

Dokusai: The Evolution of a Japanese Word

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I. Introduction

In 1936, Japanese journalist Kuroda Reiji published his biography of Adolf Hitler, *Dokusaiō Hittorā* 「独裁王ヒットラア」 or *Hitler the Dictatorial King*. Kuroda had been the Berlin correspondent for the Tokyo newspaper the *Asahi Shinbun*, and had become an admirer of Hitler, even interviewing him in 1935.¹ However, students of Japanese may find the phrase *dokusaiō* strange and redundant. The symbol “独”, meaning “single” or “alone” and “裁” meaning decision, make some intuitive sense in defining “dictatorial”, but why include the symbol “王” for king at all? Moreover, why render the word “dictatorial” using Chinese characters, or *kanji*, at all, when one could just transliterate the word “dictator” into *katakana*, the script reserved for foreign words?

The phrase *dokusai* (独裁) has its origin in Tang Dynasty Chinese texts. In this original context, *dokusai*’s meaning was very literal: one individual (独) making one decision (裁) alone. However, Japanese culture, politics and language all experienced significant change after the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry in Japan in 1853.² Japan was effectively forced to open up after a long period of *sakoku* (鎖国), or national isolation. With this opening came an influx of Western products and philosophies. Over time, *dokusai* also came to be attributed to Western concept of *dictatorship*, which itself had its own origins in the Roman Republic.

I argue that over time, *dokusai* underwent a semantic shift, that is, a changing of definition, during the rise of the twentieth century, and that by the beginning of the Second World War, it became effectively synonymous with the Western term “dictator”. However, *dokusai*’s attribution to a word meaning a sole person with extraordinary or absolute power, was in direct contradiction to its original meaning in Chinese texts. I then argue that in turn, as the word “dictator” underwent a semantic expansion, that is, a broadening of definition, with the rise of 20th century

¹ Ricky W Law. *Transnational Nazism: Ideology and Culture in German-Japanese Relations, 1919-1936*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. pp. 51.

² Shinichi Kitaoka, *A Political History of Modern Japan*, trans. Robert D. Eldridge with Graham Leonard (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 8-17.

authoritarians like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Japanese scholars and thinkers were forced to reevaluate and reassert the definition of the word in reflection of changing times.

I examine *dokusai*'s semantic shift through its use in newspapers from the Late Meiji era (1868-1912) to the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact between Germany and Japan in 1936. Newspapers were integral to public opinion in the late 19th and early 20th century. While *dokusai* was used briefly in a domestic context around the turn of the century, it was almost exclusively in foreign coverage until the 1930s. According to Ricky Law, newspapers specifically were “the most available and affordable segment of the media.”³ At a time when travel to Europe was inaccessible to the lower and middle classes, newspapers served as a window into the outside world. In this regard, the press both oversaw and perpetuated the semantic shift of *dokusai* through the twentieth century.

The historical analysis of word usage over time is not without precedent. Historian Thomas Dodman's *What Nostalgia Was: War, Empire, and the Time of a Deadly Emotion*, describes how the word “nostalgia” transformed from a diagnosable medical disease to a general yearning for the past as we know it today. Dodman examines the first historical usage of “nostalgia” in a 17th century doctoral dissertation and then shows different instances of the word in the Napoleonic era, French North Africa and the present day.⁴ Abbot Gleason's *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*, explains how totalitarianism, first used in critiques of Mussolini's fascism, was then appropriated by Mussolini as a complimentary term. Later, the Cold War was framed in the United States by a battle against totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, drawing a thread between fascism and communism.⁵ Gleason's work especially is notable, since it analyzes a word semantically proximate to the modern definitions of *dokusai* and “dictatorship”—“totalitarianism”. It raises an interesting question: whether *dokusai* was appropriated by right-wingers, similarly to how Mussolini adopted “totalitarianism” as a positive term.

³ Law, pp. 3.

⁴ Thomas Dodman, *What Nostalgia Was: War, Empire, and the Time of a Deadly Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 3-4

⁵ Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: the Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Tracking the use of *dokusai* in the same fashion as Dodman and Gleason extends their work to a word of Eastern origin. This analysis offers a window into how Western philosophy was adapted into a Japanese context. In addition, it highlights the semantic difficulty of translating Western words into Japanese. Furthermore, I aim to highlight how the Japanese language was fundamentally altered by the West in the twentieth century, and what role authoritarians played in that alteration. Given that *dokusai*'s meaning extends beyond "dictatorship" in many cases, I have decided to keep it untranslated in different contexts. I will do my best in every situation to explain the meaning of each individual use of *dokusai* and the connotation around it in my analysis.

