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University Newspaper Editorial: The Starting Point of the Student Movement

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Abstract: The editorial translated below appeared in the *University Newspaper (Daigaku Shinbun)*, published out of Tokyo Imperial University, on 11 October 1945. It is a very early example of the reemergence of the Japanese student movement after years of repression under the wartime regime. The central issue animating the editorial is the question of how to guard against the rise of “liars and opportunists,” who will use the language of democracy to further their own interests. For the writer, the answer is a vigorous association of progressives, with students at its heart. But for students to be able to play their proper, indeed historically mandated role in such a movement, they first need to acquire the correct political subjectivity. This is the starting point of the student movement.

Keywords: postwar occupation of Japan, student movement, subjectivity, newspaper editorial, protest, political theory

1 Introduction

The editorial translated below appeared in the *University Newspaper (Daigaku Shinbun)*, published out of Tokyo Imperial University, on 11 October 1945. It is a very early example of the reemergence of the student movement after years of repression under the wartime regime. Drawing on the language of freedom and human rights contained in paragraph 10 of the Potsdam Declaration, the terms of surrender issued to the Japanese by the United States, Great Britain and China on July 26 1945, and reacting to campus democratisation struggles already taking place in schools in Japan,¹ the editorial sets forth in strident terms a programme for student engagement in the process of securing democracy and

¹ See Yamanaka 1961: 10–13.

Original Title: 大学新聞社説：学生運動の発足点 *Daigaku Shinbun shasetsu: Gakusei Undō no Hassokuten*

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respect for human rights, and makes a bold case for the centrality of students, alongside intellectuals, workers and progressive farmers, in such a movement.

The central issue animating the editorial is the question of how to judge whether the democratic values promised by Potsdam, being as they are intangible ‘problems of thought’, have been truly established. Furthermore, the editorial asks how is it that progressive forces can oppose the inevitable emergence of “liars and opportunists,” who pretend to be democrats to further their own interests? For the writer, the answers are to be found in a vigorous association of progressives, with students at its heart. But for students to be able to play their proper, indeed historically mandated role in such a movement, they first need to acquire the correct political subjectivity (*shutaisei*).² This is the starting point of the student movement.

Given the dire material conditions Japan faced in the immediate postwar period, it seems strange that the editorial should dwell so long on such abstracts as subjectivity. But in this regard the discussion is a precursor to the thoroughgoing and vigorous debate over *shutaisei* that took place between 1946 and 1948, and which would continue to shape the contours of political activism in the years to follow.³ The reasons for the emergence of the debate over *shutaisei* at this time can be found in the unique conditions brought about by the end of the war and the legacy of prewar thought. A review of these conditions and the debate itself, with a focus on the position of students within it, thus provides useful background for understanding the issues raised in the editorial.

The individual and his or her relationship with history, nation and social change was a consistent concern during Japan’s period of breakneck modernisation since the 1868 Meiji Restoration, and was the subject of theorisation by intellectuals across the ideological spectrum. This political experimentation had its heyday in the relatively liberal Taishō period (1912–1926) in which public intellectuals debated democratic models of Japanese society, party politics was established and, with the proletarian movement, Marxist thought started to gain momentum. The Taishō period also saw the first instance of organised student radicalism in modern Japan, which started in 1918 with the founding of the Shinjinkai (The New Man Society) at Tokyo Imperial University.⁴ Gestated in the

² Following Koschmann 1996. I use the terms *shutaisei* and subjectivity interchangeably throughout.

³ See Koschmann 1981 and 1996. Also see note 19.

⁴ The key work on the Shinjinkai is Smith 1972.

heady ideological atmosphere that followed the Russian Revolution and the end of the First World War, Shinjinkai radicals experimented with a potpourri of liberal and left-wing thought before aligning themselves with first the proletarian movement and, after its reconstitution in 1926, the Japan Communist Party (JCP).⁵

