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The Origins of Student Radicalism in Japan

Henry DeWitt Smith

In the early morning hours of 18 January 1969, over eight thousand riot police were mobilized and led into the main campus of Tokyo University in an effort to dislodge several hundred diehard student radicals committed to 'fight to victory'. The police barrage of tear gas and water was met by volleys of rocks and molotov cocktails hurled by the masked and helmeted students from the rooftops of the three major buildings they had fortified. It was to be more than thirty hours before the last of the students, hands bound and heads low in defeat, were led from the Yasuda Amphitheatre, their last bastion. The battle marked a new crisis in the Japanese student movement, leaving the nation's greatest university not only in physical disrepair – the damage to property was estimated at over \$1 million – but also in a profound spiritual crisis which promised only to deepen in the following months.

By sheer coincidence, at two o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, a meeting of some seventy elderly men was held at the annexe of the University Alumni Club immediately adjoining the campus, a meeting which had profound and dramatic relevance to the battle waged less than three hundred yards away. This meeting was the fiftieth anniversary reunion of the Tokyo University Shinjinkai (New Man Society) a radical student group founded in 1918 which had launched and dominated the Japanese left-wing student movement for over ten years until its dissolution under intense police suppression in 1929. The reunion of 18 January was the first ever held by the surviving members, and, given their advanced age, was doubtless also the last. Although disregarded by the mass media, which were mobilized in great force for the more newsworthy activities of the younger generation of student radicals nearby, the reunion of the Shinjinkai highlighted in a most dramatic way the depth and importance of

modern Japan's long tradition of student radicalism, and provides a timely opportunity to reconsider its origins.

The Meiji Heritage

The Meiji Era (1868–1912) saw both the initial experimentation and the final consolidation of the framework of modern Japan's system of higher education, a system which in its structural aspects has had a strong influence on the emergence and development of the radical student movement. For the modern Japanese student movement is the result of the admixture, in proportions which vary with historical circumstances, of political radicalism with the tensions and weaknesses that characterize Japan's system of higher education.

The modern Japanese university system as it clearly emerged in the last two decades of the nineteenth century consisted of two almost parallel channels, wholly distinct in historical origins, founding ideals, and financial security. On the one hand was the 'elite course' of state education, composed of a three-year higher school as a preparatory course and a three-year imperial university, and on the other the private universities, which conducted the entire six-year course on a single campus, with an organizational division between the 'preparatory course' and 'main course'. Entrance into both was decided by competitive examinations taken after the completion of six years of compulsory primary education and five years of state middle school. Since the state course offered the twin advantages of far greater prestige and far less expense (tuition fees being nominal), few students chose private universities unless they had first failed to enter a state higher school.

The state higher schools were devoted exclusively to preparation for the imperial universities. The original Imperial University was founded in 1886; the prefix Tokyo was added in 1897 when a second imperial university was established in Kyoto. The capacity of the higher schools was limited in such a way as virtually to guarantee entrance for its graduates to one of the imperial universities. They numbered eight in 1918 and had increased to 32 by 1930 to meet the rapid expansion of the imperial university system, and were strategically located throughout provincial Japan so as to gather in the best of local talent from the middle school system. This was in contrast to the private

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universities, almost all of which were located in either the Tokyo or Kyoto-Osaka metropolitan areas. For this reason, private university students, who began their education in a large city somewhat earlier, tended to be more cosmopolitan than imperial university students.

Central to the duality of this system of higher education in modern Japan, a duality which remains largely unchanged today, was the vast prestige enjoyed by the students at state universities, especially the imperial universities and their postwar successors. Initially the Imperial University was designed to provide a training centre for the state bureaucracy, and to this end was given legal and budgetary preferment over the private schools, which were not even permitted the title 'university' until the University Law of 1918.¹ Graduates of the Tokyo and Kyoto Imperial University law faculties were, throughout the Meiji era, virtually guaranteed entrance into the ranks of the bureaucracy. Because of this monopoly of government service by the imperial universities, the private universities tended to train their graduates for non-bureaucratic professions: business, journalism, law, and politics; the private law schools of mid-Meiji, which today are the great private universities of Waseda, Nihon, Hōsei, and Chūō, tended to be founded in a spirit of antagonism to the ruling cliques within the Meiji government.²

