

# “Tenno-empire” and the Struggle Against Established Power in Japan - One Historian's Engagement

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Translated by Meredith Box and Gavan McCormack

## 1. The Tenno-Empire - A Definition

The Tenno-empire (*tenno teikoku*, literally “emperor empire”) is Japan’s hierarchical class order combining authority and power that oppresses and exploits the common people. At its summit are the bureaucrats who support the emperor, together with the complex of political parties and monopoly capital and its affiliates.

The Tenno-empire model continued to evolve from the Meiji Restoration to the war period, was dissolved after defeat in the war, but then, after several years during which it stayed hidden during the US occupation, revived from the 1960s around its kernel of the symbolic emperor system. Thereafter, allied with the US global empire - which had become a super-empire - it flaunted its power both within Japan and beyond, and has continued to do so ever since.

On the character of this Tenno-empire, Kim Shi-jong, the resident-in-Japan Korean poet and thinker, quotes from the famous Korean poet Kim Chi-ha: “The accumulated experience of the boundless sorrow of the people is known [in Korea] as ‘Han’. ... and such ‘Han’ is always ugly.” He concludes that the reality or system of Japan is that of a structure built upon the

exclusion of the “stark, contradiction-filled reality” of ugliness and *Han*. To quote again,

“it seems that the integrated oneness that cannot accommodate ugliness might after all be fascism. If there is one thing horrifying about Japan, I cannot help thinking that it might be the notion of beauty that stresses exquisiteness. These tendencies seem to be pyramidal in shape, with the emperor at the apex. The convergence upon regulated beauty is always in accord with a vertical order and to the extent that it is not excluded from that vertical order ‘ugliness’ is always blocked from view by the wall of ‘beauty’.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Kim Shi-jong, the kind of beauty in which the miserable reality of the people, their “Han” and their ugliness, is rejected and regulated is inevitably vertical, that is to say pyramidal in shape, and this pyramid is what constitutes the Emperor system (*Tennosei*).

In my view, what Kim thus describes as the emperor system i.e., the Tenno-empire, is supported from below by what I have described as “emperor-ism” [*Tenno-shugi*], which, in a word, means the ideology of worship of established authority. In all Japanese groups, one person is always central, other members of the group defer to that person, so that over time s/he comes to hold a great deal of power.

In other words, that particular person becomes superior and strong. This happens in all groups at all social levels. I conclude that the ideology of reverence or worship of established authority forms the base upon which an enormous hierarchy is constructed.

When one adopts such a view, then to overthrow the Tenno-empire, we have to drive out and topple the notion of “worship of established authority” in the hearts of people at all levels of society and we also have to overthrow existing authority at each level. It is bound to be a long and difficult struggle.

## 2. My Struggle - History and Overview

### (1). *The 1960 Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Struggle (1960 AMPO)*

Entering university in April 1958, I became aware of politics for the first time. Former Class-A war criminal Kishi Nobusuke had returned to civilian life as Prime Minister and was rolling out one reactionary policy after another, digging away to try to destroy the vestiges of post-war democracy. It was the time of the purge of the education system through the substitution of appointed for elected education officials, and through the system of teacher job performance ratings. It was the period when the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) set its sights on monopolising government through an attempt at introducing a single-seat constituency system, and machinations such as the introduction of amendments to the Act Concerning Execution of Duties of Police Officials, were designed to enlarge police powers. To cap this off, the reactionary Kishi clique was set upon re-establishing itself in relationship with the United States as an autonomous Tenno-empire state by revising the US-Japan Security Treaty (AMPO treaty).

Reacting against these excesses, I joined a party established the following year that stood for revolution. As the Communist League,

known as the Bund, we plunged into the 1960 AMPO struggle. This new revolutionary party was a break away group from the Japan Communist Party (JCP) which included many of its former members. Its thinking was in some respects just like that of the party that gave rise to it, and in particular, as became clear later, it maintained much of the same bureaucratic character.



**Demonstrators Surround the Diet, June 1960**

In May of 1960, at a mass meeting convened by the University of Tokyo (Todai) Central Committee, I criticized the top cadres of our Todai cell because they had shown absolutely no leadership in the turbulent phase between 26 April and 15 May, with the result that I and other members of the general student body had lost our way. The Bund response, far from exercising its authority to address the problem,

was to dismiss me from the headquarters of the National Federation of Students' Self-Government Associations (Zengakuren) for the "transgression" of criticizing cadres, transferring me instead to an ad-hoc position with the organization. My superior, A, gave me strict orders to raise operating funds through the organization for metropolitan universities. This was exactly the same as the "local procurement" approach of the former Japanese Army. In addition, my superiors like S, A, etc. had plenty of money, and to me, suffering because I had lost my part time job, my seniors seemed rich; the Secretariat was affluent. Because this is how things were, the Zengakuren secretariat and the Metropolitan Student secretariat used to be known as the "bureaucrats of Kinjo-cho" after the name of the local district in Bunkyo ward where their headquarters was located. (I could cite many other examples of self-indulgent and irresponsible behaviour on the part of H, the cell cadre of the other group within the Todai arts faculty cell, but I pass over these here.)

