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Maruyama Masao Lecture
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On History and Politics in the Thought of Maruyama Masao

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After multiple delays over a six-hour period at O'Hare Airport and flying through a lightning storm, I am very, very happy to be here today. Should I stumble, it's because we arrived in San Francisco airport at 4 o'clock this morning—the Japanese term for my state of mind is *jisaboke*.



I am deeply grateful and honored to speak to you today as this year's Maruyama Masao lecturer. I should like to use this extraordinary opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on Maruyama's historiography as it relates to his political and social criticism over a lengthy period of time. I shall, of course, refer only to those portions of his vast and complex oeuvre that have been of interest to me in my own work as a student of Japanese intellectual history.



Even before Maruyama Masao passed away on August 15, 1996, one heard speculations in Japan about what intellectual life might be like in the "post-Maruyama" era, the supposition being that, in terms of intellectual history, his death would mark the end of the "postwar" period. Indeed, his presence for over half a century as critic, social scientist, and historian was so extraordinary that everyone agreed he would be an impossible act to follow. While these comments were often sincere expressions of regret, others were not quite so.

There were suggestions about "going beyond," "overcoming," and, occasionally, "avoiding" him altogether—leaving him aside, circumventing him and going down another path. Going beyond or avoiding Maruyama suggested also

turning away from his view of modernity. Maruyama's understanding of modernity in Japan, or any modernity for that matter, was that it should not be defined in terms of a geographically limited national history, but that it must always incorporate critical perspectives from abroad or from another vastly different period of time. The idea of going beyond or overcoming Maruyama seemed to resonate with some of the views voiced at the highly publicized symposia to "overcome the modern" (*kindai no chōkoku*) held in the spring of 1942, when intellectuals and journalists gathered to discuss how, after the war to end all wars was over, Japan might be rescued from the assaults of modern historical change.

We know, of course, that this vision of overcoming the modern was not realized. Instead there emerged in the immediate postwar years a movement for a new democracy with Maruyama Masao, the powerful proponent of modernity, standing at the forefront as its most prominent leader. I do not believe he sought this position, but I do believe he enjoyed it with an intellectual excitement and emotional gusto that was special to him.



Some fifty years later, there is today a movement dedicated to reclaim or "restore" national history so that it might belong once again to the nation, to the people—a history that is uncontaminated by the interpretive interventions from the outside. It is a conservative nationalist undertaking to rewrite history mainly "by ourselves on our terms." Writing history is viewed as a privileged extension of nationhood.

Maruyama's historiography, of course, was diametrically opposed to this view. For him there was only one kind of history, which he called "problem-oriented history," the content of this problem being for him the issue of modernity. The exploration of this problem could not rest on an exclusively insider's view of national history, as perspectives must continually be introduced from other places and times to challenge the present, stimulate debate, and gain distance and objectivity. Maruyama's intellectual heroes were individuals who did just that. In the early eighteenth century, Ogyū Sorai referenced political criticism with the idea of ancient historical beginnings that might explain the ethical purpose of politics of his time; and in the early decades of the modern era, Fukuzawa Yukichi explored ideas from the Western Enlightenment that he believed to be pertinent for Japan's future. While Sorai turned to an ancient Asian past and Fukuzawa the modern West, both individuals emphasized the point that national boundaries alone did not shape intellectual visions in history. Thus, when Maruyama unashamedly

endorsed democracy he did so not with the aim of promoting a foreign idea, but rather to challenge the present to transform itself into something else, to seek a new ideal that, in the end, he believed depended on human desire in the present.



As graduate students, we all read this Maruyama thesis as it was woven into his critique of ultranationalism, and we were moved by the power of his language that called on citizens of his day to choose democracy and steadfastly refuse to retreat to the dark days of the 1930s. In going over his impressive historiography, especially seeing it all together in his collected works of seventeen volumes (1996), it is clear that the "antinationalist" theme informs the overall "logic" of his work. Despite the incredible breadth in his choice of subject matter, there is a sturdy consistency in his critical point of view that is certainly at odds with the view currently being circulated by the self-styled wizards of national memory. I'm sure some of you are aware of the heightened activities of these people in recent years. It will be interesting to see how Maruyama will be remembered, if at all, in their accounts.