Within each line of the dual university system there existed elements which, given the proper political environment, could work to encourage a radical student movement. On the one hand, students in the imperial universities were easy prey to an intense elitism, which, when coupled with the natural idealism of youth, found an outlet in demands for a voice in political decision-making. In addition, the sudden shift of many students from the carefree and stable life in provincial higher schools to the more volatile, politically charged atmosphere of the great metropolitan centres, heightened this possibility. On the other hand, students at the private universities, while less elitist and more cosmopolitan, nevertheless tended to manifest strongly the 'outsider' mentality closely associated with the founding spirit of such universities, a mentality which could easily be translated into political rebellion. This attitude was most clear-cut at Waseda University in Tokyo,

¹ Before 1918, private universities had the legal status of 'professional schools'.

² Nagai Michio, *Nihon no daigaku* (Tokyo, 1965), 35.

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which, together with Tokyo and Kyoto Imperial, stood at the centre of student radicalism in prewar Japan.

Apart from these structural elements within the educational system which tended to encourage student political activity, there was a significant tradition of non-political student activism, a tradition abetted by a characteristic Japanese tolerance of student excesses (rowdiness and drunkenness, for example, were widely sanctioned), and seen most clearly in the frequency of school strikes to win such campus-related demands as more lenient dormitory regulations or the rescinding of disputed disciplinary actions. Such strikes, largely in provincial middle and normal schools, occurred from the earliest years of the new Meiji educational structure, and in fact had their roots in the domain schools and private academies of Tokugawa Japan. By the twentieth century, the school strike and similar student techniques of expressing discontent which went under the generic label of 'school disturbances', had become familiar institutions in Japan. Such non-political student activism at the middle levels offered a framework within which student political radicalism might blossom at the university level.

The Taisho awakening

The birth of Japanese student radicalism as a sustained movement came with the founding of the Shinjinkai at Tokyo Imperial University in early December 1918.³ During middle and late Meiji there had, to be sure, been a number of cases of significant political activity among university students, notably during the 'movement for freedom and people's rights' of the early 1880s and the socialist movement at the time of the Russo-Japanese War,⁴ but they did not reach the stage of a sustained, self-generating organization with inter-mural contacts which could be called a full-fledged student movement. It was only with the emergence of a new political atmosphere around 1918 that such a movement of student radicals came into being. The central element in this new atmosphere was the first world war and its economic and intellectual repercussions in Japan.

³ For a more detailed account of the founding era of the Shinjinkai, see my article, 'The Shinjinkai (1918-21): The Making of an Intelligentsia', *Papers on Japan*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

⁴ Tanaka Sōgorō, *Shiryō nihon shakai undōshi* (Tokyo, 1947-8), I, 148; II, 31.

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Economically, the war meant prosperity for Japan, which had the good fortune to be allied to the victors but carried few military responsibilities. Taking advantage of the gap left in Asian markets and of the demands for matériel from her allies, Japan was launched on a boom that lasted until recession set in early in 1920. But with the prosperity came strains, most notably a serious inflation which led to widespread riots in the summer of 1918 as the price of rice soared to staggering heights. The Rice Riots triggered off a tremendous expansion of the trade union movement, which had remained in the hands of moderate Christian elements until then but now surged ahead in a far more belligerent mood under aggressive young leadership. At the same time, the political repercussions of the riots toppled the conservative Terauchi government and brought to power Japan's first party cabinet under Hara Kei. Labour unrest and political change led many intellectuals, including students, to conclude that a new era of popular discontent was at hand, needing only proper leadership to effect a broad social revolution.

To this was added the impact of the concept of Wilsonian Democracy, which struck a sensitive chord among young intellectuals in Japan as in many other countries, and merged with the demand of Japanese intellectuals for a democratic reform of Japanese political institutions. The major spokesman for this trend of 'Taisho democracy' (after the Taisho era, 1912-26) was Yoshino Sakuzō, a professor in the Faculty of Law at Tokyo Imperial University. From about 1916, Yoshino vigorously expounded his own theory of political democracy in a number of articles.⁵ He had great influence among many of the members of the Shinjinkai, not only as a teacher but also through his leadership of the university YMCA and the Faculty of Law Debating Club.