Many things could be learned from study of the process of transition from JCP to Bund. The depth and breadth of the ideological critique of the JCP should be reconsidered, and, going further back, the relation between the student movement around Takei Teruo and the JCP in the immediate post-war period should also be reconsidered and re-evaluated.<sup>2</sup>

The Bund way of thinking, which we considered as completely novel, could be boiled down to several elements: recognition of changes in the world situation after the shock of the Hungarian uprising and the revelations of Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin, the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre and Lucien Febvre, the adoption of "permanent revolution" theory through a swallowing almost whole of Trotsky's criticism of the Comintern and the Soviet Communist Party, and the re-reading of the early Marx's "German Ideology" and "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts". The active

praxis of Trotskyites such as George Orwell in the Spanish Civil War seemed especially valuable as a demonstration of Trotskyist ideology. Bund cells at the University of Tokyo also adopted particular economic theories - stage theory, financial accumulation theory - from Uno Kozo's "Capitalism and Socialism" and "The Principles of Economics". You could summarize this by saying that the Bund's theoretical position derived from Neo-Marxist, or reinterpreted, theories of ontology, history, movement organization, and revolution (or communism).

The reason I introduce the term Neo-Marxist system is because the ideology that we were enveloped in at this time was ramified, systematic, and all-encompassing, totally consuming the body and soul of individuals. I was just a new arrival from the country, and I certainly had no immunity to the turbulent global conditions and drastically shifting conditions within Japan. In any case, there can be no doubt that the type of thought structure I have described tended to exert a strong influence, or even to control, the thought and behaviour of individuals.

Towards the end of June as the 1960 AMPO struggle was collapsing, I experienced a serious, almost fatal, illness and spent years in and out of hospital. Therefore, for better or for worse (I can say this because of the distance of time) I was completely cut off from the factional struggles that followed the collapse of the Bund and was forced to come to terms on my own with what the struggle had meant. As I confronted my ideology, in solitude and on the verge of death, the whole system of ideology with which I had been totally absorbed, collapsed. During my long illness and the period that followed it at home, I examined each of those collapsed pieces intensively. To this end, the "pragmatism" of Tsurumi Shunsuke and his "Science of Thought" (*Shiso no kagaku*) group was very helpful.<sup>3</sup>

The ideological legacy of the 1960s Bund, in particular its positive elements, was negligible, as I have described above, but of course in terms of movement and organizational theory, political thought, strategy and tactics, etc. there were positive aspects. One that probably deserves particular note is that the Bund was forever emphasizing the overwhelming density and weight of the central authorities. The cell of which I was a member, like others, never ceased calling for the establishment of a sophisticated movement that could keep a close watch on the movements of state power and resist them. Such thinking permeated our very beings. However, we also have to take to heart how reckless was our ideological over-reach as we in the student movement tried to confront, with all our might, and almost single-handedly, the unlimited power of the State.

*(2). The Todai (University of Tokyo) Struggle - Meaning at a Personal Level*

My involvement with the Todai struggle was almost accidental to begin with. Later, however, the ideological significance that it held sank in and penetrated to my very bones. By the Spring of 1968 I already had a partial and fragmented judgment and theory that was limited in range and scope, but had not been able to find anything to draw the threads together. Generally speaking, I suppose you might say that as of the Spring of 1968 I was in a state of ideological collapse, my neo-Marxist structure practically bankrupt. But I tended to think that this was no more than a transitional and temporary phenomenon, and that sooner or later I would reach a point at which I could recognize and positively affirm something truly universal. On the other hand, however, in my heart of hearts I had become convinced that I might just have to start writing, putting things into words by myself.

In this situation, together with fellow students, I was involved in planning a demonstration for June 15 to commemorate the death of Kamba

Michiko, slaughtered eight years earlier.<sup>4</sup> After our group set off from the University of Tokyo heading for Hibiya Park, a dramatic event took place on the campus: a Young Medics Association group that had been engaged in a long-term struggle at the Medical Faculty occupied the clock tower.<sup>5</sup> The following day 16 June, the University authorities promptly called the riot police onto the campus. With this, opposition to the authorities spread and the struggle quickly evolved into the Todai (University of Tokyo) struggle against the university. Those of us on the 15 June Demonstration Organization Committee changed our title to the All-Campus Joint Struggle Committee (*Zenkyoto*), and expanded our membership by bringing in older undergraduates and masters students including "I" from Urban Engineering, "Y" from Physics, "K" from International Relations, and "S" and "N" from History, among others. (I was then an assistant in a research institute.) Those who later became leaders of the Todai struggle were prominent in this group.





