that not all proofs come to us linguistically.*

At this point I imagine most arguments against the above would assert that I have made the false presumption that death is only experienced from the subjective point of view. We know death, not because we experience it, but because we see others experience it. I would reply in stating that this is precisely the argument through which I would argue that death has nothing to do with the individual. When we die we are never one. We are always multiple. To put it differently, death always begins with a collective not reducible to individuals. As such death operates according to a logic of subtraction. I do not experience your death as a reproduction of my own individuation. This is merely a historically determined illusion developed by virtue of a particular mode of subjective production. *Rather, I experience death as a subtraction from my experience of collectivity.*

To push this further, we can also state that death is not calculable as an algebraic experience, but a geometric one, because the subtraction of death does not merely change an

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<sup>344</sup> See Yoshinori Kobayashi, *Shin Gomanizumu Sengen Special: Sensōron [the New Arrogantism Manifesto, Special: On War]* (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 1998).

already established consistency in collective organization. Its subtraction produces an altogether new form to the collectivity as the subtraction of one side of a triangle transforms the figure altogether. Anyone who has experienced a death of someone close to them has some sense of this. The death of a father, mother, sister or brother, changes the family dynamic completely. Yet, this family collective was merely a means to contain the transformation. Modernity was built precisely upon a necessity to contain the transformative effects of death – be it a material or even a symbolic one. Seen from another perspective, our questions concerning modern thought's relation to death should not concern themselves with questions asking why any deaths took place. I think the more fundamental question that plagues us should be why death, especially state sanctioned deaths, did not elicit a complete transformation of society. The answer inevitably must follow that life and its extensive spatiotemporal logic ensured this would not happen. This was the primary role of the concept of life, and the reason why I would say that all life, not just life at the margins of society, is more than bare. It is individuated, and found this individuation through a logic of expression.

## **II. Iwano Hômei**

### **1. Naturalism's Individuation**

Iwano Hômei provides a peculiar, though illuminating view into the dominance of the figure of the individuated I in Meiji era thought, precisely because all aspects of his thought would seem to direct him away from the economic reduction of experience to individuated solitude. Placing himself within a tradition of naturalist writers and critics – such as Emerson, Maeterlinck, Plotinus, and Swedenborg – who attempted to deepen their connection to the

greater natural world, Iwano turned from the realist aspects of naturalism to probe the depths of the mysteries of life that could only make themselves heard through a play of symbols.<sup>345</sup> If we were to see naturalism in the Meiji era as a reaction against the over-emphasis on subjective experience that the romantic school, lead by the *Bungakukai*, or Literary Studies Group, promoted, then naturalism would seem best inclined towards a non-anthropocentric form of literary expression, and Iwano's deepening of its principles to mystic ends would seem to push this distance from the human even further. On the surface, this seems to be the case. Naturalist writers of the Meiji era were influenced by the works of Emile Zola, and Hippolyte Taine, who appealed to scientific principles of evolution and heredity expressed through objective narrative styles. These found expression in such stylistic practices as the "flat description" (*heimen byôsha*) promoted by Tayama Katai, which aimed to displace subjective experience from the center of literary production. Existence was not an issue of mere human existence as seen through the lens of individual experience, but on the contrary, human existence was framed by a larger world of natural processes.

The mysticism that emerged from this connection to nature seemed destined to broaden distance from subjectivism by suturing the gap between experience and the mysteries of life. Mysticism tried to speak a more profound relation of man to universe – of man to life itself – that could transcend the exterior relations established through naturalism's adherence to scientific principles. Following the mystic tradition in European literary and

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<sup>345</sup> In Hômei Iwano, "Shinpiteki Hanjû Shugi [Mystic Demi-Animalism]," in *Meiji Bungaku Zenshû 71, Iwano Hômei*, ed. Sei'ichirô Yoshida (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobô, 1965). 1. For ease of access all quotes will be taken from the online version of Iwano's work provided by Aozora Bunko (<http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000137/files/733.html>; the version provided is that given in the citation above). As this makes reference to page numbers difficult, citations will include section titles and paragraph number. All translations are mine.

philosophical circles, Iwano seemed the spokesperson for this trend; yet, instead of pushing life and mystery beyond considerations of the human, Iwano rather inverted the relation of man to universe making the individual human, as obligated only to existential freedom, the center of all existence rather than one more phenomena floating untethered at its margins. Subjectivism, for Iwano, came to colonize exteriority itself, making all existence operate according to the rules of the individuated self. Iwano was not alone in making the individuated I the centerpiece of given reality. After all, the I-novel, the quintessential expression of Japanese modernity's solipsistic preoccupation with the self and all its slippages, was not the by-product of romanticist experiments in subjective experience. On the contrary, the I-novel was the birth-child of those who defined their literary practices in opposition to the subjective demands of the romantic: naturalist writers such as Tayama Katai, Shimazaki Tôson, and Shimamura Hôgetsu. This turn can only be thought in relation to the emergence of the modern concept of life or *seimei* that became a centerpiece for so many thinkers of the day. For Iwano Hômei in particular, this concept of life is the very means through which he justifies a turn to radical individualism as extension of mystic and naturalist traditions, and finds his own radically individualist experiments in I-novel writing. His philosophical justifications for this turn from naturalism to radical individualism is most explicitly given in one of his earlier works, *Shinpiteki hanjûshugi* ("Mystical Demi-Animism") of 1906. We should not ignore the relevance of its date of publication: the year following the end of the Russo-Japanese war. Its time of publication forces us into consideration of the broader implications that any enunciation on reality, life or its mysteries might have, especially at a time when so many lives were sacrificed at the altar of state

being. I leave these considerations, however, for the time being, and will focus in on the text itself.

## **2. Mystical Demi-animalism and its Influences**

### **i. Maeterlinck**

Iwano's text places us from the outset in matters of expression I have mentioned above. His characteristic rethinking of naturalism is enunciated through a focus on the problems of expression exemplified in the works of the three mystics he takes up: the playwright and essayist Maurice Maeterlinck, the transcendental idealist Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the scientist turned Christian mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg. For these mystics, the former two in particular, mysticism emerged precisely as a result of a believed failure or inherent inadequacy of rational expression. Iwano's focus on these inadequacies thus forces us to confront the limits of our own critique of his work: how are we to critique mystical life without appropriating his language into a form of expression he, along with the mystics influencing him, found to be lacking in subtlety. The answer, at least for my purposes, is to engage him at the very level of the conditions and limits of expression itself. To do this, we need to understand that expression itself is not uniform. In fact, as seen above with Deleuze's understanding of the term, expression can be thought as a matter of a divine logic linking the substance of God to his attributes, or it can be thought in its more prosaic form, as the expression of meaning in man. Iwano's entire work operates according to a conflation of these two modes of expression.

In Iwano's introduction to Maeterlinck's thought, he points out the limits that consciousness has for encountering the mystical world. Maeterlinck is first and foremost a

thinker, neither of the rational nor the real, but of life itself. It is his focus on life that gives vitality to his mysticism.

