The Problem of Technology in Maruyama Masao's Notion of Modernity in Japan's "Overcoming of Modernity" Debate in 1942[1]

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to rethink the meaning of modernity through an examination of Maruyama's defense of modernity during the "Overcoming of Modernity" Debate in Japan in 1942. I will initially propose that Maruyama understood the opponents of modernity as ultra-nationalists who were merely defending an ideological justification for Japan's war. However, Maruyama defined "modern thinking" (*kindaiteki shii*) in terms of personal autonomy.

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[1] This paper was delivered at a conference on "Asian Modernities and Democracies" sponsored by the *Asian Association of Christian Philosophers* at the Ateneo de Manila University in November, 2015.

His understanding of modernity as a mental attitude led to his failure to consider the technological aspect of this debate. After considering the various intellectual positions on this issue, I shall argue that a democratic control of technology must be presupposed in Maruyama's defense of modernity.

Key words: *Autonomy, totalitarianism, Kyoto School, The Japan Roman School (Nihon Rōman ha), socialism, Nature*

Introduction

Maruyama Masao (1914-1996), the most influential political thinker in post-war Japan, tried to defend modernity against the criticisms of the participants of the so-called "Overcoming Modernity" symposium in 1942. It was held immediately after the outbreak of the Pacific War under the auspices of the literary magazine "Bungakukai" (Literary World).

In general, this symposium was thought to be an attempt by the ultra-nationalists to ideologically justify Japan's war. Many studies on the symposium, however, have shown that the advocates of "Overcoming Modernity" had real and serious concerns with the phenomenon of modernity, and did not merely promote ultra-nationalist goals. In light of this more nuanced

understanding of the symposium, how then should we understand Maruyama's defense of modernity?

My first step in answering this question is to approach it from the perspective of technology, that is to say, I will show how technology was an essential component of the debate about modernity in the symposium. My thesis is that Maruyama had a persuasive point of view regarding the phenomenon of modernity, but he overlooked the importance of the technological aspects of modernity that the advocates of "Overcoming Modernity" knew had to be dealt with in the real world. This is because he reduced the question of modernity to that of "modern thinking" (*kindaiteki shii*).

1. Maruyama's Reaction to the "Overcoming Modernity" Debate

1.1 *Modernity for Maruyama* Maruyama believed that "modern thinking" (*kindaiteki shii*) was never acquired in Japan. For him, this way of thinking was constituted by autonomous individuals who can change and re-invent society according to their own will and judgment. Maruyama tried to promote this notion of "personal autonomy" (to put it in the vocabulary of Rikki Kersten)[2] as the prerequisite of modern democracy in post-war Japan.

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[2] See Rikki Kersten, Democracy in Postwar Japan: Maruyama Masao and the search for autonomy (London: Routledge, 1996).

Maruyama thought that one of the problems of Japanese society was the absence of autonomy. In the "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism" (1946), he characterized the political structure of pre-war Japan as the "interfusion of ethics and power."[3] According to Maruyama, modern European governments take a neutral attitude towards the individual's moral and religious values, such as truth or justice. In accordance with this attitude, the systems of laws are formed on the basis of formal validity claims that can be redeemed regardless of the values held by individual persons. In other words, modern states do not intervene in one's internal and private sphere. This separation between the public and the private spheres is an important characteristic of modern states.

Japan, however, overlooked the importance of this separation and attempted to establish the unbroken Imperial line as the absolute substance of the people's sense of values. As a result, the people exercised their judgments not according to their own conscience but in relation to those who are in power. They no longer decide by themselves whether they

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[3] Maruyama Masao, Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics, expanded edition, ed. Ivan Morris, (London: Oxford University Press, 1969),9.

were right or wrong. Instead, they decide according to the "*degree of proximity* to the ultimate value or entity."[4]

Maruyama argues that even the Emperor himself was not an exception. For he was also inescapably bound by the ancestral tradition. He observed that "[t]hough the Emperor was regarded as the embodiment of ultimate value, he was infinitely removed from the possibility of creating values out of nothingness."[5] Thus, in pre-war Japan, no one lived as an autonomous and responsible individual. In his later essay, he called this structure the "system of irresponsibilities."[6]

For those who are aware of Michel Foucault's criticism towards the notion of subjectivity, Maruyama's argument could raise some controversies. From the standpoint of Foucault, European modern states have never been "neutral" because the notion of autonomy is always constituted in relation to power structures.

The Panopticon, conceived by Jeremy Bentham, was cited by Foucault as an example of the domination of social structures.[7] It was a prison where a guard can

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[4] Ibid., 12.

[5] Ibid., 20.

[6] Ibid., 128

[7] See Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-228.

keep watch on all inmates; each inmate cannot see the guard and does not know when he or she is being watched or not. Therefore, the only strategy that the inmates can employ is to always behave in accordance with the norm or rule of the prison even while they are not watched. Thus, they internalized the norm and controlled themselves. According to Foucault, this so-called autonomy comes from a form of self-control. The subject cannot be independent of power relations and cannot be purely rational. In this sense, we might be able to say that Foucault declared the death of the subject.

Therein lies the similarity between Foucault and Maruyama. Maruyama also thought that people internalized the values and norms embodied in the Emperor's social system because their way of thinking and behavior were constituted in relation to the power structures within the system. Nevertheless, Maruyama did not declare the death of the subject as Foucault did. On the contrary, he cried out for the establishment of the modern autonomous subject. In this light, we can say that he tried to create a "modernity" that existed nowhere in Japan.