II. Origin in Chinese Literature

As Japan was forced open and Westernized in the Meiji Era, the influx of Western ideas forced the Japanese to invent new words. Many were *Wasei-kango*, words using Chinese characters but originating in Japan.⁶ Japanese philosophers like Nishi Amane began translating Western philosophical works into Japanese such as John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*. In order to translate Western words with no Japanese equivalent, thinkers like Nishi turned to Ancient Chinese texts to find words with similar or adjacent meanings.⁷ While I was unable to find who first translated the term "dictator" into "*dokusai*" (独裁), I was able to find the first recorded use of the word in the Book of Jin (晉書) a history of the Jin Dynasty written during the subsequent Tang Dynasty. Japanese scholars would likely be familiar with this history, especially since the Tang Dynasty coincided with the Nara Period in Japan, during which Japan heavily borrowed from China.⁸

Dokusai appeared in the history of not the Jin Dynasty, but rather the chronicle of China's Sixteen Kingdoms period, a period of about a century when Northern China was splintered in several warring kingdoms. This era is notable for the prominence of non-Han ethnic groups, such as the Xianbei. The Xianbei ruled over much of Northern China and the Murong clan was among

⁶ Yoko Hasegawa, *Japanese: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 49-50

⁷ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Nishi Amane." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. Accessed November 14, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nishi-Amane>.

⁸ Craig Lockhard. "Tang Civilization and the Chinese Centuries," Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

the most powerful.⁹ The first use of *dokusai* in the Book of Jin comes in an argument between Murong Wei (慕容暉), the young emperor of the Xianbei state of Former Yan, and his uncle and regent, Murong Ke (慕容恪). Ke advocated for the appointment of Li Xu (李續) to a government post, while Wei opposed the appointment because Li was a vocal critic of his rule. The argument concluded with the Emperor saying “Uncle, I can leave power to you in all other things but I will make the sole decision on Li”¹⁰. Here, the meaning of *dokusai* is very different from “dictatorship”. A dictator is usually defined as one who wields absolute power, but Murong Wei emphasizes his cession of power to his uncle in “all other things”. The meaning of *dokusai* in this context is quite literal. Derived from the characters 独, meaning alone or individual, and 裁, meaning decision, this compound only emphasizes that Wei makes the decision on Li alone, without consultation from his uncle. Effectively, when *dokusai* became the translation for “dictator”, it acquired the opposite meaning of one person with extraordinary or absolute power. Murong Wei’s use of *dokusai* meant the assertion of power over one decision, and he qualified the statement with a cession of power in “all other things” to his uncle. This assertion is, in fact, the opposite of total power. This definition of *dokusai* as one person making a “sole decision” did not exclusively appear in this text. In newspapers in the late Meiji Era, *dokusai*’s meaning was more akin to its original definition than to “dictator”.

III. *Dokusai* in Late Meiji Japan

Dokusai was used almost exclusively in a foreign context after the Russo-Japanese War, but the press used it in a very specific context in the late Meiji Era. That context was closely connected to its original use in the Book of Jin. In the European context, while *dokusai* could be used to denote an ideology of absolute power vested in an individual, it tended to be used in a smaller scale context in Japan. From the early 1890s to the beginning of the First Sino-Japanese War, two factions drove political conflict in Japan. The first was comprised of the *hanbatsu* or

⁹ Charles Holcombe, “THE XIANBEI IN CHINESE HISTORY,” *Early Medieval China* 2013, no. 19 (2013): pp. 1-38, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1529910413z.00000000006>.

¹⁰ “萬機之事委之叔父，伯陽一人，暉請獨裁”

domain cliques, the nobles left over from the Meiji oligarchy responsible for the implementation of the Meiji Restoration. According to the constitution, the Meiji Emperor, who preferred the *hanbatsu*, appointed cabinet ministers. This effectively meant that the domain cliques appointed their peers to the cabinet. The second faction was the political parties, who occupied the Diet, especially the House of Representatives elected by a limited number of landowning males.¹¹ The domain cliques advocated transcendentalism, the idea that government policy should be independent of political opinion, while the political parties advocated a responsible cabinet that would comprise elected party members.¹² Fundamentally, the argument between transcendentalism and a responsible cabinet hinged on where power should have been concentrated: within the imperial court and the nobles, or among the voting citizenry.

However, neither the domain cliques nor the political parties were ever described as *dokusai* by the press during the era. In contrast with the coverage of Europe and Russia, where *dokusai* represented an entire governing system (for example *kunshudokusai* for absolutism), in Japan, *dokusai* was used only when individuals had large power over *parts* of the government or a political party. Additionally, in this Japanese context, the individuals or systems described as *dokusai* did not command absolute power. In this sense, the meaning of *dokusai* in this early Japanese context was more consistent with its original use in the Book of Jin.

