

The Nature of Emergency: The Great Kanto Earthquake and the Crisis of Reason in Late Imperial Japan¹

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The term *hijōji* (emergency, or literally ‘extraordinary time’) first became etched into Japanese consciousness following the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Hirohito, then Regent to the Taisho Emperor, broached the concept in a public statement of 12 September:

.... since natural disasters are difficult to control with human power, there is only one thing we can do: to quickly recruit men in order to settle the hearts of the masses. At the time of emergency (*hijō no toki*) extraordinary actions are needed.⁴

The earthquake of 1 September 1923 brought massive destruction to the capital and the deaths of more than a hundred thousand, followed by the spread of vicious rumors about Japanese Koreans and socialist activists, and accompanying massacres. Hirohito’s invocation of emergency was accompanied by the advice that politicians remain composed in making decisions, just like in *heiji* (ordinary times). Few could have realized it then, but ‘ordinary times’ or ‘settled hearts’ as a description for any imagined state of Japanese existence was already an anachronism. The phrases *hijōji* or *hijō no toki* were subsequently used widely in the writings of state and right-wing intellectuals who supported the revival of imperial and military power. By the early 1930s, writers and propagandists across all political spectrums acknowledged that they now lived in a *Hijōji Nippon* (Emergency Japan), though few dwelled on its origins or agreed on its precise definition.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference “Asian Environments Shaping the World”, held at the National University of Singapore in March, 2009. Portions of pages 4-6 and 28-31 were also presented in a different paper by Clancey at a seminar on “Fear” at Princeton University’s Davis Center in October, 2008. I am grateful to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at NUS for funding some of this research through an internal faculty development grant.

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⁴ Yoshikawa Mitsusada, *Kanto Daishinsai no Chian Kaiko* (Tokyo: Hōmufu tokubetsu shinsakyoku, 1949) p.4. Hereafter, KDCK.

In Japanese and foreign scholarship alike, the Showa Revival of the 1920s-30s and the accompanying rise of militarism rarely takes the destruction of the national capital as a starting point.⁵ There is, after all, a general uncomfortability in historical writing with extending agency to crises of nature (as opposed to crises of politics, economy, and/or society which manifest in nature), which are often approached as ‘time-outs’ in social and political gamesmanship.⁶ Mainstream historical scholarship locates the origin of the Japanese *state of emergency* of the 1930s in such events as the 5.15 Incident of 1932 and the withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933.⁷ Yet much of the emergency language activated in the 1930s was produced by right-wing officials and intellectuals in the aftermath of the 1923 earthquake, a discourse which was not only unprecedented, but would provide an important ideological resource into the following decade and beyond. Intellectual and popular responses to the natural disaster opened a new front in conservatives’ attacks on the Left by substituting a language of speed, urgency, and millenarianism for the slow, measured, and often

5 There are exceptions, mostly within Japanese scholarship. In *Shinsai ni Yuragu: 1923-1931* (1962) Imai Seiichi et al portrayed the earthquake as a seminal event marking the beginning of the era which ended with the Manchurian Incident. In the epilogue, Imai explained that “Japan in this period had a delicate mix of social stability and sense of anxiety as an undercurrent, preparing her way for the subsequent abnormal period” (Tsurumi Shunsuke and Imai Seiichi et al eds., *Shinsai ni Yuragu: 1923-1931* [Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1962], p.335-336, hereafter, SNY). Two decades later, Nakajima Yōichirō, the author of *Kanto Daishinsai* (The Great Kanto Earthquake, 1982), also interpreted the disaster as a political event, relating the public fear and confusion caused by the disaster to the later military usurpation of power. Because of the earthquake and the economic crisis in the 1920s, he argued that the masses held a profound sense of crisis even prior to military propaganda about the imminence of war. Under martial law in the aftermath of the earthquake, the Japanese military had proven its usefulness and managed to “blow away the public mistrust and calls for demilitarization” which had been so pervasive prior to the disaster (Nakajima Yōichirō, *Kantō Daishinsai* [Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1982], p. 1-2).

⁶ One of us (Clancey) has written elsewhere of the peculiar economy of natural disaster in modern historical and social science literature. Famines and droughts have gathered the largest attention from historians and social scientists, followed more recently by epidemics, because their points of contact with political and social history are perceived to be most numerous, while more sudden-onset disasters, e.g., floods, typhoons, and seismic events, have been largely left to the realm of journalistic non-fiction. Moreover, environmental history, which might have provided a more wholistic frame, favors the crisis as *process*, thus under-theorizing the sudden-onset event of a major earthquake or tsunami. For these and other reasons, it has been methodologically and theoretically easier (and thus more common) for historians of inter-war Japan to discuss the political effects of the rural famines than of the seismic destruction of the capital city. More recent attempts to work Tokyo’s destruction into a national (and international narrative) by Charles Schencking, Janet Borland and Christopher Mullins, Kerry Smith and others are just beginning to be published, and may contribute to reversing this trend. (see Clancey, “The Meiji Earthquake: Nature, Nation, and the Ambiguities of Catastrophe”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 4 (2006), pp. 909-951; Charles J. Schencking, “Catastrophe, Opportunism, Contestation: The Fractured Politics of Reconstructing Tokyo following the Great Kanto Earthquake”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 4 (2006), pp. 833-74; Janet Borland, “Stories of Ideal Japanese Subjects from the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923”, *Japanese Studies*, 25, 1 (May, 2005); Christopher Mullis, “Shockwaves and Reverberations: The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and the Japanese Diaspora in Hawaii and the Continental United States” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Melbourne, Feb. 2008)

⁷ For example, Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931-33* (London, NY: Routledge, 2002), pp. 63-67. While Wilson’s claim that the word *hijōji* was not in use before 1932 is in error, her careful documentation of its resurgence in that year suggests a hiatus in its use between the earthquake and the Manchurian Incident.

tedious language associated with constitutional reform. Arising initially from post-apocalyptic Tokyo, *Hijōji Nippon* would eventually be characterized by terrorism, coup d'état, disastrous foreign wars, and ultimately Tokyo's second, less natural reduction to physical ruins.

Those who most consistently deployed this novel language of emergency described the Great Kanto Earthquake as a test from Heaven, and one needful of being passed on the way to a better life. Given that Japan is one of the most seismic nations on earth (and also prone to fires, typhoons, landslides, and floods) the history, popular sayings, and traditional perceptions of violent nature (which also found source in Buddhist traditions) were liberally drawn on by the Right in preaching moral lessons and unity, and denying excessive materialism and individualism. This discourse asked for allegiance by provoking *fear*, but also spread the promise of a better future. There was some initial convergence in post-disaster discourse between the language and imagery of the Right and that of the Center - for example, the "Regeneration Plans" proposed for Tokyo after the earthquake would resonate with a range of Japanese reformers and revolutionaries in the 1930s - but while the sense of *emergency* would eventually drop away for many political players, it would remain vital to conservatives and radical nationalists. For them there was no clear divide between the natural and political crises, which would come to be framed as a near-continuous *emergency*, and one presenting a personal, and ultimately spiritual challenge to every Japanese.

The Japanese rhetoric of *emergency* drew on both nativist and internationalist sources. Some of it was excavated from historical and mytho-historical material, particularly Nichirenism, which counted such infamous Rightist intellectuals as Kita Ikki and Ishiwara Kanji among its followers. On the other hand, the 1920s was the first and arguably most crucial decade in the development of a global discourse of emergency, which *hijōji* translated and domesticated. Both in its local and international manifestations, moreover, the concept was bound up with events of nature as much as shifts in society, the economy, or politics. In Japan, perhaps uniquely, it also shaded into the supernatural. This convergence indeed proved crucial to giving the new 20th century *state of emergency* its particular charisma, one it continues to carry today.

The Japan of the 1920s, and particularly Tokyo, was of course a 'center of calculation' with a well-developed scientific community, and a reading public which readily consumed scientific as well as political and religious tracts. Japan's seismologists, whom I've discussed at length elsewhere, were among the most numerous, most sophisticated, and most respected in the world in the years and

moments before the destruction of Tokyo in 1923, an event which nonetheless shook their community to its core. Meiji and Taisho era science had managed to vanquish to a remarkable extent ‘popular superstitions’ about seismicity - such as those describing earthquakes as the movements of a giant catfish - even as it cautiously subjected certain others (e.g. the relationship to earthquakes to weather, or animals’ responses to seismic vibrations) to cautious scientific investigation. But Japanese science had not decisively encountered – let alone taken on – millenarian beliefs related to certain long-dormant strains of Buddhism, which would become resurgent in the aftermath of Tokyo’s destruction. These beliefs, as inchoate and ‘irrational’ as they would have appeared to Japan’s earth scientists and many other thinking persons, came too late and too strongly to be effectively countered, and would contribute to sweeping away – temporarily – much of the epistemological legacy that Meiji and Taisho science had worked so hard to construct.⁸

Toward a History of *Emergency*

Although *emergency* was among the prominent keywords of the twentieth century (and it seems the early twenty-first century as well)⁹ we know relatively little about how it came to prominence or why. In the past decade, philosophers and legal scholars have taken up the problem of *the exception* to the rule of law, following the work of Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt, a matter that seemed particularly pressing in the context of the contemporary *war on terror*. As important and topical as this discussion is, it has not been deeply informed by historical studies, and the examples it references thus tend to cluster around a few iconic sites – Imperial Rome, The Third Reich, Guantanamo Bay, etc. Perhaps for this reason, philosophical and legal discussions about *states of emergency* have tended to be more vigorous than political, social, or economic ones, a condition noted, and even lamented by some of those at the center of the present discussion.¹⁰

⁸ For an extended discussion of the formative years of Japanese earth science in the Meiji Period, and its crisis following the Great Kanto Earthquake, see my Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity, 1868-1935 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁹ As we write, the “Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008” is being implemented by the US government in order to salvage the national and global economic system.