Early in 1919, shortly after the founding of the Shinjinkai, similar groups were set up at various private universities in Tokyo, the most notable being the People's League at Waseda. At Kyoto Imperial University, a group called the Labour-Student Society had been founded the previous fall, but it never indulged in social and political activism to the same extent as the Shinjinkai, preferring to devote its efforts to quiet study under

⁵ For a profile of Yoshino in English, see Takayoshi Matsuo, 'Sakuzō Yoshino', *The Developing Economies*, June 1967.

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the auspices of the professor of economics, Kawakami Hajime, later to emerge as one of modern Japan's most prominent Marxist economists.

During the first three years of its existence the Shinjinkai devoted most of its efforts to spreading a rather simplistic message of 'liberation and reform' through a monthly magazine, and helping to organize trade unions. At this time its membership was very small and exclusive, being tacitly limited to students in the Faculty of Law at Tokyo Imperial University – the oldest and most prestigious of the university's six faculties; its active membership never rose above about thirty at any one time. Although the Shinjinkai in 1918–21 was located on the university campus and was composed of students and recent graduates of the university, its attention was focused almost exclusively on off-campus affairs. From the outset the Shinjinkai defined itself as a gathering not of university students but of aroused young intellectuals, of 'new men' who happened to be university students; in the early period they made little use of the older tradition of campus-related student activism, and took little or no interest in the reform of the university itself or in the building of a mass student movement. In this sense the early Shinjinkai may be seen as a 'pre-student movement'.

The predominantly off-campus orientation of the Shinjinkai produced various strains within the group which came to a head in late 1921. By this time, the Japanese socialist movement had become larger and more diverse, and student groups found that their internal unity could be preserved only by a narrower definition of their goals and areas of activity. The Shinjinkai was especially susceptible to the tensions generated by the diversification of the socialist movement as a whole, since a pattern had been set from the very start of full participation by recent university graduates in its activities. This alumni participation inhibited the natural tendency of a student movement to rapid changes in leadership and ideology which are its greatest strengths. Hence late in November 1921, it was decided to separate the student and alumni membership, with the former carrying on the name of the Shinjinkai. A similar type of reorganization was carried out in the student movement at Waseda University as well.

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The emergence of student communism

Until about 1922 the Japanese student movement had been small in scale and free of any clear-cut ideological commitment. It was a period of uncritical enthusiasm, of excited susceptibility to any and every school of social thought brought in from the West. One member of the Shinjinkai in this period recalls that it was 'an age in which all sorts of reformist ideas were whirling around together. The ideologies of not only political democracy and bolshevism, but also of social democracy, syndicalism, the IWW, guild socialism, anarchism, Fabianism, and national socialism were all blooming at once, like spring flowers in the north country, presenting a beautiful scene of many colours'.⁶

Among this great variety of influences from the West, one of the most clear-cut strains within the early Shinjinkai was Soviet communism. The group had been formed just over a year after the Russian Revolution, which played a crucial role in turning the attention of many students in the direction of radical social reform. Especially influenced was a small group of 1917 graduates of Tokyo Imperial University, centred on Asō Hisashi, who was then working as a newspaper reporter in Tokyo. Asō's group of about five merged with the student members of the Shinjinkai and thus heightened the interest of the group as a whole in the Soviet experiment.

Interest in Russian communism was merely one of a number of influences in the Shinjinkai at the start, but came to occupy a more and more prominent place in the pages of its magazine as time passed. Symbolic of this change was the title of the magazine which was changed frequently with the succession of student generations: originally named *Democracy*, by late 1921 it was entitled *Narod* (Russian for 'people'). By that time most of the younger members were far more interested in the Soviet model of socialism than in the Anglo-American lineage of social democracy.