The radicals were also successful in establishing a cross-faculty student association at Tokyo Imperial, the Gakuyūkai (Student Friendship Association) in 1920, and in pushing for the association's democratisation in 1923. By this time, however, the Japanese state's tolerance for political pluralism was beginning to wear thin. Mass arrest of communists in the wake of the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake presaged the passing in 1925 of the Peace Preservation Law, which criminalised association with any organisation that threatened the integrity of the "national body" (*kokutai*) and the system of private property.⁶ Student radicals were firmly in the crosshairs: indeed, the first use of the new law was against left-wing students at Kyoto Imperial University in December 1925.⁷ And in 1928, a year which saw the mass arrest of JCP members in March, the Gakuyūkai at Tokyo collapsed in the face of right-wing attacks on left-wing members and pressure from conservative athletics clubs. Then in 1929, under continual harassment by state authorities and their own university administrations, and on instructions from the Soviet Comintern, the Shinjinkai and the national student organisation it had spearheaded dissolved.⁸

From then student radicalism went underground. Two years later, on 18 September 1931, the Japanese military instigated the Manchurian Incident and the invasion of China began in earnest. In this new climate of nationalist militarism most liberal thinkers recanted their views and pledged allegiance to the state in an act dubbed *tenkō* (lit. "turning"). During the subsequent war years the Japanese people were exhorted by the state to "obliterate the self and serve public authority" (*messhi hōkō*). In the postwar assessment of one Japanese activist – an assessment shared by many at the time – under this regime the Japanese became little more than domesticated "barnyard animals".⁹

However, not all those who opposed the state in the prewar period succumbed to *tenkō* – many prewar communists, despite being prosecuted and imprisoned, maintained their views. Thus, on their release by the Allies after the

5 Smith 1970.

6 Mitchell 1973.

7 Smith 1972: 190–194.

8 Smith 1970: 100.

9 Wakabayashi 1998: 20.

war the communists achieved superstar status and enjoyed considerable moral authority as principled resisters of the Japanese wartime state. Reading the atmosphere of the times, the JCP leadership embraced the Allied Occupation's goal of democratisation, and reached out to a wide range of progressive forces in Japan in order to create a unified front.¹⁰ This strategy, and the climate of free speech instituted by a slew of Allied reforms since the end of the war, facilitated exchange between Marxists and non-Marxists alike on the type of *shutaisei*, or in Barshay's words the "historical agent,"¹¹ needed to secure the democratic revolution once and for all.¹² While all involved in the debate agreed that the Japanese should reject any vestiges of feudalism, the subjectivity question provoked a wide range of responses. For writers of the literary *Kindai bungaku* movement, *shutaisei* was to be found in an embrace of the individual, egoism and indulgence; for Marxist theorists in identification with the party or the proletariat; and for modernist intellectuals it required internalisation of a set of universal values and their practice in daily life.¹³

The editorial, however, predates the beginning of the *shutaisei* debate proper by some months. So, what does it mean by the term? On one hand, reference to objective social conditions in the prewar period, the proper critique of industry, and its concern with economic arrangements suggest a broadly Marxist framework, and it is worth noting that the Tokyo University JCP cell had been set up on the same day as publication of the editorial. But on the other hand, in maintaining that democracy can only be secured in Japan by associations of real "individuals" (*kojin*) actually *doing* democracy on a daily basis, the general thrust of the editorial foreshadows later modernist definitions of *shutaisei* associated with thinkers such as Maruyama Masao, Shimizu Ikutarō and Ōtsuka Hisao.¹⁴ These thinkers, most notable among them Maruyama, saw *shutaisei* as a form of democratic *ethos* internalised and externalised through praxis, which would enable modern democratic subjects to associate themselves with a range of public organizations without being subsumed by them, and would eventually see democratic politics become a feature of everyday life.¹⁵ Along similar lines, in the editorial student self-government associations, which

¹⁰ Scalapino (1967: 48–77) is a good source for the JCP's early policy of "loveable" communism.

¹¹ Barshay 1998: 289.

¹² Koschmann 1981: 610–616.

¹³ Koschmann 1981: 626. This is of course an oversimplification of a complex and far-ranging debate. For a detailed treatment see Koschmann 1981 and 1995.

¹⁴ Barshay 1998: 289–301.

¹⁵ For an interesting comparison see Maruyama's 1958 essay "*Being*" and "*Doing*" (Maruyama 1958).

in contrast to prewar Gakuyūkai are fully independent of the authorities, are reconceptualised as both the primary institution for student welfare and, through student participation in their activities, a place for the cultivation and practice of democratic *shutaisei*.