¹⁰ I’m particularly referring to William E. Scheuerman, who criticizes the neglect of “economic emergencies” by legal and political scholars in his “The Economic State of Emergency”, *Cardoza Law Review*, Vo. 21, Nos. 5-6 (2000); the classic work by Giorgio Agamben is *State of Exception* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 2005); the most accessible introduction to Carl Schmitt’s work in English is John P. McCormick, “The Dilemmas of Dictatorship: Carl Schmitt and Constitutional Emergency Powers”, in David Dyzenhaus ed., *Law As Politics: Carl Schmitt's Critique Of Liberalism* (Duke U. Press, 1998) 217-51. For a pathbreaking legal discussion of states of emergency, and based largely on Asian examples, see

We might begin to untangle the historical problem which *emergency* presents by cleaving more closely to the word itself, rather than starting with the conditions it is assumed to describe - i.e. the *state of exception*. In other words, by tracing emergency as a discursive and conceptual object that arose at a specific point in time, and as a result of specific series of events, we might arrive at a fuller sense of how and under what circumstances it came to be deployed across a range of interlocking domains. Much legal and philosophical scholarship presumes that the author knows an *emergency* or *exception* when he/she sees one – and that the two words are interchangeable - regardless of the language used at the time by participants or observers. This has the result of projecting a difficult and nuanced word into periods and spaces (and applying it generously to many documents, incidents, and situations) where it would have been peculiar to historical actors.

If legal scholars and philosophers have been overly-casual in applying *emergency* to their cases, however, historians have not helped by under-reporting its occurrence – either ignoring its frequency in the historical record or substituting their own synonyms. In histories of the United States during the 1930s for example, the word *emergency* is often casually clipped from the long titles of New Deal agencies (where it was ubiquitous), and terms like *The Great Depression* are substituted whenever possible for contemporary descriptors like *The Economic Emergency*. In the Japanese case too, the frequent use of *hijōji* in the same period tends to be under-reported in historical accounts, or the word is translated into *crisis* or other more general (and generally older) synonyms. Thus does the term appear like a phantom in the historical record, darting around the periphery of many research projects but rarely a subject of analysis in its own right.

Though the contemporary politics of the word are ambiguous, historically it was more often associated with the Right (i.e. as a condition of reaction to the Left's emergence). In one sense, *emergency* seems fundamentally related to the creation and projection of fear – the socio-political equivalent of *fight or flight* – though the word is ultimately more complicated in the work that it does. The *declaration of a state of emergency* mixes a concession of weakness (or at least limitation of vision) with a will toward action. In that sense *the emergency* differs, at least at its point of origin, from the 18th century state of *the sublime*, which held one helpless and in awe before the potentially destructive power of an Almighty God(s). *Emergency* by contrast creates an actionable space - one in which dangerous events are presumed to be occurring, but can theoretically be reversed. It likely came to popularity in the realms of 20th century politics and journalism not least because of its seemingly *progressive* tendencies, and

arguably stands at the boundary between *progress* and *fear*, a liminal space convergent with many twentieth century projects and stances.

Yet just as *the sublime* was simultaneously a state of politics and nature (and, at their junction, aesthetics) so the more actionable and modern state of emergency gained power and substance by mediating across those same realms. Contemporary legal and political writings about emergency nearly always neglect the *emergency of nature*, as though it were an epiphenomenon of the *emergency of state*. The *emergency of health*, in the form of epidemic diseases and their control, is slightly more visible in contemporary writings if only because of the existence of public health bureaucracies in modern states. Indeed modern science itself seems to operate comfortably in the realm of emergency - from the relations of physics with nuclear weapons, to climatology with global warming, to microbiology with pandemics, etc. – a condition under-remarked in histories and social studies of the sciences. Missing on a more fundamental level, however, is a sense of when, how, and why the term/concept emerged at the nexus of these and other realms, transcending them all while re-producing each in turn.

Nature, and more specifically natural disaster, may be the missing puzzle-piece which promises to make our picture of modern emergency whole. Rather than being an epiphenomenon or second-order application, the emergency of nature has marbled through and informed the modern politics of emergency from its early 20th-century beginnings, and more fundamentally than most social science literature allows. The modern state of emergency was at its point of origin a new politics of landscape, in which natural and political environments were made to explicitly converge or link, giving the term a power nearly akin to *history*, *technology*, *modernity*, and other better-studied twentieth century keywords. And it is here that *the sublime* in the form of natural catastrophe, or more specifically the *catastrophic event*, had its part to play in creating a deeply compelling vista. In few places was that vista more compelling, or politically actionable, than in Late Imperial Japan.

Post-Seismic Utopianism: Tokyo, 1923

Tokyo's sudden and unexpected destruction in late 1923 occurred in the midst of a partial political vacuum, further amplifying its inevitably massive impact. Prime Minister Katō Tomosaburō's death a week before the Great Kanto Earthquake left the government leaderless while his eventual successor was still forming a cabinet.¹¹ On the morning after the quake the Minister of Foreign Affairs (who was appointed

¹¹ Imai Sei'ichi, as cited in Nakajima Yōichirō, *Kanto Daishinsai* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1982), p.24. Hereafter, KD.

provisional prime minister) issued an *Hijōchōhatsurei* (Emergency Conscript Law) and established a special headquarters.¹² The capital also came under the jurisdiction of *kaigenrei*, or Martial Law¹³, which was only the second time that had happened since the adoption of the Meiji Constitution, the first following the Rice Riots only four years before.¹⁴

The new Yamamoto cabinet was rushed into place by the evening of September 2, the same day that Tokyo's Korean population began to be targeted by rumor-mongers.¹⁵ By the 4th day, Kanagawa, Saitama, and Chiba in addition to Tokyo were all designated as *kaigen chiiki* (martial regions), where *kaigen guntai* (military police) closely watched the survivors. Vigilante groups nonetheless formed and began attacking the Korean population, while Socialists (*Kameido Jiken*) and anarchist Ōsugi Sakae and his family (*Amakasu Jiken*) were singled out for arrest and assassination by elements of the police. Some left-leaning publications were also banned for the duration of Martial Law.¹⁶ On September 5, Prime Minister Yamamoto announced the following;

.....the attack against Koreans...not only goes against the fundamental ideal of assimilation between Koreans and Japanese, but it is also not favorable since it is reported to the outside countries. I understand that the incident resulted from this very sudden and difficult situation, but I specially wish that everyone will not lose calmness, a sense of judgment, and display our national spirit of moderation and peace under this current emergency (*hijōji*).¹⁷

Thus did the natural catastrophe quickly become as well a crisis of social control, an age-old condition in Japanese disaster zones.

As in all such situations from the mid-Meiji period onward, the press and public turned to scientists to help explain the disaster, though it discovered the foundations seismology had been equally shaken. As Kerry Smith has discussed, seismologist Imamura Akitsune became something of a celebrity as he pinpointed the earthquake's epicenter and performed other necessary rituals for Japan's press corps. But Imamura's 'scientific voice' was hardly detached from the trauma of the event. He described to reporters not only how his seismological lab at Tokyo University had

¹² This law gave the Home Secretary the right to confiscate food, drinks, medicine, fuels, and so on any time at his own discretion. Those who refused were punished. KD, p. 44.

¹³ KDCK, p. 1.

¹⁴ It was the superintendent-general of the Metropolitan Police, Akaike Atsushi, who made the suggestion about Martial Law to the Home Secretary, and requested help from the military. KD, p. 24.

¹⁵ KD, p. 25 and KDCK, p. 2.

¹⁶ KDCK, p. 2.

¹⁷ From KDCK, p. 3.

literally collapsed around him, and how he personally fought the fires that burned through decades of scientific records, but went on to expose the long-standing professional struggle between himself and his mentor, Prof. Omori Fusakichi, over the likelihood and timing of the Great Kanto Earthquake. Tokyo's destruction vindicated the theories of Imamura (who had predicted it, but been ignored) while so tarnishing the reputation of senior scientist Omori (who had declared the city safe for additional decades) that the latter would die of 'natural causes' before the dust of the catastrophe had fully settled. Japanese seismology would eventually recover, but for a time at least, the authority of science, which had increased steadily if not exponentially with every previous earthquake, tsunami, and volcanic eruption, seemed in abeyance.¹⁸

Within a week of the disaster, and despite the continued impact of the destruction, print reactions began to extend their range beyond the traumatized and tragic, and the search for scientific explanations, to include the optimistic and even euphoric, the latter condition being referred to in some disaster-studies writings as "post-disaster utopianism". The expression *konosai dakara...*, which means "On this occasion..." or "Now that it happened..." and followed by some generally positive statement, became common in print sources and apparently in daily speech, suggesting a reformist readiness to accept accelerated changes rather than return to the past.¹⁹ Those who had been antipathetic about the rise of capitalism particularly appreciated the earthquake for destroying its symbols and breaking down the walls between social classes.²⁰ Likewise, those who perceived the disaster as a judgment on the "pervasion" of materialism felt enthusiastic about undertaking the political task of remaking history.²¹ In previous 'regional' earthquakes the voices of government figures and scientists had largely dominated the search for meaning, challenged only by the woodblock artists and photographers who created sometimes vivid counter-narratives. But this time the disaster site was the national capital and primate city, and a myriad of insistent and

¹⁸ Kerry Smith, "Imamura Akitsune and the Great Kanto Earthquake", unpublished paper delivered at the JSPS/CJS Joint Colloquium "Responses to Destruction in Japan", UC Berkeley, Oct. 13, 2006

¹⁹ Minami Hiroshi, *Taisho Bunka*, (Tokyo: Keisōshobō, 1965), p.355. Hereafter, TB.

²⁰ For example, the editor of the *Asahi Shimbun* wrote, "At that time when everyone ate brown rice and walked on foot, I felt happy despite the suffering because I felt as if the world became mine. I found it extremely amusing there was no distinction about who is who." Sugimura then used an ironical voice to report the destruction of many expensive buildings. (Sugiura Sojinkan, as cited in SNY, p. 55-56). Miyatake Gaikotsu, the writer of satiric journals published six-volumes as *Shinsai Shohō*, also reported, "There were no boundaries between the rich and the poor as all wore poor clothes and ate poor food. There was equality between the noble and the low just like the world in the primitive times." (Miyatake Gaikotsu, *Shinsai Shohō*, vol.1 [Tokyo: Hankyōdō, 1923], p.6).