With Maeterlinck, then, the unraveling of a particular species of life is the life of the text itself. To see this in adjectival terms we could say he writes about supreme life, absolute life, sacred life, or transcendental life; however, as with the transcendental idealism of Emerson's philosophy, this is not a matter of external reality, but one of the extrasensual (*chôkannôteki*) interiority of truth. This is a matter of the indistinct boundary, or more to the point, the passions emergent at the boundary separating our consciousness from the unconscious. It is a matter of the spirit that hides there.

Truth is born from this work of mystery.<sup>346</sup>

For Iwano's Maeterlinck this indistinction at the heart of life gives reality its dreamlike quality, while truth can only be glimpsed through the intellectual capacity (*chiryoku*) formed in the space where the self encounters other selves; yet, this intelligence is never enough to fully comprehend the mystery, because of the crude nature of the senses (*kannô*).<sup>347</sup> For Iwano's interpretation of Maeterlinck, this mystery is translated temporally along a line that sees our past determined through heredity, and our future through fate. The silence of mystery is what meets at their point of contact, and the emotions "are all that allow us to feel our way through the darkness of the mystical world, such that we find beauty, charm (*omoshiromi*), and life there."<sup>348</sup> Thus, mysticism as it is read through life pushes us beyond the limits of expression, and we can only encounter it in a profound silence; the silence of pure emotion. Maeterlinck literally has nothing to say about the mysteries of life, because any attempt at expression would serve as an erasure of the pregnant meaning of silences.

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid, "Me-terurinku no shinpisetsu [Maeterlinck's theory of mystery]," paragraph 3.

<sup>347</sup> By *kannô* we should not think of sense as a matter merely of the perceptive faculties. The Chinese characters of *kannô* literally translate as the potential of that which governs the body (the organs), and thus there is a more dynamic quality implied by the use of *kannô* as opposed to the more percept oriented term, *chikaku*.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid. paragraph 3.

Thus, it would seem that silence founds for us a space beyond the human to contemplate and encounter the greater divine mysteries of being; yet, the very conditions of this encounter have us adhere to a human path – the past of heredity and a future destiny. Silence becomes purely a matter of the encounter between evolution and its inherent contingencies. In either case, what we will discover is that what Iwano through Maeterlinck considered natural processes founding the silent encounter of pure emotion, were in fact historical determinations that smuggled into the center of his theorization of life and mystery ideologies of the market and social relation. What he took to be the natural expression of a divine mystery was only the silent hum of modern human thought.

## **ii. Emerson**

For Iwano's Emerson, on the other hand, any limit on expression is enunciated through the very form of writing itself. In his study of Emerson's "On Nature", Iwano writes,

...Emerson's idealist logic is merely its form, it's life is something else altogether.

We can see this by looking at his style of writing. With frankness, avoiding the kinds of adjectives used by someone like Irving,<sup>349</sup> and instead focusing on nouns imbued with fact, with texts tirelessly peppered with periods, Emerson ensures the relation between each phrase and clause does not easily follow the course of a syllogism, since, were he to write his sentences as easy to follow, his readers would not pay attention to the key points in his writing. Consequently, it is necessary he stop readers at these points and force them to dwell on them.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Possibly Washington Irving, a essayist and short story writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Best known for works such as "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, "Emerson no 'shizenron,' [Emerson's 'On Nature']" paragraph 2-3.

In order further to overcome the problem of writing on concepts and notions not reducible to syllogistic rationalization, Emerson operates by suggestion, hint, and metaphor. Again we see here at the heart of mysticism an antagonistic relationship to the expressive capabilities of the intellect. Unlike Maeterlinck and his belief that the passions are too crude to access this mystical realm, Emerson returns to reason through the passions such that reason functions to temper the passionate mystery and guide its extension into platonic ideals. He can do so by virtue of a representational relationship linking the life of interior mystery with the exterior dream of reality. In this way language itself functions as mere extension of the symbolic function of reality while mystery becomes the greater transcendental material of existence given form through platonic ideals. Thus, Emerson's transcendental mysticism provides Iwano with a means to gain access to mystery aside from Maeterlinck's silence, and his turn from naturalism to symbolism is given shape. Where Maeterlinck provided a silent lacuna at the meeting point between the naturalized modern concepts of heredity and destiny, Emerson literally gave human voice to divine expression through the work of the symbolic. Iwano writes,

Language is not simply a matter of human conversation, but seen from the perspective of Emerson's idealism, nature itself is the language used to express thought. In this there are three mystical clauses:

1. Language is the symbol of nature's truth
2. The unique natural truth is the symbol of a unique spiritual truth
3. Nature itself is the symbol of the spirit<sup>351</sup>

To consolidate the human monopoly over expression and close off the gap opened by Maeterlinck's mystical realm that is opaque to human intellect, Emerson provides access to this same realm by virtue of the unification of the spirit. Unlike rationalists such as Hegel or

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid. Paragraph 9.

Berkeley, Emerson's unity of spirit does not find expression solely in relation to the real, since the real is mere aggregate of broken symbols swirling over the surface of a more fundamental natural realm. Instead, unity finds its expression between the soul of man and the greater spirit of the universe. The link that ties these two realms together is life itself as it mediates the expressive faculty of the human intellect to the greater expression of a pure concept that acts as symbol of the Unity of Spirit.<sup>352</sup> As Iwano writes,

Man within the realm of his everyday borrows from all material and external things to make of them symbols of interiority or the spiritual. The realm of the exterior world, is also the interior realm of the spirit such that an angry man becomes a lion (*shishi*<sup>353</sup>), a cunning man is a fox, and an imperturbable man a rock...If we do not look at these as individual parts of nature, and see them as the unity of the pure concept I mentioned before, this unity becomes a symbol of the Greater Unity of Spirit (*ichidai shinrei*). If we consider this intellectually, it takes the form of reason, but in contrast to nature, it is better to term this the spirit. In vulgar terms, this spirit is given as God (*kami*).<sup>354</sup>

For Iwano, however, the Emersonian reliance on platonic ideals is inadequate to hold together nature and the unity of spirit. For him, these ideals are not active enough. Instead, he reconciles the division separating Maeterlinck's opaque mysticism and Emerson's eidetic one through an alteration posited at the level of time. Compelled by the concept of life, and its ties to Darwinian evolution and the long tradition of German *lebensphilosophie*, Iwano

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<sup>352</sup> By Spirit, I should note that Iwano is more likely to be indicating a notion akin to Hegel's *geistes* than the Christian understanding of the spirit as something internal or intrinsic to the body's self. In Iwano's terms this distinction is made through the characters *shin* (心) and *rei* (霊) where the former should not be read literally as heart, as is the tendency in general English translations, but can be read in a much broader sense to indicate the spirit of that which is in all things, while the latter character of *rei* can be read in the more general sense of the soul within the body. Thus, together the two characters indicate a sense of spirit (*shinrei*) that is beyond the meaning of the soul and can indicate a greater connection to the spirit of God, the world, or all of life itself.

<sup>353</sup> The English would have *shishi* as a lion or lion-dog, but the *shishi* is more like a mythical dragon meant to guard temples and shrines from evil.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid. Paragraph 10.

finds his answer in the works of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. In Maeterlinck's temporal diagram of the past as hereditary and the future as fate, Iwano replaces the opaque silence of pure emotion at their meeting point with the force of the will. Thus, like Emerson, Iwano finds a means to give expression to the mysteries of life, but instead of reason and its ideals, the will, as read through evolution and *lebensphilosophie*, becomes the lens through which mysteries can find expression. Iwano then inscribes the individual life as the form and content of this will, and human life solidifies its place at the center of all existential expression.