However, this "nowhere" character comes from the ideality of Maruyama's notion of modernity. As Kersten points out, the word "modernity" has been

caught in a tangle of dichotomies such as "tradition versus modernity, East versus West, internally generated versus externally generated change, and modern versus feudal."[8] Maruyama has often been criticized for his Western-centered attitude because he often denounced Japanese traditions by the standards of Western culture. However, he was not a mere occidentalist. Kersten argues that "[i]n order to avoid such a clash, modernization had to transcend its Western image. Maruyama resolved this in part by associating the modern with the universal." [9] This universalization inevitably accompanies the idealization of modernity. In other words, universalization sublimates modernity into an ideal which has not yet been realized anywhere, but which we should make infinite efforts to realize. In this sense, Maruyama's approach may be similar to that of Habermas, who regards modernity as an "unfinished project."

To get straight to the point, Maruyama thought the ideal of modernity lies in democracy, not as a static institution, but as a dynamic process. For example, Maruyama says in one of his diaries:

> It does not make any sense to talk about an
> eternal revolution concerning socialism. It

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[8] Kersten, Democracy in Postwar Japan, 109.
[9] Ibid., 109.

is concerning democracy that it makes sense. For, democracy is a concept which contains a paradox, namely the rule by the people—the rule by a majority. Precisely because it is unnatural that a majority rules and a minority is ruled (Rousseau), democracy is realistic not as an institution but as a process, as an eternal movement.[10]

What he is saying here is probably the following: the rule by a small group of people is a natural form of government. For example, a minority such as kings, aristocrats, etc., governed a majority of the people in pre-modern states. Democracy is not an exception either, even though representatives are elected by means of voting. If the rule by a minority is a natural form of government, it follows that there is always a danger that democracy will be immobilized and fall into its natural state of oligarchy. Therefore, in order to maintain democracy as the rule of the majority, we must constantly resist against this natural tendency of government. The "modern thinking" based on personal autonomy might be

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[10] Maruyama Masao, *Jikonai Taiwa: sansatsu no nōto kara* [The Inner Dialogues with Myself: From three notebooks] (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1998), 56.

nothing more than an illusion. However, from the standpoint of Maruyama, it is a necessary illusion in order to animate democracy as an "eternal revolution." Modernization requires the acquisition of this illusion.

1.2 *Maruyama's Understanding of the "Overcoming Modernity" Debate* – As mentioned earlier, the "Overcoming Modernity" debate was often regarded as an ultra-nationalist attempt at an ideological justification for Japan's war. For example, Kawakami Tetsutarō, the chairman of the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium, expressed the objective of the symposium in the following way:

> I'm not sure whether this symposium was a success or not. However, there is no disguising the fact that this was made with the intellectual shudder which we have felt one year after the opening of the war. It is true that we, intellectuals, personally feel uneasy because of the conflict between our Japanese blood, on the one hand, which has worked as a true driving force behind our intellectual activities, and the Western knowledge, which has systematized them awkwardly on the other. This is the reason

for the chaos and breakdown which prevailed during the entire symposium.[11]

What caused the conflict between "Japanese blood" and "Western knowledge" is the anti-Western character of the Pacific War. This may be easier to understand if we contrast it with the second Sino-Japanese war. Many Japanese people naively believed or hoped, with a vague sense of guilt, that the second Sino-Japanese war was, or would be, a war that aims to liberate Asian countries from the influence of the Western World. In this sense, Western countries are not really direct enemies. However, in the case of the Pacific War, the United States of America suddenly emerged as a direct enemy. This is meaningful because it is generally believed that it was the USA that first brought modern civilization to Japan.

Since the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan had received "modernity" from the West. Though there were strong objections to the acceptance of this foreign culture, Japanese people managed to accept it by separating internal "spirit" from external "techniques," as seen in the expression "Japanese spirit with Western techniques" (*wakon-yōsai*). The Japanese people, however, failed to keep the purity

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[11] Kawakami Tetsutarō, Takeuchi Yoshimi, et al., *Kindai no chōkoku* [Overcoming Modernity], (Tokyo: Toyama-bō,1979), 166.

of the "Japanese spirit." The more the society was modernized, the more inseparable it became from "Western techniques." Therefore, when the Pacific War broke out, Japanese intellectuals were forced to realize how their spirit had been permeated by Western modernity. But this was considered to be the enemy's culture that has to be sublated and they believed that they had to purify the Japanese spirit from modernity again. This is how this symposium was popularly understood as initiated by the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941.

Maruyama's understanding of the symposium is basically the same. For example, in the introduction to the English edition of *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (*Nihon Seiji Shisōshi Kenkyū*, hereafter *Studies*), he questions the standpoint of the "Overcoming Modernity" debate.[12] He asked two questions: (1) whether it is true that Japan was modernized enough to be able to problematize the question of "overcoming modernity" and (2) whether it is justifiable from a historical perspective that modernity was indeed alien to the pure "Japanese spirit" that had purportedly existed before the influx of Western civilization. His answers to these

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[12] See Maruyama Masao, Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan, trans. Mikiso Hane (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1974), xxx-xxxii.

questions are negative: Japan was not so modernized as the "Overcoming Modernity" advocates thought it was and modernity was not alien to the "Japanese spirit" even before the Meiji period.

