

Between Heaven and the People: The Conceptual History of *Kōron*

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Abstract

Article one of the Charter Oath reads ‘deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by *kōron*’. The term, *kōron*, which appears in the oath has played an important role in the political and intellectual history of Japan. The purpose of this paper is to trace a trajectory of the concept of *kōron*, which cannot be simply reduced to words such as public opinion or public discussion. For this purpose, I deploy German conceptual history methodologically as well as the history of ideas in Japan. This research aims to shed light on the semantic plurality within this concept, through which it provides a new insight into studies in modern Japanese political and intellectual history.

Through this research, it turned out that the concept of *kōron* had undergone several semantic transformations: *Kōron* was originally conceptualised as a Confucian normative discourse and then became a political ideology. Later, it was sometimes understood as public opinion and other times as a just opinion against public opinion. *Kōron* was sometimes used to express one’s moral belief and other times deployed as a rationale to gather people’s voice, and still at other times as a pretext to attack one’s enemies. Though *kōron* certainly has an undemocratic aspect, the possibility that *kōron* coincides with democracy, that the philosophy of Yokoi Shōnan and Nakae Chōmin partly unveiled, subsists in the plurality of its conceptualisation.

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Introduction

On 14th March 1868, one day before the forces of the Meiji government launched an assault on Edo, the Meiji Emperor (1852-1912) swore the Charter Oath (*Gokajō no goseimon*, 五箇条の御誓文) in the Hall for State Ceremonies (*Shishinden*, 紫宸殿) in the form of swearing an oath to the gods of heaven and earth. Comprised of five articles, the document expounded upon the Meiji government's national policy. A brief but highly influential document, it was cited nearly eighty years later in the so-called Humanity Declaration of 1946. In other words, it represents one of the most important documents in modern Japanese history. Article one of the oath reads 'deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by *kōron*' (*Hiroku kaigi wo okoshi banki kōron ni kessubeshi*, 広く会議を興し、万機公論に決すべし). The purpose of this paper is to trace a trajectory of the concept of *kōron* (公論), which cannot be simply reduced to words such as public opinion or public discussion. This research aims to shed light on the semantic plurality within this concept, through which it provides a new insight to studies in modern Japanese political and intellectual history.

Kōron was a term used by Confucians during the Edo period. This word carried moral meanings such as selflessness and fairness. Nonetheless, it did not connote political power or authority since Confucianism did not take charge of politics in Japan unlike dynasties in China and Korea. Instead, samurai seized power and the shogunate was secured by the authority of the shogun and the emperor. Yet, this authority dissipated after the arrival of the American vessels led by Matthew Perry (1794-1858) in 1853. The regime lost its grip on power as dissatisfaction mounted over its failure to address the growing threat posed by Western imperialism. During the political turmoil, *kōron* came to be used as a new political norm. The semantic transformation at this time can be characterised by politicisation and ideologisation: *Kōron* functioned as a political norm while also serving as a mechanism to justify individual speech and deeds. One could denounce one's foe or even justify resorting to violence under the pretext of following *kōron*. The Meiji government, established in 1868, could not ignore the influence of *kōron* since this concept engendered political legitimacy deriving from its moral values. Thus, the authorities attempted to harness the concept and deploy it in service of their objectives.

During the Meiji period, the concept of 'public opinion' came into Japan. Originally, public opinion was translated as *kōron*. Though *kōron* could mean opinions of the people, it did not necessarily semantically correspond to public opinion because *kōron* had another meaning of a just opinion coming from 'Heaven' (Ch. *Tian* 天 Jp. *Ten*). Hence, public opinion was eventually transliterated into *yoron* (輿論), a term not associated with Confucian morality. The concepts of *kōron* and *yoron* were both used with the aim of

establishing a parliament and constitution, while under these circumstances, the semantic distinction between *kōron* and *yoron*, public opinion, became blurred. Yet, *kōron* was sometimes used as a rationale to criticise *yoron* despite their semantic affinity. Consequently, the concept of *kōron* held great political influence in Japan, with its definition expanding into the semantic ambiguity between ‘Heaven’ and ‘people’

Another semantic transformation took place after World War II: The Charter Oath was reconceptualised as a declaration of democracy. As a result, the concept of *kōron* came to be associated with democracy and its connection with Confucianism further diminished. At the same time, however, *kōron*’s reconceptualization as a democratic concept necessitates reconciling decidedly its undemocratic aspect with its new democratic connotation.

Chapter 1 Conceptual History Methodology and Japan

This paper traces the historical formation and development of *kōron*. For this purpose, it is necessary to examine succinctly the conceptual history methodology and its applicability in Japan. Conceptual history here refers to the *Begriffsgeschichte*, formulated by German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006). Yet, the Anglo-Saxon approach to political thought – within which Quentin Skinner (1940-) and John Pocock (1924-) are the renowned scholars for this approach – is also taken into consideration. Moreover, similar research has been conducted in Japan without using the conceptual history approach. In terms of methodology, this paper aims to incorporate the *Begriffsgeschichte*'s insight into the Japanese academic tradition of investigating the semantic change of words.

Conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) was established as a methodology in 20th-century Germany, with Reinhart Koselleck as its major contributor. Niklas Olsen wrote an excellent study in English about Koselleck's life, research methods, and ideas.¹ Conceptual history demarcates itself from previous similar studies in that it criticises traditional methods of analysing the formation of concepts as they focused only on important thinkers. Alternatively, Koselleck emphasised the necessity of understanding philosophical concepts in relation to their political, social, and economic contexts.² His awareness of these theoretical issues resulted in an epoche-making project, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.³

The novelty of conceptual history formulated by Koselleck can be found in its inter-disciplinary approach. According to Koselleck, a concept is not limited to the linguistic sphere but it reflects its historical experience of social, political, and economic change to its meanings. Therefore, it is a historical structure, not influential thinkers, that plays a significant role to transform a word into a concept. Conceptual history does not, however, adopt a diachronic approach. It is more precisely understood as history that presupposes “the connection between synchronic events and diachronic structure,” and investigates that connection utilising linguistic methods.⁴

One essential part of conceptual history is the definition of ‘concept’. Concerning this, Koselleck mentioned as follows.

A word can be unambiguous in use due to its ambiguity. The concept, on the other

¹ See, Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck*.

² See, Koselleck, ‘Einleitung’, pp. XIII-XXVII.

³ *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. Brunner, Otto, Conze, Werner, and Koselleck, Reinhart. Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1972

⁴ Koselleck, ‘Social History and Conceptual History’, pp. 318-319.

hand, must retain multiple meanings in order to be a concept. The concept is tied to a word, but it is at the same time more than the word. According to our method, a word becomes a concept, when the full richness of a social and political context of meaning, in which, and for which, a word is used, is taken up by the word. Concepts are thus concentrations of multiple meanings.⁵

Thus, a concept is inseparable from a word but possesses plural meanings. A word needs to include the social and political contexts into itself to be a concept. When its meaning is put enough into the word in such a manner, the social and political situation for using this word is reflected onto its meaning. This indicates that there is a social or political conflict regarding the meaning in the difference between a concept and a word. Moreover, as Olsen already pointed out, Koselleck regards a concept as a category to recognise history as such, and in this sense, his methodology is influenced by the Kantian tradition.⁶

Furthermore, Koselleck presented four hypotheses regarding the methodology, namely, democratisation, temporalisation, ideologisation, and politicisation of a concept. Amongst them, ideologisation and politicisation of a concept would require some reformulation. Although Koselleck argued that ideologisation and politicisation of a concept occurs, it seems that a concept which is politically, socially, or economically important assumes politicalness and ideology from the beginning. It is so, because a concept that has the meaning based on a certain view of value (*Wertanschauung*) can have conflict within its multiple meanings of the concept, or can compete with other concepts. In other words, these oppositions are political oppositions aimed at establishing the authority and power of the concept as the word. Therefore, when a concept plays a major historical role, it is better to understand that its ideological aspect becomes an ‘acute’ political ideology, such as self-asserting righteousness and condemning an opponent by use of the word.

One aporia of Koselleck’s conceptual history methodology is that it leaves various points theoretically unclear regarding how an appearance or a transformation of a key concept corresponds to a historical phenomenon or a historical structure. In this respect, Koselleck himself was well aware of the problem. He found two phases in history. He wrote ‘the repeatability of the linguistic phenomena and the uniqueness of the sequence of events are what characterize the two temporal structures.’⁷ Sometimes linguistic expressions give meaning to the event belatedly and at other times regulate

⁵ Koselleck, “Einleitung”, p. XXII.

⁶ Olsen, p. 172.

⁷ Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Linguistic Change and the History of Events’, p. 656

recognition of the event in advance. As for this, Koselleck takes the stand of analysing history empirically. Consequently, he adheres to being historian rather than theoretician.

One means to analyse concretely the correspondence between a concept and a historical event is to focus on institutions or declarations, which prepare institutionalisation of the concept. When a concept manifests itself as a social or political institution, it signifies that this concept has come to possess social or political power. For instance, when social associations or political parties with the title of liberty or democracy appear in a country, the concepts of liberty or democracy are functioning as the principal conception of those associations or parties. This institutionalisation of a concept can be considered as one confluence of a concept and a historical phenomenon or structure. Nonetheless, when a concept was institutionalised or put in a declaration, it does not signify the power of the concept was fully absorbed into the principles of the institution or of the declaration. Quite the contrary, it subsists as a latent power to criticise them. Yet, the institutionalisation of a concept is just one reference point to grasp more concretely the correspondence between a concept and a historical event, and thus to answer why such a situation occurred, it is necessary to probe empirically each historical case.

Thus far, the development and the feature of conceptual history with Koselleck as its central figure has been briefly explained. This ambitious methodology has spread within Europe and South America. However, as Kai Vogelsang pointed out, conceptual history in East Asia – or more precisely speaking, in the Chinese character cultural sphere – is not fully accepted as methodology.⁸ The essential problem that arises when applying the concept history method to the study of Japanese history is that similar research has already been conducted in Japan without a methodological connection with German concept history.

One pioneering work related to the word “public” in Japanese is a 1927 article entitled “Waga kuni kindaishi ni okeru seiji ishiki no hassei” 我国近代史に於ける政治意識の発生 (The Formation of Political Awareness in Modern Japanese History), by Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造 (1878-1933). Yoshino argued that the idea of universal justice, *kōdō* 公道 provided a conceptual link between feudalistic indifference to politics and the modern desire for political participation seen in the Freedom and People’s Rights’ Movement.⁹ Yoshino’s work described skilfully the semantic change of *kōdō* and so it is possible to consider his work as one good example of conceptual history in Japan. More recently, a number of Japanese researchers have paid more attention to the history of

⁸ Kai Vogelsang, pp. 12-13.

⁹ Yoshino, pp. 223-290.

words in relation to ideas and culture.¹⁰ They do so because of the fact that modern Japanese vocabulary owes a great amount to translation from the Western vocabulary. This signifies that historical investigation on words and their semantic transitions have been conducted to a considerable degree in Japan. Therefore, in applying the German conceptual history paradigm to Japanese history, those works in Japanese should be taken into consideration.