What emerges from this unique combination is the figure of the demi-animalistic (*hanjū*) man. Urged by animal passions that tie him more intimately with the press and flow of the natural world, while still conscious of his ties to the intellect, the demi-animalistic man is a figure of pure will that can bend his inherited past, and his fated future over the curve of the instant at their meeting point. Thus, for Iwano the reconciliation of Emersonian idealism with Maeterlinck's opaque mystery occurs in a temporal field, and the demi-animal is given its own time, the time of the instant (*setsuna*). Iwano uses several symbols to express the nature of this time: the lover's kiss, the lover's embrace; yet, at each moment he evokes these symbols, they are immediately placed in a complex play of active and passive forces.

To understand this interplay of the active and passive, we need to understand Iwano's ties to Buddhism. Unlike Emersonian transcendentalism that is ultimately optimistic in relation to the possibilities of idealist ruminations, Iwano's transcendentalism takes up the Buddhist pessimistic attitude that asserts all existence is misery. It is this misery, as the misery consequent to man's place at the center of a natural world that is not organized to cater to his needs, that provides the space for willful overcoming. At the same time that

Iwano assumes this Buddhist principle into his own theory of existence, he criticizes the binary relation between misery and enlightenment, stating “even Buddhists themselves think [this binary] stinks of age (*furukusai*).”<sup>355</sup> Instead of enlightenment achieved through the intellect, Iwano turns the temporality of the demi-animal towards the instantaneous gratification of the flesh. He does so by writing carnal desire into the symbolic order of Buddhist enlightenment.

Crossing the dark brilliance of Lake Biwa to listen to the resonance of the bell at Mitsui Temple, history tells us to listen to the chime of how many thousands of generations past. This is the voice that dropped to hell to scare at once all the hearts of evil demons. Yet, if we listen with our souls, when we are awakened by the symbol of this single instant, a new heaven tied to our carnal soul (*niku soku tamashi*)<sup>356</sup> emerges in all its vitality (*katsugen suru*).<sup>357</sup>

In Buddhist or Christian morality, this instant loses its vitality, however, once the soul is made passive to all the worries of existence. Iwano considers this in relation to love, asserting that all the concerns of love including the feelings of irritation towards those who would meddle in our affairs, of fascination with the jealousy of our friends, of our anxiety over whether we can have children, all these create an air of distraction from the moment.

If there is a carnal soul to humanity, and humanity is distracted on all sides by this air [of anxiety and concern], the vitality of this instant cannot come into being.<sup>358</sup>

The instant’s greatest form of expression is the lover’s kiss or the lover’s embrace. It is in this moment that both flesh and soul come together to overcome the mundane concerns of

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid. “Hanjūshugi noshintai [The god-like body of demi-animalism],” Paragraph 1.

<sup>356</sup> The characters seem to indicate a play off of the Neo-Confucian principle promoted by Song-Ming Lixue of *shin soku ri*, or the mind/heart as principle of reason.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

moral rectitude. In this we can see Friedrich Nietzsche's influence on Iwano through the notion of the revaluation of values that pushes thought beyond good and evil. In fact, in a section, following his ruminations on "Will and Phenomena," and "The Rejection of Good and Evil", Iwano makes direct reference to Nietzsche, stating,

The hypothesis that the world was something passed on to us by God is confuted by Nietzsche as well. Instead of hypothesis, we should refer to this as a concept. For philosophy as well as religion, if either is built upon a concept that obstructs the intuition, will end in failure. Consequently, most concepts such as those given in history end up, as Nietzsche states, binding human freedom, and obstructing the development of thought's independence.<sup>359</sup>

The embrace of the instant is the space of this unbound freedom, but it is not an embrace of compassion, platonic love, or sympathy. It is the carnal embrace of a self that has bridged the gap between its animalistic intuitions and its human place trapped between its inherited past and fated future. It is the instinctual grasp of a self that wants to consume the other, because it takes pleasure in consuming that which is not victim to the same misery that is the plague of the self's existence.

In the instant, the will must consume itself, and consequently when it perceives that which is temporarily not itself, it is compelled to consume this other that does not feel its pain, and take pleasure in the consumption.<sup>360</sup>

This pleasure, however, is only fleeting, and so even the pleasure of the instant is consumed by the misery of its passing. The will is thus continually active, but only active from its position as individuated self cut off from all others, just as each instant is severed from the next. It is precisely in the pain of this individuation that Iwano discovers the joy of the will

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid. "Hyôshô no chokkan [the Intuition of symbols]," paragraph 3.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid. "Ren'ai [Love]," paragraph 4.

because it is the joy of transcendence. The individuated I becomes the pure expression of a will bent on its own self-overcoming.

### iii. Spinoza

What seems peculiar at this point is this very location of the will within the individuated self. A turn back to Spinoza is useful for highlighting this peculiarity. As with Spinoza, Iwano characterizes existence as expressive in nature. God and the world are not separate, just as Spinoza's substance and attributes are one. Thus, for both thinkers, substance is infinite and unified in its expression of its attributes and modes. In fact, Iwano himself is not unfamiliar with Spinoza and expresses concord with the Dutchman's view of a pantheistic world.

As with Spinoza who climbed to the heights of pantheism, I do not take spirit and material as a single substance with two facets, and so do not think some Great God exists exterior to those individual and separate things around us. Existence is merely a moment to moment process of change, and as such when we look to the heavens and see the brilliant shining of a star we are left with the feeling that there is some infinite salvation awaiting us. This is the work of the poetic imagination, but what we are looking at is not a star, but the constant flow of change by which our spirit along with the earth and heavens are constantly moved. There is no ease to be gained from the grandeur of the universe, nor is there any contentment gained from substance. Thus, what is left in the midst of what I call the logical form of Nature as Spirit (*shizen soku shinrei*) is only the constant alteration of symbols.<sup>361</sup>

Here we can see that though Spinoza and Iwano come to the same meeting point in thinking the unity of substance with its modes of expression, the nature of that expression is distinctly different. Where Spinoza's expressionism is a simultaneous production of differentiation at the level of the attributes and modes (the world of objects must be differentiated from each

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid. "Hyôshô no tenkan – mumokuteki [The conversion of the symbol – non-telos]," paragraph 3.

other in order to emerge as objects) and unity in the expression of substance that is the work of these same attributes and modes, Iwano's expressionism is representational. The dreamlike symbols of the world are forever pointed towards a flux of change that can never be overcome, but is necessarily more substantive than the symbols themselves. Put simply, where Spinoza's expressionism leads him to make immanent claims on the nature of the relation of substance to attributes, Iwano's expressionism is purely transcendental. Expression for Iwano is unique to life itself as it works to overcome the misery and mysteries of existence. Life is, then, made transcendental precisely because of its connection to the particular time and space inherent to it at this time in the development of modern social relations. In an immanent philosophy such as Spinoza's, the production of expression is specific to the interrelation of attributes given at any moment. There is no stable referent by which to measure change, since substance itself is infinite and infinitely expressive. There is no life to cut through the modes, only the infinite differentiation of substance. Thus, one could argue that Spinozism maintains within itself a sense of the mystical, since it provides no scientific or verifiable answer to the question of substance and its expression. Each instant is immanent to its conditions of possibility. For Iwano's mysticism, however, mystery is a function of the specific form of spatiotemporality smuggled in under the term life, and consequently differs qualitatively in its conditions of possibility.