Chronologically, each chapter of the *Studies* was published as an independent essay in the 1940's and it came out as a book in 1952. The English edition was released in 1974. Maruyama discussed in the later edition what happened about 30 years before. However, the following statement shows that his basic point of view has not changed. Right after Japan's defeat, he argues:

> Now it is obvious to anyone that far from being "overcome," modern thinking (*kindaiteki shii*) has never been acquired in its truest sense in this country. Therefore, we can say for the time being that it is not so necessary as it was before to explain, in the first place, this basic proposition over and over again; especially in a study about the modern intellectual history of our country. On the other hand, however, we cannot justifiably say that there was no spontaneous growth of modern ideas in Japan. The present depressing and pitiful situation is the best opportunity, so to speak, for the "nothing-to-do-with" (*muen*) theory

as opposed to the "overcome" (*chōkoku*) theory. However, it conceals in itself a danger that it will deprive people of their confidence in their ability to think for themselves and, as a result, cause them to return to the erstwhile concept of equating modern ideas with western ideas

In this sense, I think that the intellectual history of the Tokugawa period, not to mention the Meiji period, deserves more attention in order to elucidate the modernization of Japanese ideas.[13]

Maruyama's defense of modernity consists of two strategies: to demonstrate that (1) Japan was not so modernized to the extent that "overcoming modernity" could not be such an urgent problem and that (2) modernity was not foreign to Japan even during the Tokugawa period. As for strategy (1), whether Japan was modernized or not depends on the meaning of modernity. For example, if we regard modernity as the equivalent of industrialization, we can say that pre-war Japan was modernized to some extent. However, it is obvious that Maruyama did not take this direction. Then, how did he define modernity? I discussed this question in section 1.2 and argued that he regarded

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[13] Maruyama Masao, Senchū to sengo no aida [Between the War and Postwar] (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1976), 189.

modernization as the acquisition of "modern thinking" based on personal autonomy, which he thought was a prerequisite for the universal ideal of democracy. Strategy (2) is closely connected with his definition of modernity because his ultimate purpose was to show that Japan was not removed from the universal ideal of modernity *in essence.* To believe in the purity of the "Japanese spirit" is to believe that it is *essentially* impossible for it to be modernized. This way of thinking would close the door to genuine modernization. Therefore, Maruyama had to demonstrate that there was a birth of "modern thinking" even before the Meiji period. From his perspective, the problem is that its growth has always been hampered in Japan.

1.3 Nature and Invention – According to Maruyama, modern thinking first emerged in OGYŪ Sorai (1666-1728), a Zhu Xi neo-Confucian thinker in the middle Tokugawa period. Traditional Zhu Xi neo-Confucianism had a strong tendency to see the existing social system as a given by the natural order. Its theory functioned not as a "revolutionary principle directed against the concrete social order"[14] but as an "ideology guaranteeing the permanence of the existing social order."[15]

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[14] Maruyama Masao, Studies, 199.
[15] Ibid., 199.

This ideology was useful in the justification of the reign of the Tokugawa Shogunate, at least in the early period. In the middle Tokugawa period, however, Sorai's idea of "autonomous personality" (*shutaiteki jinkaku*)[16] appeared. The feudal social order then was becoming less and less stable. Accordingly, Sorai, as an adviser of the eighth Tokugawa Shogun, attempted to restore it through a re-invention of the Shogun. Sorai regarded the existing social order not as a given by the natural order, but as invented *ex-nihilo* by the legendary Chinese sages, and by analogy with them, the real rulers such as Shoguns. The sages are the very "producers of order out of absolute disorder"[17] and "[b]efore the sages' invention there was nothing [normative]; after it, everything."[18] Thus, Sorai believed that the social system was invented by autonomous personalities.

Observing the intellectual history of modern Europe, Maruyama argues that Sorai's idea of autonomous personality marked the emergence of modern thinking in Japan. In the transition period from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, Maruyama claimed the emergence of the "discovery of man."

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[16] Ibid., 207

[17] Ibid., 212.

[18] Ibid., 212.

> The discovery of man does not mean recognizing the existence of man as an object, but that man began to be conscious of his autonomy. Until then, man had fatalistically accepted the various social systems into which he had to fit. But now he found himself in a position to establish or abolish these systems freely according to his own will and ideas.[19]

In this regard, Maruyama thinks that the social contract theory is a full-fledged form of the theory of invention because "the theory that men as agents with free will invent the social order applies to every individual."[20] In this light, Sorai's idea is not completely modern in that only the legendary sages and the real rulers such as Shoguns had autonomy. Nevertheless, Sorai's theory of autonomous personality witnessed the birth of modern thinking in Japan in that it discovered autonomy in human beings.

However, the problem is that the lingering effects of the notion of "nature" have always hampered the growth of the ideas of "invention." For example, Andō Shōeki, an anti-Confucian social philosopher,

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[19] Ibid., 226.
[20] Ibid., 231.

situated the concept of nature as the ideal agriculture-based society prior to the emergence of what Sorai called the "sages' invention." Engaging in agriculture, Shōeki lived together with peasants and witnessed the harsh reality of the feudal society, in which the warrior class exploited peasants and collected the heavy land tax without cultivating the soil. Shōeki attributed this unfairness to the sages' invention of the feudal social order. Thus, he claimed that Japanese society should return to the agriculture-based *natural* society prior to the sage's *invention*. However, because of his denial of invention, Maruyama argues that Shōeki could not show the way towards realizing such an ideal society. According to Shōeki's logic, we can only wait for it to come, but not invent it.