In the early 1960s when I first read Maruyama's essays in the slim volume *Japanese Thought (Nihon no shisō, 1961)*, I felt that his criticism of contemporary Japanese culture, while provocative and exciting, was somewhat excessive. A recent rereading of these essays has made me reevaluate them, and I have come to appreciate more than before the strategic place these essays occupied in his thinking as a critic. They are actually extensions of his earlier writings against ultranationalism, although stated this time under conditions of economic recovery rather than the bleak conditions of the immediate postwar years.

Maruyama characterized Japanese thinking as "structureless" and as uncritically permissive, characteristics that encouraged individuals to acquiesce to things as they are (*de aru*) rather than engage in the process of shaping things that were in a process of becoming (*to naru*). There was the habit of mind that shunned open, public debates and found comfort instead in the solace of isolated "octopus pots," one of the disquieting metaphors he used to great effect. There was further the uncontroversial assumption of cultural identity that underneath all the turbulence of reality a collective unconscious could be relied on for psychological security and certitude.

Maruyama extended this discussion of the collective unconsciousness in a subsequent essay about a decade or so later on the idea of a deep note (*kosō*) in national history that resurfaced to gloss over change and transformation. He

identified one of the main sources of this idea to be the eighteenth-century scholar and ideologue of national studies Motoori Norinaga. History, to Norinaga, was not what humans acted on as agents, but something they accepted as the unfolding of events in an effortless, undifferentiated, and inevitable manner (*tsugi-tsugi ni utsurimoteyuku*). It was a view of ongoing historical time that let people accept the dissonant surge of events in history as being somehow in harmony with the deep note and therefore allowed them to remain aloof or indifferent to actual political and social problems. The present, again, was not a dynamic process producing something new; it was always the "eternal present" (*eien no ima*). Although Maruyama's essays were written under conditions of high-growth economics and within the new constitutional order, Maruyama could very easily have written these essays against Japan of the 1930s.



Most noteworthy for me is Maruyama's underlying thesis in these essays of the importance of individual resistance to all-embracing ideologies. This was a position he held to with great consistency throughout his career. However unpopular they might seem, intellectual risks must be taken to challenge and resist static ideologies. It was for this reason that Maruyama assigned great value to closely reasoned heterodoxies in history. He believed that without intellectual risk-taking against the mainstream of history, Japan's modernity, however inadequate and incomplete it turned out to be, would not have been undertaken at all. As he outlined in his brilliant essay on "loyalty and revolt"—*Chûsei to hangyaku* (1960)—loyalty was never absolute because the flip side of it was radical rejection and revolt, each being opposite sides of the same medallion. The ethics of loyalty and of revolt were embedded in the same historical and philosophical texts.

For Maruyama the Meiji Ishin of 1868 was the historical event that manifested this deep tension in an explosive and unprecedented manner. The Ishin stood for the meaning assigned to it by the ideograph for "new" (shin), the vision of new things to come, including a completely new intellectual environment. As Maruyama expressed in many different places, the Ishin was the revolutionary upheaval (*kakumeiteki henkaku*) that ushered in Japan's modern history. There is no hint in Maruyama's writings that the Ishin was a "restoration" as it came to be translated, or should I say "mistranslated," into English.

Maruyama's view of the Meiji Ishin is worth recounting here because it underscores his conviction that modernity is about historical change—change potentially, although not necessarily, for something better. Maruyama stayed

away from the great debates among contending Marxist schools on the revolutionary nature of the Ishin, but he held strong views of his own as an intellectual historian of politics.

In the late 1960s, the Japanese government announced plans to celebrate what it termed "The Meiji Era Centennial." Maruyama conceded that it was appropriate to have a centennial celebration of some kind, but he objected strenuously to the language being employed by the government, which he felt concealed an extremely important event. The use of the broad chronological term "Meiji Era," he contended, was being utilized actually to celebrate the establishment of the Meiji State, and the ideology of a Confucian-based national morality within that state. The term "era" was being used to gloss over the Ishin. The Ishin, however, was not the "era" but a specific event, a revolt against the old feudal regime, which then established a new history in which a public discourse on representative government had become possible for the first time in Japanese history. What the state sought to "celebrate" was closer to the twentieth-century movement into heavy industrialization and colonial expansion. The Meiji, however, should be celebrated for the Ishin, an event that must be historicized according to the conditions of the 1850s, not the 1910s.