The Meiji Constitution limited the powers of the Diet, giving it no authority in matters to be handled by the emperor.¹³ What resulted were critiques within the press on the uneven powers of the government. Much of this discourse arose around the banks. A March 1899 editorial in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* criticized the leadership of the Japan Hypothec Bank.¹⁴ The purpose of the bank was to issue long term agricultural credits funded by the issue of long term bonds.¹⁵ The editorial explained that bank leadership was appointed by the government, whereas the auditors were elected. What occurred within the system, however, was when the bank ran a deficit, “the gov-

¹¹ Kitaoka, pp. 57

¹² Ibid., 57

¹³ Kitaoka, 51

¹⁴ *Tokyo Yomiuri Shinbun* (TY) March 27, 1899

¹⁵ Yamaguchi, Shigeru. "THE BANKING SYSTEM IN JAPAN AND ITS PROBLEMS." *The Annals of the Hltōt-subashi Academy* 1, no. 1 (1950): 84-85

ernment grants subsidized interest, appoints their own leadership and thus interferes with the will of the stockholders”. The editorial concluded that “The leadership structure of the Japan Hypothec Bank is a system of *dokusaishugi*¹⁶ and must...be amended”.¹⁷ The compound *shugi* (主義) attached in this case to *dokusai* identifies a governing ideology, or “-ism” (for example, *jiyūshugi*, 自由主義 means “liberalism”). It also argued that bank governors should be democratically elected like auditors. In essence, this editorial was a liberal criticism of the abundance of power granted to the cabinet by the Meiji Constitution. It argued that the dysfunction within the bank stemmed from the lack of accountability from government appointed leadership.

Later, several columns in the *Asahi shinbun* concerning the power of the banks also appeared during budget negotiations in 1899. One of the few powers conferred to the Diet by the Meiji Constitution was the ability to approve the budget.¹⁸ At the time, the Bank of Japan (BOJ), Japan’s largest national bank, was led by Yamamoto Tatsuo, a career bureaucrat. Yamamoto had studied in England before being called back to run the BOJ by his predecessor, Iwasaki Yanosuke.¹⁹ During the budget negotiations of 1898, Yamamoto had convinced Diet Members to vote for a tax on fiduciary issue in a back door deal. The passage of the tax was especially surprising, since a special committee within the House of Representatives had come out against the tax.²⁰ This was looked upon unfavorably by the editors of the *Asahi Shinbun*, who published a column on August 14, 1899, during negotiations for the next year’s budget. The column accused Yamamoto of “...a policy of *dokusaishugi*” and “failing to consult the leadership of the Ministry of Finance.”²¹ It concluded that this year’s budget negotiations could bring about a reevaluation of the bank’s “special privileges”. Unlike the previous *Yomiuri* article, this *Asahi* article did not attribute the bank governor’s despotic behavior to power vested by the government. Rather, by

¹⁶独裁主義

¹⁷ *dokusaiseiji*

¹⁸ Kitaoka, 51

¹⁹ Ishikawa, Michisato, ed. “Nihon Ginkou Hyaku Nen Shi.” Nihon ginkou. Bank of Japan. Accessed November 5, 2020. <https://www.boj.or.jp/about/outline/history/hyakunen/index.htm/>.

²⁰ Ishikawa

²¹ *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* (TA), August 14, 1899

failing to consult the Ministry of Finance, Bank Governor Yamamoto had been practicing a policy of *dokusaishugi*. What's clear is that in both editorials, *dokusai* meant the excessive individual power of one person with power over the bank, rather than a dictator with absolute power over an entire governing system.

In party politics, journalists also attributed *dokusai* to Itō Hirobumi's leadership of the *Rikken Seiyukai* party. Itō, a Meiji oligarch, believed that transcendentalism could be achieved with political parties.²² In 1900, he founded the *Seiyukai*, or the "Friends of the Constitutional Government", and members of the former liberal party joined soon after. Many saw this development as a blow to party politics because a member of the domain cliques had become the leader of the Liberals, who had a long tradition of advocating democracy through the People's Rights Movement.²³ The press certainly saw the alliance between Itō and the liberals as tenuous, and headlines from Itō's tenure as leader were quick to point out the possibility of the party splintering. On November 28, 1900, barely 2 months after the party's founding, the *Yomiuri* reported "internal discord within the *Seiyukai*."²⁴ Members of the former Liberal Party had met in Chiba without other *Seiyukai* members, as they had done in the past for their annual meeting. The *Yomiuri* described the event as "an act which in every way violates the one-person rule²⁵ of the *Seiyukai*", referencing the leadership of Itō. The *Yomiuri* also reported of discord in June 1903 near the end of Itō's tenure as party leader. It described the "system of one-person-leadership."²⁶ as unable to accomplish anything without the support of the cabinet ministries or the liberal faction.²⁷ Despite the press using *dokusai* to describe Itō's leadership, it is clear that they did not consider him as the "dictator" of the *Seiyukai*. Itō did not wield absolute power, and had to make concessions to the liberal faction in order to maintain the coalition. Both *Yomiuri* and *Asahi* newspapers reported that the liberal faction was demanding an expansion of the *Seiyukai*'s