²¹ One of the few scholars to look explicitly at the political discourse generated in the aftermath of the Kanto Earthquake is Janet Borland (see her "Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Reinvigorating the Japanese State with Moral Values through Education Following the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake" *Modern Asian Studies*, 40, 4 (2006), pp. 875-907. Her work focuses on earthquake-themed moral tracts produced for school-children, primarily by the Ministry of Education, which might be characterized as 'center-right' in content, and concentrated on imparting Confucian values such as filial piety and sacrifice.

articulate voices would vie to control the conversation. Among the most insistent would be those of the reformist Right.

Not only right-wing intellectuals, however, but mainstream elements of the Japanese government wasted little time in grieving over Tokyo's loss. As early as the 4th of September 1923, a plan to reconstruct the city of Tokyo was drafted by the Home Secretary, Gotō Shimpei, and submitted to the council on the 6th.²² In his statement, Gotō stressed *fukkō* (revival, regeneration), a drastic transformation of Tokyo into a cosmopolitan city, as opposed to *fukkyū* (retrieval, recovery).²³ Gotō's proposal that the government buy out or confiscate all private land in Tokyo was eventually dropped in the face of political opposition, but he was not alone in deploying a utopian rhetoric of total change. While Gotō preferred *fukkō* over *fukkyū*, the word *shinzō* (new creation) was coined as a more energetic replacement for the then-common *kaizō* (recreation, reform).²⁴ In one popular tract, the reconstruction of the capital was compared to the rebirth of Phoenix. The disaster "will probably burn down all the past obstacles" wrote the author "and establish the most magnificent city in the West Pacific as well as East Asia [which] can contribute to the civilized culture of the entire world. The great disaster is the price [we paid] for this [goal]."²⁵

In the eyes of the Right, however, transforming Tokyo into "the most magnificent city" was bound up with two more fundamental political goals: the suppression of the Left and the acquisition of public consent to conservative rule. Justification was provided by the influential business leader, Shibusawa Eiichi, who declared that the earthquake was divine punishment for public moral decline, and employed emergency (*hijō*) to suggest mass introspection and self-reform.²⁶ His so-called *tenken ron*, or "theory of retribution", became prominent in writings of the period and was strongly supported by right-leaning intellectuals. It was effective because it had origins in Chinese cosmology (the Mandate of Heaven), even though, unlike Chinese emperors, the Emperor Taisho was never blamed in any source for the rumbling of the earth.²⁷ In 1923 Japan, it was rather the masses who had brought natural disaster upon the realm, and were urged to reflect on their past actions future responsibilities. It was in this atmosphere that the phrase, "We will refrain from

²² For the fullest description of Goto and his plan for Tokyo, see Schenking.

²³ Koshizawa Akira, *Fukkō Keikaku*, (Tokyo: Chūōkōron shinsha, 2005), p.43. Kurita Sendō similarly commented, "*Fukkō*, as many people say, is different from *fukkyū*" in "*Seishin Fukkō no Sakebi*," Tokyo City eds., *11 ji 58 pun* (Tokyo: Shiseidōshoten, 1924), p.312.

²⁴ ,Dai Nihon Yūben Kai, *Taisho Daishinsai Daikasai* (Taisho Great Earthquake, Great Fire) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1923). Hereafter, TDD. p. 267.

²⁵ TDD, No page number.

²⁶ Shibusawa Eiichi, "Ichi Kokumin to Shite," in TDD, p.276.

²⁷ SNY, p.54 and Hori Arata, "Kanto Daishinsai to Tenken Ron: Shibusawa Eiichi wo Chūshin ni" in Kyōdō Kenkyū Rekishi to Bungaku, Geijutsu: Kanto Daishinsai (Tokyo: Risōsha, 2004), p.130-131.

anything luxurious from now on”, famously associated in the post-war period with war-time Japanese society, actually emerged and became popular.²⁸ Only a very few individuals, such as the writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, openly expressed skepticism toward the “theory of retribution” and the emergence of other rightist discourses in the earthquake’s immediate aftermath. Indeed, most mainstream Japanese thinkers did not protest the murders of Koreans, Anarchists, and Socialists.²⁹

Gen. Fukuda Miyatarō, who was in charge of security in the *kaigen chiiki* (regions designated under the martial law) also explicitly combined the retribution theory with invocations of *hijōji*. Besides the damage caused by the disaster, the activities of socialists and anarchists were seen as a part of *hijōji* for the Japanese military. Fukuda emphasized that because the military had managed to suppress the Left and restore public order, its bond with the Japanese people had been refreshed, and the now-unified nation was ready to rise to the challenge posed by Heaven.

Look at the energy of our fellow citizens who work towards a great new start. After the mountain, there is a river. There is a path after hardship. The recovery of the Imperial Capital! The construction of a new culture! The birth of new life values! The nation is already filled with courage to pass this great trial given by the heaven...Hopefully, both the wealthy and the poor will display loyalty befitted to your own place and throw away the differences in your ideologies and claims to dedicate yourselves for the establishment of a strong nation and a healthy society.³⁰

The state of *hijōji* was stressed to emphasize the role of the Japanese military, but more importantly, to show that these soldiers, who had only recently been criticized as elitist and even redundant in the Taisho press, were in fact on the people’s side. With such statements as “we all start from scratch”, “everybody is equal now”, and “we all stand at the same starting point”,³¹ a new harmony between the military and the masses was announced. The military now emphasized its role of providing safety and security for the population at home rather than just expanding and defending the Empire abroad.

This conformed to a palpable sense on the Right that the earthquake was not an

²⁸ TB., p.355.

²⁹ Inagaki Tasurō, “Kanto Daishinkasai to Bundan” in Inagaki *Tatsurō Gakugei Bunshū vol.3* (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1982), p.427-429. See also Borland, “Capitalising on Catastrophe . . .”, pp. 13-15. She points out that a Home Ministry survey of 1924 found that the majority of those questioned believed the Earthquake was “divine punishment” for the nation’s (or at least Tokyo’s) sins.

³⁰ Fukuda, “Kaigenka ni okeru Kokumin to Guntai to Gojin Shōrai no Kakugo” in TDD, p.274.

³¹ Wada Kiyoshi, “Start wo Aratani Seyo,” in *11 ji 58 pun* (Tokyo: Shiseodōshoten, 1924), p. 373. This book, which was edited by the City of Tokyo to commemorate the 1st anniversary of the earthquake, comprised a number of pro-state and anti-left articles.

agent of destruction, but one of salvation; that the natural disaster had actually prevented a social and political one of potentially greater magnitude. Masuda Yoshikazu, a powerful businessman and also another supporter of the retribution theory, pointed his finger at socialism and Marxism -- the “selfish ideologies”-- as responsible for the social corruption which brought about the earthquake.³² Mamiya Heizō was more explicit in his article written for a book published by the City of Tokyo at the 1st commemoration of the event. He stated that “Japan is blessed because the Communist revolution which almost took place was successfully prevented by nature’s revolution.”³³ The novelist Murakami Namiroku described the political violence accompanying the earthquake as a godsend for the state:

Although the state tried to prohibit the spread of rumors, [it] is quite unavoidable during such a time of crisis (*hijō no sai*). Moreover, one cannot conclude that these rumors had absolutely no authenticity. These rumors did not emerge as a result of the riots of the Koreans, but rather came from the dangerous ideology of those Japanese who instigated those Koreans. This is why [the phenomenon of rumors] can perhaps benefit the state in controlling dangerous ideologies in the future. Since the citizenry also became alarmed by these dangerous ideologies as a result of the chaos and fear they were experiencing, [the rumors] probably brought more gains [than losses] for the future of the state.³⁴

This discursive drumbeat by the state and military officials caused at least one socialist to confess his sins in the article titled “My Confession and Awakening after the Earthquake”:

How can one lead a peaceful life if the state is destroyed? Moreover, anyone who advocates anarchism ends up suffering such a horrible death. I was such a sinner, and caused emotional pain to my old parents. I am now awake. The earthquake gave me the incentive to reform my life’s destiny and I now realized that I should take this opportunity as a turning point [of my life] to convert to nationalism, and a patriotic and humanistic philosophy, so that I can die a respectful death as a human being...³⁵

³² SNY, p.54.

³³ Mamiya Heizō, “Shizen Kakumei to Shinshakai no Kensetsu” in *11 ji 58 pun*, p. 384. He then continued to discuss how beautiful it was to see people helping each other regardless of their class.

³⁴ TDD, p. 280.

³⁵ Takahashi Takematsu, “Shinsai ni yoru Watashi no Zange to Kakusei” in *11 ji 58 pun*, p. 384.

While the military and right-wing intellectuals experimented with fear and guilt to win trust and forge a stronger nationalism, they also sold utopianism. Frequent reference was made to the Japanese popular proverb, “Crisis can turn into good luck” (*wazawai tenjite fukuto nasu*). For instance, after expressing “deep gratitude” for “the ten thousands of fellow citizens who sacrificed their lives in place of the other seven million Japanese to receive this divine punishment”, Mikami Sanji argued that the nation must repay their sacrifices by “actively striving to turn this crisis (*wazawai*) into good luck.” This would be “a truly everlasting memorial gesture for the victims if [they] worked for a new and honorable epoch after 1923.”³⁶ The famous Meiji-period novelist Kōda Rohan also claimed that the retribution theory was not a mere expression of “religious sentiments of the old-fashioned and uneducated” and added, “by learning lessons and coming up with ideas, it will allow us to improve further, lessen our crisis, and increase our luck.”³⁷ The novelist Murakami Namiroku agreed, writing:

The nation should neither slack off nor get intimidated by a power forcing you to behave as great citizens appropriate for *hijōji*. Instead, [we] should waken ourselves and start fresh, thinking that [this disaster] was a kind of great warning from heaven, so to work with courage to turn this crisis into good luck.³⁸

One professor of science believed that the crisis was brought upon the Japanese because the nation “had enough qualifications to bear the burden”.³⁹

In framing the earthquake as a message from Heaven, right-wing intellectuals evoked the traditional Japanese idea of *yonaoshi* (roughly “world rectification”) to present hope for creating a unified, “peaceful” and ultimately totalitarian world. While Murakami stated, “[We should] redo society (*yonaoka no yarinaoshi*) and restart lives (*ningen no denaoshi*), specially to repay those unfortunate victims”⁴⁰, the poet and critic Ōmachi Keigetsu wrote, “[The earthquake] wakens our fellow citizens. Our laziness will change. Our arrogance will be refrained, corruption will be blown away.... the crisis will become the basis of our happiness, and human hearts will be reformed (*tatenaoshi*) while the capital is reconstructed (*tatenaoshi*).”⁴¹ Not only did the destruction manifest a new beginning for the capital and human morality, but Ōmachi

³⁶ TDD, no page number.