**Kamba Michiko, (1937-1960)**



As well as condemning the entry of the riot police, we criticized the University of Tokyo faculty for being so ready to call in police power, and we extended our criticism to the university system itself, including matters such as the lecture system, the arrangements for academic-industrial cooperation, and the way professors controlled and oppressed [their juniors and students]. Our most symbolic statement was the slogan “the university is a redoubt of slaves”. As the whole campus became a maelstrom, we succeeded in capturing the clock tower. Once launched, the Todai struggle linked up with the struggle exploding at Nihon University (Nichidai) and triggered a wave of struggle on campuses across the country. These events paralleled the rise of the international movement of 1968.

Amidst this activity and debate we had to refine our own thinking. The university’s pretence was that it contributed to society through specialized research, but its effect in reality – controlling and oppressing undergraduate and graduate students to produce pawns of capital – was of absolutely no benefit to the masses of society. Furthermore, each of us – differing slightly from institution to institution and individual to individual – was located within the existing system of state power and monopoly

capitalism, and had to be very conscious of ourselves. As Marc Bloch pointed out in “The Historian’s Craft”, research that has no answer to the fundamental question of for whom and why is worthless. We tended to go even further, and to be convinced that it might even be criminal.

In this way, you might say that the greatest accomplishment of the campus struggles across the country was that we developed through them a way of thinking and action that raised for each and every one of us comprehensive and fundamental questions about our existence and livelihood, and that on that basis we then went on to construct our daily activity and our struggle.

One further characteristic of this struggle worth stressing is its suffusion with the idea of proceeding from the particular to the universal. The masses, from students through to young researchers and general workers, even though confined to the everyday world of the campus and devoting their efforts to “improvement” in various tasks, found themselves caught up in the political problem of the reorganization of health, welfare and education systems and so confronting the violence of state power in the form of the public security forces, riot police and courts.

To realize these objectives a very distinctive kind of organization was established. We aimed to construct a movement and organization based on the complete spontaneity and subjectivity of the individual, abolishing the relationship of leader and led. It was those who defined themselves as “non-political” who put up a canvas stall in front of the University’s Yasuda Auditorium and thus opened the path to the struggle to occupy it. They described themselves as “non-political radicals”, from which came the later term “non-sect” (or “non-sect radical”). The Zenkyoto movement, through its reliance on the complete autonomy of the individual and through the abolition of

the relationship of leader and led in the movement, sought to free itself from the common bureaucratic and ossified character of conventional anti-establishment movements.

To summarize the above, what the nation-wide campus struggles, beginning at the University of Tokyo and Nihon University, accomplished was to initiate a new way of thinking, a consciousness of one's own existence within the system, of the politics and sociology of properly attending to the particular, of abolishing the leader-led relationship, and of complete subjectivity. There is no doubt that it opened a new page in the history of anti-establishment struggle, getting rid of bureaucratic ossification and going beyond the bounds of previous struggles, plunging into continuing, permanent and unlimited struggle. But, unfortunately, we could not properly accomplish our objectives, such as the critique of academic-industry cooperation, the abolition of the lecture system, the smashing of state-university cooperation, the prevention of the imperialist reorganization of the medical system, or the dismantling of Todai itself. It is truly regrettable.

There is something I should say, now, from a personal perspective. I have been expounding here what you could say was my personal creed, my ideological principles. One does not live by positions and principles alone, but, without them one cannot keep on living. Ever since the 1970s, the question of how to incorporate the Tokyo University struggle in my thinking, how to continue it or to develop it, has been continually in my mind.

*(3). From the Movement in Support of those Framed on Bombing Charges to the Counter Offensive against 1970s Public Security Repression*

The four years from 1969 were a rest period for me as far as activism was concerned. The incident of Mishima Yukio's breaking into the Ichigaya headquarters of Japan's Self-Defense

Forces, and the arrival of the Revolutionary Communist League's Japanese Red Army Faction in North Korea and their international base theory passed me by. Instead, I spent my time constructing and developing a theory of Japanese fascism. In 1971 I completed a paper written as a Todai assistant on the theme of Ishihara Kanji and the Manchurian Incident, and in 1972 published my first book "Tachibana Kozaburo - The "Return to the Origins" Faction within Japanese Fascism" dealing with Tachibana Kozaburo who, even within Japanese fascism, is known as a proponent of the theory of "agriculture as the base". After that, I produced a few more papers on Japanese fascism. One of the motivations for this research was reflection on the Tokyo University struggle.