Because Iwano's mystery is characterized as a mystery of life, his thought must take on a transcendental tone. By subsuming mystery under the rule of life, Iwano forces what could be an intensive relationship interior to its conditions of operation into an extensive relationship conditioned by the time and space of a given social condition. Life as concept cannot think immanent relations because the condition of possibility for thinking life is a

specific economy of forces that relies on a principle of extension. Put simply, life is merely the metonymic expression of the extensive economy of market forces. When I speak of the mystery of life, I am not speaking of the condition of unknowability for a given and restricted set of circumstances. We saw this in the shift from the indeterminate time of the ideal *mujin-kô* form to its transformation into the life insurance corporation. The modern concept of life cannot abide immanent indeterminacy, but constantly wants it deferred, elided, or subsumed under a greater logic of indefinite extension. The mystery of life does not disappear or die with a change of variables. It is constant through indefinite time. At the same time, the source of this constancy cannot be ascribed to the mystical side of the mystery of life. In fact, mystery would seem to contradict the very notion of constancy, because mystery itself holds no condition for maintaining itself as constant in its reproduction. Mystery as a concept in and of itself has no problem embracing whatever immanent contingencies fashion the product of its expression. The product of the mystery in the end will always be a mystery.

Life, for Iwano, on the other hand, allows no such leeway, because life can only think its end, its own death, as exterior to its structure. Death is abhorrent to the full vitality of a life that can only extend itself through time. This is not a theoretical assertion. He writes this as fact. “It is a natural effect that our instincts find no preference for death.”<sup>362</sup> As we saw with the development of life insurance, this form of extensivity or constancy in time is, if not fundamentally a product of the centralization of the social sphere around market forces, then at the very least able to run concurrently with market temporality. The relation of life to

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid. “Ishi to genshō [Will and phenomena],” paragraph 2.

death, or in fact the very act to put them in relation, whether it be expressed as a matter of finances, or as an aesthetic issue, must always point to a very particular economy of time.

By making death thinkable only as a given limit to life, and neither implicit or completely unrelated to the logic of life, Iwano can then expand on the instinct to abhor death to its necessary conclusion: the eradication of death as simply a product of the ongoing symbolism of life. Iwano writes in his chapter on “Alternation and Life” that the one consistency between ancient thought and the contemporary is the instinctual drive to live.

The instinct of the spirit seems to be to beg to live. As such, to die is merely to transform to another form. One symbol is transferred to another symbol, and death no longer exists... because we are aware of the fact [of eternal transmigration], doesn't thought concerning the transience of the present moment (*genseshugi*) begin with the realization that even should we attempt to die, we cannot die?<sup>363</sup>

For Iwano, life exteriorizes death as a limit no longer relevant to its extension through the time of the present. Life, in the absence of death, does not merely operate according to extensive time and space. Life *is* extensive time and space. As such, life at the moment of its enunciation enforces the erasure of all conditions of indeterminacy thus flattening out time and space so that all other collective imaginaries can be plotted only as so many symbols across their extensive surface. In the constant stream of change and transformation that is the substance of life, death can no longer take hold, and only the individual will can dominate expression.

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid. “Ryûten to seimei [Flux and Life],” paragraph 4.

The connection of this life to individuation, however, does not make complete sense until we consider Iwano's appropriation of Darwinist principles as the basis for an understanding of the continuity of the will's vitality.

#### **iv. Darwin**

Though Iwano falls back on a sense of intuition and natural instinct he believes to be given because of its association with the given concept of life, any intellectual historian studying the period would recognize that Iwano's naturalized life was not natural at all. He was merely the benefactor of a concept of life fashioned in the sciences under a logic of continuity amongst species developed by a series of scientists, not the least of which was Charles Darwin. Iwano had become, consciously or not, a disciple of evolution. Although Darwin had only published his *Origin of Species* less than fifty years previously in 1859, there is no doubt that Iwano would have been familiar with the concept of evolution. Thinkers such as Katô Hiroyuki, Oi Kentarô, and Ono Azusa<sup>364</sup> had been using the concept of evolution to promote their Spencerian, or what would later be termed "social Darwinist," projects for the development of the Meiji state decades before Iwano's work on life and demi-animalism. Moreover, even had Iwano not read Darwin's text himself, his knowledge of naturalism's ties to evolutionary theories through the work of Emile Zola and Hippolyte Taine, and his own appeals to a hereditary past indicate he was more than adequately versed in its basic precepts. To understand how significant evolutionary life was in influencing

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<sup>364</sup> Suzuki ties the latter two to Darwinism in his *Seimeikan no tankyû* (Suzuki [2007], 82), while Katô Hiroyuki's connection to notions of evolution is part of the very narrative of his life's work, since it was his contact with Spencer's sense of evolution that enforced what most call a tenkô (conversion) in his manner of thinking.

Iwano's conceptualization of the individuated self, I think it useful to take a look at some key distinctions that separated the evolutionary theories of the time.

First we need to detach the concept of evolution from the common practice of authorizing the term under the name of Charles Darwin. There is no doubt that Charles Darwin contributed greatly to the promotion of evolutionary thought, but as most familiar with the concept's history are aware, he was only one player amongst many, and none of these players were perfectly unified in their understanding of the mechanisms of evolution. The first and foremost distinction amongst evolutionist is the one separating Darwin's theory of evolution from a similar theory published by Alfred Russell Wallace. As the story goes, it was precisely because Darwin received a copy of Wallace's draft proposal for a theory of evolution that Darwin himself rushed forward the publication of his own evolutionary theory, a theory he'd been cultivating in quiet for decades. In fact, Darwin was so taken by the similarities between his theory and Wallace's, he had to admit more than a little sense of disappointment that his idea would lose its novelty. To his friend and one of the major influences on his work, geologist Charles Lyell, Darwin wrote the following in a letter accompanying Wallace's manuscript.

I never saw a more striking coincidence. If Wallace had my manuscript sketch written out in 1842 he could not have made a better short abstract!... So all my originality, whatever it may account to, will be smashed.<sup>365</sup>

Despite Darwin's affirmation of the similarities between the manuscripts, one key difference separated the two, and one that spoke to more than a mere difference of opinion.

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<sup>365</sup> Quoted in Charles Darwin, *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin, Volume 7: 1858-1859*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991). 55.

As Edward Larson writes in his work on evolution, “closer inspection would show that Darwin emphasized the role of individual competition in natural selection, for example, while Wallace stressed the selective power of ecological factors working on varieties.”<sup>366</sup> This difference, though seemingly slight in nature, speaks to what I consider a parallax view, this time at the heart of evolutionary theory. For Darwin, the key factor in determining how differentiation amongst species’ developed from generation to generation depended upon a struggle between the fittest of the species and those that were less suited to their environment. This would have fit in line with Wallace’s own rendering of evolution were the work of this differentiation kept on a local plane of organization. Differentiation was kept, for Wallace, on an immanent plane of organization in which the members of a species, and the species itself, transformed according to the specific limits and conditions given by their environment. Darwin, however, drew his own line of differentiation along what could be seen as a transcendent trajectory. It was not just that species competed for resources at a local level and adapted themselves to local conditions, but this line of adaptation also worked across a progressive vector that cut through the specificity of place, and subsumed specificity to an abstraction of extensive time. Evolution was not just about adaptation, but also about progress with the human at the top of the evolutionary chain.