³⁷ TDD, no page number.

³⁸ TDD, p. 277.

³⁹ TDD, no page number

⁴⁰ TDD, p. 278.

⁴¹ Ōmachi, “*Shinshi Shokun wo Tomurau*,” TDD, p. 283.

and others saw the disaster as bringing equality between rich and poor. He argued, “There is no longer any difference between those with money and those without. Anyone who works hard in the midst of this unprecedented crisis has met with a lifetime’s opportunity.” He added, “The recovery [from the disaster] is a matter of the Empire’s rise or decline. The whole nation of Japan must rise . . . as if we were born in this world for the first time.”⁴²

While the last ‘great earthquake’ to have struck Japan, the Nobi Earthquake of 1891, also contributed to a wave of popular criticism of the existing order, most graphically in the form of wood-block prints expressing the fragility of western-derived modernity, it was arguably scientists and their patrons in the Japanese state who reaped the greatest benefit from that disaster. While western engineering was widely seen to have exposed the limits of its knowledge, Japanese earth science not only filled the breach, but went on to teach lessons to foreign scientists in (and about) earthquake zones around the world. The realm of modern rationality was even extended back into time, as Japanese carpenters were described as proto-earthquake-engineers, whose pagodas cleverly resisted seismicity through the use of pendula. The Nobi plain was far from Tokyo, however, and though the peasants who were that earthquake’s major victims may have wrestled with their world-views, both folk and Buddhist, urban elites suffered no crises of consciousness. While some took the opportunity to criticize rural Buddhism for doing too little to assuage victims, millenarian beliefs or visions hardly surfaced in print discussions. Mid-Meiji was, after all, a time when reformist instincts were channeled into institution-building on western models, and accelerated seismicity was also made to serve that purpose, directly contributing to the formation of an internationally-prominent Japanese scientific community.⁴³

In the shattered Tokyo of late 1923, however, seismicity was a much more powerful recruiting tool for the nascent far-right. Kokuryūkai, (The Black Dragon Society) a right-wing organization established in 1901, and which infamously contributed its Pan-Asianistic ideology to the militarist milieu of the 1930s, was perhaps the most enthusiastic proponent of fundamental social change in the aftermath of the earthquake. One of its writings compared the earthquake with the Christian genesis of the world, declaring “the first day [of the disaster] was a hell” and “the second day was [like] pre-historic time,” just like when “primitive people wandered around the Garden

⁴² Ōmachi, “Risai Shokun wo Nagusamu,” TDD, p. 285.

⁴³ See Clancey, Earthquake Nation for an extended discussion. The example of the popular and intellectual response to the Nobi Earthquake indicates that while phenomena like *yanaoshi* were recurrent throughout Japanese history, there were other varieties of response, and the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in post-apocalyptic landscapes are those who can control the conversation. Pre-existing ideologies or tropes, in other words, have no intrinsic power unless properly animated by political actors. In 1891, millenarian Buddhism was simply not animated by any of the major actors vying to shape the event’s meaning.

of Eden.”⁴⁴ The third day was when survivors became more like actual humans, as they started to worry about their livelihoods and became realistic about the means of survival. “We received an order from heaven” it reported “to rebuild and reshape [the society] after being resurrected on the third day”. Although society was still feeling lost and helpless, people “somehow became full of hopes and energy....[and] interestingly enough, sadness and despair turned into optimism.”⁴⁵ Kokuryūkai believed that Japanese society was penalized by Heaven because “all spheres of society including political, religious and educational were [then] at the height of their corruption. There was no other choice left but to explode after such a social dead-end. That [explosion] was this earthquake.”⁴⁶ They continued, “To think that it has been 69 years since the great earthquake of Ansei period, it is almost one person’s lifetime. A big, once in a lifetime cleansing was therefore performed on every person, to clean us from dirt.”⁴⁷

Heaven, Kokuryūkai believed, had also performed natural selection, rewarding good citizens while taking everything away from the bad. Thus Japanese society no longer had to fear the “dangerous ideologies,” because “once we have a good state administrative system, we do not even need the party system and the cooperation between the state and citizens, the *kyokokuicchi* (united country, becoming one) will follow bringing more social stability and harmony than the time before this disaster.”⁴⁸ They were of course wrong about events of the following few years, in which party government temporarily flourished with the expansion of suffrage, but such language would be helpful to their long-term cause.

Going beyond even the “retribution theory”, Kokuryūkai wrote that the earthquake had salvaged the Japanese ethos: “The Japanese people whose eyes are now opened are in a way very blessed. The destroyed objects can be restored, but the human spirit on its verge would have eventually been destroyed [eternally].” Their tracts were also run through with social Darwinism, as when they explained that “although we feel sorry for those who passed away, we have to see them as those who failed the test of nature selecting those that are fittest.....so those that are alive, you should feel happy and work hard.”⁴⁹ The nation had experienced a re-birth as if through war, to which the earthquake was related: “The people living in the period between Meiji and Taisho are blessed,” because “they experienced the Sino-Japanese war, the Russo-Japanese war....survived the earthquake of Taisho and witnessed the great power of natural disaster.” These people were blessed “having been enabled in this period...to

⁴⁴ Kokuryūkai, *Tokyo Daijishinki* (Osaka: Chūshinkakushobō, 1923), p.306. Hereafter, TDK.

⁴⁵ TDK, p. 307.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ TDK, p. 308.

⁴⁸ TDK, p. 309.

⁴⁹ TDK, p. 311.

experience various changes, [because] there was no other period in our history like this 45 years since the [Meiji restoration], where there was such a tremendous change.”⁵⁰ And later, “Heaven’s anger made people earnest, [so] the natural disaster was much better than any riots or revolution.”⁵¹

By stressing how blessed were the survivors, Kokuryūkai rhetorically enlisted them in the creation of a new post-apocalyptic state. Those who were still despairing and complaining were criticized as weak and lazy,⁵² and to further justify the earthquake as the mandate of Heaven, Kokuryūkai made the seismicity of the Japanese landscape into a virtue rather than a burden. Comparing Japan to Korea, where earthquakes were far fewer, they argued that people living in seismic zones tend to be more lively, hard-working and active. The annexation of Korea was thus “the natural fate”⁵³ of that country. A language of environmental determinism re-vitalized by natural disaster would emerge more generally in the 1930s with Watsuji Tetsurō’s more famous description of Japanese as “typhoon people”.

Statements by some military officials shared rhetorical similarities with those of Kokuryūkai. The book *Daishinsai to Sono Kyōkun* (The Great Earthquake and Its Lessons) was published in 1923 by the Society for Promoting General Moral Education, an affiliate of the Organization of Military Education (Gunji Kyōikukai). The content has a strong spiritual and nationalistic tone, also analyzing the disaster as Heaven’s message to urge the nation to implement new changes in society and mentality, e.g.:

What we strongly felt for the first time was that life is *mujō* (frail or impermanent). Who, among the 2,500,000 citizens of this nation, does not feel this?.....The monks always tell us that life is *mujō*, but this time, the ordinary people really experienced it. ... Our modern civilization has been turned upside down from its core. We thus cannot help feeling the helplessness of humankind.⁵⁴

In Buddhist belief, the impermanence of human life may indeed be the law of nature. However, the author of this book argued that recognition of impermanence begets not resignation but *hijōji*, a state which can be productively handled and managed through strong will:

⁵⁰ TDK, p. 315.

⁵¹ TDK, p. 314.

⁵² TDK, p. 315.

⁵³ TDK, p. 311-312.

⁵⁴ *Tsūzoku Kyōiku Fukyū Kai, Daishinsai to Sono Kyōkun* (Tokyo: Tsūzoku Kyōiku Fukyū kai Shuppanyoku, 1923), p131. Hereafter, DSK.

An unprecedented great disaster has been inflicted on us. This truly is a great trial given from heaven to all the Japanese... Regardless of *jōji* (usual circumstance) or *henji* (time of change), to master oneself and control oneself without having to rely on the other people or other things but himself is important....If the spirit of self-help is not solid, [one can] blindly believe something groundless...This is very common during the *hijōji* (unusual incident).....Not only is it at the time of *jihen*, but also during the *jōji*...one's actions are one's own responsibilities.⁵⁵

To manage the state of emergency, however, not only the strengthening of oneself but the help of the military was inevitable:

Japan fought wars against foreign countries including the Sino-Japanese war, Russo-Japanese war, and the First World War, and when our military won many victories, the nation's admiration and trust for both navy and army was tremendous. Yet when demilitarization became a global trend in these recent years, the views of the Japanese toward their military forces changed incredibly. When they agreed to demilitarization, their admiration and trust for military officers tremendously weakened, compared to the past. With this earthquake, however, the navy and army both made tremendous accomplishments...[examples of the accomplishments follow].....Such recognition that *hijōji* could not [have been overcome] without the power of the military was deeply buried even in the minds of small children....The armament of both navy and army does not simply prepare us for external attacks, but it also prepares for the internal problem such as *hijōji*. This occasion truly made the nation appreciate [the military] deeply.⁵⁶

The author chided citizens for having elected corrupt politicians, citing local administrators who stole food and other goods in midst of chaos.⁵⁷ The masses were thus to blame for social and political corruption, and indirectly for the earthquake, while the military officials who distributed relief proved their "efficiency...during *hijōji* because every idea could pass without opposition from anyone."⁵⁸ Thus, while life may be impermanent, morality is controllable with public reform and military power.

⁵⁵ DSK., p.138-139.

⁵⁶ DSK., 153-155. The Washington Naval Treaty had been signed by Prime Minister Katō in 1922 and proclaimed by President Harding about ten days before the earthquake.