²² Kitaoka, 69

²³ Kitaoka, 70

²⁴ TY, November 28, 1900

²⁵ *dokusaishugi*

²⁶ *sousaidokusaisei*

²⁷ TY, June 6, 1903

general affairs committee in October 1900.²⁸ The *Yomiuri* then reported that, accordingly, the committee had expanded.²⁹ Clearly, the Liberals had some say in the formation and organization of the party. For this reason, the power Itō held was not absolute, meaning that *dokusai* in this context meant individual power. In addition, the press only described Itō's leadership as *dokusai* when the coalition of the *Seiyukai* was at threat or there was a possibility of a breakaway faction forming. In this sense, the use of *dokusai* highlighted Itō's precarious position as a member of the domain cliques and the leader of a political party.

IV. *Dokusai* and the Roman Dictatorship

In order to understand *dokusai*'s translation into "dictator," it is important to understand the word's historical origin. The position of dictator was a temporary magistracy given to individuals in the Roman Republic. They were nominated by consuls in times of crisis and were granted extraordinary powers.³⁰ The use of a dictator in a temporary capacity enabled the Republic to take quick action against military and internal threats.

In Japan, the classical Roman "dictator" was translated into *dokusaikan* (独裁官). In early uses of *dokusai* before the 1918 Russian revolution, this term was used in adherence to its classical definition. These articles were often accompanied with phrases like *hijō gentei* or "emergency restrictions", and *chitsujō iji* or "maintaining order". Military leaders were given emergency powers during both the Goudi rebellion in Greece and the Young Turks Movement in the Ottoman Empire in 1909, and were called *dokusaikan* by the *Asahi shinbun*.³¹ This was consistent with the historical dictatorship of the Roman Republic, as these positions were temporary roles assigned during times of crisis.

²⁸ TA October 7, 1900 and TY October 24, 1900

²⁹ TY October 25, 1900

³⁰ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, ed. "Dictator." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. Accessed December 17, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dictator-Roman-official>.

³¹ TA April 27 and April 28, 1909 and TA December 24, 1909

However, upon reading any Roman histories, the Japanese would be well aware of the potential of the temporary dictatorship role to become a permanent one. In the Roman Republic, the dictatorships conferred upon Sulla and Caesar were not based on a state of emergency, but by a need to “restore the republic”. Caesar eventually was elected “dictator for life” but assassinated by the senate soon after.³² This historical precedent was important, as with the rise of new authoritarians in the 1920s and 1930s, the Japanese press would be forced to adapt and interpret a *dokusai* defined by absolute control and rule in perpetuity.

V. *Dokusai* in Russia: From Absolutism to Bolshevism

Russia had loomed large in the minds of the Japanese since the 1861 Tsushima Incident. The Russians had occupied the island of Tsushima, which lay between the Japanese island of Kyūshū and the Korean Peninsula.³³ In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Russia’s eastern expansion was a primary concern for Japan, and drove many of their foreign policy decisions. In 1904, Russian occupation of the Liaodong and Korean Peninsulas led the Japanese to attack Port Arthur, beginning the Russo-Japanese War.³⁴ Japan’s view of Russia as its rival in East Asia meant that Russia’s government and political affairs received thorough coverage within the Japanese press. *Dokusai*’s use primarily came in translating one of the governing principles of Russia under the Czars: *samoderžavije*, or autocracy. The basic tenets of this philosophy were that the Czar derived indivisible power from God, and that he was beholden to no elected body. This philosophy was backed by the Russian Orthodox Church, which maintained a close relationship with the Romanov family.³⁵ In this context, *dokusai* became the translation of “autocracy” as a governing system and philosophy.