One can see here how Darwin’s understanding of evolution, and not Wallace’s, fit better with social theories of development at the time, which were used to justify both the economic privations at home and the colonial projects abroad in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Those studying the Meiji era are intimately familiar with this social Darwinist turn in evolutionary

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<sup>366</sup> Edward J. Larson, *Evolution : The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory* (New York: Modern Library, 2004).75.

theory because of Herbert Spencer's influence on the development of state policy by the Meiji state ruler's of the time.<sup>367</sup> Of course, the roots of Spencer's social Darwinist theories were in fact developed before Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species*. Spencer's original sense of evolution depended more on the vitalist theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck whose theories were first published in 1802. This could account for what Mark Driscoll has noted to be the Lamarckian tendency in evolutionary thinking for Japanese social scientists in the early twentieth century.<sup>368</sup> The relationship of Spencer to Darwin, however, was not one-sided, as the term "survival of the fittest" most closely associated with Darwin's thought was coined not by the father of evolution himself, but by Spencer. Darwin used the terms struggle for existence and natural selection as his key terms in his original work, but the resonance these terms had with Spencer's own notions of competition in his famous work of 1851, *Social Statistics*, can't be ignored. Moreover, their mutual allegiance to the principles of population given in the work of Thomas Malthus gave the two thinkers a central point of concord. Most importantly, however, the two men both shared grounding in a particular political economy of thought. This was not something either of them shared with Wallace, and it is here on the grounds of their economic influences that their differences for thinking life seem to come into sharpest distinction.

It is no coincidence that Darwin's notion of evolution fit naturally with the climate of market competition and its false ideology of meritocratic ideals guiding the competitive rules

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<sup>367</sup> Spencer provided a response to a request to comment on state policy in letters to cabinet minister Kaneko Kentaro in 1892. See Herbert Spencer, "Advice to the Modernizers of Japan," in *Herbert Spencer on Social Evolution*, ed. J. D. Y. Peel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972). 253-57.

<sup>368</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895-1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).36.

of a capital driven economy. Darwin himself was a child of this capitalist milieu. According to Darwin biographer Janet Browne, “natural selection intuitively seemed the right answer to a man thoroughly immersed in the productive, competitive world of early Victorian England.”<sup>369</sup> Edward Larson is more explicit in his diagnosis of Darwin’s political and economic leanings.

Essential to Darwin’s conception was a modern worldview influenced by ideas of utilitarianism, individualism, imperialism, and laissez-faire capitalism... Darwin also read the writings of Adam Smith and other utilitarian economists who presented individual competition as the driving force of economic progress. Perhaps more importantly, he lived in a society that embraced this view; Darwin himself came from a family of successful capitalists.<sup>370</sup>

In contrast to this Wallace was from more humble beginnings. Though his mother was from a middle-class family, and his father had inherited property, his family fell into financial difficulty due to poor financial planning.<sup>371</sup> Wallace was left with no resources to support a formal education and had to educate himself.<sup>372</sup> Furthermore, where Darwin’s financial position allowed him to embark on his well-funded trip on the Beagle to collect the samples he used to support his evolutionary theory, Wallace was left to “bare-bones collecting trips...paying his own way by shipping back animal skins, pressed insects, and dried plants for sale to British collectors.”<sup>373</sup> Even their attitudes towards the native peoples they encountered on their trips suggested a difference in their view of the world. Where

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<sup>369</sup> Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: Voyaging* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). 390.

<sup>370</sup> Larson, *Evolution : The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory*. 70.

<sup>371</sup> John G. Wilson, *The Forgotten Naturalist: In Search of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2000).

<sup>372</sup> Larson, *Evolution : The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory*. 72.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.* 73

Wallace “instinctively felt an affinity for the native peoples he encountered and a certain distance from European colonialists,” Darwin was inclined to draw his progressive line in hierarchical fashion linking natives with the animal species he encountered with them. “Forget the use of language,” he wrote in private notebooks of 1838, “and judge only by what you see. Compare, the Fuegian and Orangutan, and dare to say the difference so great.”<sup>374</sup> These differences in economic leanings were further worked out in the trajectory of the two men’s work following their simultaneous publication on evolution. Where Darwin continued to thrive in his bourgeois milieu producing papers and research on evolution, Wallace became a practicing socialist, joining John Stuart Mill’s Land Tenure Reform Association and publishing works on land reform such as *Land Nationalisation; Its Necessity and Its Aims*.

Though we should be wary of making any ties between the life of an author and his works, the connections never amounting to anything more than speculative rather than necessary determinations, I mention these differences between Darwin and Wallace to highlight a possible differentiation at the level of economic vision itself that can enter into issues that seem a far cry from the financial sectors of the world. Regardless of the authorial source of each theory of evolution, we can see a fundamental difference in focus is at work amongst theories of evolution. This difference in focus allows for variation in the expression of relations amongst the members of the species. How is this anything except variance in the economic conditions by which collective forms, in this case written under the sign of life, are distributed? In Darwin’s case the central element by which the entire process of evolution

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<sup>374</sup> Charles Darwin, *Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836-1844: Geology, Transmutation of Species, Metaphysical Enquiries*, ed. Paul Barrett (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987). 291.

operates is the individuated member of a species. Each member is stripped of any necessary relation to all other members and all other species. This individuation is further reinforced by a temporal relation to the progression of life as a whole. The time of life's history is taken as a blasted landscape of pure fungibility upon which each member of a species can be inscribed and then mobilized into competition with all other members, all other species, all other lives. There are no breaks in the temporal line of life. There are catastrophes, events, and variations, but with individuated life as the impossibly durable kernel to indefinite time, all other possibilities for narrative expression are eliminated from thought. Furthermore, this logic of competitive individuation is not then fixed to members but can then move vertically to implicate itself in the conditions of possibility by which all collective forms operate, whether they be members of a species, groups within the species, or the species itself in relation to others. Individuated life breeds competition at all levels of collective organization.

In contrast to this Wallace's theory of evolution displaces individuated life from the center of focus and instead emphasizes a particular relation of reciprocity between a species and its environment. This produces a fundamentally different understanding of collective organization for thought, since it offers the possibility of thinking collectives not necessarily formed out of competitive individuation, but collectives as malleable entities in and of themselves. With a focus on the relation of life to its environment at the center of expressive possibility in Wallace's understanding of evolution, the transcendental position is no longer made necessary. Instead, Wallace's evolution offers us the possibility to think a temporality to collectivity that is not progressive, but immanent and specific to its own conditions of existence. Put differently, Wallace allows for the potential to think the relation of being to

relationality as fundamentally organized across a field of difference. Members of each species may compete for survival. Changes in the form of species can still be narrated through a logic of the survival of the fittest, but the emphasis on relationality instead of individuated life forces acts of survival into local battles to accommodate the immanent factors of existence – this can result in members or species working in opposition to each other, but also allows for the possibility of thinking collective engagement in unities not reducible to the members themselves. More importantly, differentiation is not bred from an antagonistic relation between members, or their groupings as species, but emerges consequent to each species relation to the environment. Thus the battle for survival is not one aimed at eliminating rivals, but at maintaining homeostasis at a collective level. Wallace’s evolution, in stark contrast to Darwinian evolution, thus opens thought up to the cooperative potentiality of group formation centered not on competitive violence, but on immanent relationality.