In April 1922 the final issue of the Shinjinkai magazine was published and seven members of the group graduated, leaving the active student membership at only about five. This low point

⁶ Hayashi Kaname, 'Shinjinkai no koro', Tokyo daigaku kyōdō kumiai shuppanbu, ed., *Rekishi o tsukuru gakusei-tachi* (Tokyo, 1947), 173.

in membership also marks a radical change in the thrust of the entire Japanese student movement, away from the earlier exclusiveness and unconcern for the university itself, towards a mass student movement with a strong campus base. Politically-minded university students, in other words, now began to utilize and develop the older tradition of non-political activism based on demands related to student life. The role of the Shinjinkai and other groups in the left-wing movement as a whole was now redefined in terms of their qualifications *as students* rather than merely as young intellectuals.

The first steps in this direction were taken during the period of the formation and early activity of the first Japanese Communist Party (JCP), which had a definite influence in determining and implementing the new trend in the student movement. In the summer and fall of 1922, for example, a concerted campaign was waged to establish left-wing student groups in the provincial higher schools in which the prime vehicle was a drive to collect money for Russian famine relief. This had been launched in June by the embryonic JCP and because of its charitable nature proved an ideal channel for expanding communist influence among idealistic higher school students. The fruits of the summer famine relief campaign were reaped in the fall of 1922 when a group of four or five members of the Shinjinkai went on a lecture tour to six schools in west Japan, seeking contacts with newly formed study groups there and offering them guidance in reading and organization. These groups were of great importance to the future development of the Shinjinkai and of the student movement at Kyoto Imperial University, since they formed what was an effective 'farm system' for student radicals. Almost all the members of the Shinjinkai after 1923 were students who on entry into the university were already tempered and dedicated radicals.

Concurrent with this attempt to establish a farm system by contact with lower level schools, plans were made to establish horizontal contact with the private universities and provincial state universities. The initiative came largely from the leaders of the Waseda University student movement, which had been considerably less conspicuous than that at Tokyo Imperial in 1918-21, but from 1922 was entering a new period of campus-oriented expansion, much like the Shinjinkai; at the end of the

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year the national Student Federation (abbreviated 'Gakuren') was founded,⁷ and in 1923 began its activities in earnest.

Setting the tone for this new era in the Japanese student movement were two incidents in the spring of that year. In May, the members of the Shinjinkai led an attempt to reorganize the existing student union, which at the time was little more than an association of extracurricular clubs dominated by the athletic teams, into an effective organ of campus government, under the slogan 'All Power to the Student Masses!' Shortly after this, a major incident was sparked off by the proposed establishment at Waseda of a Military Study Group, strongly opposed by the Gakuren affiliate, the Cultural League, which started bloody rows between right and left wing students. The protest was vigorously supported by the Shinjinkai and other Gakuren groups in Tokyo, and may be seen as the first great 'incident' of the modern Japanese student movement.

The political radicalism of the movement suffered a temporary setback from a series of events affecting the left-wing movement as a whole in the summer and fall of 1923. First came the mass arrest of members of the Japanese Communist Party in June, which led to its dissolution within a year. This was followed by the Kanto earthquake of 1 September, which produced a white terror in its wake and forced a sense of caution upon the entire socialist movement. Nevertheless, from 1924 on, the student movement grew and consolidated its organization. Student groups were organized on every major university and higher school campus and were all united in the Gakuren, which by November 1924 boasted a membership of 1600 in 53 different schools.⁸ Its leaders came almost entirely from three major universities, Tokyo Imperial and Waseda in the capital, and Kyoto Imperial in west Japan. Control from the centre was strict, and participating groups were required to follow the forms of study and organization set by the central leadership. The names of all member groups were standardized as 'Social Science Study Group', normally referred to by the abbreviation 'Shaken', with the sole exception of the Shinjinkai, which by virtue of

⁷ The title of the federation was changed in 1924 to Student Federation of Social Science, and in 1925 to All-Japan Student Federation of Social Science, but the term 'Gakuren' remained unchanged.

⁸ Kikukawa Tadao, *Gakusei shakai undōshi* (Tokyo, 1947), 216.

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its tradition and standing was allowed to keep its original name.