The most attractive point of conceptual history methodology, as defined above, resides in the capability to educe the various possibilities of the meanings that a concept contains and the oppositions between different meanings. In this paper, this paradigm of conceptual history is *partially* deployed. Hence, focusing on the plurality of the meanings contained in the concept and its political as well as ideological facet, this paper analyses from a new perspective the word *kōron* that was used by Confucian scholars in the Edo period, that frequently appeared as a slogan during the political turmoil towards the end of the Edo period, and that continued to be an important political idea from the Meiji to the post-war periods. Through this research, I aim to present a new perspective in the study of the history of Japanese politics and the Japanese history of political thought during this period.

¹⁰ Yanabu Akira. *Honyakugo seiritsu jijō*. Saitō Tsuyoshi. *Meiji no kotoba: bunmei kaika to nihongo*. Ishida Takeshi. *Nihon no shakai kagaku*.

Chapter 2 *Kōron* during the Edo period

Recent studies demonstrate that the term *kōron*, or *kōgiyōron* (公議輿論) and *kōgi* (公議) as its synonym, came to be used frequently as a political slogan during the turbulent times of the Bakumatsu period (1853-1867).¹¹ Nonetheless, few previous studies have analysed why *kōron* became so widespread as a political slogan during that time. In reality, *kōron* did not just suddenly come into use during the Bakumatsu period but had been already used by Confucians during the Edo period.

The Edo period was a time when Confucianism was relatively widespread in Japan. Confucian intellectuals thrived in every part of the country, and discussions among scholars of various schools took place. They were familiar with the Chinese classics and Confucian scriptures, and also pursued new knowledge from Korea. Various Confucian scholars had already made some references to the idea of *kōron*. This was enabled by the enlargement of cultural networks attendant upon the development of a commodity economy,¹² the improvement of institutions for petitions and remonstrances,¹³ and the discussion in ‘schools established by daimyo (*hankō* 藩校)’ and in private schools.¹⁴ Even in politics, Confucianism came to wield influence. For instance, the fifth shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi 徳川綱吉 (1646-1709) sought to conduct politics based on the Confucian idea of benevolent rule. As such, the spread of *kōron* in Japan based on the development of society and permeation of Confucianism could be affirmed in the Edo period.

However, society during the Edo period was founded on a class system, in which everyone assumed duties and privilege. It was samurai who assumed the helm of state affairs. Their military prestige provided their political legitimacy. Hence Japan was under a military regime from the 12th century and Confucianism was never a state ideology, unlike the case with dynasties in China and Korea. Confucians in the Edo period were rarely in charge of the affairs of the state.¹⁵ No meritocracy through the civil service examination system, which captivated many 18th century French physiocrats, was implemented.¹⁶ The ethos of samurai, which was expressed by phrases such as ‘if the

¹¹ Major contributions to this field are: Osatake, *Ishin zengo ni okeru rikken shisō*; Osakake, *Meijiishin*; Inoue Isao, ‘Bakumatsu ishinki ni okeru ‘*kōgiyōron*’ kannen no shosō’; Bitō, *Edojidai towa nanika*; Mitani, *Meijiishin to nashonarizumu*; Maeda, ‘*Kōron*’; Mitani, *Nihonshi no Naka no ‘fūhen’—hikaku kara kangaeru Meijiishin*.

¹² Miyachi, pp. 133-138.

¹³ See, Mitani Hiroshi, ‘Nihon ni okeru ‘*kōron*’ kansyū no keisei’.

¹⁴ See, Maeda Tsutomu, *Edo no dokushokai*.

¹⁵ Beatrice Bodart-Bailey, p. 314.

¹⁶ For example, François Quesnay (1694-1774), who is known for *Tableau Économique*, highly evaluated the Chinese monarchy. See, Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*.

lord orders, I would not hesitate to behead my parents', was very disparate from the ethic of Confucianism, in which piety to one's parents came to be the primary value.¹⁷ Confucian reason or law (Ch. *Li* 理, Jp. *Li*) was not fully practiced in the samurai world, where the rule of samurai preceded the reason of Confucianism as the saying 'one can defy the reason by obeying the rule, but one ought not to defy the rule by following the reason' well demonstrated. Confucianism was required to bow to the class system and military prestige. Therefore, it was unlikely that politics were conducted under the banner of *kōron*, which was coloured by the Confucian morality.

In order to confirm how the term *kōron* entered in Japan, it is necessary to look at the usages of *kōron* in Chinese classics. In China, the usage of the word *kōron* dates back to the 5th century. It was found in *A New Account of the Tales* (Ch. *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, Jp. *Sesetsu shingo*) written by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403-444). *A New Account of the Tales* became widely popular in Japan during the Edo period and acquired a large number of readers.¹⁸

Furthermore, Zhu Xi 朱子 (1130-1200), a perfecter of neo-Confucianism who held great influence in Japan at that time, also made several references to the idea of *kōron*. For instance, Zhu Xi once said that generals were appointed not following *kōron* of scholar-officials but the private will of eunuchs, and thus he condemned eunuchs' arbitrary use of power.¹⁹ Here, Zhu Xi created the binary opposition between *kōron* of scholar-officials and the private will of eunuchs to support the former and condemn the latter.

The intellectuals of the Edo period were receptive to these texts and developed their own ideas about *kōron*. Although the character of 公 in Japan had a semantic affinity with the state (read as *ōyake* おほやけ), the Confucian concept of *kō* (公) was close to Heaven.²⁰ Such being the case, whilst there were various interpretations amongst Confucianists about the concept of *kōron*, there was a shared understanding that *kōron* was a normative concept. Therefore, *kōron* could manifest itself as a new political norm in the chaotic situation at the end of the shogunate. Maeda Tsutomu has already clarified the discourses on *kōron* by some Japanese Confucians during the Edo period such as Ogyū Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666-1728), Satō Naokata 佐藤直方 (1650-1719), Kumazawa Banzan 熊

¹⁷ Ishii Shirō, p. 205.

¹⁸ Liu, *Sesetsu shingo*, vol. 1, p. 31.

¹⁹ *Shushi gorui*, pp. 262-265.

²⁰ To avoid straying from the aim of this article, I do not dissect the concept of *ōyake*, but it is important to know that this concept differs from the Confucian concept of *kō* and the Western concept of public (publique, Öffentlich). Compared to them, the concept of *ōyake* has a stronger affinity with the state or the emperor.

沢蕃山 (1619-1691), Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627-1705), Kaibara Ekiken 貝原益軒 (1630-1714), Yamaga Sokō 山鹿素行 (1622-1685), and Hosoi Heishū 細井平洲 (1728-1801).²¹

Amongst those Japanese Confucianists, Sokō and Heishū left noteworthy remarks on *kōron*: Sokō, a tactician and a Confucianist, revealed his thoughts on *kōron* in *Takkyō Dōmon* (謫居童問 Dialogue with Children During Banishment), which is a transcript of a lecture to children written in 1668. In this lecture, he argues that ‘*kōgi*’ or ‘*kōron*’ is determined by ‘the world’ or ‘the people’; ‘when it comes to sex, interests, and luxury, they are the things people in the world like, and the way of the saints does not prohibit them. Therefore, they are *kōgi* and *kōron*’.²² Thus, for Sokō, ‘*kōron*’ is considered as something ‘people in the world’ enjoy, and ‘enjoying alone’ should be rejected as a ‘selfish view, conjecture, companionless argument, solitary joy’.²³ It is clear that this discourse is based on *The Mencius*; for Sokō, *kōron* was closely related to the world, and people in the world.

In *Haisho Zanpitsu* (配所残筆 Writing in Exile), written in 1675, Sokō justified his argument that Japan was *chūgoku* (中国, ‘the central country’)²⁴ by saying that ‘this is not my private opinion, but it is *kōron* of the world’.²⁵ Here, it is not necessarily a required condition for the formulation of *kōron* that one’s own discourse is accepted by all the people in the world. What makes *kōron* as *kōron* is the belief in the justness and reasonableness of one’s discourse, and that it will be accepted by people in the world. This subjective normativity was one characteristic of the concept of *kōron*.

Approximately one century later, Heishū expressed a noteworthy thought on *kōron*. He articulated his views in a letter to the lord of the Owari domain in 1787, which is called *Hosoi Jinzaburo Naikō* (細井甚三郎内考):

Politics in secrecy is war politics. [In the past] in order to avoid a leakage of political secrets to the enemy, it was important to keep politics secret. However, this politics is not appropriate for peaceful times like today. Consequently, the politics of today should be carried out in public following the *kōron*. Not solely a lord and chief vassals but everyone who engages in politics should discuss it openly in public. Throughout history all wise rulers have assumed the helm of state affairs

²¹ Maeda, “Kōron”, pp. 52-53.

²² Yamaga, pp. 264-266.

²³ Yamaga, p. 265.

²⁴ Today, the kanji 中国 is used as the abbreviation to describe China, but they literally mean the central country.

²⁵ Yamaga, p. 593.

in this way.²⁶

Politics would not function unless it was based on *kōron*, a moral opinion. Therefore, it was essential for sovereigns and subjects to discuss their interests in a public setting in order to realise a government that was in accordance with *kōron*. The characteristic feature of Heishū's idea of *kōron* is the openness of the forum and discussion. When considering modern democracy and its public nature, the openness emphasised by Heishū is very significant.

On the other hand, it is not certain to what degree everyday people used this word.²⁷ In *Vocabulário da Lingoa de Iapam*, which is a Japanese-Portuguese dictionary published in Nagasaki in 1603 and in 1604, also known as *Nippo Jisho*, there is an item 'Cōron'. This dictionary has approximately 32,000 entries and includes many words used by the people at that time. According to this dictionary, Cōron is 'Contenda de palavras', namely, contention of words. Because this dictionary does not give the kanji, it is not indisputably certain but this Cōron probably signifies 口論, not 公論. This indicates that the word *kōron* 公論 was at least not very familiar amongst the common people who lived at the beginning of the 17th century in the Japanese archipelago.

To summarise, during the Edo period *kōron* was used by Confucians such as Sokō and Heishū. *Kōron* was morally normative, signifying a fair and just opinion. This normativity was subjective due to the lack of distinction between an individual's sincere belief and the universal, objective law of 'Heaven': To be more precise, individuals' inner and mental sincerity and exterior and objective Heaven were integrated by reason, or the Way, so the concept of *kōron* existed in both subjective and objective dimensions. In other words, since one's sincere mind and the law of Heaven existed in correlation in Japanese neo-Confucianism, and since the concept of *kō* was related to Heaven, the concept of *kōron* was subjective and normative.²⁸ As such, the term was used as rhetoric to justify

²⁶ Kitō, pp. 304-307. In the appendix of Kitō's book, the full text of *Hosoi Jinzaburo Naikō* is given, and from pages 222 to 227, Kitō provides an explanation of this text.

²⁷ Ōtsuka, p. 117.