Taking these differences in theories of evolution in mind, how can we not see that at heart a discussion of evolution is also a debate on economies of collective organization? Thus, Darwin’s ties to capitalism and his promotion of laissez-faire policies find resonance with his fundamental belief in the progressive, competitive nature of life. It thus becomes an easy leap for him to move from the wilds of the Galapagos islands to the operations of global politics. He expresses as much when he writes,

When two races of men meet, they act precisely like two species of animals – they fight, eat each other, bring diseases to each other, and etcetera, but then comes the

more deadly struggle, namely which have the best fitted organization or instincts (ie. intellect in man) to gain the day.<sup>375</sup>

In contrast to this Wallace's ties to socialist utopianism seems consistent with his own beliefs about the operation of life where the focus is not on the competitive necessity of privative individuality, but on the cooperative possibilities that a reciprocal relationship to land and society can empower.

Thus, as mentioned above, life again becomes the metonymic rehearsal of economic forces; it is not just the human or the individual that smuggles in economic modes of thought, but life itself – as existential screen upon which the competitive self can emerge – which becomes the productive space for expressing only one kind of subject – the individuated one; thus, we see a reproduction of the very same figure that was produced in life insurance all based on the tattooing of life to an individuated body. The individuated body is struck from all temporal and spatial connection to its surrounding and requires life as its reality to mediate it back into relation. As we can see in the expansive nature of Darwin's vision, this is a reality operating according to the subsumption of all existential relations to a logic and temporality of competitive privation based on a particular conceptualization of life, and it is this same living reality that comes to establish the conditions of possibility for thought in Iwano's Meiji era.

#### **IV. Apriori collectivism**

##### **1. The Misery of Life**

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid. 414.

Iwano's understanding of life is profoundly Darwinian, but it does not necessarily need to be so. Alfred Wallace's evolution provides, if nothing else, a sense of contrast against which we can read the naturalism of Iwano's concept of life, and come to understand why Iwano's turn to individualism was necessary in light of the conditions of possibility that framed his understanding of the concept. Like Darwin, Iwano organizes his system of thought around a single kernel: the self free of all relation. Its freedom, however, is Janus-faced. Though on the one side the self is free of all binds keeping it to any one mode of existence, it also exists in a temporality free of moral determination. Its world is beyond good and evil. Thus, the self finds itself victim to a destiny that does not have its interests at heart, and falls into misery as destiny continually operates to cut it off from any moment of connection or fullness with another.

Our pathos and pain is this universe without telos, without direction. The man and woman that think together, that embrace each other, in the moment they overcome the instant, become like sand split into grains, and suddenly a proliferation of individual pains and sadnesses are brought into being.<sup>376</sup>

In Buddhism, and religious theory, this misery of separation in a world of pure freedom is seen as something that itself can be overcome by following the path of enlightenment. The self is mirage to the greater path towards unity with the universe. Iwano argues on the contrary, this individuated self can never be overcome.

When the self is asleep, it cannot see this hypothetical thing called the non-self, and when it wakes, even if [the non-self] exists, it has no time to work towards its rescue. Enlightenment and nirvana are meant to indicate the destruction of the self, but in truth there is no destruction.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> “Hyôshô no chokkan, [The Sign of Intuition]” in Iwano, “Shinpiteki Hanjû Shugi [Mystic Demi-Animalism].” paragraph 6.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

Not content to stick to the restrictions of scientific reasoning, Iwano broadens the realm of individuation beyond debates on species and environment. He engages the individuated self, not in the realm of the biological sciences as was the case with Darwin, but through literature and literary criticism to accentuate the experience of individuation at an affective level that adds a kind of weight and profundity to the concept of life that no scientist could ever produce. As seen above, he does not stop merely at providing an objective outline of the operative mechanisms of individuated life. He further reinforces its reality by giving expression to its interiority, an interiority which, as Harry Harootunian has noted,<sup>378</sup> was opened up by Kitamura Tôkoku in his essay “On Inner Life” (*Naibu seimeiron*) in 1892. This individuated life for Iwano is not just trained in isolation as vessel to the necessary competitive spirit such isolation breeds, but is taught to speak its isolation as misery, and sadness. Instead of mobilizing this affective order of misery towards the production of profit, as we saw was the case with the life insurance industry, Iwano rather makes misery something to glorify. The will is the emblem of this glorification, because if misery is taken as a given to existence, then the will becomes existentially necessary and not merely contingent to the constant flow of time. “As Schopenhauer affirmed,” Iwano writes, “we have nothing to do but endure duress by virtue of our male power. This is the moment when the self finds its time of greatest expression.”<sup>379</sup> Misery is not something to be avoided, but because of the ontological determination of our individuation, it is an existential apriori giving rise to the necessity of a will that endures. In the face of this existential will,

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<sup>378</sup> See Harootunian, "Between Politics and Culture: Authority and Ambiguities of Intellectual Choice in Imperial Japan."

<sup>379</sup> “Ryûten to seimei [Alternation and Life]” in Iwano, "Shinpitēki Hanjû Shugi [Mystic Demi-Animalism]." paragraph 6.

charity becomes nothing more than an act to “clothe one human weakness with another,” and sympathy is simply a “mutual deception between one incompleteness and another.” Misery becomes the existential state for an individuated self that cannot relate to others except through the expression of its will. What is this except an affective justification for social Darwinist principles?

When Iwano extends his theorization of mystical demi-animalism to issues of state policy, his links to social Darwinism become clear. Writing in the afterglow of the Meiji state’s defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese war, Iwano glorifies the victory as one expressing the strength of the entire nation – as somehow indicative of a greater national spirit. He draws this conclusion by tying it into a theory of individual life.

Once we understand the place of the life of the self (*jiga seimei*), we can for the first time begin to determine the development of its power – as Emerson stated, people build their respective homes and communities (*kuni*), and as these gel into national communities, these nations go to war; thus is given a love that includes within it hate. Collective wills (*danketsuteki ishi*) devour each other. Each side is consumed as simply one side of a symbolic order. And in the midst of this, concepts of justice and humanity seem to hold no meaning. Isn’t this a conflict between instants of existence? Because the deepest meaning is found in the moment, Japan’s victory was a result of its strength of power, a power that I would also call the sincerity and majesty of the instant.<sup>380</sup>

Like Darwin and Spencer, Iwano necessarily has to read the natural movement of vitality as one organized according to competitive strife. Instead of a battle for survival between and amongst species, Iwano sees this as an existential battle of wills. The will then becomes the necessary extension of evolutionary competition, and finds its action and activation in

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<sup>380</sup> Iwano, “Nessei to igen – kokka mondai [Sincerety and Majesty – Problems of the Nation]” paragraph 5.

reaction to a world in which competition has been naturalized. Thus, the will, contrary to Iwano's assertion of its active nature, *is implicitly passive and reactionary in expression.*

## **2. The Axiom of Extension**

Through Buddhism and Darwinian evolution Iwano naturalizes the temporality of misery that frames the need for a willful demi-animalism, but this temporality can only be thought as misery when stretched across the indefinite extensivity of life without end. On a transcendent line, there can be no guarantee that the inscription of passage between instants formed at the point of contact between a genetic past and destiny-bound future will be retained without a stable core penetrating through the series. In the absence of a transcendent God or substance to hold time together, a God which was the exact target of all evolutionary theories, only life, specifically human life, can come to occupy that strand holding the series together. Thus, as with Darwinian evolution, human life comes to be the central concept through which all theorizations of existence can be thought. To borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, existence becomes "human, all too human."