In other words, I had the feeling that we had been somewhat deficient in detailed tactics, measures and approaches for coolly observing and assessing the state of the "enemy" (including the teaching faculty). One of the things that I learned from the Todai struggle is that, since the struggle against enemy authority is like the struggle against a wily old fox, at least it is necessary to have superior foresight, ideas, and political consciousness. The idea that to defeat the enemy you must acquire qualities superior to it is something that I carried over later to my research on Japanese fascism. However, the powers that be would not let me wallow too long in the swamps of theory.

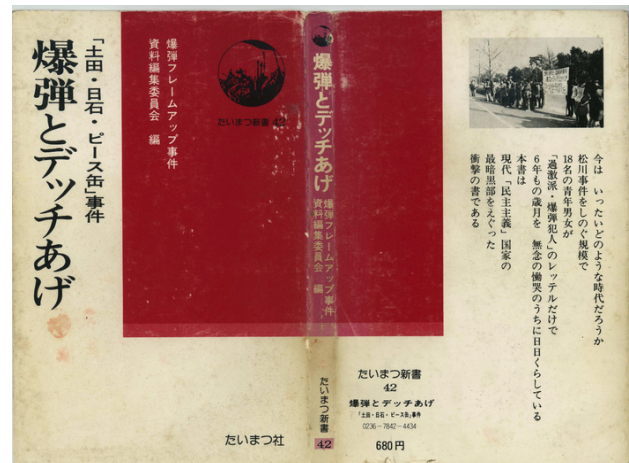
In February 1972 Sakaguchi Hiroshi, Bando Kunio and others had a shootout with the police surrounding Asama Sanso mountain villa where they had blockaded themselves. Shortly afterwards followed the revelations of the "killing of their comrades" in the course of internal purges within the United Red Army. These incidents were a concentrated expression of the positive and negative points of the anti-establishment movement. As someone belonging to that opposition camp, I

felt a certain personal responsibility. However, since no one came forward to help the accused, with some friends I set up a “United Red Army Incident Trial Measures Committee.” When, in January 1973, we received the information that one of the defendants in the United Red Army incident, Mori Tsuneo, had committed suicide while in custody at the Tokyo Detention Center, I joined other members of the committee in protest.

In 1974 a distant friend was arrested as suspect over a bombing incident and his house was searched. The embers had to be beaten out. What we thought at that time was that, if the authorities would not allow us to doze away at home, then we would have to get up and fight. However, we soon realized that things were not that simple. The reason was that the enemy pulled out all stops and committed its top figures from security police and thought prosecutors to the case, adding shortly after that a reactionary judiciary. The falsely accused, subject to separate trials, were each separately found to be “criminals” in their own right, and each judicial determination then fed back the impression of criminality to the remaining trials. In response to these manoeuvres, while finding and appointing counsel for each of the defendants, we convinced them and their families of the advantage of a unified trial, demonstrated the flimsiness of the prosecution’s evidence, and publicised the fact that the defendants had been framed.

The incidents to which I am referring are the “1971 Tsuchida residence, Nisseki underground post office bombings, and 1969 Peace [tobacco] can bombings”, all frameups. In the history of post-war oppression of the people by state power, the acts of political repression that are known under this tongue-twisting long title must be remembered as some of the gravest crimes committed by the authorities.

Two “Peace can” related bombings took place between October and November 1969 and another incident, the Nisseki Underground Post Office Parcel Bomb Incident, two years later, on 28 October 1971. In addition, on 18 March 1971 a parcel bomb was sent to Tsuchida Kunio, then head of the Criminal Investigation Section of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, who went on to become the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Commissioner. This latter incident was widely publicized by media and authorities as the first terrorist bomb attack on a public figure in the 1970s.



### Bakudan to Detchiage (Bombs and Frameups)

Although known by the collective term as the “Tsuchida, Nisseki, and ‘Peace Can’ Incidents”, the incidents involved were unrelated. The “Peace can” incident involved a low level of technology to produce bombs made out of “Peace” cigarette cans that were then thrown against the American Culture Centre and a unit of the Riot Police. The “Tsuchida and Nisseki” cases were two separate incidents: in the former, parcel bombs (addressed to Police Minister Gotoda Masaharu and the president of Narita Airport, Imai Sakafum) exploded on 18 October 1971 in the underground Post Office of the Nisseki Building and injured several people; and in the latter, a bomb exploded on 18 December in the same year at the residence of Tsuchida Kuniyasu, head of the Criminal Investigation Section of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, killing Tsuchida’s wife and injuring others. High-level public security prosecutors and police were at this time, 1969-71, arresting members of the student movement and others who were calling for “revolution” and extracting confessions on relatively minor charges to do with harbouring criminals or violating the poisonous and dangerous substances law, getting admissions to trumped up charges, and having them found guilty in single or separate trial proceedings. They were planning then to use these judgements as evidence in other trials (having the defendants “stab each other” as in the Matsukawa Incident in 1949, a technique allowed by a reactionary judiciary). Guilty verdicts in the “Peace Can” case were then to be used as a basis for framing the Masubuchi group in the Tsuchida and Nisseki incidents. At first, the trials of Masubuchi and the others were conducted either separately or one-by-one, but the Trial Support group, liaising with the families Association, brought the defendants together and gradually managed to have the trials combined, as a unified trial, and in securing not-guilty verdicts. One person, however, made to confess to a vague memory of the manufacture of the Peace can bomb, was found guilty and given a suspended sentence, while one other was found guilty at the preliminary trial of involvement in making and throwing such a bomb and given a suspended sentence against which he did not appeal.