MOTOORI Norinaga, a theorist of National Learning (*kokugaku*), strongly criticized Sorai's version of neo-Confucianism. In traditional neo-Confucianism, the principle of nature was supposed to be embodied in the social norms and thereby governed human life—not only external behaviors but also inner sentiments—from inside. However, in Sorai's theory of invention, the social norms were cut off from nature because Sorai based the norms on the sages' invention. As a result, it followed that all people have to do is to adjust their external behavior to fit external norms regardless of what they may feel

inside. Thus, Sorai's idea separated the human inner realm from the sociopolitical realm.

Norinaga placed absolute value on this human inner sphere as "nature." However, this emphasis on human sentiments as natural led to his total indifference to political participation and then passive obedience to the status quo. From Norinaga's standpoint, we cannot claim that we ought to return to nature because this claim itself is normative.

Thus, the concept of "invention" represents a point of view that we can and should change the existing social system with our own will. On the other hand, the concept of "nature" represents a fatalistic point of view which regards the existing social system as a given by the natural order and an unchangeable fate. The story which Maruyama tried to tell through these concepts was that "modern thinking" based on the notion of "invention" was already born in the Tokugawa period but its growth was always hindered by pre-modern thinking governed by the laws of "nature."

2. The "Overcoming Modernity" Debate from the Perspective of Technology

2.1 The "Overcoming Modernity" Symposium – The "Overcoming Modernity" debate has often been regarded as an ultra-nationalistic movement. However, many researches have shown, especially since the 1980's,

that the participants in the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium were not mere ultra-nationalists. The problem here is not whether they were nationalists, but what made them nationalists.

Let me explain the fundamentals of the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium. As I said earlier, the symposium was held under the auspices of a literary magazine "*Bungakukai*"[21] (Literary World) in July 1942, gathering thirteen Japanese intellectuals:

Literary critic	KAMEI Katsuichirō, KAWAKAMI Tetsutarō, KOBAYASHI Hideo, NAKAMURA Mitsuo
Novelist	HAYASHI Fusao
Philosopher	NISHITANI Keiji, SHIMOMURA Toratarō
Historian	SUZUKI Shigetaka
Theologian	YOSHIMITSU Yoshihiko
Poet	MIYOSHI Tatsuji
Music composer	MOROI Saburō
Movie critic	TSUMURA Hideo
Physicist	KIKUCHI Seishi

The participants did not actually discuss the war. For example, they did not talk about how to fight the war or how to justify the military activities of Imperial Japan. They discussed more about the Renaissance, modern science, their own experience

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[21] This magazine is still running and one of the five most authoritative literary magazines in Japan. Kobayashi Hideo and Hayashi Fusao, who are also the participants in the debate, were the central figures who launched the magazine. Kawakami was a chief editor between 1936 and 1943. Kamei was a frequent contributor to it.

of modernity, music, movies, etc. Therefore, at least superficially, it is difficult to assume that the debate was meant to be such a grandiose and stirring propaganda for the aggressive war.

Kawakami, the chairman of the symposium, said that the symposium resulted in "chaos" and "breakdown" because, in this sense, the participants failed to justify the war. Takeuchi Yoshimi, who reissued the record of the symposium in 1979, together with his own essay, describes the debate as "ideologically empty" and says ironically:

> It seems to me that the biggest legacy of the "Overcoming Modernity" debate lies in the fact that it failed to establish an ideology for the war and fascism, and that despite its attempt at the formation of an ideology; it actually ended with the loss of ideology.[22]

This "chaos" and "breakdown" resulted from the opposition between the Japan Roman School (*Nihon Rōman Ha*) and the Kyoto School (*Kyōto Gakuha*). Takeuchi classified some of the participants into three groups based on their ideological tendency: the Japan Roman School, the Kyoto School, and the "Bungakukai" group.

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[22] Kawakami, Kindai no chōkoku, 288.

According to Takeuchi, Kamei belongs to the Japan Roman School, but the true representative of this school is YASUDA Yojūrō, who was scheduled to attend the symposium but could not for personal reasons. Nishitani and Suzuki belong to the Kyoto school. Kawakami, Nakamura and Shimomura belong to the "Bungakukai" group. Kobayashi is nothing more than a nominal member of the "Bungakukai" group because his standpoint was much closer to that of the Japan Roman School, at least at that time. However, the criterion of this classification is unclear. Takeuchi did not even explain what ideological trait each group has. For example, what he called the "Bungakukai" group played almost no role in the debate. Kawakami did not actively join the debate because he was the chairman. Nakamura remained almost silent throughout the symposium and Shimomura was, in fact, a Kyoto School philosopher. Therefore, we can think that in essence the debate was fought between the Japan Roman School and the Kyoto School.

To put it briefly, while the Kyoto School philosophers aimed at a construction of a theory to overcome modernity, the Japan Roman School literary critics refused to recognize theoretical constructions, considering them as manifestations of a modern way of thinking. The Kyoto School

philosophers attempted to devise a new world-historical principle as an alternative to the Euro-centered notion of modern world history. In this sense, the summary that Maruyama gave as the common perspective of the "Overcoming Modernity" debate is in fact that of the Kyoto School:

> The common perspective of these "We shall overcome" theorists was that a great turning point in world history had been reached; the whole world of modernity which had been created by the "advanced nations" collapsing loudly about their ears. A completely new civilization was about to be born.[23]

On the other hand, the Japan Roman School refused such an "inventive" enterprise because it is nothing more than variations of modern Western ways of thinking. Hiromatsu Wataru, the most brilliant Marxist philosopher in post-war Japan, argues that "for them, presenting a new theory, practically seeking a new way of social organization, etc., such an attitude should be overcome precisely because it still remains in the framework of the modern Western way of thinking."[24] As I will discuss

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[23] Maruyama Masao, Studies, xxx.