For enlightenment thinkers trying to shift emphasis away from the aristocratic ideals that determined its lines of legitimacy and right through notions of the divine spirit, this turn to humanism provided a refreshing change from the status quo. In the Meiji era, this turn to humanism, in almost direct opposition to the European tradition, seemed aimed at justifying monarchical rule through the restoration of Imperial power. The turn of the Meiji Ishin was still a turn away from feudalism towards capitalism, but because of the historically specific circumstances determining social relations in the Meiji era, the Meiji state felt the need to raise up the monarchy to establish its legitimacy rather than tear it down. This peculiarity in

the development of a capitalist nation around the figure of a monarch has fostered a great number of debates in contemporary Japanese scholarship regarding the nature of capitalism, the most marked of these debates involving the antagonism between Kôza-ha and Rônô-ha schools of Marxist scholarship. As mentioned in a previous chapter, from the Kôza-ha perspective the Meiji Restoration was not a revolution, precisely because it resulted in the solidification of power around an Imperial center. The revolution was still to come. For Rônô-ha scholars, the picture was more complicated. The Meiji Ishin was indeed a revolution, but one which was unable to excise its feudal remnants. Regardless of the specificities of this debate, I think it important to note that each side could not think change outside of an already given narration of capitalism development. Trapped in the narrative form given by European capitalist development, the Japanese view of the Meiji political economy would forever alternate between debates concerning the nature of a revolution to come versus the nature of the revolution that was. We should not ignore the irony that both sides of this debate operate according to the very temporal form that I would argue was the product, not a constituent factor in the production of, a market centered economy: extensive time. This is the time of Darwinian progression. This is the indefinite time of corporate longevity. It is the time, not only of the imperial institution, nor of capital, but also of the individuated life.

Monarchical rule, although important to understanding the narration of specific forms of modern development, is not a *necessary factor* in considering the nature of capitalist

development.<sup>381</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 4, state being produced its various axioms of operation. The first axioms gave birth to the state apparatus itself – the axioms to flatten out both time and space such that all time and space could be ordered in an extensive reach from any center, and all alternate forms of time and space could be subsumed under this uniform rule of extension. Whether the center was an imperial subject, the state, or the commodity is inconsequential. What is important is the effect at the level of the kinds of bodies, *not subjects*, that were produced. The axiom of extension requires an account of that which appears in its field – its points of operation; these are its individuated nodes. When any field of relation has been wiped clean of its variance through the axiom of extension, there can only then be an inscription of points placed in hierarchical order in relation to the given reference point. These points are its points of individuation; yet, were they truly points inscribed over a blank surface, if we truly were individuals given as apriori to the unity of being, then there would be no reason for contestation amongst points. Contestation would simply be a matter of the contingent encounters between individuals. It should strike us as strange, then, that our individuation gives rise to the affective order that Iwano takes as given. Iwano steeps our individuation in Buddhist misery, using the vital will as counterforce to our existential privation. Yet, he never truly gives account as to why this affective privation was made necessary in the first place. Individuation is given life through the will, because in the open field of extensive time and space, individuation must be mobilized by some external principle to give shape to its vitality. Thus, the principle of mobilization for

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<sup>381</sup> What the presence of a monarch operating within a capitalist economy should indicate to us is the necessity of a particular *sovereign logic* that is essential to the operations of a market centered society. Thus we must make a distinction between the monarch as historical institution and the function of sovereignty as a formal trait within systems of governance and power.

the individuated self in relation to others is not a necessary one, but merely a sufficient one. Put differently, Iwano would have us collective only as a matter of contingency, and individual as a matter of necessity.

Should we not take this affective order as given, however, we are then forced to seek out an account of Iwano's misery. Why is modern individualism plagued by its feelings of isolation, angst, and privation? More than this, why does modern existence seem to make violence, from the individual to the global, necessary? We can answer this if we invert Iwano's social equation: rather than having the collective as contingent, and individual existence necessary, we can say that the individual is historically contingent to the necessary principle of collectivism. In the extensive time of the market, individuation does not require an external principle of life to give it impetus if the necessary cause of all relation was collectivity itself. Under a principle of *apriori collectivism*, individuation becomes the privation, and as such it is *the principle of life or vitality* in a system that enforced a privation of collective sensibilities. Individuation is the sign of life under the axiom of extension. Thus, we can see how robbing the greater soul of collectivity of its disagreements (where collectivity as primary must operate according to a logic of difference, not similarity, since this logic of similarity would recreate the field of transcendence that made individuation possible) to make it operate according to individuated life gives rise to the kinds of systematic violences and strange subjugations that, as we see with Iwano, are then made mobile along this same extensive line joining the self to the group to the larger national form, and in our own time, the global.

What we must further note in this equation is the absence of an account of death. If individuating life is made to operate according to extensive time, then there is no choice but for Iwano to make death a mere symbol.

We have no memory of dying. Our fear of death in this state of non-death comes from sensing the continuity of instants, and is due to the fear of seeing the transformation of the self in its emergence and dissipation over the instant.<sup>382</sup>

We should never ignore the political resonance this kind of statement must have had at a time when so many deaths were laid at the feet of the Meiji state. The deaths of the Russo-Japanese war, an unprecedented number in the history of the Japanese archipelago, were not symbolic, but could only be made so, if the life of continuity, which could only be a continuity guaranteed by the law and power of the nation, was made more fundamental than its individuated parts. Iwano casts aside death as only so much symbolism in the great battle of wills across the globe. Misery is a given for lives individuated over the gradual progression of the nation-state's rise to power, and the death of a son, a friend, a part of the whole, is made acceptable to thought.

We know this relation of death, however, was only a rehearsal for the greater sacrifices the state would need to ask of its population in the decades to come. With the transformation that was its lack (if we recall the state's eradication of the transformative character of death) following the Russo-Japanese war, life suddenly became more than mere concept to mobilize bodies; it became, in Suzuki Sadami's words, the super-concept of the years between 1905 and 1923. As becomes apparent in the years following the publication of *Shinpitaki hanjûshugi* and continuing on up to the Fifteen Years War, the occupation of life

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid, "Jôteki jikkô – shinpi no kagi [Emotional realization – the key to mystery]" paragraph 3.

at the center of all human relation comes to be reified in thought through so much attention, and the reification itself produces profound implications for the ordering of death in relation to individuation. In Iwano's theory of life, coming at the time of great hope for a Meiji nation-state given new life with its victory over Russia, death is mere symbol. It collapsed from its geometric possibilities to influence the substance of collective experience, and became the effect of an ongoing algebraic tally of a more general, dare we say national, movement of life. In contrast to this, thinkers like Nishida Kitarô and Kuki Shûzô would place death as fundamental to their theorization of life thus making death and its reproduction seem the only alternative to thought locked into a relation with its own individuation. What emerges is a shift in thought, in terms given by Mark Driscoll in his work *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*,<sup>383</sup> from the biopolitical expression of existence that was Iwano's task to the *necro-political ontology of nothingness*.