In the end, the state secured two guilty verdicts, but failed in its attempt to use them to its advantage in [other] court proceedings. Not guilty findings were returned against all sixteen defendants in the Masubuchi group. Most were satisfied to be freed from the trumped-up case, but several are still pursuing the crimes against them by the state and seeking compensation. (See also *Bakudan to detchiage*, (Bombs and Frame-ups), Taimatsu-sha, 1978.)



## “Bombings and Frameups” 1978

Some 18 innocent men and women were framed by the police as criminals for these four completely unrelated bombing incidents that had taken place at completely different times and places, and for another bomb making incident that was completely fabricated. Those identified as perpetrators included some who had been involved in the student movement in 1969 and had had nothing to do with it since, and others who had absolutely nothing to do with the movement at all but who were merely friends of people involved in it. Only some identified as ring leaders, including Masubuchi Toshiyuki, had had a certain amount of association with the fringes of the Red Army Faction. From the fact that it was really a far-fetched frame-up of falsely accused, it seems likely that the enemy had worked hard on this and had carefully planned the investigations and separate trials. I don't intend to pursue this question here for fear of being targeted myself, but there would appear to have been discussions about it at the upper levels of the establishment, involving the Committee for the Control of Leftist Extremist Violence (established 1971), Gotoda Masaharu (1914-2005, a major police and security official and politician in 1960s and early 1970s, later Deputy Prime Minister), and the National Public Safety Commission, as well as the Liberal Democratic Party.

These cases amounted to just one link in the chain of oppressive public safety measures taken during the 1970s. As Japan's high-speed economic growth began to fray, various types of pollution came to the surface, prices soared, and resident and citizen movements burgeoned from the late 1960s into the early 1970s. As they gathered momentum, people armed themselves with simple weapons such as Molotov cocktails and primitive bombs.

The clamp down in the name of public safety in the 1970s was intended to stop and stamp out

such activities and to allow only those who would do what the authorities and the system defined, while forbidding even the slightest opposition movement. Put simply, in order to create a highly controlled, prison like kind of state the authorities forced false confessions and made these people scapegoats. If you don't do what the established authorities demand, that will mean you are “anti-establishment”. This audacious, huge frame-up was undertaken in order to make a system where the right of individuals to live subjectively and on their own terms was denied and trampled on. The frame-ups were part of an “apartment roller strategy” under which individual homes were targeted, and it constituted one link in what was called the “extremists annihilation operation”.<sup>6</sup>

In this way I became involved once again in the struggle for people's right to continue their own existence and their normal and ordinary lives. By the beginning of the 1980s we were victorious in the court struggles over these serious incidents and secured not-guilty verdicts for almost all defendants. However, those who had been defendants simply went back to being ordinary people as before and, with few exceptions those who had been part of the support network did not go on to involve themselves in other movements. It felt as though we had put enormous effort into moving from the enormously negative position of being framed as criminals, back to point zero. The mass media who had sensationally contrived large false reports about the arrests and the confessions of the defendants merely reported that they had been found innocent, showing no regret. The police and the prosecutors, more so than before, along with the judges, maintained their stance of having acted altogether properly.

(4). *San'ya - Winter Survival Struggle, Showdowns with the Tenno-ist Right Wing, and Construction of the San'ya Welfare Centre*

It was with something of a sense of emptiness



that I set off to San'ya, the labour hiring centre (*yoseba*) for the metropolitan area, meeting there with some of its almost 10 thousand labourers. Located in central Tokyo, San'ya is an enormous flophouse quarter, or "*doya-gai*" for day labourers. A "*doya*" is a simple type of construction with extremely small rooms which are basically paid for on a daily basis but in which people may live for years. "*Doya*" are concentrated in the quarter located mainly in the north of Asakusa, in the town of Minami-Senju in the north of Arakawa Ward and in Nihon-zutsumi and Kiyokawa in Daito Ward.

It might have been 1989 when I first went to help out in the end-of-year Sanya soup kitchen in what was known as the "Winter Survival Struggle" (*etto toso, spanning the New Year*). In 1990, I invited my students too, and we participated as a group, breaking up into teams and participating for the full duration, each for about one week. After that, I also became involved in other activities, such as the Summer Festival, so I had an involvement throughout the year. At this time, I lived in an area quite distant from San'ya, so I approached people who lived on the peripheries of Tokyo (places like Tachikawa and Hachioji) and we formed the Santama-San'ya Group through which we worked towards sharing and universalising the problems of the "*yoseba*" area and day labourers.