The central function of these student groups, as the title indicates, was the study of 'social science', a euphemism for Marxism-Leninism. Elaborate and graded reading programmes were prepared by the Gakuren on the basis of Comintern literature, with variation to allow for the availability of certain texts in Japan. Much of the reading in the groups, which as a rule met once a week in groups of five to ten to discuss reading assignments, was in foreign languages, since the Japanese censors were far stricter about Japanese translations than about the import of foreign originals. Typical study courses would begin with the English edition of *The ABC of Communism* by Bucharin and Preobrazhensky, proceed through the standard Leninist literature, and for the more intrepid and scholarly might eventually lead to *Das Kapital* in the German original.

While the study of communist texts was a major preoccupation of Japanese student radicals, especially in the years 1925-7, when the movement was strongly influenced by Fukumoto Kazuo, who believed that theoretical purity could be attained through mastery of the Marxist classics, many students were also keenly aware of their responsibility as communists to engage in the more activist pursuits of organization and agitation. Perhaps the most important and effective arena of activity was the university campus itself, where it is possible to distinguish three categories of radical endeavour:

1. Concerted efforts were made by the student left to seize control of various extra-curricular groups which might be used to spread their political influence. At Tokyo Imperial University, the Shinjinkai managed to win considerable influence in the weekly student newspaper, the debating club, and the university settlement project. In this way legitimate campus channels of communication could be manipulated for political ends.

2. An attempt was made on a number of campuses to develop an effective system of student government, focusing primarily on student control of all organs related to student social and economic life, such as dining halls, dormitories, and co-operatives. The aim of the student radicals was to create student unions comparable to trade unions, which would heighten student 'class

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consciousness' and unity by exploiting issues related to student economic interests, and in this way foster an organization that could be turned to political ends. This approach, which was apparent as early as 1923 in the Shinjinkai's cry of 'All Power to the Student Masses!', was perfected in the postwar 'self-governing association' organization.

3. Radical students were constantly on the lookout for campus-related issues with a political dimension. In the 1920s, the most important such issue throughout Japanese higher education was the institution of compulsory military education on middle and higher school campuses. This provoked widespread protest movements, co-ordinated through the Gakuren and waged over a long period of time from 1924.⁹ Although the movement failed to eliminate military education, it won many new converts to the student left.

Activities were by no means limited to the campus, however, for at the first Gakuren congress in September 1924 it was resolved that the most dedicated members had a responsibility to participate in the general proletarian movement 'insofar as it is possible *as students*'.¹⁰ They were expected to contribute their own special talents to the movement as a whole, and one of the best and most successful examples of this type of activity was participation in the various labour schools in Tokyo and the Kansai area. Students from the university 'Shaken' groups would act as tutors in these schools, devoting their attention largely to political education in a calculated attempt to foster the class consciousness of their pupils. Students also participated in the trade union movement, giving assistance and contributing money to union funds.

It should be stressed that the Japanese left-wing student movement in this period was almost wholly communist. Although the Japanese left wing as a whole was split into a number of factions, student support with few exceptions was given to the extreme left in the political party, trade union, farm tenant, and proletarian cultural movements. The Japanese Communist Party itself, formally reorganized in late 1926, took a strong interest in the student movement and at one point in 1927 set up a special fraction within it to guide its policy. At the same time it might

⁹ *Ibid.*, 273-81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 254 (my italics).

be argued that the student movement tended to control the Communist Party, rather than vice versa, for many of the leaders of the resurrected JCP came from the student movement. Their strength in the JCP increased after 1928 as successive mass arrests decimated the ranks of the older leaders and new ones were recruited from student groups. By the early 1930s, the great majority of the leaders in the underground communist movement were either university dropouts or recent graduates; most of the others were working-class graduates of the Communist University for Workers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow.

Suppression and the 'Dark Valley'

Little mention has so far been made of what was indubitably the most important factor in shaping the course of development of the prewar Japanese student movement: government suppression. Systematic suppression of radical social and political movements began as early as the movements themselves in mid-Meiji, when laws were enacted which gave the government wide powers to supervise the press and control both public gatherings and private associations. The Meiji socialist movement was continually harassed by the government and was eventually crushed in the High Treason incident of 1910-11, when twelve socialists were put to death for an alleged plot against the emperor's life.