Thus, the natural product of a life spoken through the figure of the human would be a society organized around a too easy effacement of the implications of life's negation. War was only the most obvious expression of this vital relation.

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<sup>383</sup> Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895-1945*.

## Conclusion

Engaging in a critique is a dual process. Ideas and concepts have their rhythms, flows, and trajectories, but we interrupt them by virtue of a passive contemplation. We take the step back to observe the character of so much flow, but we do not do this simply for the sake of being able to give our conjunctive “aha!” Every break from the flow of contemplation is itself also a new production. So the question remains for this work, what did I mean to produce with my critique of life. Because the nature of my object of critique is one of so many implications, be they moral, ethical, political or otherwise, it seems all the more important to answer the inevitable question: “so what?” My answer is simple, my critique was always and only aimed at production – the production of concepts. The names of these concepts should be familiar by now: apriori collectivism, zones of indeterminacy, the geometry of death, a deliberate and decentralized capitalist state, the individuation of bodies, state and multiple being. I have not, however, created these concepts simply to leave them as tools for others to pick up for use in their own manner, or to float untethered from one another. Rather, they have been produced to operate much like a constellation according to which a new map of social relations may be opened up for thought, and one that looks beyond, if not in complete absence of, the extensive, individuating logic of life. For my

conclusion, then, I leave life behind to look forward to the possible fruits of this double production.

### **1. First factory: the production of impossibilities.**

By making capitalist development and its consequent privations linked necessarily under a concept of state being, and by showing that this development was not a natural, but deliberate process, the idea that must inevitably emerge from this can be phrased as follows: if this kind of immiseration at the level of being could be produced through the deliberate and conscious acts of men, and if these deliberate acts of state could make thinking forms such as the indeterminacies of the feudal order impossible to thought, then the reverse must also be possible. Capitalism itself and its antagonisms, contradictions, and immiserations can also be made unthinkable as its alternatives become thinkable. The question, then, is not when to implement these new alternatives, but how.

### **2. Second factory: A productive division.**

In the last paragraphs of the previous chapter I have tried to interrupt the normative relation linking death and life. I would state the two are not logically related, but have only been made so. Once we begin to think them as unrelated, as singular concepts, we can begin to chart out the real potential that a concept of death might hold for us. Put differently, I have separated death from life so that we might begin to consider what a politics of death might look like outside the transcendent logic of life. To borrow slightly from Judith Butler, I would ask in this case how we can make death, not life, finally grievable in its geometric form. This also allows us to focus better on the fine distinctions within a theorization of death. It requires we think through the distinction between the “real” death of bodies that act

as a subtraction from the collective whole (and consequently necessitate its transformation), and the virtualities that this real subtraction must produce for collective organization. After all, were we to make death grievable as a collective act, then this would necessitate the production of virtual deaths to mitigate against the transformative power that the real would have for collective stability. That is, collectivity would displace death from the individuated body as its only way to return death back to the collective body – a deterritorialization of modern relations that would reinscribe death over the body as a matter of absolute social significance rather than an algebraic form we must tolerate in the support of national or state aims. This would then offer the possibility of thinking alternative deaths than those that necessitate the sacrifice or mere neglect of human bodies tattooed with life.

### **3. Third factory: the disagreement of being.**

Under a logic of apriori collectivism written within a context of multiple being and its differentiations, the central tenet of expression becomes disagreement. Disagreement is not something that rests merely at the level of individuated subjectivities in conflict, or discursive disjunctions, but takes on a more fundamental character. We are confronted with the disagreement of being whose expressive capabilities gives voice to collectivities. The only adequate form that can take account of this political ontology is democracy.

Thus, thinking through the political implications of apriori collectivism and multiple being offers us the possibility to explore democracy outside its more common parliamentary forms, first because democracy is moved from its contingent place as a political institution to a more fundamental status as political ontology, and secondly, because the disagreement of being as expressed via, not individuated bodies, but collective ones, brings the very nature of

collective relations and the bodies it forms to the forefront. We can begin to think democracy not as the end of political expression, but as its ontological base from which it can express itself through other political forms. We are left to ask what would an anarchic, communist, socialist, syndicalist, etc. democracy look like? What would be the expression of a radical democracy?

#### **4. Third production: a new historical line of inquiry.**

Again, the Meiji era and the eras to follow provide an ideal historical space for thinking these questions. It only seems appropriate that following the development of a market economy and the instantiation of a logic of life, we are confronted with what is commonly known as Taisho democracy. Contrary to what we may expect following the crackdown on the FPRM in the latter years of the Meiji, the state's success in quelling this movement did not stifle anti-state movements completely, but rather forced them to thrive according to a different set of encodings. As oppressive as a state of being may be towards its origins in multiplicity, it can never eradicate this multiplicity since its very operation is moved by differentiation. Capitalism's "successful" implementation in the Meiji era did not produce a world eradicated of any other political economic alternatives. Quite the opposite, Taisho and Showa era thinkers were possibly more ebullient in their utopian imaginings and anti-state activities, if only we have the tools to recognize them as such. Capitalist society provided the distinct backdrop against which its socialisms, anarchisms, and communisms could be understood.

Instead of dealing with this period and its lead into the interwar period as uniformly organized around the development of democratic institutions, we can use democracy in its

political ontological guise as a lens through which to study the productive capacities of this plethora of other political forms to ask the question that seems most relevant to thought in our own time: what other worlds of social relation are possible?

### **Open-End**

I have written this work under the assumption that the measure of the effectiveness of a critical work is not the answers it provides, but the possibilities it opens up for further critical inquiry, and the above point to only few of these possibilities. Thus, I can only hope the above productive considerations do not enclose us in a world of solutions, but rather push us forward into a world of further production as our constellations of thought are realigned according to different sets of combination. I would ask what lies for us at the intersection between democracy and death rather than capital and life, between state and multiple being rather than institution and social policy, between history and affect, rather than fact and reason. The Taisho and Showa periods in the years leading up to the Pacific war provide ample material to engage in this work. Numerous paths leading out of our work in the Meiji era open up to us as figures such as Kotoku Shusui, Osugi Sakae, Ito Naoe, Arishima Takeo, Mushanokoji Saneatsu and Kobayashi Takiji, to name only a handful. These figures and more provide a new set of horizons, a new set of problems, and an altogether new line of historical, critical inquiry to pursue. For now, I leave the door open, as though in wait for friends not yet arrived, sitting idle amongst my thoughts as distant sounds of intensity, dissonance, and merriment drift through the air, their voices filled with such inviting, discordant promise.

There is no vitality there. There is no life. Only the delightful univocity of being with all its immanent and irrevocable disagreements.

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