[24] Hiromatsu Wataru, "Kindai no Chōkoku" ron [On the "Overcoming Modernity"] (Tokyo: Kōdansha,1989), 200.

later, Karatani Kōjin calls this attitude of the literary critics "aesthetics."

2.2 *Technology in Kyoto School* – The "Overcoming Modernity" symposium has always been linked to another set of symposia in the 1940's: "The Standpoint of World History and Japan" (*Sekaishiteki Tachiba to Nippon,* hereafter SWHJ). In addition to Nishitani and Suzuki, who also participated in the "Overcoming Modernity" symposium, Kōsaka Masaaki and Kōyama Iwao took part in the SWHJ symposium. They are all Kyoto School philosophers; although, to be exact, Suzuki is a historian greatly influenced by the Kyoto school of philosophy.

The purpose of the symposium was to criticize the ideologies that supported the Western-centered picture of world history and to discuss a totally new civilizational principle that allows Japan to engage in the making of world history. In other words, they attempted to understand Japan as an embodiment of *Weltgeist* in a Hegelian sense. In their understanding, the Western met the Eastern in Japan for the first time in world history, and therefore Japan is a place in which the Western and the Eastern contradict each other. This contradiction must be "sublated" into a new unification. They thought that only Japan, as the place of contradiction, could give such a new unifying principle of world history.

In the SWHJ discussion, they take the problem of machine civilization as one of the crises to be overcome. For example, Suzuki says:

> After all, the problem is that, while science will continue to make progress, there will continue to be a discrepancy in the relationship between the progress of the civilization and the human inner soul. The machine civilization pertains to the environment outside humans. The civilization makes the impossible possible, but still, it is nothing but a civilization about the external environment and therefore I think it is irrelevant to a true human inner soul. This dissociation and disharmony between the internal and the external is becoming more and more intense in our time. We can say a spiritual crisis of our time lies in this.[25]

In relation to this point, Kōsaka presents a solution. While he admits that the European spirit has its own spiritual depth, he argues that such depth is not enough to free us from the dissociation between the internal and the external. He said:

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[25] Kōsaka Masaaki et al., *Sekaishi teki tachiba to nippon* [The Standpoint of World History and Japan] (Tokyo; Chūō Kōron Sha, 1943), 38.

This is a very difficult problem, but I think
we may be able to mediate the depth of the
individuals' soul with the historical depth of
the nation's soul. Though this sounds
paradoxical, we can say a modern total war is
the very product of machine civilization, but
at the same time, conversely, we can think it
is an agony in which the national subjectivity
tries to put mechanical organizations under
control. If we can think in this way, I think
we may be able to escape from a dissociation
with machine civilization by discovering the
substance of the individuals' ethical life in
the historical practice of the nation.[26]

In the "Overcoming Modernity" Symposium,
Shimomura Toratarō expresses a similar idea in a
more understandable way:

The problem here is, needless to say, the
concept of soul. One of the characteristics
of the Christian idea is their understanding
of soul as the internal. The new soul is
external only to this sort of traditional soul.
An ancient soul is a soul as opposed to its
body. In the present age, however, a body in

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[26] Ibid., 42

this simple sense does not exist in reality. A
body in the present age is an organism that
has machines as its organs in some way or
the other. The tragedy of modernity lies in
that outmoded souls failed to catch up with
this "new body." This is why we need a new
metaphysics for this new body and mind. A
body in the present age became more huge
and precise. The method of ancient
psychology such as inner resolution and
personal training is not sufficient for this
new body. It requires sociopolitical, and
furthermore, national methods. Not only
that, it also requires even a new theology.[27]

It goes without saying that this "new body" means
machine civilization. Shimomura focuses not on
machines themselves but the souls that create
machines. From his viewpoint, machines are not
irrelevant or external to our souls. Rather, we have
machines as part of our body in a broader sense.
Therefore, the problem is that our obsolete souls
failed to adapt themselves to such a new body. In
ancient times, human beings developed various
methods to control their body. But the more

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[27] Kawakami, *Kindai no chōkoku*, 116

technologically expanded their body, the less effective the ancient methods were in taming this body. Therefore, we need more expanded "sociopolitical" or even "national" methods in order to control it.

Thus, what the Kyoto School philosophers have in common is the idea that the fragmentation between the internal and the external, mind and body, soul and machine can be solved through the national control of technology. However, at the same time, they thought that the principle for this national control cannot be found in modern European ideologies. What has brought about the fragmentation is nothing other than European principles such as liberalism, rationalism and capitalism, etc. Of course, they would not completely abandon modern civilization because their philosophical confidence came from the conviction that Japan is the only place where the West-East contradiction is sublated into a totally new unification. If they simply abandoned Western modernity, such a dialectical process could not occur. Accordingly, they did not attempt to return to Japanese ancient tradition in its purest form, but to establish, so to speak, a "Japanese" modernity as a synthesis of East and West.