Let me quote from Maruyama's own words on this subject:

I believe [the celebration] should be called the 'Ishin Centennial' and not the 'Meiji Centennial.' The symbolic significance here is quite enormous. What the current government wants to do is the 'Meiji Centennial.' I think what I'm about to say is common sense, but the Ishin marked the overthrow of the Tokugawa regime. After all is said and done this was a momentous revolution, realized by people within Japanese history. When we construct an ideal image of a revolution numerous negative points will surface. The end result was the imperial state system. However, if we view events in this way, we must say that even the French Revolution resulted in Napoleon; and the Russian one in Stalin. Thus, if we do not judge from the final consequence only and see things in terms of the original point of the Ishin itself, we may see that event as a transformation for which we may feel a sense of pride. The issue is what of the Ishin do we feel proud of, that is, what should be the legacy of the event. We must persist in our struggle over this issue." [*Maruyama Masao Zadan* 7, 302-4]

Whether a revolution is capitalist or socialist, Maruyama continued, was determined by world historical conditions and should not be dogmatically reduced to a simple definition. The Ishin, for example, set the terms of political discourse for Japan's modernity, namely the struggle between centralization and equality, between authoritarian governance and democracy. These issues had not

been part of political thought and practice in Japan prior to the Ishin, and they would be a legacy from the Ishin that would last into the indefinite future. The Ishin was, therefore, a fundamental break, a revolution that marked the beginnings of what he would term toward the end of his career as the unending struggle for democracy. "Put in terms of literature," Maruyama noted, "if we simply connect [Takizawa] Bakin and [Natsume] Sôseki in a seamless flow, nothing makes sense." Bakin wrote in the late Tokugawa era about good triumphing over evil; Soseki lamented the tragic human costs of industrialization in the early twentieth century. Maruyama's word for "seamless flow," which conveys better through sound the meaning of what he had to say, was *zuruzurubettari*.

Maruyama believed that the government's intention to celebrate the formation of the authoritarian Meiji state and not the revolutionary Ishin was hardly innocent. It was clearly intended to refocus on the establishment of the Confucian-based national moral ideology (*kokumin dôtoku*) with which to discipline and mobilize the people. Through such a celebration, comparable efforts in the present to revive patriotism, such as bringing back into classrooms the national anthem and the flag, would regain legitimacy.

Maruyama urged scholars not to flinch over this issue and encouraged them to challenge the government's stance as a matter of intellectual and civic responsibility. As he put it in his own feisty way, do *shôbu*, by which he meant take it on as a political contest, a fight, a match.



The sentiment expressed here was typical of Maruyama. Historical scholarship must relate to the politics of resisting attempts to establish ideological domination from above. Perhaps because he reached intellectual maturity in the 1930s, Maruyama was adamant on this point. It even led him to critique one of the two mentors who had a decisive influence on his intellectual upbringing, Hasegawa Nyozeikan (the other being Nanbara Shigeru). While he admired Nyozeikan immensely and was deeply grateful for his many acts of friendship and intellectual encouragement, Maruyama felt Nyozeikan tended to assume a "non-political" (*nonpori*) stance on public issues. Maruyama noted that Hasegawa's brief involvement in the early 1930s in the Research Society on Materialism (*Yuibutsuron Kenkyûkai*) was an anomaly rather than the rule.

Thus for Maruyama, the struggle over the meaning of the Ishin was not only historical but also about politics in the present. From quite early in his academic

career, Maruyama had set his sights on the problem of Tokugawa Confucian thought and its ideological implications for modern Japan. Although the Ishin had rejected Confucianism, it was rejuvenated some twenty years later under the guidance of scholars, Inoue Tetsujiro being the most prominent among them, who sought to reestablish Confucianism within a new academic discipline of "ethical studies" (*rinrigaku*) to serve the ideological needs of the Meiji state. Indeed, Maruyama thought that much of twentieth-century intellectual history along a broad spectrum from liberalism and Marxism to folk studies was, in one way or another, a reaction to the formulation in the late Meiji era of a national morality.