²⁸ This way of accepting *kōron* seems to have been formulated through the unique conception *Ten* in Japan. In both Japan and China, Heaven was thought of as transcendent existence. Still, according to Mizoguchi Yūzō, "the difference between Heaven in Japan and China is as large as comparing it to the Christian god". He asserts that "in Japan from the Bakumatsu to the Meiji period, [...] the so-called pure-self Heaven that I dare say acts as a pretence for transcendent, pure, and infinite selfless 'sincerity' to Heaven is observable. On the other hand in China, such things which belonged to an *individual's* resolution were not claimed *as one Heaven*". In other words, Heaven was understood in Japan not as a principal framework of society or politics but as an existence that one's sincere mind can affect. Because of such understanding, the interpretation arose in Japan that sincerity towards Heaven exists within the emperor. Mizoguchi, p. 114.

one's subjective opinion. As normative ideas are often inexorably deployed *qua* ideological tools to insist on one's legitimacy, *kōron*, too, had to intertwine with its ideological nature, regardless the efforts to delete its arbitrariness with sincerity and selflessness.

It seems that this normativity and its attendant ideological aspect of the concept of *kōron* was shared between the Edo period and the Bakumatsu period. But, in the Bakumatsu period, *kōron* developed with the actual politics of the time and came to function as a powerful slogan like the phrase *Sonnō jōi* 尊王攘夷 (Revere the Emperor and Expel the Barbarians). Consequently, *kōron* assumed a normativity and political ideology in a more intensified manner amidst the political strife in the Bakumatsu period.

Chapter 3 *Kōron* during the Bakumatsu Period

The rise of *kōron* during the Bakumatsu period shook the solid foundation of the governing system that the Tokugawa shogunate created. However, one cause for the rise of *kōron* was, in reality, the political decision of the shogunate. As Fukuchi Genichirō 福地源一郎(1841-1906), who was a vassal of the shogunate and later a journalist, pointed out, the turning point for the sudden rise of *kōron* was when Abe Masahiro 阿部正弘(1819-1857), a Senior Counsellor of the shogunate, asked for opinions from all over the country in 1853 as Japan faced a national crisis caused by the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry's fleet.²⁹

The national peril caused by the threat of the Western powers prompted the authorities to listen to the opinions of those who had originally been excluded from political decisions, although this tendency was emerging even before the arrival of Commodore Perry's expedition.³⁰ Seven years before his arrival, Tokugawa Nariaki 徳川斉昭(1800-1860), the feudal lord of the Mito domain, wrote a letter to Abe in response to the visit of Americans to Uraga and French to Ryukyu. In this letter, Nariaki asked Abe to listen to the opinions of others outside the shogunate. At this moment, 'others' only included daimyo. However, when Abe decided to request opinions from throughout the country including those of ordinary people just after the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853, those people who had been not allowed to participate in politics came to take part in the subsequent political strife beyond the existing political system. Thereafter, *kōron* was no longer limited to the righteousness beliefs of Confucianists but corresponded to actual political processes. Accordingly, *kōron*, on the one hand took on a political ideological aspect to assert the justness of one's opinion, and on the other hand functioned as a driving force to realise politics, which criticised private autocracy and was based on a larger number of people's voices.

This *kōron* as a political ideology also came to function as rhetoric to justify one's violence against an enemy who ignored *kōron*. In 1860, Ii Naosuke, a Chief Minister of the shogunate, was assassinated by feudal retainers of the Mito and Satsuma domains. This was called the Sakuradamongai Incident. The written statement of reasons for this assassination said that Ii was 'bringing disgrace upon the national polity by defiling the military prestige of the divine land from olden times'; he was 'by profiting from the shogun's youth, ignoring *kōron* and just opinions to wield his authority'; and thus deserved death.³¹ In this written statement, 'the national policy' of 'the divine state' of

²⁹ Fukuchi, *Bakufu suibōron*, pp. 20-27.

³⁰ Mitani, *Meiji Ishin to Nashonarizumu*, pp. 246-250.

³¹ *Mito-han shiryō*, vol. 2, pp. 816-817.

Japan is associated with the shogunate, and no intention to denounce the shogunate can be seen. Ii Naosuke was denounced for pursuing his own self-interests and ‘ignoring *kōron* and just opinions to wield his authority’. Here, the logic is that the shogunate is to be respected, but even more, the villainous vassal Ii deserves his violent fate under the pretext of *kōron*. Still, even though murdering a chief vassal in the name of *kōron* did not intend to be a confrontation with the shogunate, it was evident that the prestige of the shogunate was damaged by it. Criticisms that the shogunate was conducting the affairs of state for its own use discredited the shogunate, and the shogunate came to be called *bakufu*.³²

As it turned out that the shogunate was not capable of militarily competing against the Western powers, as a result of which its military prestige dissipated, various people raised their voices to request *kōron* or *kōgiyōron*, which had been oppressed by the shogunate. It was the case with the southwest domains too. Shimazu Hisamitsu 島津久光 (1817-1877), an influential politician of the Satsuma domain, submitted a suggestion for reforming the governmental system to the shogunate on 16 April 1862. He wrote that ‘regarding the foreign affair,’ it is necessary to ‘establish a better ever-lasting governmental system, based on *kōron* of the world, while uniting the court and the shogunate’. Moreover, on 2 May 1862, the Chōshū domain asked the shogunate for the shogun to come to Kyoto, and ‘*kōron* of the world’ was used three times in the petition. Those expressions indicate that the communication from below to above, which had traditionally involved difficulty, was facilitated when backed up by ‘*kōron* of the world’.

The attitude of respect for *kōron* was also seen from the Court. Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視 (1825-1883), a Court noble, exhibited esteem for *kōron* in his proposal written in 1860 on the occasion of the marriage of Kazunomiya, an Imperial princess. The marriage of princess Kazunomiya to the 14th Tokugawa Shogun, Tokugawa Iemochi, was the symbol of the union of the Imperial Court and the shogunate. Iwakura wrote ‘[it is necessary to] first of all, win the hearts of the people and settle what they aspire to, and then establish solemnly the national policy founded upon *yogikōron* 輿議公論³³, otherwise it [the ideal national politics] will not be realised’.³⁴ In other words, even when the Court ‘embellishes the hegemony of the shogunate’ with ‘the authority of the Court’, settling ‘the national policy’ following ‘*yogikōron*’ and appeasing ‘the people of the world’ is the

³² Watanabe Hiroshi clarified that the denomination of *bakufu* was a symbol of emperor-centred historiography based on state Shintoism. This historical view was spread by late Mito fiefdom ideology. Watanabe, pp. 1-5.

³³ *Yōgi* is identical to *yōron*.

³⁴ Iwakura Tomomi *kankei monjo*, p. 142.

first priority.³⁵ Iwakura was keenly aware that the prestige of the shogunate and the authority of the court were no longer strong enough as an ideology to control the country and thus it was impossible to ignore *yoron* and *kōron*.

This respect for *kōron* was also seen in his confidential letter to the emperor, ‘Tenka Isshin Saku Misshosho’ 天下一新策密奏書 in 1866, around the time of the Second Choshu expedition (a punitive expedition of the shogunate against the Choshu domain). In this secret letter, quoting the words of *Mencius*, Iwakura insisted that ‘from olden times a wise ruler’ should govern the world ‘with *yogikōron*’.³⁶ Therefore, he argued that the Court needed to ‘cease the expedition against the Choshu domain as the *kōron* of the world had already been settled’ but the Court kept ‘helping the *bakufu*’, which demonstrated an ‘utter lack of policy’.³⁷ He claimed that thereafter the Court should ‘restore Imperial rule based on the reason of *kō* 公理’ and replace the *bakufu*, which was undergoing an irreversible decline.³⁸ Thus, for Iwakura the concept of *kōron* was the norm which could relativise even the authority of the Court, and therefore the fundamental policy of the Meiji new government also needed to conform to *kōron*.

Amongst the feudal domains, the Fukui domain led by Matsudaira Shungaku 松平春嶽 (1828-1890, also known as Matsudaira Yoshinaga 松平慶永), canvassed most actively for the realisation of politics based on *kōron*. This political stance of the Fukui domain partly originated from politicians such as Hashimoto Sanai 橋本左内 (1834-1859) and Yokoi Shōnan 横井小楠 (1809-1869), who aimed to conduct politics following *kōron*.

In an essay by Shungaku called *Kohyō henkaku bikō* 虎豹変革備考, which was written presumably around 1862, it is observable that he planned a political system that respected *kōron* while adopting the British parliamentary system.³⁹ As Takagi Fuji pointed out, his vision of political organisation presupposed that the *bakufu* would take the initiative in politics.⁴⁰ This essay demonstrates Shungaku’s high principles as a politician, and the term *tenkakōkyō* 天下公共 (public of the world), which appeared frequently in this essay, shows Shōnan’s influence on him.⁴¹ He showed the same attitude in the draft written when Shungaku resigned in 1863 from the role of Seiji Sōsaishoku

³⁵ Iwakura Tomomi kankei monjo, pp. 142-143.

³⁶ Iwakura Tomomi kankei monjo, p. 249.

³⁷ Iwakura Tomomi kankei monjo, pp. 251-252.

³⁸ Iwakura Tomomi kankei monjo, p. 253.

³⁹ Matsudaira Shungaku, vol. 2, pp. 92-100.

⁴⁰ Takagi, pp. 132-134.

⁴¹ Shōnan was an adviser to Shungaku, and he put forward a suggestion to Shungaku in 1862, which was called *Kokuze nanajō* 国是七条 (Seven Articles on the Policy of the Nation). One clause of this suggestion was “open up talks and conduct politics of *kōkyō* with the world” (大いに言路を開き天下と公共の政を為せ). Yamazaki, pp. 97-98; Matsuura, pp. 211-213.

(政治総裁職, chief of political affairs, a post newly created during the Bakumatsu period). Shungaku thought that in order to restore ‘the authority of the *bakufu*’, the *bakufu* needed to ‘think with the world, govern the world, follow the people’s hearts, and ease the people’s hearts’ and ‘the world’ should ‘be with the *bakufu*’ by ‘renouncing its conventional private will and following *kō* of *yoron* of the world 天下輿論之公’.⁴² In other words, ‘the first priority was to obey the righteous discussion and *kōron* of the world, and not to manipulate the private will of the *bakufu* but to realise what the world wanted and set at peace the minds of the people in the world’.⁴³

In Shungaku’s discourse, it is observable that the political legitimacy of *kōron* belongs to the people; the legitimacy of the shogunate derives from this *kōron* of the world. Therefore, the shogunate has to renounce its private interests and be in step with the *kōron* of the world. Holding this political belief, Shungaku made efforts with the shogunate to establish a parliamentary regime.⁴⁴ However, against his wish, the new regime was built by ousting the Tokugawa shogunate. Yet, the Fukui domain’s attitude of respect for *kōron* and its desire to establish a political system founded upon *kōron* was realised to a certain degree by way of the Charter Oath.