The debate on *shutaisei* came to an end in 1948 as the conditions in which it flourished gave way to a new set of realities. Facing mass labour unrest in Japan, and with the Cold War looming on the horizon, the Occupation authorities in 1947 started a crackdown on communists in what would become known as the “reverse course.” As a result, and under criticism by the Soviets for its soft “loveable” tactics, the JCP became less tolerant of theoretical heterodoxy: the introspections of the *shutaisei* debate were now considered by the JCP anathema to the revolutionary cause. But it was not just the party leadership who wanted to stop talking about *shutaisei*. At Tokyo University, for example, the old guard’s focus on subjectivity, and their self-conscious intellectualism, frustrated a new generation of student activists who, because of their different experience of the war, were less concerned with theory and more geared towards action. For their part, those old guard students who maintained the importance of *shutaisei* drew attention to the disturbing parallels between the prewar state ideology of *messhi hōkō* and the JCP’s emphasis on absolute military and theoretical discipline, which of course only antagonised the JCP leadership further.¹⁶

The conflict at Tokyo University came to a head in the wake of the failed General Strike of 1947 when a new incarnation of the Shinjinkai, operating as a faction of the JCP cell at the university, openly criticised the party’s dogmatism and sought to establish itself as a communist entity independent of JCP influence. The JCP responded by dissolving the cell in December 1947, citing the lack of discipline and malign influence of those with a “petit bourgeois way of thinking” who “do not engage in action and simply debate amongst each other.”¹⁷ The cell soon reconstituted itself under the leadership of those younger students more amenable to the Party line, and who would in 1948 go on to form the All-Japan Federation of Students’ Self-Governing Associations (*Zennihon gakusei jichikai sōrengō* or Zengakuren). But despite purging the recalcitrant modernists, the JCP’s control over student radicals was never total, and eventually came to an end when a group of students, angered over the way in which they had been used by the Party, formed the Communist League (*Kyōsanshugisha Dōmei*), known colloquially as the Bund, and wrestled control of Zengakuren from the JCP in 1958.¹⁸

¹⁶ This is discussed in Hasegawa 2006b.

¹⁷ Hasegawa 2006b: 96.

¹⁸ See Hasegawa 2003, 2006a.

Although the formal debate on *shutaisei* ended in the late 1940s, the issues it raised – not least the relationship between the individual and the political organisations, the relationship between institutions and the practice of democracy in daily life, and the balance between theory and action in student politics – were taken up again and again over the next few decades of political protest. Students continued to struggle with questions of political subjectivity through the massive demonstrations against the renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty in 1959/60, the years running up to and including the university takeovers of 1968, and on into the years of extreme radicalism in the early 1970s.¹⁹ With the resurgence of student activism in the wake of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, it is again important to revisit the debates that provided the domestic discursive framework for making sense of political activism in postwar Japan, of which this document is a significant early example.

2 Translation

Editorial: The Starting Point of the Student Movement

The University Newspaper

11 October 1945

The work of disarmament is visible. But when it comes to problems of human thought, such as the revival and strengthening of democracy or respect for fundamental human rights,²⁰ it is hard to suddenly demand firm evidence that they have been resolved. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to establish the

¹⁹ For a concise and authoritative overview of the postwar student movement see Steinhoff 2012. For a discussion of student radicalism and Anpo see Hasegawa 2003, and for a psychological study of students in this period see Lifton 1962. The best treatments of subjectivity in the 1968 university takeovers are Ando 2013, 2014 and Kersten 2009. The quest for subjectivity also played a large part in the tragic case of the United Red Army (*Rengō sekigun*) in 1972 (see Igarashi 2007, Steinhoff 2003, and Perkins 2015).

²⁰ This is a direct reference to article 10 of the Potsdam Declaration, which was a key document in framework of Japan's democratic "revolution from above" under the Occupation (Dower 1999: 73; Koschmann 1996: 11). Paragraph 10 of Potsdam reads: "We do not intend that the Japanese shall be enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation, but stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals, including those who have visited cruelties upon our prisoners. The Japanese Government shall remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established." For an account of the initial Japanese reaction to Potsdam see Kawai 1950.

criteria for satisfaction at all. First, people lie. Moreover, they lie with ease: it is entirely possible for an ardent militarist to shamelessly proclaim “I’m a supporter of democracy!” Second, even without any ill-intent, do you not think that from now on in our nation where, as the Allies have quite rightly pointed out, individuality, namely expression of the self, has not been recognised, unthinking opportunists will one after the other emerge from the ground and declare themselves democrats and advocates for the establishment of human rights?