2.3 The "Aesthetics" of the Japan Roman School – On the other hand, the Japan Roman School and its followers have a strong tendency to refuse any act of theorizing as a

manifestation of modern Western attitudes. This is why Hiromatsu regarded their discourses as "theoretical chaos"[28] and placed more value on the Kyoto School than on the Japan Roman School. Recently his preference for the Kyoto School has been criticized. For example, Sugawara Jun insists that the philosophical importance of the Japan Roman School deserves more attention.[29] However, Hiromatsu did not completely dismiss the significance of the Japan Roman School in the debate. He properly noticed the fanatic emotion or passion behind its discourses: or more precisely, a sense of resignation and despair and warped spiritual awakening, which resulted in the refusal of any theorizing.

Yasuda Yojūrō, a central figure of the Japan Roman School, insisted that contemporary Japanese literature was caught in the logic of bureaucrats. According to him, it was nothing but "the logic of the civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmeikaika no ronri*).[30] The Japanese government during the Meiji period imposed Western civilization on the people. He called this from-above character "the logic

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[28] Hiromatsu, "Kindai no Chōkoku" ron, 201.

[29] See Sugawara Jun, "Kindai no Chōkoku" Saikō [The "Overcoming Modernity" Revisited] (Kyoto: Kōyō Shobō, 2011).

[30] See Yasuda Yojūrō, Yasuda Yojūrō Bunko 7: Bungaku no Tachiba [Yasuda Yojūrō Library 7: The Standpoint of Literature] (Kyoto: Shingakusha, 1999), 7-18.

of civilization and enlightenment." As an ex-
Marxist he thought that Marxism also has the same
from-above character, as seen in the fact that the
Communist Party had controlled the proletarian
literature movement. Thus, he thoroughly refused any
bureaucratic from-above control. However, his extreme
position led him to a sort of aesthetic attitude towards
death. He saw the supreme strength and beauty of
human souls in the act of self-sacrifice for the sake
of one's own country, neither for earthly interests
nor due to coercion.

This desperate attitude is also seen in Kamei
Katsuichirō. He had recognized that "we are the ones
being conquered by machines rather than the other
way around." Furthermore, it should be noted that
he often uses the expression of "natural compulsive
force" (*shizenteki no kyōseiryoku*) in order to
characterize the modern machine civilization. He
wrote in the essay that he submitted for the
"Overcoming Modernity" symposium:

> The heavy pressure of civilization which
> weighed on us with an almost natural
> compulsive force, machinism, all its diseases
> and the breakdown which it has caused, the
> self-destruction of immoderate human
> beings, whether we shall perish or there is

still some salvation, these are the wars
hidden behind the World War this time.[31]

His dystopian view of the world results from an
image of "nature." Machines that we "invented"
become the second "nature" and attacked us with the
furious rage of nature. We cannot escape this
dialectical structure of reality, whatever material
things we may invent. In this reality, only the
aesthetics of death substantiates the sublimity of
human souls. Therefore, hinting his antipathy to a
national educational policy, he also says:

> It is only natural that it has been thought
> that the spirit of the classics in our country
> is the best remedy against the poison of
> civilization. However, what is important is
> how to use the remedy…Once you think
> you might be saved, even get a little closer to
> the Gods, Buddha, or the great sages of old,
> you will begin to become depraved. For the
> divine sutras and the ancient classics do not
> exist for our relief but for our restless
> struggles. They are the products of the
> strictest souls that give us the ultimate

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[31] Kawakami, Kindai no chōkoku, 16.

teaching by pushing us away into the infinite
hell...They teach that only self-sacrifice can
prove what our future will be.[32]

By "the poison of civilization" he means the
harmful effects of modern machine civilization on
human spirits. After all, for him, the aesthetics of
self-sacrifice is the only way to release human spirits
from the vicious circle of human alienation.

Karatani Kōjin[33] argues that one of the
characteristics of the "Overcoming Modernity"
debate is the indifference to the problem of
technology. According to Karatani, this attitude
comes from the "aesthetic" attitude of the
participants. From the standpoint of aesthetics,
beauty should be explored through the rejection of
actual interests in the real world. Therefore, their
aesthetic attitude results in a sort of apolitical attitude.
Accordingly, they are basically indifferent to the
problem of modern technology that is filled with too
many interests in the real world. For them, the beauty
of human spirits *should* be foreign to a technology
full of actual interests.

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[32] Ibid., 16
[33] See Karatani Kōjin, "Senzen" no Shikō ["Pre-War" Thought] (Kōdansha, 2001), 99-128.

The "Overcoming Modernity" debate is closely connected with the problem of technology and human alienation. The Kyoto School philosophers attempted to establish a new principle that can overcome the problem of human alienation through the national control of technology. At the same time, however, they equated modernity with the West and therefore had to "overcome" modern principles such as liberalism, rationalism, capitalism, and others. Because they thought that Japan was the place where the West-East contradiction will be sublated into a new unification, they tried to establish "Japanese" modernity as a synthesis of West and East.

Such synthesis in a universal guise was in fact nationalistic and imperialistic. Nevertheless, they thought that the national control of technology should be based on it. On the other hand, the Japan Roman School subscribed to an aesthetic of self-sacrifice. This aesthetic attitude comes from a sense of resignation, despair, and a warped self-awakening. What was behind this desperation is also the problem of human alienation, that is, machines which humans have created inversely control them. They felt that there is no escaping this vicious circle. Accordingly, for them, the only hope is that humans show the sublimity of their spirits through the act of self-sacrifice.