Upon examining the morphology of the original Russian word for autocracy, the word breaks into *samo*, meaning “self”, *deržav*, meaning “state” or “power”, and *ije*, a bound mor-

³² “Dictator”

³³ Kitaoka, 72

³⁴ Kitaoka, 79

³⁵ Lee, Stephen J. *Russia and the USSR, 1855-1991: Autocracy and Dictatorship*. London: Routledge, 2006.

pheme that nominalizes a word.³⁶ The morphology is more or less consistent with the morphology of *dokusai*, and *dokusai*'s connection to a monarch in the Book of Jin may have led to its use in translating “autocracy”.

One of the earliest articles on Russia in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* was an 1887 publication of a conversation with the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce at the time, Tani Tateki. While Tani originated from the same regions that domain clique leaders had, he opposed the *hanbatsu* led government, and had preached a unique governing philosophy that involved the Emperor as an active arbiter in government.³⁷ Tani was discussing his tour of Europe, and the differences between European constitutional monarchies, and “monarchic autocracies,”³⁸ in other words, Russia.³⁹ He discussed the advantages and drawbacks to each system, and offered his comments on each. In what may have been a backhanded criticism of the Meiji oligarchs, Tani expressed the concern that government officials may have undue influence upon a monarch in an autocracy, but concluded that “within autocracies, there are methods to control the selfishness of government officials”. Tani’s statements were an early Japanese critique of Russian absolutism. His thoughts on autocracy were colored by his thoughts on Japanese politics, as seen by his comments regarding officials around the Czar.

The word *dokusai* itself was the lone consistent word in translating the concept of Russian autocracy into Japanese. Several different kanji compounds described Russia’s Czarist governing system, but each one involved *dokusai*. Tani Tateki called Russia a *kunshudokusai* (君主独裁), with *kunshu* meaning monarch. Later, an 1895 *Asahi* article discussed measures to suppress liberal movements within Russian universities and described Russia as a *dokusaiseiji* (独裁政治) or “autocratic government.”⁴⁰ As Japan entered war with Russia in 1904, the *Asahi* adopt-

³⁶ Vasmer, Max, O. N. Trubachev, and B. A. Larin. *Etimologiceskij Slovar Russkogo Jazyka Russisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch: v Cetyrech Tomach*. Moskva: Izdatelstvo "Progress", 2009.

³⁷ “Tani Tateki.” *Kokuritsu Kokkai Toshokan* National Diet Library, Japan. Accessed December 17, 2020. <https://www.ndl.go.jp/portrait/datas/131.html>.

³⁸ *kunshudokusai*

³⁹ TY August 25, 1887

⁴⁰ TA April 11, 1895

ed a new phrase, *senseidokusai* (専制独裁).⁴¹ The compound *sensei*, derived from the characters 専, meaning exclusive and 制, meaning system, translates to “autocracy” or “despotism” in English. Given the semantic proximity of *sensei* and *dokusai*, this description seems quite redundant. However, the change from *kunshu* to *sensei* suggests a shift in emphasis from the monarch himself to the monarch’s sole power, and therefore strikes a more critical tone. This may have been driven by Japan’s war with Russia in 1904. In addition, the consistent use of *dokusai* within the descriptions suggests that the nature of Russia’s governing system laid within that word itself.

The importance of *dokusai* within Japan’s coverage of Russia also lies within direct translations of Russian texts. In January 1905, Russian workers in St. Petersburg, led by Father Georgy Gapon, attempted to present a petition to Czar Nicholas II at the Winter Palace.⁴² Police were at the scene and were ordered to fire upon the marchers. More than 100 demonstrators were killed in what became known as the “Bloody Sunday Massacre”. The *Nichinichi shinbun* published a partial translation of the petition Father Gapon had written. The original Russian petition addressed the Czar as *gosudar’*, or “sovereign”, and the Japanese translation used *dokusaikunshu* or “absolute monarch.”⁴³ In this context, the *dokusai* was being applied to the Czar himself, rather than just Russia’s governing system. This translation also demonstrates the ubiquity of *dokusai* in Japan’s interpretation of Russia’s political philosophy.

The Bloody Sunday Massacre led to a widespread call for reform across Russia and eventually forced Nicholas II to call a Duma, or diet, and appoint a formal cabinet.⁴⁴ The Japanese press regarded the changes as fundamentally superficial. The *Yomiuri shinbun* called the newly formed Duma a “false parliament” and declared the Duma “subordinate to the autocratic⁴⁵ system.”⁴⁶ However, with these reforms came a slight shift in the use of *dokusai* that was similar to its use in late Meiji Japan. In some respects, Russia’s governing system had come to resemble

⁴¹ TA May 12, 1904 and TA May 26, 1904

⁴²Smele

⁴³ TNN January 24, 1905

⁴⁴ Smele, et al. 46

⁴⁵ *dokusaiseido*

⁴⁶ TY August 22, 1905

Japan's in the late Meiji era. It comprised of a representative assembly with severely limited powers along with a more powerful, monarch-appointed cabinet. This led to criticisms not of an entire governing system, but of individual people with significant political power. In April 1906, Sergei Witte, the first constitutional prime minister of Russia, stepped down and was succeeded by Pyotr Stolypin.⁴⁷ However, the *Asahi* reported that Witte still had large influence over the cabinet, was subverting Stolypin, and called him a *dokusaikan*, using the Japanese word for the ancient Roman office of dictator. Besides this slight shift in usage however, *dokusai* translated as “autocracy” remained the prevailing usage while the Czar stayed in power.