⁵⁷ DSK., p. 148-149.

⁵⁸ DSK., p. 148.

“Suffice it to say that nature does no harm to humans, but only brings good to us,”⁵⁹ wrote the author, though humans need to be able to “control nature by learning how to adapt to it and understand it.”⁶⁰ He concluded with the statement:

Since mankind is the blessed child of the nature, we have no reason to receive the evil of nature. Life is neither fragile nor *mujō*. The roads before us are shining with lasting lights. Open your eyes to look at those lights, open your eyes to embrace and feel the affectionate hands of nature!⁶¹

Once nature’s message was understood, Tokyo could be “the proud capital of the East within ten years from today.” Thus the earthquake “should be perceived by all as the destruction which was necessary for the construction of a better [society] both mentally and physically”.⁶²

Disaster Landscapes and Japanese Millenarianism

There was some kinship between the new condition of *hijōji*, as expressed in the writings above, and certain pre-existing Japanese religious states, some of which arose from earlier post-apocalyptic circumstances. These were both likely rooted in the sense that *emergency* provides a moment of “exception” or “time-out”, not in the rule of law (which did not strongly exist in Japan) but in the realm of everyday life, inviting people to enter or live in a different dimension, and blurring the boundary between the time of the secular and the sacred. Mystic readings of natural disasters as productively unsettling normality were common in the course of Japanese history and the messages and beliefs commonly known as *yonaooshi* (world rectification) often provided the masses and would-be social reformers with justification for political changes.

Archaic forms of *yonaooshi* first appear in *Nihonshoki* (Chronicles of Japan),⁶³ which was finished about 720 A.D., and the concept remained popular over the course of Japanese history. Yasumaru Yoshio’s and Hirota Masaki’s paper, “The Genealogy of *Yonaoshi*” (1965), analyzed the phenomenon as the Japanese manifestation of a universal millenarianism. They defined the term simply as “the illusion of imminent liberation matured in the lives of people facing hardship.”⁶⁴ This allowed other social

⁵⁹ DSK., p.161.

⁶⁰ DSK., p. 160.

⁶¹ DSK., p. 162.

⁶² DSK., p. 137.

⁶³ Tomita Masashi, *Dentōteki Shakai no Sennenōkoku Undō* (Kyoto: Kōyōshobō, 1996), p.72.

⁶⁴ The paper is compiled in Yasumaru Yoshio, *Nihon no Kindaika to Minshū Shisō* (Tokyo: Aokishoten,

movements in Japanese history to be rediscovered as millenarian, including the peasant uprisings of the late Tokugawa period known as House Bashing (*uchikowashi*) and the *Eejanaika* movement.⁶⁵ The reforming elites who represented people's visions and voices were also sometimes revered as *yonaooshi-sama*.⁶⁶ Yasumaru and Hirota claimed that unlike the case of Christian millenarianism, however, Japanese religions were not able to provide political and ideological frameworks for the imagined new world, thus making *yonaooshi* fatally marginal and transient in character.⁶⁷ Their argument, however, likely undervalued its larger (and lasting) social impact as the following historical examples illustrate.

One vivid example of *yonaooshi* is Miroku worship,⁶⁸ a popular belief that a Buddhist deity in a rich land of the Eastern Sea would send ships carrying rice at times when people faced extreme poverty, oppression, or distress. The belief became popular in the eastern regions of Japan, which are incidentally most prone to earthquakes and typhoons, and where folksongs and dances dedicated to Miroku were passed down for generations. Miroku, or Maitreya in Sanskrit, has etymological connection with the Indian god Mitra, which refers to "promise" or "contract" in the original meanings found in Vedas. The mythological stories of this saving god are believed to have developed from a legendary disciple of Shakyamuni,⁶⁹ and spread from the Asian continent to Japan in the sixth century.⁷⁰ That was around the same time when Buddhism was introduced to the country, but Yanagida Kunio's field research strongly suggests that Miroku worship was influenced by native myths and beliefs held prior to the Japanese contact with that religion.⁷¹

From the late Heian period, Miroku shared popular respect with another popular deity, Amida Buddha, and two different images of paradise they conjured co-existed until the Edo period.⁷² In hopes of bringing this messiah on earth, devotees invented original names for the eras they lived in, thus putting themselves in a separate

1974), p.87.

⁶⁵ For example, Wakamori Tarō, "Kinsei Miroku Shinkō no Ichimen," in Miyata Noboru ed., *Miroku Shinkō* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1984), p.69-72. *Uchikowashi* refers to peasant attacks on public offices and the residences of wealthy merchants and loan sharks. The *Eejanaika* movement was a huge public craze in singing and dancing caused accompanying the end of the Tokugawa regime.

⁶⁶ For example, the socialist Kōtoku Shūsui was called "*yonaooshi-sama*" by the people of his hometown. Haga Noboru, *Yonaooshi no Shisō*, p.10-11.

⁶⁷ Yasumaru, "Genealogy," p.87-91.

⁶⁸ "Miroku" is often written in Katakana in order to distinguish the Miroku revered in Japanese *yonaooshi* from the one depicted in the Buddhist texts. In a strict sense, Miroku worship is blended with the essence of popular beliefs originated in Japanese traditional society. See, Miyata Noboru, *Miroku Shinkō no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1975), p.24.

⁶⁹ Miyata, *ibid.*, p.23.

⁷⁰ Tomita, *Dentō teki Shakai*, p.69.

⁷¹ Yanagida Kunio, "Miroku no Fune," in Miyata ed., *Miroku Shinkō*.

⁷² Tomita, *ibid.*, p.70-71 and Yasunaga Juen, "Miroku Shinkō to Miroku no Yo," in Miyata, *ibid.*, p.173-174.

dimension of time from the official chronology.⁷³ This unofficial chronology was called *shinengō*. The name “Miroku” was first employed in 1171 and was frequently used during the 16th century when political confusion was exceptionally overwhelming.⁷⁴ By this period, Miroku was believed to bring gold and silver to the suffering rather than rice.⁷⁵

With the relative peace and prosperity of the Tokugawa era, the ideal land of Miroku came to be seen as achievable only after some natural disaster had swept away the country. In some incarnations, a brand new world was imagined as regenerating from the muddy sea produced by a large earthquake. Disasters were therefore encountered with some appreciation because they blurred the Confucian class system and encouraged the government to distribute rice in their aftermath.⁷⁶ They also forced landlords to rebuild, thus putting money in the hands of the artisan class. During the Great Ansei Earthquake of 1855, which destroyed Edo, the incompetence of the government and the foreign pressure to open the country combined to create a positive popular reaction to the disaster.⁷⁷ The earthquake was seen as “a kind of regeneration rite destroying the existing order and recreating a new society”.⁷⁸ Since the early Edo period, a large catfish, *namazu* or *kokuryū* (Black Dragon) in some regions,⁷⁹ living under Japan was believed to cause earthquakes and a number of *namazu-e* (prints of catfish) were produced as popular commentaries in the aftermath of the event.⁸⁰ Because the earthquake brought *yonaoshi* and created jobs for craftsmen, the catfish is depicted in these prints as alternately frightening and revered, a destroyer and a savior.⁸¹ One *namazu-e* depicts a whale-like catfish swimming in from the sea and showering gold coins on those welcoming him from the shore, much in the manner of Miroku. Another shows artisans trying to save a catfish who is being beaten by wealthy landowners.

The most famous example of a social reformer who aspired to materialize

⁷³ Yasunaga, *ibid.*, p.178-179. Prior to the 12th century, the Japanese believed that Miroku land was something that would be brought about irregardless of their efforts, but they also attempted to bring it into existence with the use of this unofficial chronology called *Shinengō*. This manifested not just utopianism, but discontent with and resistance to the state administration.

⁷⁴ Miyata, *Miroku Shinkō no Kenkyū*, p.33.

⁷⁵ Yasumaru, “Genealogy,” p.93.

⁷⁶ Miyata, *Miroku Shinkō no Kenkyū*, p.228.

⁷⁷ Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan eds., *Tenpenchii to Seikimatsu* (Tokyo: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2000), p.41.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁷⁹ The oldest catfish living in Lake Biwa was called *Kokuryū*, a sacred mythological creature that was believed to bring disasters and epidemics. Its relationship to *Kokuryūkai*, if any, is unclear.

⁸⁰ Ōbayashi Taira, “*Jishin no Shinwa to Minkan Shinkō*” in Hayashi Kentarō eds., *Tokyo Daigaku Kōkai Kōza 24: Jishin* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1976), p.273. Also, *Tenpenchii to Seikimatsu*, p.34. According to Ōbayashi, this belief exists around the world, and prior to the Edo period, people believed in dragons instead of catfish.

⁸¹ *Tenpenchii to Seikimatsu*, p.42.

yonaooshi and drew his moral justification from natural disaster is the Buddhist monk Nichiren (1222-1282). He lived in a time of exceptional social, political, and natural tumult, being born when the Kamakura shogunate was struggling to consolidate its power,⁸² and dying a year after the Mongols attempted their second invasion of Japan. During the prime of his career, the nation was also struck by a relentless number of natural disasters, including floods, epidemics, famines, and the great earthquake of the Shōka era, all appearing in tight succession from 1256 to 1262. The consequences of these multiple disasters were so devastating that they caused the government to rename the era five times in hopes of warding off inauspiciousness.⁸³ Under such social circumstances, Nichiren became extremely conscious of the secular world and “formed an apocalyptic view of the deterioration of Japan from within and its destruction from without.”⁸⁴

As a result of these calamities, Nichiren became skeptical of the prevailing Buddhism, and condemned other doctrines aside from his own as heresy. He was a monk of the Tendai sect, which upheld the Lotus Sutra for its teaching that all men had the potential to attain Buddhahood. Tendai was originally introduced from China by Saichō in the early ninth century and along with Kūkai’s Shingon sect, it flourished under the patronage of the court during the Heian period. In Nichiren’s time, however, the new sects of Buddhism, Jōdo (Pure Land) and Zen, emerged and became prominent. He thus felt the need to restore *shōbō*, or the Correct Law, in order to save Japan and Buddhism from *hibō*, the teachings that slander the religious truth expounded in the Lotus Sutra.⁸⁵

Nichiren emphasized the significance of a Buddhist proselytizing called *shakubuku*, or the correcting of doctrines that are in error (*shaku*) and persuading the believers to revere the Correct Law (*buku*).⁸⁶ He also authorized the use of arms to carry out *shakubuku*, which drew its authority on the doctrine of *isshetsu tashō* (kill one to save many). The forcible attitude of Nichiren brought inevitable tension with state authorities and a series of persecutions against him and his followers. Yet Nichiren did not compromise with a belief like Hōnen’s, which taught one to renounce hope for rewards in a life hereafter. He stressed the meaning of self-effort in order for an

⁸² A year before Nichiren was born, a former emperor, Gotoba, organized a rebellion against the shogunate, but was suppressed by the Hōjō family who had been the de facto rulers of Japan as regents since the death of the founder, Minamoto Yoritomo. The incident is known as the Jōkyū War.