Labour exchanges and day labourers exist behind the scenes of civil society but actually sustain its surface. It is these short-term workers who support regular employees and workers. This form of work was most common in the building construction and civil engineering industries but depending on the season they were also involved in other industries such as chemicals and warehousing. They might also do truck-driving. In the capital's other labour exchange, Yokohama's Kotobuki-cho, there used to be a lot of port and harbour work (stevedoring, etc.).

Orders for construction and civil engineering work come from regional administrations and almost always the main contracts are awarded to major construction companies. They then subcontract to big capital, medium and small sized companies, who in turn then subcontract further and the process goes on to reach finally "great-grandchildren" in the chain of subcontracting, in a multi-tiered structure. Each time something is subcontracted a margin is taken, so that at each stage the wage of the worker is reduced. At the final stage the actual work is done by the day labourers from places like San'ya, who are procured in the labour exchange in the early morning, work one day at a time, and in a different location from day to day. The largest labour exchange in Japan is in Kamagasaki (by JR Shin-Imamiya Station).

Under Japan's so-called "construction state" (*doken kokka*), the margin taken by the major construction companies went back to the coffers of the long-serving conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government, and the LDP developed policies to produce further work for large construction companies — the construction of highways, harbours, dams, large buildings, high-speed bullet train lines (*Shinkansen*). The day labourers of the *yoseba* were compelled to work on a casual basis, under severe conditions, at the base of the system. The morning labour exchanges were operated by unscrupulous brokers usually connected with organized crime (*yakuza*). The Japanese state at this time depended in the last resort on the violence of organized crime. The conservative party and large capital supported this misleadingly grand-looking system, and the police, by allowing the gangsters a free hand, were a factor manipulating it. (You only have to visit San'ya to understand. Dice gaming is conducted on the road immediately behind the enormous Police Box and a bit further away off-course betting operations are also conducted quite blatantly.)

Around 1972-74, activists from the Jobsite

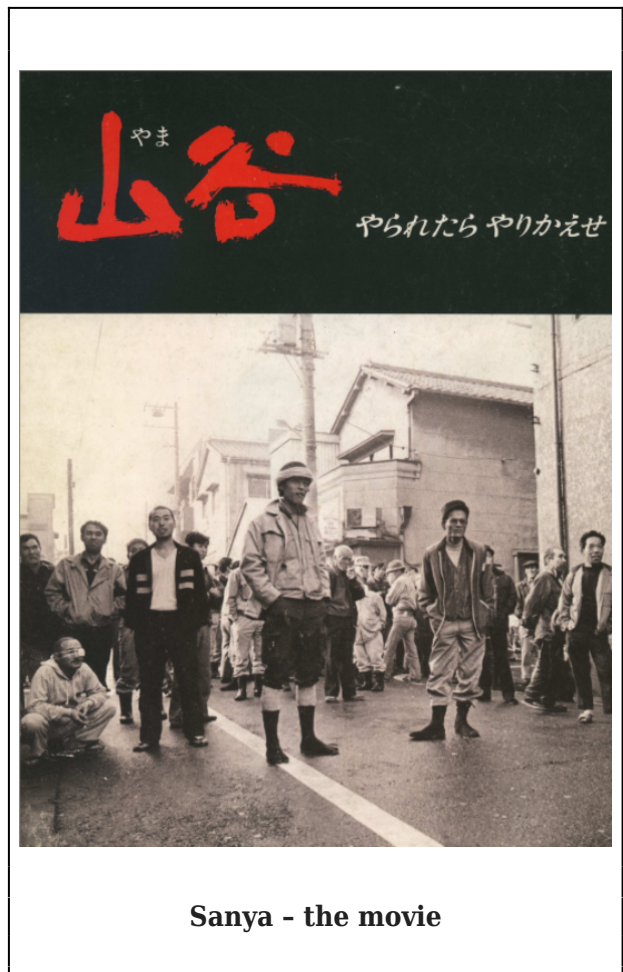
Struggle Committee of the Kamagasaki Joint Struggle Council, who had a base there, were involved in a direct action struggle, calling for the corrupt brokers to be driven out and for workers to recapture control over the hiring sites. With the support of many workers, they began to win conditions favourable to workers.

There was around this time a plan to build regional communities and an all-Japan *hamba* (labor camp) stratagem to overthrow the system. It failed, but it might be seen as the last brilliant flash of resistance as a strict public security and control system was set in place in the 1970s.