Compared to the court and daimyo, which had been excluded from political decision making under the shogunate system, those who had taken charge of politics tended to maintain the conventional political system. Despite it, those who had a keen sense of the times aimed to change the autocratic politics of the shogunate over to a political system based on *kōron* without overthrowing the shogunate. And, their understanding of the political system based on *kōron* was inspired by the Western parliamentary system. Ōkubo Tadahiro 大久保忠寛 (1817-1888, also known as Ōkubo Ichio 大久保一翁), a direct retainer of the shogun, was one of those people. According to his letter to Matsudaira Shungaku on 15 October 1863, Tadahiro claimed the necessity of establishing *kōgisho*, where everyone including the common people and the court nobles could propose their opinions. He insisted on ‘adopting eternally unchanging *kōron* anew’ through *kōgisho*.⁴⁵ Then, the question was whose opinion would become *kōron* among the various opinions being expressed. Tadahiro thought, ‘in reality it should be limited to seven daimyo’, including Shungaku. Since this letter was addressed to Shungaku, there might have been Tadahiro’s reserve to Shungaku, but from today’s perspective the problem of Tadahiro’s idea is that except only a few daimyo, people could not have

⁴² Matsudaira Shungaku, vol. 2, p. 89.

⁴³ Matsudaira Shungaku, vol. 2, p. 90.

⁴⁴ Takagi, pp.189-191.

⁴⁵ *Zoku saimu kiji* vol. 6, p. 196.

political independence.

As evinced in these writings, the concept of *kōron* during the Bakumatsu period assumed a politically ideological aspect whilst holding its normativity. Because *kōron* was the norm which transcended the existing political units – such as individual activists, the feudal domains, the shogunate, and the Court – and was the slogan which united them, every political subject tried to follow *kōron* throughout the Bakumatsu period. On the other hand, as this term was used frequently in politics, it became ambiguous if this word was stated with a firm belief. Sometimes, this term seemed to be used as merely a rhetorical expression. This sloganisation of *kōron* was the substantial difference between its concept during the Edo period and during the Bakumatsu period.

A new dimension of the concept of *kōron* can be found in the thought of Yokoi Shōnan 横井小楠 (1809-1869), who was arguably the best political philosopher of the Bakumatsu period as well as an excellent politician of that time. Shōnan's philosophy has received relatively little attention outside of Japan, compared to the recently renewed interest in him in Japanese-language studies.⁴⁶ He was born in the Kumamoto domain as the second son of a low-ranking samurai family. Though he did not write a single book, it is possible to understand his philosophy through his letters and dialogues.⁴⁷ Inspired by Western politics and Confucian philosophy, his idea of *kōron* took on both democratic and moral meanings. His idea of 'public' was based upon universal *humanity* (Ch. *Ren* 仁, Jp. *Jin*), the highest virtue of Confucianism. Therefore, his concept of *kōron* possessed a universal normativity. Fortunately for Shōnan, unlike the Confucian scholars before him he could take part in real politics in the Fukui domain, whilst espousing this Confucian philosophy. Hence, Shōnan's concept of *kōron* came to be used uniquely in politics whilst retaining its Confucian philosophical meaning.

Before delving into Shōnan's idea of *kōron*, it is important to expound on his understanding of public and private views in order to have a clearer understanding of *kōron* itself. Recently, an essay called *Kōshi no setsu* (公私之説) was discovered.⁴⁸ Hiraishi Naoaki estimates this essay was written by Shōnan in around September 1855. This essay began with 'that the teaching of Confucius and Mencius are the public way, *kōdō* (公道), and the teaching of Taoism and Buddhism are the private way has been said by every ancient sage'. And, the purpose of this essay is to 'bring up decisively the

⁴⁶ Minamoto Ryōen, *Yokoi Shōnan Kenkyū*. Fujiwara Shoten, 2013 ; Matsuura Rei, *Yokoi Shōnan*. Chikuma Shobō, 2010. Watanabe Kazuyasu, *Meiji Shisōshi*. Perikansha, 1978 ; Karube Tadashi, *Rekishī toiu Hifu*. Iwanami Shoten, 2011

⁴⁷ It is said that he wrote one book on Christianity in his later life, but this book was lost during the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877.

⁴⁸ Hiraishi Naoaki, "Yokoi Shōnan 'Kōshi no setsu' honji to kōshō", pp. 1-24.

argument for the public path of the world'. As Hiraishi already summarised, the gist of this essay is that; first he criticized the narrow-minded views of people who supported the hereditary system while considering revolution as the public-minded path; and secondly, even the pursuit of interests could be viewed as something concordant with the public path, which went with the law of Heaven, considering the fact that the Western countries became opulent through the pursuit of interests.⁴⁹ Against the background of Shōnan's judgement, there was his conviction that the ideal of politics was to comfort the people. In this essay, the word *kō* (公) was expressed as *kōdō*, public path, and possessed moral meanings. The understanding of public way as the righteous way which follows the law of Heaven does not deviate from its ordinary usage in Neo-Confucianism. Despite this, its philosophical contents show the originality of Shōnan as mentioned above.

When it comes to the use of *kōron* itself, the earliest examples can be found in *Bojutsu zasshi* 戊戌雑誌. These were a sort of miscellaneous notes written in 1838, when Shōnan was 30 years old. He was still studying in Kumamoto at that time. In one note of *Bojutsu zasshi*, he gave his opinions on historical figures. He said 'it is not my private opinion. Quite the contrary, *kōron* of the world should come from the same judgement [with mine]'. Thus, he justified his opinion, and here Shōnan's expression of *kōron* followed its ordinary usage at that time. It was his participation in politics, deepened understanding of Confucianism, and knowledge of the West that served as a catalyst for developing Shōnan's original ideas on *kōron*.

Shōnan praised politics following *kōron*, although such a system had not been realised in Japan but in the West. At this time, Western parliamentary politics was a brand new concept for the Japanese, so in Shōnan's case, it was considered as a sort of *gakkō* 学校, an educational institution in which people discuss and learn politics. His understanding of *gakkō* was clearly shown in his writing, titled *Gakkō mondōsho* 学校問答書—a proposal to the Fukui domain, written in 1852. In this, he wrote:

If not only in a Court but also between a father and son, brothers, and a husband and wife do they mutually reward good, relieve themselves from mistakes, and discuss the advisability of the politics of the world, the way towards learning and discussion will be realised in family life. If people in high ranks thus engage in learning and discussion, this influences those who are in low ranks, and people in the country or even in this world will engage in learning and discussion, and eventually everyone will be capable of ruling over a country, as the people of Yao

⁴⁹ Hiraishi Naoaki, "Yokoi Shōnan 'Kōshi no setsu' honji to kōshō", pp. 10-11.

and Shun were.⁵⁰

The passage of ‘everyone will be capable of ruling over a country, as the people of Yao and Shun were’ is referring to the passage, ‘everyone among the people of Yao and Shun were capable of ruling over a country’, in the volume 99 of the *Book of Han*, *Hanshu* 漢書.⁵¹ From this writing, Shōnan’s strong orientation towards equal and free communication is noticeable, even though he emphasised the role of political leaders. In this proposal, he also wrote ‘Although they have their roles as a lord, vassal, father, son, husband, or wife, they should learn with the mind of fellowship in the place where the Way is realised.’⁵² For Shōnan, *gakkō* was a place in which learning, discussing, and carrying politics out were thoroughly intertwined and conducted together. This union of the spheres of education and politics transcended the distinction between officials and the people, as well as the distinction between men and women, with everyone working in solidarity with each other. It is no coincidence that women activists for education and for women’s emancipation movements in Kumamoto during the Meiji period were relatives of Shōnan or relatives of his disciples.⁵³

Shōnan found the realisation of this *gakkō* in the Western parliamentary system and thought *kōron* should derive from there. In one of his writings in 1855, he praised the Western parliamentary system:

Did not you hear about the rule of the Western barbarians, that they are diligent and the relationship between the upper class and the lower class is good? [They] elect their talented people *publicly* (*kōsen* 公撰) and recommend excellent figures. In an emergency, [they] consult the people and ease opinions of the country. The taxes are light and the people are not poor. [They] have a great amount of money and munitions, and feed their soldiers.⁵⁴

This writing shows that, according to Shōnan, politics that are in line with the Confucian ideal were, in fact, conducted in the West, where they ‘elect their talented people *publicly*’ and ‘consult the people’. He found their political system admirable in that they succeeded in enriching the country without oppressing their people.

Shōnan used the word *kōron* when he talked about Western politics again in a

⁵⁰ *Yokoi Shōnan ikō*, p. 4.

⁵¹ *Hans shu*, p. 4089.

⁵² *Yokoi Shōnan ikō*, p. 4.

⁵³ See, Hanatate Saburō, *Yokoi Shōnan no deshitachi: Kumamoto jitsugakuha no hitobito*.

⁵⁴ Noguchi, p. 171; Minamoto, pp. 145-152.

letter in 1856. In this letter, Shōnan wrote of the Western parliamentary system through the example of Russia. According to Shōnan, Russia was prospering after Peter the Great, and ‘the central *gakkō* in Saint Petersburg’ was playing an important role in that. He wrote:

[In Russia,] all political affairs are decided at the *gakkō*, and without a unanimous agreement of people’s opinions in the *gakkō*, the king or the government can never carry out politics. And, important government officials such as administrators and ministers are selected by the *kōron* of the country.⁵⁵

Thus, he thought discussion at *gakkō* connected directly to politics and created the *kōron* of a country. Politicians were selected according to *kōron*. Here, *kōron* seems akin to public opinion. This *gakkō* in Saint Petersburg should refer to Saint Petersburg University, established in 1724 by a decree of Peter the Great. However, this *gakkō* was seemingly understood by Shōnan as a parliament rather than an academic institution; this was because his notion of *gakkō* was a place to learn and discuss politics, as *Gakkō mondōsho* showed. Shōnan’s view on *kōron* and its relationship with *gakkō* shows certain similarity with Jürgen Habermas’ idea of public sphere.⁵⁶ While Habermas emphasises political deliberation, Shōnan valued the act of learning with others to create public opinion *qua kōron*.

Yet, the relationship between ‘people’s opinions’ and ‘*kōron*’ is unclear in his letter. In his later years, Shōnan wrote five poems, in which he mentioned people’s opinions and the concept of *kō*.⁵⁷ It is important to bear in mind that poetry in Confucianism tends to reflect the political intentions of the poet. Shōnan’s five poems, too, show his political resolution. Naitō Toshihiko has already written a detailed article on the philosophical meaning of poems.⁵⁸ In the first and second poems, Shōnan wrote:

Wisdom only resides in choosing virtue.
 Choosing virtue is choosing the middle path.
 How can I choose the middle path?
 Only with the ‘selfless and open (公)’ mind.

⁵⁵ *Yokoi Shōnan ikō*, p. 243.

⁵⁶ See, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

⁵⁷ *Yokoi Shōnan ikō*, p. 885; Noguchi, pp. 231-236.

⁵⁸ Naitō Toshihiko, pp. 171-203.

‘People’s opinions (衆言, *shūgen*)’ fear a ‘just opinion (正義, *seigi*)’.

A just opinion hates people’s opinions.

Both are all about fame and interests.

There is the law of Heaven different from these opinions.⁵⁹

The first poem shows that Shōnan deeply valued having a selfless mind, as this was the *sine qua non* for achieving virtue. Then, in the second poem, he rejects both people’s opinions and a just opinion, saying the law of Heaven exists in a different place. Here, Shōnan distinguished justness (正) and selflessness (公), which are often interchangeable in Confucianism.