⁸³ Tamura Yoshirō, “Nichiren no Shōgai to Shisō” in Tamura ed., *Nichiren* (Tokyo: Chikumashobō, 1986), 10-12.

⁸⁴ Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), p.101.

⁸⁵ Nichiren, *Shugo Kokka Ron*, compiled in Tamura ed., *Nichiren*, p.29-32. This was written in 1257.

⁸⁶ There are two ways of proselytizing taught in Japanese Buddhism: One is *shakubuku* and the other is *shōju*. While the former enforces forcible conversion, the latter shows understanding for others’ own beliefs and convinces them in an intellectual manner. Now that people were infected by many evil teachings, Nichiren thought that *shōju* was no longer effectual.

individual to be liberated from the sufferings in this world. At the same time, he also rejected the views of Zen preachers such as Dōgen —Nichiren’s contemporary— by placing more importance on social action than the status of one’s inner being.⁸⁷ His concerns were strongly attached to the world of here and now.

Nichiren’s uncompromising, militant attitude was supported by the doctrine of *mappō* (The Latter Day of the Buddhist Law), which composed Buddhist eschatology in various sutras and commentaries.⁸⁸ East Asian Buddhists widely held the idea that the Buddha’s teachings go through three successive stages of development: *shōbō*, the age of flourishing, *zōbō*, the age of decline, and lastly, *mappō*, the age of disappearance. The first two ages last for one thousand years each following the death of the historical Buddha, and the final age of *mappō* for the next ten thousand years. Buddhists in medieval Japan believed that the *mappō* had commenced in 1052, based on a record which purported that Shakyamuni’s nirvana took place in 949 B.C.E.⁸⁹ The political, social, and natural chaos that had befallen Japan in the thirteenth century was conceived by many as the exact embodiment of the world’s last days.

Despair, pessimism, and the Buddhist pathos or impermanence (*mujō*) were deeply felt in the late Heian and Kamakura period and became the common themes of medieval literature, prose, and poetry.⁹⁰ While such *mappō* thought gave rise to Hōnen’s *nembutsu* and made it extremely popular among those trapped in tremendous helplessness, Nichiren gave the idea a positive and even exultant meaning. This was because the social and political upheaval paved the way for such new types of Buddhists as himself, but more importantly, the sense of proto-emergency provided by the notion of *mappō* gave Nichiren a pretext to disallow others’ objections.⁹¹ He thought that all the doctrines of Buddhism would disappear except for the Lotus Sutra, so this age of darkness was essentially the time of flourishing for the True Dharma, his own doctrines.⁹² The doctrines of *ki* (opportunity) and *toki* (time) were devised so as to

⁸⁷ Tokoro, *ibid.*, p.2. Here, Tokoro discusses the eclectic nature of Nichiren’s teachings, which incorporate the *tariki* (reliance on others) of *Jōdo* with the *jiriki* (self-effort) of Zen.

⁸⁸ The doctrine of *mappō* was first conceptualized in Sui and Tang China. See, Tokoro, *ibid.*, p.313 for the brief history of this doctrine.

⁸⁹ See, Nichiren, *Shugo Kokka Ron*, p.57, where he writes about the three great ages of Buddhist law and calculates that the *mappō* had already commenced in his period. For more details, see Tokoro, *ibid.*, p.317-318. The reference for my English translation of the names of the three ages comes from Varley, *Japanese Culture*, p.70.

⁹⁰ de Bary, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p.207.

⁹¹ Tokoro, *Nichiren no Shisō*, p.312-314.

⁹² Nichiren’s *Nyoraimetsugo Gogohyakusaishi Kanjin Honzon Shō* (*Discourse on the Establishment in the Fifth-Half Millennium after the Buddha’s Passing of the Object of Worship for Observing One’s Own Mind*) or simply, *Kanjin Honzon Shō* (1273), discusses how the essence of Truth (*ichinen sanzen*, or “the three thousand worlds in an instant of thought”) will finally manifest itself in the age of *mappō* once people recite *daimoku* with complete faith in the Lotus Sutra. He writes, “[The Buddha’s] advent was specifically for people like us, those living in the beginning of the Latter Day, not for those who lived in the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law.” See, Burton Watson and others trans,

argue that his teachings had not been ripe for people to embrace in preceding ages.⁹³ Such sensitivity to time — he constantly referred to how many years had passed since Shakyamuni's death— formed the direct basis of his justification for the importance of *shakubuku*.⁹⁴ Nichiren's uniquely positive and "optimistic" outlook on the Buddhist apocalypse is unseen among the other teachers of Japanese Buddhism from this period.⁹⁵

Nichiren perceived Buddhist eschatology as the "prophecy of the Buddha"⁹⁶ and made assiduous effort to provide objective proof by drawing on historical facts and examples. Observations about natural disaster were consistently used to evince the primacy of the Lotus Sutra over other doctrines. Among such events, the great earthquake of 1257 had a special meaning for Nichiren because he saw it as the genuine sign of the world going through apocalyptic change. He wrote:

Now is when the Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear and establish in this country the supreme object of worship on the earth which depicts Shakyamuni Buddha of the essential teaching attending [the original Buddha]. This object of worship has never appeared in India or China....[These Bodhisattvas] have been waiting for the right time to emerge from the earth and carry out the Lord Buddha's command. They did not appear in the Former or Middle Day. But if they did not appear in the Latter Day of the Law, their vows would be outright lies, and the prophecies of Shakyamuni, Taihō, and the other Buddhas would be no more than froth on the waters. We have recently experienced earthquakes, comets, and other calamities such as never occurred in the Former or Middle Day. These signs could not be caused by *garudas*, *asuras*, or dragons; they must foretell the appearance of the Four Great Bodhisattvas.⁹⁷

According to some accounts in the Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra, thousands of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth emerged from the ground one day and Shakyamuni revealed to them that they were his first disciples. Four among them were especially entrusted

Philip B. Yampolsky ed., *Selected Writings of Nichiren* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.148-149 and 176-178.

⁹³ Yampolsky, *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Nichiren wrote *Kyōkijikokushō* (The Treatise on Teaching, Opportunity, Time, and Nation) and *Senjishō* (The Selection of the Time) in 1262 and 1275, respectively. *Senjishō* opens with the sentence: "One who wishes to study the teachings of Buddhism must first learn to understand the time." See, *Selected Writings of Nichiren*, p.183 and also, Tokoro, *ibid.*, p.323 and 336-344 for more details on Nichiren's conception of time.

⁹⁵ Tokoro, *Nichiren no Shisō*, p.329.

⁹⁶ Nichiren, *Kanjin Honzon Shō*., in Tamura ed., *Nichiren*, p.332.

⁹⁷ Yampolsky, *Selected Writings of Nichiren*, p.178-179.

with the task to protect and deliver the teachings of the Buddha after his death.⁹⁸ What Nichiren advocates here is the imminent realization of the Buddha land in Japan, and nowhere else.

Three years after the earthquake, Nichiren wrote and submitted *Risshō Ankoku Ron* (The Establishment of the Legitimate Teaching for the Protection of the Country) to Hōjō Tokiyori, a retired regent who had remained influential in the military government. It took the form of dialogue between a host and a visitor, thinly-veiled references to Nichiren and Tokiyori.⁹⁹ It opened with the visitor's moans over the disasters that have made people suffer around the country, followed by the host's harsh criticisms of Hōnen's *nembutsu* as the primary source of such troubles. Nichiren mentioned five kinds of calamities that have already ravaged the country and two others that will soon occur if the Lotus Sutra continues to be neglected by the state. Those two were the "calamity of invasion from foreign lands" and the "calamity of revolt within one's own domains."¹⁰⁰

When the Mongols first sent their envoys to Japan in 1268, it reinforced Nichiren's sense that he was a prophet, the sole "evangelist of the Lotus Sutra," and one of the Four Bodhisattvas of the Earth.¹⁰¹ Under an extremely strong messianic mission, he urged the government to grant his request on three different occasions and was exiled twice by the enraged officials. Yet, Nichiren felt energized the more the persecution intensified because the true "evangelist of the Lotus Sutra" was supposed to meet with numbers of adversities before he could actually accomplish his goal. When his third warning failed, however, he finally retired to Mount Minobu where he died in 1282.

For these actions, Nichiren was later depicted as a fervently nationalistic character, and by some as Japan's first nationalist. His importance in our current, discussion, however, lies not only in the influence natural disaster likely played in his teachings, but in the fact of the revival of his reputation and writings the decades preceding the Great Kanto Earthquake, and hence their availability as a usable resource in the earthquake's aftermath.

Nichirenism in *Hijoji Nippon*

Nichiren reached out to influence the 20th century in the form of Nichirenism (*Nichiren Shugi*), a Meiji-period revival of his teachings, which counted among its adherents certain right-wing architects of the *Emergency Japan* of the 1930s. One of

⁹⁸ Nichiren, *Kanjin Honzon Shō*, p.291, 297 and 328.

⁹⁹ *Selected Writings of Nichiren*, p.12.

¹⁰⁰ *Selected Writings of Nichiren*, p.12.