With Nicholas II's abdication in 1917, the system of autocracy in Russia came to an end, and the use of *dokusai* in a Czarist context faded. One of the final uses of *dokusai* as “autocracy”, recognized its end as the ruling political philosophy in Russia. According to an *Asahi* article reporting Nicholas' abdication, “There was some debate on the head of the Russian Orthodox Church's claim that the Czar's autocracy⁴⁸ would make him unable to execute reforms. However, this change...rejected this notion.”⁴⁹

The years 1917 and 1918 saw dramatic political shifts in Russia. With the Czar's abdication, a provisional government filled the power vacuum. At the same time, Vladimir Lenin returned to Russia from Switzerland. Lenin and the Bolshevik party besieged the Provisional Government in October 1917 and ultimately announced a new socialist government.⁵⁰ The first successful communist revolution warranted considerable coverage by the Japanese press. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx had written that the alternative to capitalist bourgeois rule would be the “dictatorship of the proletariat” which would make society and the economy entirely collective.⁵¹ With the rise of the Soviet rule in Russia, the government justified itself based on this title.

⁴⁷ TA December 2, 1906

⁴⁸ *dokusaishugi*

⁴⁹ TA March 25, 1917

⁵⁰ Peter Kenez. *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. pp. 24

⁵¹ Lee, 6

When the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets met in January 1918, according to the *Asahi shinbun*, Leon Trotsky pledged “to substitute the general voting system with a dictatorship of the proletariat”⁵², in Japanese, *rōdōkaikyū no dokusai seiji* (労働階級の独裁政治). The next day, the *Asahi* reported Trotsky’s declaration that “...the election system has now become obsolete and a dictatorship of the proletariat will be Russia’s only possible relief.”⁵³ The Bolsheviks’ motivation for abolishing elections stemmed from their losses they had suffered to other socialist parties in the Constituent Assembly election.⁵⁴ Trotsky’s appeal to Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat” was a calculated effort to delegitimize election results. Indeed, within both Czarist autocracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat were embedded justifications for rule without popular elections. Perhaps this is the quality that led both systems to be described by the Japanese as *dokusai*.

This development in the coverage of *dokusai* was significant for several reasons. For one, it was the first time, in Japanese newspapers at least, that the term *dokusai* was ascribed to a modern, non-Roman concept of “dictator”. However, more important was how it fundamentally altered the meaning of *dokusai* from its original definition, or even its use as a translation for Czarist autocracy. In the Book of Jin, Murong Wei used *dokusai* to assert that he alone would make a decision over his uncle on the appointment of Li. The philosophy of autocracy too, claimed the indivisible power of one person, the Czar. However, the proletariat, as a social class, meant that *dokusai* could now represent the power of *multiple* people. In fact, this rendered the phrase *rōdōkaikyū no dokusai seiji* somewhat oxymoronic, as the *rōdōkaikyū* (proletariat) represented more than one person, and the *doku* (独) in *dokusai* meant “one person” or “alone”. This was a significant first step in the change in meaning of *dokusai* and one that brought it further away from its original definition and the semantics of the individual Chinese characters within the word. Throughout the rest of the 20th century, as new authoritarians emerged, *dokusai*’s meaning would be increasingly tied the word “dictator” in its contemporary definition.

⁵² TA January 28, 1918

⁵³ TA January 29, 1918

⁵⁴ Kenez, pp. 32

VI. Fascism and Mussolini

The rise of Benito Mussolini and Fascism in Italy saw another shift in use of *dokusai*. Fascism's cult of heroism created an image of Mussolini as a strong, absolute ruler, and so *dokusai* described leaders who held limitless control over a nation state. This is in stark contrast to *dokusai*'s use in a Russian context, which described a governing system or philosophy. When the Italian Fascist party initially came to power, *dokusai* maintained this use.