In the third poem, he wrote ‘both of these opinions are already rejected,’ and asked, ‘Where can I find the law of Heaven?’.⁶⁰ His answer is found in the fourth poem as well as in the beginning of the fifth. The fourth poem reads as follows:

One considers that as right and this as wrong.

Judging right or wrong itself is partial.

Leave the judgmental mind aside for now.

Once one’s mind is disinterested, one can see Heaven.⁶¹

In the beginning of the fifth poem, he wrote: ‘Insofar as one’s mind is disinterested, one can see Heaven. Under the law of Heaven, everything is in harmony’.⁶² Following these five poems, it can be said that the law of Heaven can be realised with one’s open and selfless mind, and one can see that everything is harmoniously in order under this law. Shōnan, therefore, rejected people’s opinions as well as just opinion and valued primarily the selfless mind, which progresses towards the law of Heaven.

To conclude this chapter, Shōnan was impressed that the *kōron* of a country could control the politics of the country and yet, put an emphasis on the selfless mind of *kō*. This sort of attitude itself is a good example of the nature of *kōron*: *Kōron* can represent the opinion of the people as well as the just opinion of oneself. For Shōnan, *kōron* was the opinion deriving from one’s disinterested mind as well as the opinion which was universal along with Heaven. Here, the modern significance and a potential problem of Shōnan’s political thought which was formulated between the Confucian worldview

⁵⁹ Yokoi *Shōnan ikō*, p. 885.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 885.

⁶¹ *Idem.*, p. 885

⁶² *Ibidem.*

and the Western worldview can be found.

Chapter 4 *Kōron* during the Early Meiji Period

Kōron played a pivotal role in the transition from the Tokugawa shogunate to the Meiji government. On 14th October 1867, the 15th shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu 徳川慶喜 (1837-1913) addressed a petition to the emperor and returned political power to the emperor, an act called *Taisei hōkan* 大政奉還. Yoshinobu was fully aware that the concept of *kōron* or *kōgi* was of cardinal importance for the legitimacy of the authorities. Therefore, he put emphasis on it in the *Taisei hōkan* ceremony using the phrase ‘widely carrying out *kōgi* of the world and seeking a divine decision of the emperor’ (広く天下の公議を尽くし、聖断を仰ぎ). Following this ceremony, on 9th December 1867 the Restoration of Imperial Rule was carried out. The Court was also conscious of the importance of *kōron*. So, in the decree of the Restoration, they clarified that they would respect *kōron* by declaring that ‘[they] would conduct the most righteous *kōgi*, with everything being based upon the inauguration of enterprises by the Emperor Jinmu and without distinctions of class,’ (諸事神武創業の始めに原に、縉紳武弁堂上地下の別なく、至当の公議を竭し). As these two wordings clearly show, the concept of *kōron*, which functioned as a pillar of political legitimacy from the Bakumatsu period, continued being a political norm into the Meiji period.

Because the Meiji New Government was fragile at the beginning, the government needed to secure the support of *kōron*. Article one of the Charter Oath, ‘deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by *kōron*’, was an attempt to connect *kōron* and the state, and therefore to demonstrate that the new government was not a *private* political organisation. This can be confirmed by the remark of Iwakura Tomomi in 1869:

Establishing a deliberative organ seems like imitation of the Western custom, but it is no such thing. Adopting *kōron* in our great empire had already commenced in the age of gods. The government shall immediately order the investigation of the format of deliberative organs and have the people submit proposals on its regulations, and then promptly establish a deliberative assembly. In the first place, speaking of how the great work of the Restoration was carried out, I cannot but say it was by virtue of the *kōron* of the world.⁶³

This statement by Iwakura was, on one hand, insisting that *kōron* had been traditionally adopted in politics, and, on the other hand, was emphasising that the Meiji New

⁶³ *Kenpō kōsō*, p. 47.

Government was founded upon the *kōron* of the world.

Iwakura's remark was soon put into practice; the Meiji government established *kōgisho* (公議所), a legislative body, in 1869 and put in place a petition system so that the government could show they were following *kōron*. In the petitions, which could be submitted by anyone, there were phrases such as 'allow me to hope that the government adopts *kōron* by unanimous consent of the divine country' or 'discuss in public (*kōgishuhyō*, 公議衆評) the plan of the divine country'. These phrases indicate that some thought the concept of *kōron* would be realised in the framework of the state.⁶⁴ At the same time, the Meiji New Government was well aware that the basis of their existence originated from the emperor, unlike the Western governments, which were founded upon public opinion.⁶⁵

However, regardless of these efforts of the Meiji New Government, the view that the government represented *kōron* was not dominant at the beginning of the Meiji period. The *Ōuetsu reppan dōmei* (奥羽越列藩同盟, the Alliance of the domains of Mutsu, Dewa, and Echigo), which was a military-political coalition established to resist the new government in 1868, did not consider *kōron* to be with the government. They named their policy-making base *kōgisho* (公議所) to claim their legitimacy. In the well-known manifesto, 'Tōsatsugeki' (討薩檄), Kumoi Tatsuo 雲井龍雄 (1844-1870) denounced Satsuma domain for not following the *kōron* of the world as they should and trenchantly condemned Satsuma's egoistic behaviour.⁶⁶ For the alliance, the *kōron* of the government was nothing but deception, and the real legitimacy resided in them with *kōron*.

Moreover, Ōkubo Toshimichi 大久保利通 (1830-1878), a central figure of the government at that time, was assassinated by a group of discontented former samurai under the pretext of *kōgi*. According to the written statement of this assassination, they killed Ōkubo because the new government's 'policy does not come out of the divine decision of the emperor nor originate from the *kōgi* of the people', and moreover, the government 'oppresses civil rights and obstructs *kōgi*'.⁶⁷ These anti-governmental actions under the aegis of *kōron* demonstrate that this concept could exist as a normative power independent from the Meiji government, despite the efforts of the government to follow or control *kōron*. In other words, there was tension concerning *kōron* between the Meiji Government, which aimed to embody the concept of *kōron*, and those who criticised the cliquish nature of the government and justified their opinions as *kōron*. In addition to

⁶⁴ *Meiji Kenpakusho Shūsei*, vol. 1, pp. 145-146, 556-564.

⁶⁵ *Shukyō to kokka*, pp. 310-311.

⁶⁶ *Kumoi Tatsuo zenshū: Tohoku ijin*, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁷ *Ōkubo Toshimichi monjo*, vol. 9, pp. 416-17.

this tension, there was a movement against the government founded on another principle, namely *yoron*.

Towards the end of the Edo period, the concept of *kōron* took on an extremely political, ideological, and practical nature. Nonetheless, during this period a new yet similar concept was emerging from a different channel. This was the idea of ‘public opinion’ coming from the West. The following two paragraphs from writings in 1864 and 1865 respectively demonstrate the ambiguous nature of the concept of public opinion and *kōron*.

What is called public opinion (*kōron*)⁶⁸ is a sort of newspaper ... Only with a sheet of paper and several sentences, if it is opportune, it is said to be stronger than a million soldiers.⁶⁹

Meeting renowned figures in Paris and in London, and asking them about the newspaper, I heard that it was the power of newspapers that influenced *yoron*, public opinion, on domestic as well as foreign politics. After having heard this, I hoped for the first time to be a journalist later, if I had a talent, and to discuss topics of the day.⁷⁰

In the first passage, ‘public opinion’ is taken to mean *kōron*. The 1864 mission to Europe, headed by Ikeda Nagaoki, was astounded by the power of public opinion. On the other hand, for Fukuchi Genichirō, the newspaper was considered to be influential on *yoron*. What these two passages signify is that public opinion was represented in two ways: *kōron* and *yoron*.

However, neither *kōron* or *yoron* was a neologism to transliterate public opinion or words akin to it. During the Bakumatsu period, the word *yoron* began to be widely used and was inseparable from the ideas of *kōron* and *kōgi*, as the term *kōgiyoron* shows. That both *kōron* and *yoron* had existed before the Westernisation of Japan, and that they were used to transliterate public opinion, indicate that both of them possessed a conceptual affinity to public opinion. Yet, public opinion ceased being translated as *kōron*, and *yoron* came to be used more frequently. This shift from *kōron* to *yoron* was gradual.

⁶⁸ In the original Japanese, Ikeda puts *paburikku opinion* (public opinion) in katakana phonetic script (*rubi*) above the kanji for *kōron*, thereby offering the reader both terms as being of similar meaning.

⁶⁹ *Genron to medeia*, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Fukuchi, *Fukuchi Ōchi shū*, p. 326.

Some literature used both of them in the same writing.⁷¹ Presumably one reason for this shift could derive from the fact that, compared to *kōron* and *kōgi*, *yoron* was distant from the Confucian public and private view to a certain degree. In other words, the shift from *kōron* to *yoron* partly originated from the incompatibility between the concept of public opinion and that of *kōron*, since the former presupposed a certain group as the public, and the latter was based upon Confucian morality, regardless of the number of people. Nevertheless, it is notable how much those who talked about *yoron* bore the concept of public opinion from the West in mind.

Although the word *yoron* had existed before the arrival of the concept of public opinion, it is certain that the concept of *yoron* gained new meaning from the Meiji period. This novelty derives from the following two points. Firstly, the advent of the newspaper, which can be described as a product of Western modernity, had a revolutionary significance for creating and actualising public opinion, *yoron*. With this new type of media, *yoron* during the Meiji period was transmitted more rapidly than before. Even before the proliferation of newspapers the publishing culture of the Edo period was already highly developed at the beginning of the 19th century. Building on this publishing culture, newspapers spread rapidly and *yoron* itself became widespread along with newspapers. The Meiji New Government was well aware of the political influence that newspapers potentially possessed. Therefore, in 1868 during the Boshin War between the ex-shogunate army and the new government army the new government implemented strict controls on newspaper publication in Edo. But after the war the government supported newspapers to enlighten the people. A newspaper which prefixed the term, *yoron* to its name such as ‘*Tokyo Yoron Shinshi*’ 東京輿論新誌 by Omeisha 嚶鳴社 also appeared. However, upon the rise of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, the government commenced oppressing the newspapers which criticised the government severely.

Secondly, because of newspapers, the conventional concept of *kōron* and *yoron* became semantically closer to public opinion. Such being the case, the concept of *yoron* came to be discussed. Discourses such as ‘*Yoron to wa ikanaru mono zo*’ 輿論とは如何なる者ぞ (What is Yoron?) in 1880 by Suehiro Shigeyasu 末広重恭 [1849-1896] and ‘*Yoron kanarazushimo zenryō narazu*’ 輿論必ずしも善良ならず (Yoron is not always good) in 1881 by Aoki Tadasu 青木匡 [1856-??] demonstrate that the concept of *yoron*

⁷¹ For instance, Kuga Katsunan 陸羯南 (1857-1907) did not distinguish *kōron* and *yoron* in his article, ‘*Shinbun Kisha*’ 新聞記者 in 1890. In this article, he used both ‘*kōron wo daihyō shite*’ and ‘*yoron wo daihyō shite*’. Kuga, pp. 736-744.

at that time became to a certain degree different from its conventional conceptualisation.⁷² Furthermore, influenced by *yoron qua* public opinion, the usage of *kōron* that could be described as misuse, in the light of its original meaning, appeared. For example, Ueki Emori 植木枝盛 (1857-1892), one of the leaders of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement said the following in 1880 as he defended freedom of speech.