In April 1982, aiming to rebuild and regenerate the Yoseba movement and carry on the work of the Kamagasaki Joint Struggle Council Congress and the Jobsite Struggle Committee, we organized the All-Japan Day Labourer Council (*Hiyatoi zenkyo*) in four of the largest labour exchanges - San'ya, Kamagasaki, Kotobuki-cho and Sasashima.

However, on 3 November 1983 rightist gangsters of the Koseikai (mostly members of the Kokusuikai or National Essence Society), suddenly appeared, claiming to act in the name of the emperor, at the morning labour exchange and set about trying to destroy the labour movement and re-establish direct gangster control of the labour market and the workers. Of course behind this lay the design on the part of monopoly capital for intensified exploitation and on the part of state authorities for intensified control. After several months of fierce struggle, we drove them back. However, on 22 December 1984, as we were in the last stages of shooting a film designed to attract support for our case, we lost cameraman Sato Mitsuo just as he began filming. Afraid of a full expose on the conditions of San'ya in the film, the authorities, capital and organized crime had Sato fatally stabbed in broad daylight, just as he began filming. The assailant then fled straight into the Police Box.<sup>7</sup>

Shooting of the film continued, with "Yoseba brain" Yamaoka Kyoichi central to the effort, and was completed in December 1985 under the title "Yama [as San'ya was known]—If Attacked, Fight Back" However, soon after the preview screening for the film the yakuza struck once again, shooting and killing Yamaoka. It was 13 January 1986. We travelled all over Japan screening the film, and it evoked a sense of empathy from a very large number of people. The tour extended to other parts of Asia including Hong Kong and Beijing. However, on the one hand the Yoseba movement itself was petering out, on the other we had acquired land and building construction had gone ahead. In October 1990 we established the San'ya Welfare Centre for Day-Laborers.



**Sanya - the movie**

Soon after this, however, the actual means of

procuring day-labourers through the labour exchange itself changed due to advances of mechanization and to workers being put onto a contract basis (so that capital hemmed them in) so that the labour exchange ceased being the main means of labour supply in the construction industry. Indeed, the construction industry itself declined and its share of the economy shrank. In the decade from the 1990s into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gradually but indisputably, seismic changes took place that transformed both society and state.

There was a rapid expansion in the reliance on dispatch, contract, and part-time labour in the electrical and electronic equipment, chemicals, and manufacturing sectors, and this became the essential mechanism across sectors including shipbuilding and autos. The weight and the importance of temporary employees in all Japanese industries is bound to become ever more crucial in future. Now, the recruitment of workers by mobile phone from over a wide area is common, supplemented by the acquisition of labour from railway stations or under various sorts of “sweatshop” (labour contained in buildings that from the outside might look fine) arrangements. It is clear from these cases that big capital has judged that it is not beneficial to concentrate and use workers in a single place, and that they prefer to have them dispersed.

Since the change of government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the new mode of control seems to rely on different methods of exploitation and large-scale changes in the control system. While the basic policy is still to seize control of scattered workers one-by-one, there is also a design, through various interest groups that stretch their tendrils throughout society such as business and employment organizations (the so-called industry groups) and regulated labour unions, to revamp the way in which profit and interest are circulated, and also the ways in which opinions are gathered up and circulated. We need to respond to these changes.

### 3. Towards a History of Postwar Japan from Below - The Japan Association for the Study of Yoseba

To go back slightly in time, in April of 1987, after the murder of Yamaoka Kyoichi, we set up the Japan Association for the Study of Yoseba, and in April of 1988 we published the inaugural volume of our annual publication “Yoseba” (the current volume is No 22). Focussing on day workers and the labour exchange, we wanted to address the totality of society and the social control system. It may not count for much compared to the contribution that “brain of the Yoseba” Yamaoka made, but I hope it helps somewhat to advance the cause.

下層社会から現代を照射する

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フォトグラフィー—長居公園テント村の軌跡—写真—山西麻依

Yoseba Association, Author Addressing Founding Meeting, 1987, and Cover of Issue No 21 (2008).



Below, finally, to bring this rather long short paper to an end, let me return to my attempt at a definition of the “Tenno empire” that I gave at the outset and say something of how I see the relationship between the “Tenno empire” and the world empire of the United States.

The United States tries to control, and has in the past controlled, East Asia, using Okinawa as a bridgehead and frontline military base, Japan proper as staging post and economic supply area, and South Korea as a political and economic base area, in other words as frontline regions. US-Korea Relations and US-Japan relations are unequal alliance relations. The arrangement is triangular in structure, with Korea in the van (previously the Philippines also), Japan bringing up the rear, and Okinawa as the military frontline.

In the end, the control over East Asia by the United States” world empire is plain and these relationships are its expression. Okinawa is an irreplaceable weapon for the US empire. Its loss cannot be contemplated. Japan, its role as supply-base to the US empire semi-hidden, grew fat off the Korean, Vietnam and other wars and associated reparations and, by assimilating Okinawa, accomplished its own restoration as new “Tenno-empire”.

