

The Formation of Bio-Politics and Fascism in Japan

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Abstract

What was “Japanese fascism”? This has been a long-standing question in the study of the history. Some people regard it as militarism contrast with post-war pacifism. However, this understanding of “Japanese fascism” overlooks continuity between the war-time period and the post-war period, as well as a common feature under the world-system. Therefore, I try to investigate the phenomenon of “Japanese fascism” in terms of continuity and universality of bio-politics from the pre-war and war-time movement of “socialization” to the post-war “welfare state” in Japan.

This theoretical theme, however, would require comprehensive research, thus, my first step is limited to the analysis of the ideological transformation from the inter-war to the war-time by exploring Japanese social activist Kagawa Toyohiko. He had a fabulous reputation worldwide for his charities in the slums at that time, but he is almost forgotten now. His humanistic activities may be understood when compared with contemporary social works such as caseworkers, the charities of NGOs and social policies of the state. As the word “from warfare to welfare” is often quoted, total war and total mobilization developed the social welfare system dramatically. Moreover, recent studies revealed the effect of modernization through fascism. Those who were brought up after WWII cannot admit a positive effects of the war. However, we should reflect on the war-time experience including modern positive values.

The thrust of my investigation is our actual, problematic structure originated from the social movement in the mid-1960s to the crisis now, that is, the question of life. In the inter-war period in Japan, with economic development, the transformation of industrial structure, urbanization, people’s life was speedily changed. This structural transformation also entailed the extension of disparity between the rich and the poor, city and countryside, and of social conflicts. Various subjects such as labor, peasants, women, the youth and the discriminated come into being, struggling for recognition as equal beings and objectified as resources by the power to control society. Subjects became the objects of mobilization, and vice versa. It can be seen as the continuity between democratization during the inter-war period and Fascism during the war-time period as productivism is the same ideology of the total-war system and the “welfare state”. Therefore, I explore the ideological transformations with relations to social structure in this period, by reflecting upon our questions of life.