What is called *kōgiyoron* is something a state needs most. Then, to create truly good and beautiful *kōron*, the people need to be cultivated and to know things in depth about their country. Then, what lets the people be cultivated and know things of their country in depth resides in that: the people have the liberty of speech, and communicate, show, teach, and persuade each other, and thus do not stay ignorant and illusioned. Otherwise, *yoron* can hardly become truly beautiful and a scholar would say that *kōron* can be wrong and *kōron* is not always right, as that history shows.⁷³ What a shame it is. Now we must liberate our speech. This is also why the liberty of speech is the *sine qua non* for the state.⁷⁴

For Emori, *kōron* and *yoron* were synonymous, and 'kōron of the people' were not assumed to be a just opinion because of its Confucian value, 'kō'. This sort of usage would not be something the Confucians in the Edo period would have accepted. The reference to *kōron* by Deguchi Onisaburō [1871-1948], that I will discuss later, was towards these 'abuses' of the concept of *kōron*.

⁷² *Genron to medeia*, pp. 63-71.

⁷³ It is unclear what 'that history' refers to, but presumably it refers to the history of Western countries.

⁷⁴ Ueki, p. 67.

Chapter 5 *Kōron* and *Yoron* during the Freedom and People's Rights Movement

Into the Meiji period, political activities such as giving speeches and debates increased, prompted by the words 'all matters decided by *kōron*' in the Charter Oath. One social cause of this vitalisation in political discourse was the advent of newspapers, as mentioned earlier. Based upon this new communication media, the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (*Jiyū minken undō* 自由民権運動) emerged. On 12th January 1874, the first political party in Japan, *Aikokukōtō* 愛国公党 was formed with Itagaki Taisuke [1837-1919] as the central figure. Its object was to 'rouse the *yoron* of the people by organising a major political party'.⁷⁵ On 17th January, they submitted a petition called *Minsen giin setsuritsu kenpaku sho* 民撰議院設立建白書 (Petition for the Establishment of an Elected National Assembly) to the Council of the Left (*Sain*, 左院), a legislative advisory body of the government, to extend '*kōron* of the world'.⁷⁶ This council was newly established in 1871 and accepted petitions. Indeed, this council willingly accepted petitions that criticised the Meiji government and the emperor, as the members of this council themselves were generally critical or sceptical of the drastic 'civilising' policy of the government.⁷⁷ When the council accepted the *Minsen giin setsuritsu kenpaku sho*, the members agreed on this petition.

Though the petition was for founding a representative parliament, there were already movements to establish a representative parliament or a legislative organ prior to the formation of *Aikokukōtō*. The petition itself was also not very detailed. Still, this petition generated a huge response because it was reported in the newspaper *Nisshinshinjishi* 日新真事誌, run by British journalist J. R. Black (1827-1880), on the day after the petition was submitted to the Council of the Left. The Freedom and People's Rights Movement thus saw the first light of day. There are many studies on the characteristics and history of this movement, and on its relationship to the political activities of ordinary people, so I will not give a detailed analysis of these issues here but instead trace the relationship between the movement and the concepts of *kōron* and *yoron*.⁷⁸

As there was a groundswell for the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, the concepts of *kōron* and of *yoron* together functioned as driving forces for the establishment

⁷⁵ *Jiyūtōshi*, p. 83.

⁷⁶ *Jiyūtōshi*, p. 92.

⁷⁷ Makihara, *Meiji shichinen no daironsō*, pp. 164-166.

⁷⁸ Major works in this field include Irokawa, *Jiyū minken*; Emura, *Jiyū minken kakumei no kenkyū*; Inada, *Jiyū minken no bunkashi atarashi seijibunka no tanjō*; Arai, *Jiyū minken to Kindai shakai*; Makihara, *Minken to kenpō*; Matsuzawa, *Jiyū minken undo 'democurashii' no yume to zassetsu*.

of a parliament. In other words, the Freedom and People's Rights Movement commenced with *Minsen Giin Setsuritsu Kenpaku Sho* by *Aikokukōtō*, and one of the main rationales of the activists of this movement was that 'deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by *kōron*' as stated in the Charter Oath. It is symbolic that among the signatories of *Minsen Giin Setsuritsu Kenpaku Sho* was Yuri Kimimasa (1829-1909), who was a *deshi* (弟子 follower) of Shōnan in the Fukui domain and was involved in the drafting of the Charter Oath. Since *Minsen Giin Setsuritsu Kenpaku Sho* put into practice the Charter Oath, namely the national policy, even the government could not deny the purpose of the Movement. Here, as mentioned earlier, the concept of *kōron* was released from the conventional Confucian meaning. Instead, the concept of *kōron* and of *yoron*, synonymous here with the concept of public opinion, came to wield influence over politics.

It has been pointed out by previous studies that the Freedom and People's Rights Movement was not identical with movements of the people.⁷⁹ The common people harboured a wish for benevolent rule and a restoration of order and they did not necessarily have a strong connection to the idea of liberty and people's rights. The political activists of the Movement shared with the new government a role of awakening the people to a sense of being Japanese. As such, it cannot be said that demands to respect *kōron* and *yoron* in the Movement perfectly represented the voices of ordinary people. However, the Freedom and People's Rights Movement had a great significance in that it created a political culture that enabled a lot more people to participate in politics.⁸⁰ In this political culture, both the concepts of *kōron* and *yoron* had a closer relationship with the people.

On 16th April 1874, Itagaki and others formed Risshisha 立志社, which became a leading association of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. During this time, members of the former samurai class were the main supporters of the movement. For them, *kōron* and violence were not contrary to each other; assassinations under the pretext of *kōron* or *kōgi* and the fact that some participants of the movement sided with the rebels in the Seinan War in 1877 show this well. Both *kōron* and violence were following an identical course that excluded politicians in power who were driven by self-interests and who suppressed free speech. In relation to the affinity between *kōron* and violence, the activists of the Movement during this period were an extension of the activists during the Bakumatsu period. When the Seinan War ended with the defeat of the Satsuma rebels,

⁷⁹ See, Yasumaru Yoshio. *Nihon no kindaika to minshū shisō*; Makihara Norio, *Kyakubun to kokumin no aida*.

⁸⁰ Inada, pp. 339-343.

instead of resorting to force the power of speech and newspapers became a more common means of criticising the government.⁸¹ By involving various social strata, the Movement became even more powerful. From 1879 to 1880 the Movement demanded the establishment of a parliament, and the government was frightened by its increasing power. In March 1880, the movement formulated a large-scale alliance for the establishment of a parliament, called *Kokkai Kisei Dōmei* 国会期成同盟.

The government deployed various measures to stop the Movement. By promulgating *Shinbunshi hakkō jōmoku* 新聞紙発行条目 (Article on Publication of Newspapers) in 1873, and *Shinbunshi jōrei* 新聞紙条例 (Press Regulations) and *Zanbōritsu* 讒謗律 (the Defamation Law) in 1875, the government restricted newspapers which were critical of the government. In April 1880, the government issued *Shūkai jōrei* 集会条例 (Assembly Regulations), which strictly repressed the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. The activists within the Movement were not submissive. One activist wrote to the government. Considering Western legislatures, he argued, 'trusting the people is achieved by deciding all affairs with *kōron*'; and 'it is unquestionable that *yoron* is selfless and a fair [opinion] of the world. The reason why the Tokugawa *bakufu* was overthrown is because they were against *yoron*'.⁸² By saying so, he demanded freedom of speech. In this discourse, the meanings of *kōron* and *yoron* were reversed.

The Freedom and People's Rights Movement may be considered to have ended in 1884, when *Jiyūtō* 自由党, which was the core of the movement, was dissolved and the Chichibu uprising was put down.⁸³ Yet, the political activities linked to the Movement lasted. *Kōron* and *yoron* were a purpose of as well as a means for these activities. The political activists aimed to attain freedom of speech and extend *kōron* and *yoron*. At the same time, the movement developed under the auspices of the Charter Oath and *kōron* and *yoron* of the people. Here it seems that the political activists of the movement in general did not recognise a conceptual difference between *kōron* and *yoron*. Nakae Chōmin, who will be discussed in the next section, was one of the few people who was keenly aware of the difference between the Confucian private view and the public view,

⁸¹ In the works of Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉, there is a piece called 'Meiji jūnen teichū kōron' 明治十年丁丑公論. In it, Fukuzawa defends Saigō Takamori 西郷隆盛 (1828-1877), who was defeated in the Seinan War. The fact that the title contains *kōron*, but not *shiron* 私論, a private opinion, is noteworthy. Perhaps, Fukuzawa believed the justness of Saigō's argument when he named his work *kōron*, but not *shiron*. See, Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Meiji jūnen teichū kōron*, *yasegaman no setsu*.

⁸² *Meiji Kenpakusho Shūsei*, vol. 6, pp. 6-8.

⁸³ The Chichibu incident was the biggest riot by farmers during the Meiji period. It took place in the Chichibu region, and thousands of the people were punished for it. See, Inoue Kōji, *Chichibu jiken: jiyū minkenki no nōmin hōki*.

and the concept of *yoron* originating from the Western concept of public opinion. As the Movement came to its end, Chōmin nonetheless pursued people's rights, and what he relied on in this situation was *yoron* and the people.

One of the leaders of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement was Nakae Chōmin 中江兆民 (1847-1901). After studying in France, he translated Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* into Classical Chinese. As such, he is well known in Japan as the 'Rousseau of the Orient' (*Tōyō no Rusō*). He devoted his life to seeking one rational principle, *Li*, which unified Western philosophy and Confucianism.

Chōmin's view of public and private was Confucian. In his essay written in 1880, 'Ron kōri shiri' 論公利私利 (Discussing Public Interests and Private Interests), he criticised utilitarian discourse. Even one person's interest, as long as it is a just cause, can be a public interest (*kōri*). On the other hand, even everyone's interest, if it is against a just cause, will be a private interest (*shiri*). Chōmin argued that public and private interests had a substantial difference and utilitarianism was nothing but the pursuit of private interests. This attitude of Chōmin's forms a striking contrast with Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835-1901), an enlightenment philosopher. Fukuzawa wrote 'private interests are the foundation of public profits, and public profits usually originate from the pursuit of private interests'.⁸⁴ For Chōmin, opinions of the majority did not in themselves become '*kō*', but morality was required to render them '*kō*'. Still, he realised the political importance of the opinions of the people, that is, *yoron*.

Chōmin discovered *yoron* in the French Revolution. In 1886, he published *Kakumeimae Furansu Niseikiji* 革命前法朗西二世紀事 (The History of France from Two Centuries before the Revolution), in which he analysed the process of the French Revolution.⁸⁵ He explained that 'the power of *yoron*' triggered the French Revolution; when one with ambition acts for national interests, this person must do so not by himself or herself alone, but with the support of the people through 'formulating so-called *yoron*'. In 18th century France, 'the power of *yoron*' had already 'reached its high point', and therefore even royalty could not ignore it. Thus, for Chōmin, *yoron* was something new and discovered in the French Revolution, and he aspired to expand civil rights in Japan with this idea of *yoron*.