3. Maruyama's Reaction to the "Overcoming Modernity" Debate

3.1 *The Possibility* – If we take into consideration the technological aspect of the "Overcoming Modernity" debate, what problem and possibility does Maruyama's defense of modernity have? The problem is clear: basically he overlooked the problem of technology that the "Overcoming Modernity" advocates had to face in the real world.

Maruyama, however, did not completely ignore the problem of technology. Though his point of view in technology was not developed enough, he writes in one of his diaries:

> In what sense *am* I, or do I want to be, a socialist? First, it is because I am against nationalism—any trends in which a nation absorbs societies and the individuals. Socialism is essentially international and it should be a principle that is not limited to the *so-called* socialist states. It is the principle for a cosmopolitan rather than international solidarity.
>
> Second, the swelling of modern technologies and organizations as well as the complication of social interrelationships can no longer be dealt with by bourgeois individualism.

Planned production and distribution are indispensable in order to keep the socialization of production to the principle of irresponsible or fundamental pursuit of profits. While bourgeois individualism is responsible to the formal organizational evil of a nation (or bureaucrats), it is insensitive to the organizational evil that grows in a society. Modern huge industries are clearly totalitarian and based on a leader-centered principle. While it is authoritative as an organization, it demands irresponsible freedom from the consumerist members of other societies.

However, the second point subordinates the first. Therefore, from this standpoint, "national-socialism" is more dangerous than individualism. Socialism must be "individual-socialism." Planning should only be approved if it serves the dignity of each individual.[34]

Muruyama was sometimes criticized for his sympathetic attitude toward socialism and communism. It is probably for that reason that he asked himself

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[34] Maruyama Masao, *Jikonai Taiwa*, 247-248.

the above-mentioned questions. It is not that actually he was, or wanted to be, a *so-called* socialist.

Maruyama's viewpoint here, is in a sense, similar to that of the Kyoto School philosophers because both insist on the control of modern technologies and industries in some way or the other. As I have argued, the Kyoto School philosophers insisted that technology should be put under national control. In this light, their standpoint is partly similar to socialism or communism. This is because the Kyoto School philosophers, left or right, have come to be influenced by Marxism since the latter half of the 1920's. In fact, Nishida Kitarō, the founder of the Kyoto School, produced not only nationalistic philosophers but also many talented Marxist philosophers such as Tosaka Jun. This is how even the right-wing Kyoto School philosophers could not ignore Marxism. Instead, the rightists regarded it as the ultimate form of Western modernity and attempted to establish a totally new unification by overcoming Marxism. However, because the true nature of this new unification is nothing more than an ultra-nationalistic and totalitarian one, their attempt ended with an ideological justification for Japan's total war.

The difference is that Maruyama tried to base the control of technologies on what he called "individual-socialism." Since he does not clearly define the term as "bourgeois individualism" and "individual-socialism", it is not certain what he was trying to say here. Nevertheless, we can surmise that he tried to think about the democratic control of technological activities. As I quoted earlier, Shimomura Toratarō insisted on the need for a totally new sociopolitical method to domesticate machines as our new expanded body. Shimomura and the other Kyoto School philosophers thought that this new sociopolitical method should become national in scale. However, Maruyama clearly opposes this direction. For him, such a new sociopolitical method should be based on individualism, not on nationalism.

It may be a little strange that he criticized "bourgeois individualism" and in the next breath, proposed "individual-socialism." The problem is what the modifier "bourgeois" implies. We may be able to interpret it in relation to the standpoint of Norinaga and the Japan Roman School. According to Maruyama, Norinaga took advantage of the separation between the public and the private that Sorai's idea of invention brought about. This public-private dichotomy is itself a prerequisite for modern individualism. But Norinaga put an overemphasis on

private inner sentiments because he regarded such inner sentiments as truly "natural." From his standpoint, any social norm that humans "invented" is unnatural and any activities related to the "invention" of social institutions is also unnatural. Thus, he refused any "invention" and withdrew from the public sphere into the private sphere. This attitude is almost similar to that of the Japan Roman School and its followers.

The Japan Roman School literary critics had a strong tendency to refuse any theorizing because such an active attitude is itself nothing more than a manifestation of the modern way of thinking. In the vocabulary of Maruyama, we can say that they refused any modern "invention" and withdrew into the aesthetics of "nature." Thus, we can conclude that for Maruyama this was the very consequence of "bourgeois" individualism.

If this is the case, we can say that what he called "individualism" without the modifier "bourgeois" means a democratic viewpoint that each individual actively engages in "invention" of social systems. He tries to expand this viewpoint even to technological activities. Though I am hesitant to conclude this, Maruyama's viewpoint here is clearly similar to the standpoint of the democratic rationalization of

technology that Andrew Feenberg has proposed.[35] In this point we can see the possibility of Maruyama's modernist idea to the problem of modern technologies.

3.2 The Problem – Nevertheless, there is a clear limitation to Maruyama's standpoint: after all, he did not try to argue about the problem of technology as a main theme. Of course, this is partly due to his specialty. His focus as a researcher was on the intellectual history of Japan. Therefore, if we harshly criticize him too much for his relative indifference to the problem of technology, it would be like "crying for the moon," a longing for the impossible. However, there is another reason for his belittlement of technology: his reduction of modernity to "modern thinking."