As outlined in this paper, I want to re-trace Japan’s history from post-war through the early 21<sup>st</sup> century by adopting the perspective of below, from the viewpoint of day labourers and the “yoseba”. It is the process of the new “Tenno empire” engorging itself. I have drawn up the outline, intent on telling it as a coherent story, and now I am at work writing.

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*‘Okami’ suhai, haigai, haigai, no kindai Nihonshi (Traces of the Tenno Empire - the modern Japanese history of “worship of superiors”, worship of the other, and rejection of the other), (Renga shobo shinsha, 2006). The original Japanese version of this paper was delivered in December 2009 to the “Nago Conference” in Nago City, Okinawa, on “Civil Society and Social Movements in East Asia: Past, Present, and Future”.*

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kim Shi-jong, “‘Shu’ o ikiru shiso - Kin Jiha,” (Kim Chi-ha and the idea of living the ugly), November, 1970, *Zainichi no hazama de* (The constrictions of being “Zainichi”), Bonjinsha Library, pp. 144-5, 152.)

<sup>2</sup> Takei Teruo, b. 1927, first post-war leader of Japanese student movement (Zengakuren), played a prominent role in early post-war struggles against the “Red Purge”, expansion of US bases, etc. He struggled internally against central Japan Communist Party power, but did not go so far as to break from the Party or set up a new party and so was not part of the Bund (Revolutionary Communist League) set up in December 1958. Later active as a film and theatre critic, his works include *Takei Teruo ronshu* (Spesu Kaya, 2005) and *Takei Teruo hihanshu* (Miraisha, 1975-77).

<sup>3</sup> *Shiso no kagaku* (Science of Thought), was an influential journal founded in 1946 by Tsurumi Shunsuke (b. 1922). Representative work of the group includes especially the 1959 Chuo Koronsha volume, *Sengo Nihon no shiso* (Postwar Japanese Thought, by Kuno Osamu, Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Fujita Shozo). Tsurumi’s methodology was to analyse the constitutive elements of thought rather than



ideology as a coherent system and to assume the usefulness of component elements of the individual in and of themselves and distinct from the whole. Tsurumi was an eclectic thinker influenced by Dewey and American pragmatism. He was a founder of Beheiren (Peace for Vietnam) Citizens' League (1965-1974) and supported those engaged in assisting US soldiers to desert and escape to Sweden during the Vietnam War. His works include *Tsurumi Shunsuke shu* (Chikuma shobo).

<sup>4</sup> Kamba Michiko, (1937-1960), then a 4<sup>th</sup> year Japanese history student at University of Tokyo and member of the Bund, was killed in police violence outside the National Diet during the 15 June 1960 struggle against the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty. I was at the time a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student in the same Department.

<sup>5</sup> University of Tokyo Medical Faculty struggle was precursor to the general University of Tokyo struggle of 1968-9. The Young Medics Association (*Seinen ishi rengo*) was formed to protest and struggle against the exploitation of interns. Some of its members, impatient with the failure to secure advances, broke away and were central to the capture of the Yasuda Clock Tower.

<sup>6</sup> For details, see my contribution to the special edition of *Jokyo*, entitled "Kyoko to sakui" (Fabrication and Intent), October 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Sato Mitsuo and Yamaoka Kyoichi were both killed by members of an organized criminal group known as the Kanamachi family that was

affiliated with Kokusuikai (National Essence Society). Sato had been filming for just one week when he was stabbed to death by Tsutsui Eiichi, a member of the Nishido sub-group of the Kanamachi family. Afraid of being set upon by angry workers, Tsutsui immediately fled into the mammoth San'ya Police Box. The Kanamachi family, in collusion with the police authorities, feared exposure of its gambling, organized prostitution and labour exploitation, while the police, and also state authorities, were intent on crushing the *Sanya Sogidan* workers organization and its supporters (including Sato) who were resisting attempts to impose violent, organized crime control on the San'ya and other Yoseba throughout the country.

Yamaoka Kyoichi took over the task of completing the film from Sato. It was completed and released in December 1985 as "*Yama - Yararetara yarikaese*" (literally "If Attacked, Fight Back," but marketed under the English title "Attack to Attack"). Weeks later, on 13 January 1986, Yamaoka was shot and killed in the vicinity of Shin Okubo while on his way to San'ya. The culprit was Hoshina Tsutomu, then 28 years old and a young deputy gang boss of the Kokusuikai's Kanamachi family. In both cases the real responsibility rested with the Kokusuikai boss named Kudo, in command of the San'ya district and leading the move by Yamaguchigumi to expand into the Kanto region. Cornered by local Kanto criminal groups such as Sumiyoshikai Kudo later committed suicide. The two assailants were both sentenced to 15 years hard labour, and are expected to be released soon.