In 1888, two years before the establishment of the Imperial Diet, Chōmin was involved as the editor-in-chief in the *Shinonome shinbun* 東雲新聞 (Shinonome newspaper), which started in the same year. Ueki Emori, who was mentioned above, was also involved in this newspaper. In *Shinonome shinbun*, Chōmin made several remarks

⁸⁴ Fukuzawa, *Fukuzawa Yukichi zenshū*, vol. 19, p. 634.

⁸⁵ Nakae, *Kakumeimae Furansu Niseikiji*, pp. 197-200.

on *yoron*. Amongst them, the most detailed critique was ‘Sōshiron’ 壯士論 (Essay on Sōshi⁸⁶). However, though it has been presumed that its author was Chōmin, recently this presumption has been questioned by some scholars.⁸⁷ Consequently, the author of ‘Sōshiron’ is not confirmed. Be that as it may, in terms of conceptual history, this critique shows one facet of the understanding of *yoron* at the time and therefore is worth examination.

According to ‘Sōshiron’, the people consider ‘good reason and the way of justice’ as their guiding principle in ‘the civilised age’, when the people ‘discuss and argue’ in a lively manner. Under these circumstances, the government shall follow ‘*yoron* of the people’.⁸⁸ However, ‘*kōgiyoron* of a nation’ is not ‘an agglomeration of opinions and discussions of the whole people’. *Kōgiyoron* is formulated by ‘those in a nation who, having opinions and discussions, express them in public and then have the people and the government listen to their judgements based on their interests and their passion’.

Then, who in reality are the bearers of *kōgiyoron*? According to the author, it was *sōshi*. ‘*Sōshi*’ are

from the societies of the farmers, craftsmen, and merchants, and [they] create a different society. Patriotic and worrying about the world, they have courage and knowledge and by representing well the societies of the farmers, craftsmen, and merchants and by showing their interests and their feelings, *sōshi* have influence over the *kōgiyoron* of their nation.

Therefore, ‘opinions and discussions of *sōshi*’ become the ‘*yoron* of a country’.⁸⁹ As such, the government should prioritise the opinions of *sōshi*. This is because if the government ‘oppresses the opinions of *sōshi*’, it means ‘oppressing the *kōgiyoron* of the people’.⁹⁰

In these wordings, the concept of *yoron*, expressed as ‘*kōgiyoron*’ or ‘*yoron* of a nation’, is described as something similar to public opinion, but is, at the same time, a mélange with some elements of Confucianism such as ‘good reason and the way of

⁸⁶ *Sōshi* is a term which was used frequently in the mid-Meiji period. During that time, the term meant stalwarts, who actively participated in the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement.

⁸⁷ There is a modern translation of ‘Sōshiron’ in volume 36 of *Nihon no meicho* 日本の名著, edited by Kawano, from pages 313 to 328. However, in *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* 中江兆民全集, which was published after *Nihon no meicho*, ‘Sōshiron’ is not included. Currently, it is presumed that the author of ‘Sōshiron’ is not Chōmin. Kawano, pp. 313-328.

⁸⁸ ‘Sōshiron’ 壯士論, *Shinonome shinbun* 東雲新聞, 1888.1.29.

⁸⁹ ‘Sōshiron’ 壯士論, *Shinonome shinbun* 東雲新聞, 1888.2.2.

⁹⁰ ‘Sōshiron’ 壯士論, *Shinonome shinbun* 東雲新聞, 1888.2.11.

justice’. Hence, *yoron* is morally righteous and in this regard it is semantically close to the Confucian concept of *kōron*. Also, *yoron* was not a simple assemblage of opinions of the majority. It is the opinions of *sōshi*.

Whether the author of ‘Sōshiron’ was Chōmin or not, it is certain that Chōmin understood the political power of *yoron* and its semantic difference with *kōron*; he never used the word *kōron* to describe the will or opinions of the people. Chōmin defined *yoron* as ‘equivalent to the thought of the masses’ in ‘Heimin no Mesamashi’ 平民の目さまし (Awakening of the Common People), published in 1887.⁹¹ This remark on the concept of *yoron* here shows a striking contrast with the concept of *kōron*, which does not depend on the number of people. Even when ‘an excellent person alone amongst others’ expresses ‘his or her thought’, it is not ‘*yoron*’. Once the people agree upon it, it becomes ‘*yoron*’ for the first time.⁹² It seems clear that Chōmin understood the concept of *yoron* as commensurate with public opinion, which he discovered in the French Revolution.

This existence of *yoron* was what bifurcated political parties in Western countries and those in Asia. In a critique in *Shinonome shinbun* called ‘Seitōron’ 政党論 (Essay on Political Parties) in 1888, Chōmin wrote: ‘Political parties in Asia decide victory or defeat by force, whereas political parties in the West decide victory or defeat by *yoron*’.⁹³ He observed that ‘political parties in the Western civilisations’ are ‘always igniting the lamp of wisdom and following the principle of conscience, and, by resorting to the judgement of *yoron*, [they] intend to gain victory of the opinion of one’s party’.⁹⁴ Chōmin thought Japan could learn from the West because they constructed a political system which sought the truth through competition with each other. What is noteworthy in this essay is that he accepted the competition between parties. This diverges from the Confucian political stance, which abhors trouble among cliques. On the other hand, the attitude that the righteousness of one’s opinion is left up to ‘the judgement of *yoron*’ is akin to asking one’s righteousness to become the *kōron* of the world. However, while *yoron* contains subjective moments that one can work on to gain support, the Confucian *kōron* has an unshakable morality within itself. As such, it was probably more difficult to attain the mode of thinking which aims ‘to gain victory of the opinion of one’s party’ by influencing *kōron*.

For Chōmin, it was the people who were the bearers of *yoron* and sovereign. Nonetheless, the Imperial Diet, which was eventually established in 1890, was far away

⁹¹ Nakae, *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* vol. 10, p. 31.

⁹² Nakae, *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* vol. 10, p. 32.

⁹³ Nakae, *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* vol. 11, p. 172.

⁹⁴ Nakae, *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* vol. 11, p. 173.

from his ideal, and the rights of the Diet were strictly limited. Under these circumstances, Chōmin expected ‘*yoron* of the Diet’, that the members of the Diet formulated. And simultaneously, he aimed to create ‘*yoron* of the whole country’ as backing for the ‘*yoron* of the Diet’ against the government.⁹⁵ On the other hand, he also took precautions against the members of the parliament becoming despotic and so gave precedence to the people.⁹⁶ The members of the parliament must ‘appeal to the *yoron* of the world’ and ‘aim for the approval of *yoron* itself’ instead of the acceptance of government.⁹⁷ Chōmin kept holding onto his belief regarding liberty and civil rights, and endeavoured throughout his life to form politics based on the *yoron* of the people, and not the *kōron* of one person.

⁹⁵ Nakae, *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* vol. 11, pp. 365-69.

⁹⁶ Matsunaga, ‘Kaisetsu’, p. 441.

⁹⁷ Nakae, *Nakae Chōmin zenshū* vol. 12, pp. 180-183.

Chapter 6 *Kōron* from the Late Meiji Period to the Post-War Period

The Charter Oath stated, ‘deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by *kōron*’, therefore the concept of *kōron* was abstract and capable of holding various meanings. It had a Confucian meaning corresponding to the meaning of public opinion as well as to *yoron*. Accordingly, in the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, these two meanings were in harmonious agreement. Yet ironically, due to the upsurge of the movement, discourses which highlighted these differences in the concept also appeared. It was at this moment that the two meanings of the concept of *kōron* became irreconcilable.

For those who had a profound knowledge in Confucianism, it was evident that the concept of *kōron* was different from *yoron* or public opinion. Nakae Chōmin used the term, *yoron*, but not *kōron*, on purpose to represent the opinions of the people. Opinions of the people did not automatically become the fair and selfless *kōron*. Like Chōmin, a person who was well aware of this was Motoda Nagazane 元田永孚 (1818-1891), advisor to the Meiji Emperor and disciple of Yokoi Shōnan. However, in Motoda’s case, the conceptual difference between *kōron* and *yoron* was in the esteem regarding *kōron*. As Numata points out, Motoda found *kōron* in the just opinion of the emperor, based upon his knowledge of the classics.⁹⁸

In 1879, when the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement was increasing in momentum, he sent a memorandum to the emperor about the constitutional polity. According to Motoda, ‘though *kōron* contributes to the opinions of the majority, those opinions of the majority are not necessarily *kōron*’; there were historical cases that showed that *kōron* was the minority opinion. Thus, ‘why can we say that the majority possess *kōron* and the opinions of a couple of people are private opinions?’⁹⁹ His perspective correctly reflects the Confucian views of public and private. He continued:

Even if we establish a parliament and gather the opinions of the people (*shūron* 衆論), when it comes to deciding *kōron*, it consists in solely attaining the middle way (*Chū wo toru* 中を執る). Although the activists of the Movement imitate Western political rules and are persistently debating, they do not make clear the essence of national policy and of the form of government. Nor do they distinguish the difference between *kōron* and opinions of the people. Inasmuch as they just insist upon their prejudiced opinions, when Your Majesty makes a decision and establishes the fair and just criteria, the world will know the direction to proceed

⁹⁸ Numata, p. 220.

⁹⁹ *Nihon kensei kiso shiryō*, p. 263.

for the first time.¹⁰⁰

Hence, Motoda did not acknowledge the principle of majority rule and sought the command of the emperor. When he gave a lecture to the emperor in 1882, he said that ‘deliberation in a parliament decides *kōron* of the majority but it is not *kōron*. Impartial opinion neither tends to the majority nor to the minority. The [truly] impartial *kōron* occurs in the heart of a person and does not take on the selfishness of the will’.¹⁰¹ That Motoda, a *deshi* of Shōnan who praised the Western parliamentary system, found *kōron* in the impartial opinion of the Emperor indicates one important facet of parliamentary politics. It is whether parliamentary politics can realise the common good or not. Shōnan imagined *kōron* would be formulated through deliberation in parliament, but for Motoda, decisions in parliament were nothing but the pursuit of private interests.

In the wake of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, the Japanese Constitution of 1889 was established, and under this constitution the Imperial Diet was established in 1890. Similar to Motoda, there is another figure who held a negative view of the opinion of the majority and found value in *kōron*. Deguchi Onisaburō 出口王仁三郎 (1871-1948), a leader of Ōmoto religion, left a remark in 1930 about the idea of the Charter Oath.