These liars and opportunists exist across all classes and professions. If they were to come together for some purpose the damage they would cause in their efforts to satisfy their desires would perhaps be more extreme, more pernicious, than the various crimes committed by the past alliance of the militarists, government, *zaibatsu* and landlords.

Regarding these problems, it has been the Allies, rather than our still somewhat reticent intellectuals, who have worked forcefully towards establishing the worth of the individual. To put a stop to the rapaciousness of the liars and the opportunists the Allies have first of all revised Japan’s feudal system (the land problem), thereby eradicating the breeding ground for militarism. They have shone a new light on the structure of work and purchasing power, and one aspect of this, their demand to dismantle the *zaibatsu*, is most welcome.²¹ Although solved in theory since before the Manchurian Incident, such arguments were prohibited in our nation during the war.²² Thus we contend that now is precisely the right time to put a halt to feudalist corruption, which is also a source of frustration internationally, and quash hope for the future held by the liars and the opportunists.

However, it goes without saying that it would be meaningless if, even though expressing complete agreement with the policies of the Allies,

21 By October 11 SCAP had already issued 96 directives to the Japanese government. On the same day, the editorial was published Prime Minister Shidehara visited MacArthur’s residence to formally introduce himself. At this meeting MacArthur made clear his intentions for Japan in what would become known as the “Five Major Reform Directives” (*gōdai kaikakurei*). The reforms included (1) emancipation and enfranchisement of women; (2) provisions for an organised labour movement; (3) democratisation of the education system; (4) the lifting of laws against freedom of speech and abolishment of agencies that enforced those laws; and (5) democratisation of Japanese economic system including measures to dismantle the *zaibatsu*’s monopoly on production. For the Japanese text of the Reform Directives and the minutes of an extraordinary cabinet meeting convened on 13 October by Shidehara in response see National Diet Library 2003.

22 It is unclear what is being referred to here, but given the context and later detailed discussion of prewar student organisations, it would appear to be a reference to the critique levelled by the proletarian and communist movements of the 1920s.

progressive intellectuals, workers, and farmers in Japan were to simply sit back and applaud. Human rights are not something that can be realised in one's mind, nor do they spring forth from the written page; they are to be made real through active implementation in daily life. In this regard, we must thoroughly recognise that discovering the starting point for the realisation of human rights rests with each and every individual's grasp of subjectivity. Laying the social foundations for democracy becomes possible when those who have grasped this subjectivity, in other words real "individuals," find an arena in which they can act together to make the ideal of civilisation and enlightenment a reality.²³ Without these preconditions even the all-important "abrogation and immediate suspension of all laws that restrict civil liberties" will likely result in innumerable deplorable outcomes that will have an unpredictable impact on the Allies.²⁴ Is it not natural that those of us who consider ourselves progressives should lead the way in consideration of these issues?

★

It is an established historical fact that students occupy a position of tremendous importance amongst individuals that act on the basis of self-awareness,

23 Here the editorial is harking back to the early Meiji Period (1868–1912) and the policy of "civilisation and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*) pursued by Japan in its efforts to catch up with the West and become a modern state. This rhetorical use of "civilisation and enlightenment" links the future oriented concerns of the editorial to what was widely seen as a glorious period in Japan's history. It is, however, conveniently decoupling "civilisation and enlightenment" from its militaristic sister slogan "rich nation strong army" (*fukoku kyōhei*).