One of Maruyama's earliest essays (1942) was on Fukuzawa Yukichi's rejection of Confucianism as unacceptable for Japan's future because of its reliance on hierarchy, obedience, and other moral absolutes. This was accompanied by an examination of Ogyū Sorai's political philosophy, a study for which Maruyama gained widespread renown, especially for his thesis on "artifice" and "nature," and on human agency in the creation or "fabrication" of history. The connection between Fukuzawa Yukichi and Ogyū Sorai, however, was not genealogical, although some have seen it to be so. The link was a conceptual one, held together by Maruyama's understanding of "problem-oriented history" —the only way, as far as he was concerned, that intellectual history should be done.

In making his break with Tokugawa Confucian studies in order to face the brave new future, Fukuzawa argued that claims of total truth by any single philosophy or religion were misleading to the individual and potentially harmful to the polity. Sorai also set himself apart from the intellectual history of his immediate past and pointed out fatal flaws in Sung Confucianism, especially its metaphysical philosophy that fixed absolute truths upon which the Tokugawa regime sought to rest its claim to power in the eighteenth century. With a consistent scholarly method, Sorai held to a heterodox position against what he saw as a faulty moral system in a premodern setting, while Fukuzawa provided theoretical support for such intellectual opposition in the modern era. Drawing on John Stuart Mill, Fukuzawa called for resistance to totalistic claims of truth because such claims may turn out to be false in the future, while minority positions in the present might someday be correct or closer to the truth of things and therefore should not be suppressed out of hand. Sorai, too, had resisted the idea that moral truth could be fixed by a cosmological absolute. Sorai presented a minority view in which ancient beginnings were crucial because they were man-made; this theory of original creation had a direct bearing on why history is always changeable, being made and unmade and made again, and that, therefore, politics must constantly address changing conditions in the present.

Because of his uncompromising defense of this scholarly position Sorai would be labeled an advocate of heterodox teachings in the proscription of heterodoxy of 1787, *Kansei igaku no kin*. And, quite interestingly, Sorai would also not be looked upon with favor by the modern Meiji state. The Meiji government extended posthumous honors sanctioned with the imperial seal to scholars from the premodern era. These honors were extended in the late 1880s and again midway in the 1910s and 1920s. While virtually every scholar of significance in the Tokugawa era was recognized with such a rank of honor, Sorai was not recognized in this way. Indeed, all of the students of his academy, the Keien, with one exception, would similarly be excluded from this honor. The one exception was Yamagata Shûnan, who was the head teacher at the domainal academy in Chôshû (the Meirinkan, in the mid 1750s). Chôshû was one of the domains that had led the attack on the old Tokugawa regime in the name of loyalty to the monarchy.



Some years ago while doing research on my dissertation—sometime in late 1961 and 1962, if my memory serves me correctly, shortly after the mass protest movement against the Mutual Security Treaty—I encountered a passionate defense of Ogyû Sorai as a scholar and thinker by Inukai Tsuyoshi, the liberal politician and defender of civilian government against the military. I was intrigued to read Inukai's accusation of figures in the inner sanctum of the imperial court for committing an injustice by excluding Sorai from the list of those receiving posthumous imperial honor. Inukai questioned the objectivity of the review committee and whether the standards were consistent, as he believed there could not be a rational basis to exclude a scholar of such eminence as Sorai. Inukai had weighed the pros and cons of "idealistic" as against "rationalistic" action theories handed down from the Tokugawa period, and, in the end, firmly came down on the rationalistic end represented by Sorai. I remember that this episode whetted my appetite to study Tokugawa intellectual history. That the ideas of a premodern figure such as Sorai still generated such high emotions among modern-day party politicians such as Inukai intrigued me greatly, but I quite frankly did not appreciate at that time its implications for modern Japanese politics.

I later discovered that almost twenty years after this Maruyama had zeroed in on this issue as well in a lengthy essay that he wrote (1979) on the probable reasons behind Sorai's exclusion from imperial favor. He agreed with Inukai, of course, that it was patently unfair that a scholar of Sorai's great eminence was not