In the Charter Oath, there are the sacred words, ‘all matters are decided by *kōron*’. *Kōron* is never the discussions of the majority. The discussions of the majority are so-called opinions of the masses or opinions of the majority. *Kōron* is nothing but *kōron*; even if it is one person or the minority’s argument, as long as it is fair and righteous and its sincerity can move Heaven, it is *kōron*. This being said, I cannot put up with the parliament of today considering the decision of the majority as the best option and regarding it as *kōron*. In this world, regardless of when and where, wise people are few and stupid many. Hence, opinions of the majority are mobocratic opinions.¹⁰²

Deguchi’s remark emphasises the concept of *kōron*, which is a fair opinion unrelated to the number of people. After the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, the various forms of liberal political activities during the Taisho Democracy, and universal male suffrage in 1925, he was even more keenly aware of this aspect of *kōron*. It is significant

¹⁰⁰ *Nihon kensei kiso shiryō*, p. 263.

¹⁰¹ *Motoda Nagazane monjo*, vol. 2, p. 56.

¹⁰² Deguchi, pp. 23-24.

for analysing the concept of *kōron* that Deguchi closed his remark on the Charter Oath by saying, ‘our country is open and peaceful, and the people enjoy tranquilly their destiny by virtue of the august powers of the Emperor. For that reason, our country is called the divine country where virtue is the lord and the law is vassal’.¹⁰³

Both Motoda and Deguchi insisted upon the righteousness of *kōron* and the emperor, within whom *kōron* existed, standing against the opinions of the majority formed in the parliament. Yet the opinions of the emperor did not automatically become *kōron*. To form *kōron*, norms such as impartiality and sincerity were needed. On the other hand, there were people such as Nakae Chōmin, who supported politics by *yoron*, which was to be realised in the parliament. At this moment, there was a substantial confrontation regarding the legitimacy of politics between *kōron* and *yoron*.

After World War II, the Imperial Rescript of the Emperor Showa (Hirohito), called ‘Shin Nippon kensetsu ni kansuru shōsho 新日本建設に関する詔書 (the Imperial Rescript on the Construction of a New Japan)’ was issued as part of his New Year’s statement on 1st January 1946. This Imperial Rescript is often known as ‘Ningen sengen 人間宣言 (the Humanity Declaration)’ since the emperor was considered to have denied his divinity. But indeed, this rescript began with the whole of the Charter Oath. The Emperor Showa spoke reflectively about his intentions in prefacing the rescript with the Charter Oath at a press conference on 23rd August 1977.

When it comes to this [the insertion of the Charter Oath in the rescript], it was the main purpose of the decree, to tell the truth. Things like divinity were a secondary issue.

[The reason for] speaking about it was, at that time, because the United States and other foreign countries were powerful and also because there were concerns that the Japanese would be overwhelmed by them.

Adopting democracy was the will of the Meiji Emperor. Moreover, he swore before the gods. As such, he made the Charter Oath, and the Meiji Constitution was founded upon it, and so I think it was necessary to show that democracy was never something imported.¹⁰⁴

Considering the pre-war situation, when anti-democratic discourses and politics were predominant, the Imperial Rescript seems to be somewhat far-fetched rationalisations. However, with this rescript the concept of *kōron* officially took on the meaning of something associated with democracy after a fashion.

¹⁰³ Deguchi, p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ Takahashi, p. 241.

In the same vein as this declaration of the Emperor Showa, when the initial edition of the highbrow intellectual magazine *Sekai* (世界 World) was issued in 1946 by Iwanami Shoten, a major publishing house in Japan, it started with democracy and the Charter Oath: ‘Things such as democracy, esteem of individuality, freedom of speech and religion, and world peace [...] originate in the demand of human nature and in the way of the justice of the world’, and ‘this purport was already clearly shown in the magnificent project of the Charter Oath at the time of the Meiji Restoration’.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, it was not necessarily wrong that ‘all matters decided by the *kōron*’ of the Charter Oath were conceptually close to democracy. Kaneko Kentaro 金子堅太郎 (1853-1942), who was a bureaucrat, politician and one of the drafters of the Meiji Constitution, gave lectures twice on the origin of the Charter Oath in 1917 and in 1937.¹⁰⁶ The content of these two lectures was more or less the same. Kaneko was frightened that the draft of the oath written by Yuri Kimimasa, who assumed the mantle of Yokoi Shōnan, was too *democratic*. Kaneko examined why this draft was so democratic and found that it originated from Shōnan’s *Kokuze Sanron* 国是三論 (*The Three Arguments for the National Policy*). Shōnan wrote this essay to decide the policy of the Fukui domain in 1860. Kaneko’s analysis that Yuri’s draft was based on *Kokuze Sanron*, which was inspired by the unanimity between ruling and ruled in England and republicanism in the United States, is convincing and probably correct. Accordingly, interpreting that ‘all matters decided by *kōron*’ originally intended democracy is possible. And because of this possibility, Kaneko feared Yuri’s draft.

In contrast to people such as Kaneko, there were people who espoused this possibility of democracy. Ishibashi Tanzan 石橋湛山 (1884-1973), a journalist and politician, is a good example of one of those people. Before, during, and after World War II, he consistently spoke of the Charter Oath and *kōron* as expressions of democracy. In September 1912, just after the demise of the Meiji emperor, he published an essay which defended democracy in a newspaper called *Tōyō Jiron* 東洋時論.¹⁰⁷ He said that ‘if one thinks about the Meiji era superficially, from every respect it was the heyday of militarism. It was nothing but the époque of imperialism. But I do not want to look at the Meiji period like this’.¹⁰⁸ Instead, he saw the possibility of democracy in the oath, stating that ‘the politics of *kōron*, [or] the politics of the opinions of the people (*shūgi* 衆議), namely the

¹⁰⁵ ‘Hakkan no ji’, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰⁶ See, Kaneko, ‘Gokajō no goseimon no yurai’, 1917; Kaneko, ‘Gokajō no goseimon no yurai’, 1937.

¹⁰⁷ In Tanzan’s memoirs, there is section where he reminisced about this essay. Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol 15, pp.103-105.

¹⁰⁸ Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol. 1, p. 232.

great policy of democracy, which was repeatedly stated [by the emperor] may hereafter undergo its application enlargement and shine in its glory more and more, but will never lose its significance by the changing of the trend of the times'.¹⁰⁹ From arguably after the Russo-Japanese War until the beginning of the 1930s, a liberal and democratic atmosphere appeared in Japanese society, which is known as the Taishō democracy.

However, after this period, the military authorities commenced intervening in politics, and as a result democracy came to be oppressed. Even in this predicament, Tanzan adhered to democracy; in 1937 in the newspaper *Tōyō keizai shinbō* 東洋経済新報 he wrote, 'no matter what the interpretation of the wording at the time of the promulgation, the Charter Oath is the charter which laid the foundations of Japanese democracy'.¹¹⁰ In August 1940, when the Imperial Rule Assistance Association was about to be created and to begin one-party dictatorship, he stuck firmly to party politics. According to Tanzan, 'forms of politics are by nature, roughly divided, nothing but despotism or *kōron* policy. Here *kōron* policy means politics which follow the purpose of the phrase 'deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by *kōron*' of the Charter Oath. Maybe it is no problem to call it democracy as long as this word is understood correctly'.¹¹¹ However, the phrase 'the foundation of politics solely comes from the emperor' does not signify autocracy. This is because there is 'the divine principle that 'deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by *kōron*.'" Consequently, 'the form of politics based upon *kōron* policy' must be the form of politics in Japan.¹¹² Thereby he claimed that 'after all, I think the politics of *kōron* policy are [carried out] in no other institutions but the Diet. Then, if there is a Diet, it is natural that several political parties separately exist, and I assume it is never unnecessary [that they exist]'.¹¹³

Considering Tanzan's political stance before and during the war, it was no surprise that Tanzan maintained his stance regarding democracy after the war. It can be confirmed in his writing in September 1945, too. 'The word, democracy (*demokurashii* デモクラシー), is, of course, a foreign term, but when it comes to its spirit, it does not differ from the one established in our country'. 'The Charter Oath', which the Meiji emperor made, 'truly asserted the essence of democracy'.¹¹⁴ Tanzan thus upheld democracy, but he did not unconditionally admire it by its form. He believed that by

¹⁰⁹ Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol. 1, p. 232.

¹¹⁰ Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol. 10, pp. 476-477.

¹¹¹ Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 146.

¹¹² Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol. 11, pp. 146-47.

¹¹³ Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol. 11, p. 148.

¹¹⁴ Ishibashi, *Ishibashi Tanzan zenshū*, vol. 13, pp. 14-15.

stipulating not only the rights of the people but also their duties in the constitution the people can be the true bearers of democracy.¹¹⁵ Simultaneously, he considered that the emperor could have enough meaning, even in democracy, as the impartial authority. Here, the entangled relationship between democracy, namely *kōron* policy and the emperor, is observable.

Considering the aforementioned discourses, it does not seem valueless to interpret that the concept of *kōron* did contain the possibility for democracy, and in the same vein, it is not futile to connect democracy in post-war Japan and the Charter Oath. Nonetheless, areas of further research may include why the possibility of democracy, which existed in the concept of *kōron*, remained as merely a possibility and did not manifest itself as the actual political system, and also it could be examined how the term ‘democracy’ itself was understood in Japan and should be understood.

¹¹⁵ Tanaka, pp. 175-176; Masuda, p. 152.

Conclusion

The concept of *kōron* has undergone several semantic transformations. *Kōron* was originally conceptualised as a Confucian normative discourse, and then became a political ideology. Later, it was sometimes understood as public opinion and other times as a just opinion against public opinion. *Kōron* was sometimes used to express one's moral belief and other times deployed as a rationale to gather the voice of the people, and still at other times as a pretext to attack one's enemies. At this point, trying to understand whether the discourses on *kōron* were endowed with one's firm conviction or were merely a rhetorical expression is not meaningful. It is because *kōron* came from one's sincere mind, reaching Heaven, and so self-confidence in one's *kōron* no longer needed any exterior and objective criterion.

Accordingly, one's mode of existence with the self-confidence of holding *kōron* and its representations in reality could show a disparity. This self-representation discrepant with the world is appropriate to name a quixotic self-representation and it assumes a sort of heroism; one with this self-representation made political actions believing in one's righteousness without any consideration of opinions of the public. On the other hand, when the concept of *kōron* represents the opinions of the people in a more objective manner, it semantically resembles the concept of *yoron* or of public opinion. Here, the semantic plurality of the concept of *kōron* is revealed.

If one believes in the discourse of post-war Japan that *kōron* in the Charter Oath demonstrates that the concept of *kōron* is harmonious with democracy, a trustworthy narrative is the *sine qua non* condition for it. Discussing this goes beyond the aim of this paper, but I will briefly deliberate on it: Upon relating the concept of *kōron* with democracy, its inexorable difficulty resides in that, on one hand, *kōron* can defend democracy, and on the other, it can function as a logic to reject it. However, this antinomy itself can be reckoned to be something rather positive. Insofar as democracy is understood as an incessant movement to seek democratic and moralistic politics simultaneously, the meanings of *kōron* that connote the opposition and the tense relation between the majority opinion and the law of Heaven can exist as an idea which orients towards the reconciliation of this antinomy. In other words, the possibility that *kōron* coincides with democracy, that the philosophy of Yokoi Shōnan and Nakae Chōmin partly unveiled, subsists in the plurality of its conceptualisation.

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