24 This line refers to the memorandum on "Removal of Restrictions on Political, Civil, and Religious Liberties" (SCAPIN-93), issued by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers to the Japanese Government on 4 October 1945 (see National Diet Library 2006). Also known as the "Civil Liberties Directive," this wide-ranging memorandum called on the Japanese government to "abrogate and immediately suspend the operation of all provisions of all laws, decrees, orders, ordinances and regulations" that restricted freedom of thought, religion, assembly or speech (including criticism of the Emperor); restricted the collection and dissemination of information; and enabled discrimination on the basis of race, nationality, creed or political opinion. To facilitate the lifting of these restrictions the Directive demanded the repeal of a host of repressive laws including the 1925 Peace Preservation Law, the release of all persons "detained, imprisoned or under 'protection or surveillance'" under said laws and abolishment of all agencies charged with enforcement of those laws including all "secret police organs" and the Ministry of Home Affairs' Special Higher Police (*Tokubetsu Kōtō Keisatsu* or *Tokkō*). The response from the Higashikuni cabinet, which feared that releasing communist prisoners would be the first step towards revolution in Japan, was resignation en masse on 5 October. The cabinet that replaced it, headed by Shidehara Kijūrō was more amenable, and the offending laws were repealed on 15 October (Dower 1999: 81).

i. e. radicals. So too in our nation have students formed a powerful wing of past intellectual movements.²⁵ As sincere patriots during the war they played their part in the ideology of productivity, and now that the fighting has come to an end we hope that students, as able people capable of self-examination, come forward to both develop a vision for the future and propel Japan towards it.

However, while there is no doubt that students with ability and vision should be at the heart of the development of a peaceful nation of culture,²⁶ the freedom bestowed upon them has up to now been mostly a mirage. To put it in extreme terms it was only “the freedom to wish to study.” And even then students found themselves in a deplorable situation where lectures by peers were banned by law and the reach of the state extended into seminars in which free debate should have been permitted. It is quite clear that students placed in this situation could not prevent the loss of their subjectivity. This being said, we cannot help but be pleasantly surprised to see that some were able to hold onto their critical faculties in the face of oppressive irrational militarism, as demonstrated by intellectual actions such as people taking their good conscience to the factories, as well as the existence of a largely proper critique of industry. On the whole, however, we must acknowledge that the harsh objective conditions made the fight against the loss of subjectivity difficult.

With regard to collective organisations for students the current trend is to dissolve the student brigades and return to the former student and school associations.²⁷ But in this regard, we believe it necessary to submit the old associations to further examination.

25 Students took part in the “Freedom and People’s Rights Movement” (*Jiyūminken undō*) in the 1880s, the socialist movement during the Russo-Japanese War, and the proletarian and communist movements of the 1920s (see Shimbori 1963: 64; Smith 1970: 92; Sumiya *et al.* 1953).

26 Here we see an amalgamation of what would become two of the most popular slogans in the postwar period: “build a nation of culture” (*bunka kokka kensetsu*) and “build a nation of peace” (*heiwa kokka kensetsu*). To quote Dower (1999: 177), and as with the reference to “civilisation and enlightenment” above, these slogans “resurrected two key themes of wartime propaganda, construction and culture, and turned them into rallying cries for the creation of a nation resting on democratic, antimilitaristic principles.” For a detailed discussion of the uses of the concept of culture in Japan see Morris-Suzuki (1998: cha. 4)

27 The editorial is referring to the short-lived prewar Gakuyūkai (student friendship associations). Established first at Tokyo Imperial University in 1920, Gakuyūkai were umbrella organisations for management of university faculty, sports and cultural clubs (see Smith 1972: 149–161). For a more general discussion of the university system and students’ activities during the war see Shillony 1986.

The common model for student (school) associations was, in general, based on the division between cultural clubs and athletics clubs,²⁸ with athletics clubs in a position of dominance. Moreover, because athletics clubs had at their heart a system of competitive athletic selection, the impression was given that student associations were only for the select few. This situation was the starting point for the reform of student associations.²⁹

Now, student associations develop out of the cooperation between educational institutions and their students. But the reason for the existence of these organisations was originally the material and spiritual improvement of students' lives. Therefore, beyond the educational remit of the cultivation of morality, mind and body, the main thrust of student associations must be towards the betterment of the notably unique student lifestyle. It is now firmly acknowledged that the reason for the near complete domination of students' associations by athletics clubs was to direct student's interests towards sports as a method of policing thought (the establishment of the respective ideologies of actual activists notwithstanding). Indeed, it was for this very reason that the separation of athletics clubs and student associations took place at Tokyo University in Showa 3, and a similar movement for a major reform of the system had to take place at Kyoto University in Showa 13.³⁰

28 The literature on prewar student associations tends to translate *undōbu* as “athletics clubs” rather than the broader “sports clubs” and I have stuck to this convention. However, athletics is used here in the North American sense to denote all sports, not just track and field.