In October 1922, Mussolini and other Fascist leaders planned an insurrection which would end in a march on Rome. The Prime Minister, Luigi Facta, ordered that Rome enter a state of siege, but King Victor Emmanuel III refused to sign the order, effectively allowing the fascists to march into Rome and form a government.⁵⁵ Around this time, Japanese coverage of fascism began. Each paper offered their own take on fascist ideology. The *Tokyo Nichinichi* described the Fascist Party as “conservative and nationalist,”⁵⁶ and remarked “the party has a considerable amount of influence within the labor movement.”⁵⁷

Other editorials went more in depth. On November 8, 1922, the *Asahi shinbun* published an editorial by columnist Nagai Tōru entitled “Fascism and Bolshevism”. A criticism of both left and right extremism, his column broke down the differences in philosophies of the two ideologies. Nagai examined Italian Fascism from a Japanese perspective: “The Fascist Party leader Mussolini's catchphrase is ‘loyalty and patriotism’...[I am worried] that people in our country will adopt this foreign phrase without thinking.”⁵⁸ Nagai stated that his goal was to “Compare the mentalities of Fascism and Bolshevism and bring this to the attention of the public”. Nagai claimed that Bolsheviks advocated for *rōdōsha mannō musansha dokusai*, or “the all-powerful dictatorial rule of the proletariat”. On the other hand, Nagai stated that the fascists advocated for *shōsūsha sensei shihonka dokusai*, or “the autocratic dictatorial rule of the capitalist minority”. Ultimately Nagai's interpretation of both ideologies classified them as *dokusai*, but the difference

⁵⁵ Bosworth, R. J. B. *Mussolini's Italy: Life under the Fascist Dictatorship, 1915-1945*. New York: Penguin Books, 2007. pp. 180-182

⁵⁶ *hoshu teki kokka shugi teki*

⁵⁷ TNN October 30, 1922

⁵⁸ TA November 8, 1922

lay within where they claimed that power derived from. He claimed fascism to be a product of capitalism, which was a standard Marxist argument at the time, but he did not identify as a communist. Nagai viewed labor movements as being separate from socialist movements, and argued in the same editorial that they should not be confused with one another. Nagai also criticized the Japanese press for accepting the press releases from the Fascists as fact. Overall, Nagai provided a unique evaluation of Fascism and Bolshevism, and identified their common trait as *dokusai*.

Once the Fascists took power, they began to slowly dismantle Italy's liberal democracy. There was no sudden seizure of power that the press could point to as an assumption of *dokusai* by Mussolini and the Fascists, but these small changes were thoroughly reported on. In July 1923, the Italian lower house voted to abolish Italy's proportional representation system and instead institute a system where the party with the plurality of votes would automatically receive two thirds of the seats. This effectively guaranteed the Fascists a supermajority in the lower house. The *Yomiuri shinbun* ran the headline "The whole country as one unit and the victor's absolute power,"⁵⁹ referring to the party with the most votes.⁶⁰ The language reporting the Fascist justifications for this measure resembled the words used around the traditional definition of *dokusaikan*. The measure voted on by the lower house was described as a *hijyō gentei*, or emergency order, and the *Yomiuri* reported that the measure was passed to "maintain a stable government."⁶¹ The Fascists used traditional justifications of a dictator's power for their justifications of Mussolini's power. Tensions rose within Italy after Fascists murdered socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti in late 1924. On January 3rd, 1925, Mussolini declared that he "assume[d] political, moral and historic responsibility for all that has happened", and announced the dictatorship.⁶²

After 1925, as Italy became more authoritarian and less democratic, the word *dokusai* was attributed more to Mussolini than to the Fascist Party. The *Asahi shinbun* declared Mussolini Italy's *dokusai shushō* (独裁首相), or "*dokusai* prime minister" in 1929.⁶³ The language within

⁵⁹ *zenkoku ichi tani to shōsa no dokusai*

⁶⁰ TY July 18, 1923

⁶¹ *kyōko na seifu wo iji shi*

⁶² Bosworth, 213-214

⁶³ TA September 14, 1929

the article was unlike any other description of any person or government described as *dokusai* beforehand. The article discussed Mussolini serving as prime minister along with six other cabi-



Fig. 1: The “Cabinet of Mussolini” cartoon published in the *Asahi Shinbun*,

net offices concurrently, including home minister, head of the army and air force, and foreign affairs minister.

However, the article also took a condescending tone towards Mussolini. Instead of using the usual honorific title *shi* (氏) in describing politicians, Mussolini was given the diminutive title *kun* (君), usually reserved for addressing small boys and younger men. The article included a cartoon depicting several Mussolinis at a table during a cabinet meeting, a kind of farcical take on Mussolini’s *dokusai* (Fig. 1).