¹⁰¹ Tokoro, *ibid.*, p.344.

these was Tanaka Chigaku whose Kokuchukai (Pillar of the Nation Society), founded in 1914, was a lay organization marrying Nichiren Buddhism with an extreme, Emperor-centered nationalism. Among Tanaka's disciples were Ishiwara Kanji and Kita Ikki, who, as much as any two Japanese, helped to make emergency a lived reality in the 1930s.

Like Nichiren, Ishiwara Kanji (1889-1949) first formed an apocalyptic vision of Japan's fate in the wake of natural disaster, this time the Great Kantō Earthquake. Ishiwara was in Germany at that time, but the news of Japan's devastated condition convinced him that Nichiren's prediction for "the eventual appearance of the Great Bodhisattva of the Earth" was indeed true and imminent.¹⁰² The degenerating image of *mappō* was also accepted by Ishiwara at a time of intensifying international disputes, which caused him to advocate a theory of "final war" as a means to attain in the prophesied world unification. The war was to be fought between Asia and the West, led by Japan and the United States respectively, and Japan, for her *kokutai* and eminence as the holy birthplace of Nichiren, was fated to win and end all conflicts.¹⁰³ The Manchurian Incident of 1931 was masterminded by Ishiwara so as to prepare Japan to mobilize both human and natural resources for this total war.¹⁰⁴ With this war, he said, humanity will face "God's judgment" before establishing "a higher form of civilization" embracing the spirit of *hakkōichiu*.¹⁰⁵

Ishiwara drew the justification for his "final war" from two sources. The first was Nichiren's statement in *Senjishō* that "a great war, unprecedented in prior ages, shall break out in the world," at the beginning of *mappō*.¹⁰⁶ Nichiren was warning the government authorities against the Mongol invasion, which was six years away, but Ishiwara used it to argue that "a war of unprecedented scale is certain to occur in the world at the initiative of Japan."¹⁰⁷ The second theoretical grounding came from Ishiwara's research on military history, which divided the evolutionary process of war technology into three periods according to the types of war weapons and strategies. From this study, Ishiwara speculated that the "final war" would break out within thirty years, mobilizing all the forces at the height of human technological progress. Once

¹⁰² Ishiwara Kanji, *Ishiwara Kanji Senshū*, vol. 2, (Tokyo: Tamairaboshuppan, 1986), p.173. Also, see Matsuoka, *ibid.*, p.108 and 112.

¹⁰³ Ishiwara, "Sekai Saishūsen Ron," Ishiwara Kanji Zenshū Kankōkai ed., *Ishiwara Kanji Zenshū*, vol. 1, (Tokyo: Ishiwara Kanji Zenshū Kankōkai, 1976), p.51, 79-80. The final chapter of this "Sekai Saishūsen Ron" (Discussions on the World's Final War) is called "Bukkyō no Yogen" (The Prophecy of Buddhism). It was written in 1940.

¹⁰⁴ Ishiwara, "Sekai Saishūsen Ron," p.147-149.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.94 and 98. *Hakkō Ichū* literally means "the entire world under one roof." It was a phrase drawn from *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*) and popularized to justify Japanese aggression on the Asian continent.

¹⁰⁶ As cited in Stone, p.272.

¹⁰⁷ Ishiwara, "Sekai Saishūsen Ron," p.80.

ended, the world would be left with no more wars to fight, thus gradually moving toward peace and unification over the following twenty years.¹⁰⁸

Ishiwara's faith in Nichiren never diminished even in the last years of his life, but after Japan's defeat in 1945 he supported Japan's disarmament policy as the "mandate of Heaven which has entrusted Japan to act as the example in leading humanity to everlasting peace."¹⁰⁹ Now Ishiwara believed that technological development would allow humans to live a materially and spiritually sufficient life free of calamities and wars. The world unification was now considered to be accomplished by advanced aircraft and aerospace technology, which would bring people together under one cosmology with an extended knowledge on outer space, while all races on the earth would be gradually assimilated into one through intermarriage.¹¹⁰

Kita Ikki (1883-1937) was another Nichiren devotee and central architect of emergency whose political visions were deeply inspired by the Lotus millenarianism. He proposed a Japanese form of national socialism: the building of a socialist world through Japanese conquest and struggle against the Western capitalist nations. Like Ishiwara, Kita equated the political emergency with Nichiren's idea of *mappō* and asserted aggressive measures to usher in the predestined world unification.¹¹¹

Messianism was particularly strong in Kita, who identified himself as "a second Nichiren."¹¹² The testament to his millenarian visions first appeared in his *Shina Kakumei Gaishi* (Unofficial History of the Chinese Revolution), written in 1915. Modeled on Nichiren's *Risshō Ankoku Ron*, it warned the state authorities of Western designs Asia and compared them with the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century.¹¹³ "I hereby dedicate to you this *Taishō Ankoku Ron*," Kita wrote in the conclusion and cautioned that the world's fate rested on the religious consciousness of Japan's leaders.¹¹⁴ He even dedicated the Lotus Sutra to the Regent (Hirohito) through a radical nationalist thinker, Ōkawa Shūmei.¹¹⁵ Kita also claimed that the Buddha was incarnated in the body of the Meiji Emperor and every morning, he and his wife worshipped *shin butsu dan* (the altar of Emperor-God and Buddha) that enshrined the Emperor's portrait, as well as a wooden plate engraved with the seven-letter title of the Lotus Sutra. During the ritual, his wife often entered a trance and communicated what

¹⁰⁸ Ishiwara, "Sekai Saishūsen Ron," p.36-39 and 54-55.

¹⁰⁹ Ishiwara, "Nichiren-kyō Nyūmon," p.571.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.592-606 and Stone, p.275.

¹¹¹ Kita, "Shina Kakumei Gaishi," *Ibid.*, p.203.

¹¹² Jacqueline Stone, "Japanese Lotus Millennialism," p.270.

¹¹³ Stone, *ibid.*, p.269-270. Also, see the final chapter in Kita's "Shina Kakumei Gaishi," entitled "The Mongol Invasion by Britain and Germany."

¹¹⁴ Kita, "Shina Kakumei Gaishi," p.203.

¹¹⁵ Tokoro Shigemoto, "Tero to Nichiren-shugi no Kankei: Kita Ikki, Ōkawa Shūmei, Inoue Nisshō," in Tamura Yoshirō and Miyazaki Eishū eds., *Nihon Kindai to Nichiren-shugi*, (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1972), p.104-105. Ōkawa was also religious, being fascinated with both Buddhism and Christianity.

she claimed were the prophecies of Nichiren and other historical figures. These were recorded in Kita's hand almost every day for over seven years until two days before the occurrence of the infamous coup d'état of February 26, 1936.¹¹⁶ Scholars generally agree that these "product of Kita's...ideologies and fantasies," had some impact on the cadre of young military officers who led the insurrection.¹¹⁷ To uplift the spirit of his admirers Kita wrote;

The sutras foretell the appearance of the Bodhisattva of the Earth from the breaking earth. The breaking earth is the sign for the imminent world revolution, like the World War that just passed. The Bodhisattva of the Earth is a number of messiahs hiding beneath the earth, and they signify the great, righteous men of the low-ranking heroes.¹¹⁸

On the day of the coup, about one thousand five hundred men led by a cadre of rebel army officers assassinated high government officials and seized the main government quarter in the heart of Tokyo. The insurrection was a hymn to Kita's *Nihon Kaizō Hōan Taikō* (A Plan for the Reorganization of Japan) written in 1923, the very year of the earthquake, a text that urged the liquidation of Japan's ruling elite and the establishment of direct imperial rule. He was executed in 1937 along with other insurgents, but the incident became a milestone event on the Japanese military's path to power.¹¹⁹

By this time (from about 1932 onward) the term *hijoji* had re-emerged to become even more ubiquitous than in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake; it was now to be the name for the era of Japan's regeneration. The term increasingly appeared in books and articles written by right-leaning intellectuals, such as the seven-volume *Hijōji Kokumin Zenshū* (The Collection of the Emergency Nation) of 1934, which elucidated the concept over seven different areas: Diplomacy, Living, Industry, Economy, Air Force, Marine, and Army. An army-sponsored documentary propaganda film entitled *Hijoji Nippon* was released in 1933, by which time the term had worked its way into everyday language, even becoming the keyword of a popular greeting. When one asked "what time is it now?" the other would answer "It's *hijōji*." (the time of emergency).

Although the term now referred to the political, diplomatic, and economic

¹¹⁶ Matsumoto Ken'ichi, "Roman teki Kakumeika no Genzō," in Matsumoto Ken'ichi ed., *Kita Ikki: Reikoku Nikki* (Tokyo:Daisanbunmeisha, 1987), p.322-323. This book compiles and analyzes the "oracles."

¹¹⁷ Matsumoto, *ibid.*, p.328.

¹¹⁸ Kita, "Shina Kakumei Gaishi," p.8.

¹¹⁹ Tokoro, "Tero to Nichiren-shugi," p. 107.

situation rather than the earthquake, *emergency* usefully confounded their differences. The common thread was the threat posed by outside powers beyond Japan's control: in the first instance Heaven and in the other, the hostile foreign world. *Emergency* in the early 1930s provided nearly as vivid an image of distress as actual warfare or a city in flames. The Mongol invasion of Japan in the thirteenth century and the contacts with foreign countries after the Meiji Restoration were listed as the other examples of *hijōji* and *kokunan* (national challenges) in the course of Japanese history. *Hijōji to Kokubō* (Emergency and National Defense) published by the Army Ministry in 1935 argued that *emergency* of the 1930s was predestined ever since the Japanese decided to open themselves to Western thoughts.¹²⁰

Ironically, as *emergency* became more deeply indigenized in Japan, its use abroad spread apace, especially in the United States. One author, Shirotsuki Kyōichi, dealt with this paradox by writing in 1934

Hijoji is not just unique to Japan. The whole world now uses the term “e-mar-jen-cie” (*hijoji*). Various reasons, such as the failure of parliamentary system, the stagnation (*yukizumari*) of capitalism, and the collapse of materialistic view are proposed to explain the emergency. But in the case of our country, the main cause of *hijōji* arose from the very fact that Japan is trying to grow strong in the world, which thus caused the foreign nations to bully us, just like how our proverb goes: “the exposing nail is always hit hard.” . . . Due to Japan's growth, the economic balance in the world has been broken, and the world of white men is in great shock.....