The emergence of the student movement in 1918 was greatly eased by a brief thaw in the climate of suppression. It should be noted that students, by virtue of their prestige in Japanese society, were treated with special leniency; the university campus enjoyed a kind of extra-territorial privilege which exempted students from the degree of suppression suffered by the labour movement. This was especially marked in the imperial universities, a circumstance which helps to explain the dominance of the Shinjinkai in the initiation and leadership of the pre-war movement itself.¹¹

But as the left-wing movement grew in size and militancy in the early 1920s, so the government, through the police, began to reinforce suppression. The critical juncture in this process was the passage of the Police Preservation Law in 1925, stipulating long prison terms on conviction as a member of any group which

¹¹ This assertion was made by Miyazaki Ryūsuke, one of the founders of the Shinjinkai, in an interview with the author, 27 January 1967.

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overtly threatened the emperor system of private property. It is testimony to the radicalism or the student movement that the law was first enforced against the leaders of the Gakuren in a series of arrests in early 1926. Nearly all the thirty-eight students arrested, mostly members of the Kyoto Imperial University Shaken, were eventually convicted.

In fact, the systematic suppression of the student movement had begun even before the Kyoto arrests; it was the work not of the police but of the educational authorities. Between November 1924 and the following January, twenty-three of the Shaken at the higher school level were dissolved on the orders of school officials,¹² although most of them managed to continue underground for several years. In the universities, where the tradition of academic freedom and university autonomy had deeper roots, the process took considerably longer. In the years 1926-8, student activists were subjected to constant police surveillance and harassment which soon put an effective end to most above-ground off-campus activities. There can be little doubt that the intensity of police suppression in this period served to maintain the unity of the student movement and to drive it steadily in more extreme directions. This tendency in large part accounts for the absence of factionalism among the student groups and of a moderate or non-communist student left.

Systematic suppression at the university level came after the mass arrests of members of the Japanese Communist Party and its front groups in March 1928. On the grounds that many students and recent university graduates were among those arrested (whose average age was twenty-five), the Ministry of Education took immediate steps to control the student movement, and ordered the dissolution of all major radical student groups. The Shinjinkai, largest and strongest of the Gakuren affiliates, was formally dissolved on 17 April 1928, and thereafter student leaders went underground. The Shinjinkai, although deprived of formal university recognition, continued to exist, exerting its influence through a number of front groups on the campus, notably 'reading groups' which continued as before to study Marxist-Leninist texts. In late 1929, following Comintern instructions, the theorists of the student movement announced that in times of severe

¹² Tōdai Shinjinkai gojū shūnen kinen gyōji hokkininkai, ed., *Shinjinkai nenshi hyō* (Tokyo, 1969), 13.

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repression it was inappropriate to support an independent movement of students, and that the Gakuren and its affiliates should be dissolved and reorganized as chapters of the Communist Youth League. The Gakuren was dissolved on 7 November 1929, on the twelfth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and the Shinjinkai followed suit two weeks later.¹³

Hampered by the police in their direct political activities, left-wing students in the period from 1929 to about 1932 devoted themselves to systematic incitement of campus disturbances throughout Japan, making skilful and effective use of the long tradition of non-political student protest; almost all the issues involved related to such questions as disputed disciplinary action, unpopular teachers, dormitory regulations, and the like. The number of such disturbances, which occurred at every level from middle school up, rose from 13 in 1927 to 117 in 1929, and then to a peak of 395 in 1931,¹⁴ after which strict disciplinary measures by educational authorities began to stem the tide. Known as the 'age of chronic school disturbances', this period bears a striking resemblance to the situation in Japan in the late 1960s.

In the five or six years after the 1928 arrests, the radical core of the student movement continued to survive in a strange limbo of continual suppression and occasional outbursts of activity. The Communist Youth League cell at Tokyo Imperial University managed to put out a mimeographed propaganda sheet entitled *Akamon senshi* (The Red Gate Fighter), which went through over 120 issues from June 1931 until mid-1934.¹⁵ But the student movement in the 1930s was fighting a losing battle. Repression grew more and more comprehensive, and a research section was established in the Ministry of Education to provide analyses of radical student activity. At the same time, the mood of the nation became steadily more hostile to such activism as the shadows of war lengthened and Japan entered the 'dark valley' of her modern century.