Koyasu Nobukuni points out a problem in Maruyama's reaction to the "Overcoming Modernity" debate in relation to his idealization of modernity. According to Koyasu, there is a sharp contrast between Maruyama and Horkheimer as well as Adorno. To put it plainly, while Horkheimer and Adorno criticized modernity itself in order to resist

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[35] Andrew Feenberg, Between Reason and Experience (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 2010).

fascism, Maruyama defended modernity and accused the immaturity of modernity in Japan. Based on this line of thought, Koyasu recognizes that Maruyama sees the origin of the error and the traps of modernism. Maruyama's modernist discourse had been formed as a counter-argument to the fascistic tendencies of the advocates of "Overcoming Modernity". Accordingly, in order to cope with the debate, Maruyama had to idealize modernity. As a result, his modernism could not respond to the actual problems of modernity which the "Overcoming Modernity" advocates astutely pointed out. Koyasu argues:

> It is through the replacement of the question of "modernity" with the question of whether "modern thinking" is mature or immature that the "modernistic" discourse has been constituted. In the discourse, however, the notion of "modernity" in the so called "modern world order" was not questioned. The "modernism" does not have a point of view to question and denounce "modernity" itself.[36]

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[36] Koyasu Nobukuni, Nihon Kindai Shisō Hihan [A Critique of Modern Japanese Thoughts] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 244-245

He does not explain thoroughly what he actually means by "modern world order." It seems to me that he means the world order that the modern European states have established based on the ideology of the nation-state, but it is not important here. What is important is that the idealization of modernity may have led Maruyama to dismiss the type of modernity that exists in reality.

Mindful of Maruyama's intellectual position, Julia Adeney Thomas argues that "[w]hile Japan was not a liberal modernity, a democratic modernity (except in the most limited formal sense of universal male suffrage by 1925), or, by any means, a leftist modernity, it achieved modernity nonetheless."[37] According to her, what is behind the conception of modernity is the concept of "Nature" in the singular. She invoked the "Dialectic of Enlightenment" as Koyasu did.

While pointing out the stark contrast between Maruyama's position on the one hand, and Horkheimer and Adorno on the other hand, she also pointed out a fundamental similarity between them in that they regarded modernity as transcending nature.

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[37] Julia Adeney Thomas, Reconfiguring Modernity: Concepts of Nature in Japanese Political ideology (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), 224.

In addition, she argues that "most modern left and liberal theorists, especially in the early and mid-twentieth century, were highly skeptical of any reliance on nature in political thought."[38] However, as her detailed research demonstrates, even in Japan the ideas concerning nature are too diverse. They should not be conflated together as a singular theory of nature. Therefore, she proposes to give up thinking of modernity as a monolithic and universal phenomenon. Instead, modernity should be understood in its plurality: "Reconfiguring multiple concepts of nature, as I came to realize, meant recognizing multiple forms of modernity."[39]

The criticism of Koyasu and Thomas suggests that Maruyama, because of his idealization of modernity, overlooked modernity as a "historical experience." Thomas says:

> "[w]hat unites different forms of modernity around the globe is the shared experience of the dissolution of the old "cosmopolis", the fundamental relationship between nature and society, followed by its conscious reconstruction in a different pattern."[40]

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[38] Ibid., 20.

[39] Ibid., x.

[40] Ibid, 28

In the "Overcoming Modernity" debate, there was a sense of the "dissolution of the old 'cosmopolis.'" Then, what brought about such dissolution? Koyasu would say it was the Euro-centered world order based on the ideology of the nation-state. I did not take this direction.

I focused on the problem of modern technology and human alienation as a historical experience of the dissolution. In order to point out the pre-modern character of pre-war Japan, Maruyama said sarcastically:

> "*vide* the fact that the technological capacity to produce first-class battleships coexisted with, was mutually supportive with, the national myth, the *pre*-twentieth myth, that Japan's rulers had been designated in perpetuity by edict of Sun-Goddess Amaterasu."[41]

We can say that Maruyama criticized the "pre-twentieth myth" by "replacing the question of 'modernity' with the question of whether 'modern thinking' is mature or immature." On the other hand, however, he left almost untouched the problem of

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[41] Maruyama Masao, Studies, xxxii.

modernity as "the technological capacity to produce first-class battleships."

Conclusion

In this paper, I showed that Maruyama basically overlooked the technological aspect of the "Overcoming Modernity" debate because he reduced the problem of modernity to that of "modern thinking." Behind this reduction were various political issues such as Japan's war and the anti-Anpo movement [42] in the 1960's. In such situations, political democratization was the most urgent task.

On the other hand, however, when we give a thought to the Fukushima nuclear incident, we cannot help but feel that the problem of the democratic control of technologies has been left almost untouched behind various conspicuous political issues. Upon reflection, the concept of "invention" is more fitting for technological activities. In this sense, Maruyama is using this concept through a metaphorical projection from the technical realm to the political realm. Nevertheless, he limited its coverage within the political

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[42] Anpo is a shortened form in Japanese language for Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. There was a fierce campaign against the conclusion of this treaty in the 1960's. Maruyama played an important role in this campaign as an opinion leader. The ruling party (Liberal Democratic Party) rammed the legal approval of this treaty through a forced passage of a bill, physically removing sit-down Socialists. Because many Japanese people thought that this was the destruction of democracy, this movement became more and more intensified.

realm and understood "invention" almost only as a sort of mental attitude, or modern "thinking." This is one of the reasons that he did not seriously take up the problem of technology despite the affinity of his ideas with technology.

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