29 As noted in the editorial the Gakuyūkai at Tokyo Imperial was initially an extension of the university athletics association and as such athletics clubs (*undōbu*) far outnumbered “cultural clubs” (*bunkabu*). Thus, the culture of the Gakuyūkai remained firmly conservative. This was to change in 1924 when progressive students successfully implemented reforms that shifted the balance of power away from the athletics clubs under the slogan “All Power to the Student Masses!” These reforms included automatic membership for all students, a compulsory fee to secure financial stability, representative management committees, and a popularly elected student council. For a detailed discussion see Smith 1972: 149–161 and Nakazawa 2008.

30 As left-wing students became more closely aligned with the proletarian movement and the Japan Communist Party in the latter half of the 1920s, right-wing student groups sought to destabilise the Gakuyūkai. Tensions came to a head in 1928 at a left-wing rally organised by the Debating Club in protest of the university's decision not to host the High School debating championships that year. After a peaceful start the rally quickly descended into chair throwing when a member of the right-wing Seven Lives Society (Shichiseikai) threw a speaker from the podium; the next day bands of right-wing students hunted for and assaulted their left-wing adversaries. As this was going on, the athletics clubs, arguing they did not want to get pulled into the ideological fray and disgruntled over the loss of autonomy over their budgets (Nakazawa 2008: 319–320), withdrew from the Gakuyūkai and reestablished the independent Athletics Association; four faculty clubs soon followed suite. When last-ditch efforts to

Now that human liberties have been restored and the suppression of thought has been lifted, strategically motivated student associations like those discussed above have already lost all meaning. Thus, student associations must return to their original honorable role, namely devotion to the goal of improving the everyday lives of students. Simultaneously, in the refashioning of student associations consideration must be given to promoting their role as places that provide the opportunity to acquire lost subjectivity.

To achieve these goals, we see the following as essential:

1. Student associations should become the main organs of student self-governance.
2. Mechanisms for the expression of opinion should be instituted.
3. To address the buildup of difficulties likely to be faced by students in their everyday lives an increase in economic cooperatives and consumer organisations, which were previously banned, should be planned for.
4. With special regard to private educational institutions, it is of the utmost importance that we introduce institutions for criticism of school management, and in this critical spirit, see that the management of both cultural activities and athletics is conducted transparently.

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Even though paper is scarce there has been no alternative but to write at length. The reasons are as follows. The strengthening of democratic tendencies and the establishment of fundamental human rights as mandated by the Potsdam Declaration are the stuff of thought. Therefore, while their realisation is predicated on reform of the economic system (i. e. the dissolution of the feudal system), we feel keenly that it also depends on the establishment of subjectivity. Those with the right to address the world of tomorrow will be unafraid of power, and will overcome unthinking formalism to stand for themselves. And in this we have no option but to reflect on that which world history is teaching us: that students with such qualities, together with progressive intellectuals, workers and farmers, must shoulder their proper responsibility at the heart of intellectual movements. The full extent of the efforts and activities of students in

reincorporate the athletics clubs failed, the Tokyo Imperial University Gakuyūkai was dissolved on March 29 (for a detailed account see Smith 1972: 149–161). Membership of the Athletics Association subsequently became mandatory for students – an arrangement backed by the university authorities for its utility in addressing the twin evils of poor health among the student body and the “disease” of left-wing thought (see Nakazawa 2008). For an account of the prewar student movement with a particular focus on activities in Kyoto see Sumiya et al. 1953.

neighbouring China over the past, extremely difficult, nine years will soon become clear.³¹ For now though, we must pay full attention to the question of how student associations, which have been presented here as the problem before us, can marshal the goodwill of the younger generation and direct it towards the goal of world peace. It is therefore now time to put all our efforts into making student associations a base of self-realisation.

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³¹ This may be a reference to the imminent return of Japanese communists from China, such as Nosaka Sanzō who had spent the years 1940–45 with the Chinese communists in Yanan and returned to Japan in January 1946 (Scalapino 1967: 53).

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