Japanese student activity in the middle and late 1930s has hardly been studied at all, although there are detailed government

¹³ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴ Inaoka Susumu and Itoya Toshio, *Nihon no gakusei undō* (Tokyo, 1961), 157. The figures were compiled by the Ministry of Education.

¹⁵ Scattered issues may be found in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

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reports giving the names and activities of a considerable number of students who were arrested. As late as 1938, a group of students at Tokyo Imperial University attempted to revive the JCP, which had finally collapsed in 1935, but, like a number of earlier groups, it was discovered and the members arrested before they could take any effective action.¹⁶ And yet, despite the inevitable failure of such attempts at direct political organization, there is substantial evidence of a strong current of student radicalism throughout the war years, largely in the form of the clandestine study of communist texts along the lines set over a decade earlier. Although forced to meet under such facades as 'cinema study groups' or 'dramatic reading groups', the students continued to read the same material as before.

Phoenix from the ashes

When the Japanese communist movement re-emerged under the protective aegis of the American occupation after 1945, the student movement was reborn as one of the most powerful elements within the Japanese left. Although the political situation was so different, it tended to take up exactly where it had left off some two decades earlier. The repression of the war years had implanted a fear of control that even today often verges on paranoia. The vocabulary, theory, and psychology of the student movement, even after twenty-five years of relative freedom, remain seriously limited by the traumatic experience of the 1930s. Imaginative approaches to social and institutional reform have been severely hampered by an outlook that simply denounces all authority as 'feudal' or 'militaristic'. The memory of a generation of students sacrificed on the mainland of Asia and the islands of the South Pacific has made 'peace' a slogan that retains its efficacy even when the young who preach it turn to systematic violence to achieve their goals. Limited and practical items of radical reform are frequently denounced as lacking theoretical purity, the heritage of an age when the discussion of theory was the only activity open to progressive students.

Of course, the postwar student movement is not a copy of its prewar predecessor; it has evolved its own forms and techniques,

¹⁶ Matsumura Sadahiko, 'Saikin ni okeru sayoku gakusei undō', *Shisō kenkyū shiryō (tokushū)*, May 1941.

but the differences remain largely ones of scale, emphasis, and detail. The tensions within the educational system which tend to encourage political activity have become, if anything, more pronounced since the war. The reform of the educational system raised the competitive examination bottleneck by one year and cut the total university course by two years, thereby greatly accentuating the traumatic effects of the 'examination hell'. The growth of a low-quality, mass-production style of education in many private universities has encouraged student unrest, while the elitist spirit of students at the prestigious national universities still gives a powerful impulse to political activity. The problems which make up the present 'crisis of the Japanese university' have encouraged radical student dissent and provided political activists with ample issues for campus-oriented protest movements.

One symbolic indication of the degree of continuity between the prewar and postwar Japanese student movements is the attitude taken by the sexagenarian survivors of the Shinjinkai towards today's student extremists.¹⁷ Most of them have risen to prominence in a wide variety of professions, most notably politics, journalism, scholarship, and literature, and their political colouring covers the entire spectrum, although the centre of gravity would be somewhere around the Japanese Socialist Party. Given their age and standing, it would be natural to expect them to condemn the systematic violence which is a central technique in the current student movement. Yet many of these ageing activists, when they gathered for their anniversary reunion, praised the armed students who were then battling the police within earshot, warmly approving a 'rebellious outburst of youthful energy' and 'opposition to all that is old'. This lyrical appraisal of student activism suggests the degree to which the Japanese student movement, prisoner of its long tradition, has become an institutionalized ritual of elitist self-indulgence, both for student participants and their older supporters.

It is possible, of course, that the student movement serves as a useful escape valve for the many tensions felt by young Japanese today. But if this is so, it must be said to be filling a conservative rather than a revolutionary role, sacrificing the many substantive

¹⁷ The author was present at this meeting and recorded the statements of the speakers.

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radical demands of students genuinely concerned with their position to an orgy of political activity that in the end merely drains its participants of political commitment and allows them to take up their allotted role in Japanese society. In this sense the continuity of the student movement in Japan may now be its greatest liability.