Whatever power the concept of *emergency* might have had to explain or mollify a common global distress was no match for nationalism, which by the 1930s had thoroughly co-opted the term to describe its own need for protection and re-generation.

One realm which stood outside of “*emergency Japan*”, at least initially, was science. Historian Hiromi Mizuno quotes science educator Kanabe Isuburo as writing, in 1938, that the reputation of science in Japan had peaked about 1919, and “reached its lowest point about 1935, when the call for the Japanese Spirit reached their apex” Science itself came under attack from the right as western-derived over-rationalism, an impression that the scientistic aura of Marxism only served to deepen for the most paranoid. What ‘saved’ science, Mizuno suggests, was the war with China in 1937, and the need to enlist it in the totalitarian state, along with the defeat of the “Imperial Way” faction of the Army by the more technocratic “Control Faction” in the failed coup

¹²⁰ Ministry of the Army, *Hijōji to Kokubō* (Tokyo: Ministry of the Army Press, 1935), p. 199.

of 1936, which Kita Ikki had helped inspire. While emergency in the form of seismicity had once enabled and sustained Japan's admission into a global science community, emergency in a much expanded form, but one with equally strong roots in Japan's turbulent geology, now made the survival of Meiji-period scientific rationalism an open question.¹²¹

Emergency as Global Theme

So far we have been following a Japanese story, and one rooted in part in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic beliefs with historical and religious lineages. But in the decade of the 1920s, what might be called an *emergency discourse* was then under construction in many parts of the world, and the Japanese *hijōji* must also be seen in the context of this global trend, which would eventually become a global way of framing a recurrent condition of 20th-century life. A watershed event in the history of this concept was the crafting and passage of the British Emergency Powers Act in 1920, and the subsequent *declaration of states of emergency* in Britain and various parts of its empire over the following decade. *States of emergency* were declared in Hong Kong in 1925, Ireland in 1926, Shanghai the same year, and Palestine in 1929, by which time at least six such declarations had been made in Britain itself. From 1921 onward, when the first *state of emergency* was declared in Britain, the publicity given that term in the world's newspapers stitched British language into proto-emergency regimes (regimes that had formerly had *crises*, *insurrections*, *rebellions*, *catastrophes* and the like) around the world, allowing us to talk for the first time of a convergent, if nascent *global emergency discourse*, which, as we've seen in the case of Japan, came to incorporate distinctly local understandings and features.

At the same time that the British Empire and the world's press were expanding the concept of political emergency to all corners of the globe, it's worth noting that the League of Nations, which might have been expected to advance similar language (as would the later United Nations) refrained from doing so. *Emergency* appears only once, and then only incidentally, in the League of Nations Charter, which is otherwise dominated by the tried and true terms *war* and *peace*. This indicates that the League, a creation of professional diplomats more than politicians and political theorists, considered itself a place for calm discussion and debate, in the manner of a parliament, or the eye at the center of global storms. It was therefore not going to let the language of press sensationalism, political demagoguery, or rush-to-judgment decision-making

¹²¹ Hiromi Mizuno, *Science for the Empire: Scientific Nationalism in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 109. What of course allowed science to survive and even flourish under the totalitarian government, argues Mizuno, was another strong Meiji-period legacy – nationalism.

into its official documents and self-descriptions, even if the press-reading public would come to closely associate *crisis* and *emergency* with nearly all acts of diplomacy, and especially those of the League itself.¹²²

If the League of Nations had little use for *emergency*, the same cannot be said for another global institution, the Red Cross, which grew and expanded largely on the strength of the concept. Its respect and popularity rooted in the relief of wounded soldiers and care of POWs in World War I (and in the Japanese case, the Russo-Japanese War), the inter-war Red Cross was uniquely suited to graft the overtly political British *state of emergency* onto the condition of natural disaster. Quasi-military and quasi-governmental (the Japanese Empress and American President headed the institution in their respective countries), the Red Cross can also be seen as an extension onto a distressed global landscape of *the emergency hospital* and the full-bodied language of *emergency medicine* which was beginning to form around public health in those same years, particularly following the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918. Not only would the American Red Cross provide the largest single foreign donation to distressed survivors of the Great Kanto Earthquake, but the gift would be facilitated through close coordination with the Japanese branch of the organization. These two branches of the International Red Cross (American and Japanese) would indeed come to constitute the largest two national chapters of that organization in the period between the wars.¹²³

The American case is also relevant to the Japanese one because in both countries the emergency of nature and the emergency of politics were intensely co-productive, with natural disaster as their catalyst. Although *emergency* as a term of governance would come to be most closely associated with the Roosevelt Administration in the 1930s, it was pioneered as a governing style of his predecessor, Herbert Hoover, who took office in the 1920s largely on the strength of a disaster-management resume. In fact Hoover was so identified with the word that a radio talk by one of his supporters in 1928 was entitled “Herbert Hoover: America’s Emergency Man”.¹²⁴ A mining engineer by training and thus no stranger to the conditions of *hazard*, *accident*, and *emergency* with a small ‘e’, Hoover began his shift

¹²² Article XI of the League of Nations Charter includes the line “In case such emergency shall arise (war or the threat of war) . . . “ That the drafters felt that they had to strictly define emergency the one time they used it demonstrates their discomfort with the term (“Full Revised Covenant of the League of Nations”, *New York Times* (hereafter NYT) Apr. 28, 1919, p. 1)

¹²³ For the joint relief effort, see Christopher Mullis, “Shockwaves and Reverberations: The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and the Japanese Diaspora in Hawaii and the Continental United States” (unpublished PhD dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Melbourne, Feb. 2008); for a history of the International Red Cross see John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996)

¹²⁴ NYT, Sept. 16, 1928

to public service by heading the Committee for the Relief of Belgium during the First World War. This was a non-governmental organization in which Hoover acted as a citizen of a then-neutral power, the United States, organizing food shipments to assuage famine. With America's entry to the war, Hoover became head of the American Food Administration, another famine relief organization, and eventually (in 1921) became Secretary of Commerce in the Harding Administration on the basis of his emergency-response expertise, despite Harding's own obsession with *normalcy*, a word he coined. As an organizer of crisis response teams (to use a contemporary phrase) Hoover took the most quiescent of existing bureaucracies (the Commerce Dept.) and made it into one of the most activist and innovative in the otherwise intentionally somnolent Harding and Coolidge Administrations. He did this, in part, by elevating *emergency* as his political watchword.

Famine relief in Belgium and Europe generally, being related to war, and even more to the economic health of American farmers, was conceivably an emergency measure. It was not explicitly described as such, however, given the association of *relief* with charity-work and the realm of religion in Progressive Protestant America. Hoover's innovation in the 1920s was to embrace the position, already being expressed by the governments of rural states, that nature could also cause *emergencies*, and that these required the attention of the political class in Washington as much as foreign wars. Most importantly, he realized that these were political opportunities more than potential quagmires, allowing a dramatic display of concern for distressed *rural* people – a concern in every sense equal to the one previously displayed for suffering Europeans in the war years. Given America's new isolationist mood this was a winning formula, and could be justified even among Republicans if charisma and organization were mostly substituted for monetary relief.

In 1927, Hoover headed the joint Federal Government / Red Cross response to the Great Mississippi Valley Flood, the worst in the nation's history before Hurricane Katrina, a performance that, more than any other, would catapult him into the White House the following year. Described as "Hoover's New Emergency Job" by the *New York Times*, the coordination effort was a break from anything that had occurred before in the United States.¹²⁵ Hoover invented for himself the position that would much later be called 'Czar', basing his authority not only on his cabinet status (his portfolio did not include disaster relief) but his charisma as the man who had *relieved famine* in Europe, and his identity as a top official of the non-profit Red Cross.¹²⁶ The relief effort was widely considered a success by the American press, and Hoover came out of the event

¹²⁵ NYT May 15, 1927

¹²⁶ "Disaster Response and the Appointment of a Recovery Czar . . ." *CRS Report for Congress* (Oct. 25, 2005), p. 6

with the word *emergency* implanted on his persona. “Equal to Any Emergency” was the title of the *New York Times* article extolling his acceptance speech at the 1928 Republican Convention. Hoover, it wrote, in one of the greatest of 20th century political misjudgments, “would be equal to any emergency that might arise in the next four years”.¹²⁷

Toward the Emergency State

In many historical accounts, The *Hijōji Nippon* of the 1930s and the emergency-oriented New Deal America of the same decade seem to have little in common other than their responsiveness to the global financial crisis of 1929. As we have demonstrated, however, a full-bodied language of emergency was crafted in both countries well before the collapse of the global economy, and against the backdrop of post-natural disaster landscapes. Such landscapes were compelling in ways that abstract theorizations about the shape and role of governments and societies could never be, and were approached as sites of opportunity and meaning as well as trial. The *state of emergency* was, at its point of origin, an actionable space within a disaster zone. While the concept was given global wings by the British States of Emergency of 1920-21 (which continued Emergency Legislation from the time of the First World War), it gained added power and charisma in Japan, America, and likely other places by its association with natural catastrophe. Thus did modern politics establish a new connection with the traditional realm of the sublime, and in the case of Japan, the supernatural. Other charismas would attach themselves to other states of emergency in subsequent decades, but emergency’s association of politics with nature would never disappear, and has perhaps even strengthened in the early 21st century.

In the Japanese case, the emergence of a politics of *hijōji* in the inter-war period had particularly dire results. While the nation had previously experienced *dai-shin-sai* (great earthquake disasters), *dai-ka-sai* (great fire disasters), etc., the coining of a transcendent term and its ability to incorporate political, the social, the natural, the supernatural, and the historical into a single frame, provided the Right with a powerful linguistic technology it would deploy to devastating effect in the decade following Tokyo’s destruction. For many, Japan would remain in a perpetual state of emergency from the moment the earth began to move in 1923 until the beginnings of post-war recovery in the 1950s, if not later. By this time the world at large had adopted the concept to help describe the linked and seemingly interminable illnesses of its political and natural systems.

¹²⁷ NYT, April 12, 1928

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