The article itself painted Mussolini as an effective leader. “Regardless of whether one supports or opposes Mussolini’s Fascism, he is a politician that solves problems quickly and effectively”. This perception of Mussolini was one perpetuated by Italian propaganda. One of Mussolini’s chief propagandists, Paolo Orano, wrote that “every public service needs its specific military guarantee and the permanent attention of responsible authorities mobilized and made completely alert by the armed representation of power”.⁶⁴ This cult of heroism around Mussolini was a myth. Despite the famous claim that under Mussolini, “the trains in Italy ran on time”,

⁶⁴ Bosworth, 439

railways were little developed south of Rome.⁶⁵ Yet the Japanese press perpetuated this myth. In this sense, Nagai Tōru's 1922 column was prophetic. The Fascists' strict control of the press extended to its press releases, and therefore any information that cast the regime as dysfunctional could be suppressed. This meant that the international coverage of Mussolini reflected the image that the Fascists were curating for him at home. Within Japan, this had given a new attribution to the word *dokusai*; it now described a leader with extraordinary absolute powers. This use of *dokusai* would be later applied to Hitler upon his rise to power in 1933.

VII. Germany before Hitler

In contrast to the autocratic Russian Czar, when Germany's government under the Kaiser was described as *dokusai*, it did not signify a governing system, but the existence of a governing elite. Several critiques of the Kaiser's government appeared in the *Asahi shinbun* in the closing years of the First World War. An editorial compared the domestic and foreign issues confronting Germany and Austria in August 1917.⁶⁶ It stated that the Austrian Emperor, which had recently reconvened Austrian parliament for the first time since the beginning of the war, was "comparatively more aware of constitutional ideas" than Kaiser Wilhelm II. Wilhelm's government, according to the editorial, consisted of a "bureaucratic cabinet appointed by the Kaiser alone."⁶⁷ In this case, the Book of Jin definition of *dokusai* as sole decision maker is best, since it is used in the direct context of a sovereign appoint government officials. However, clearly during the Kaiser's reign, *dokusai* in this context did not represent autocracy.

Before Hitler's rise to power, *dokusai* was generally applied to situations when the traditional definition of "dictator" would apply. After defeat in World War I and the Kaiser's abdication in 1918, German military leaders Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff passed power to Max von Baden and other founders of the Weimar Republic. This allowed Hindenburg and Ludendorff to pass on the blame of defeat onto the founders of Weimar democracy, leading too

⁶⁵ Bosworth, 439

⁶⁶ TA August 6, 1917

⁶⁷ *kaizā doksai no kanryō naikaku*

far reaching effects such as an inherent distrust of the Republic among the German people.⁶⁸ This put the Weimar government in a precarious position, as they faced frequent attacks from anti-government force. The Republic faced several challenges to its sovereignty in the 1920s, such as the Kapp Putsch in 1920 and Adolf Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. In essence, these challenges were antidemocratic armed coups whose ultimate goal was to remove power from the Republic by force. However, while these movements were authoritarian or even autocratic in nature, they were never described by the Japanese press as *dokusai*. This can partially be attributed to the Japanese press' fixation on the Kaiser. The press misinterpreted these authoritarian movements as movements to restore the Kaiser, and frequently speculated on whether the Kaiser would be returning from his exile in Holland.⁶⁹

Because of the threat of authoritarian coups, Weimar frequently had to resort to emergency orders to maintain political power. This power was embedded within Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, which allowed the German President to rule by decree in emergency situations.⁷⁰ This temporary absolute governing power was similar in many respects to the position of dictator in the Roman Republic, and accordingly, the Japanese press thus used *dokusai* in terms of that traditional definition. In 1923 especially, Weimar Germany faced two serious problems, massive hyperinflation and the threat of coups both on the left and right. In October 1923, the Reichstag granted the cabinet of Chancellor Gustav Stresemann an enabling act that allowed them to legislate on economic issues in order to combat hyperinflation.⁷¹ The *Yomiuri shinbun* covered the passage of the act in subsequent days, describing the enabling act as granting the government "absolute authority" or *dokusaiken*. The measure is described as a *kinkyū hōrei* or "emergency order".⁷² Concurrently in Bavaria, the threat of a right wing coup was building, not only among the young National Socialists like Hitler, but within the Bavarian government itself. Gustav Ritter von Kahr had been appointed to the position of General State Commissioner and

⁶⁸ Evans, Richard John. *The Coming of the Third Reich*. London: Penguin, 2005. pp. 61-62

⁶⁹ Law, pp. 38-40

⁷⁰ Evans, pp. 80

⁷¹ Caldwell, Peter C. *Popular Sovereignty and the Crisis of German Constitutional Law: the Theory & Practice of Weimar Constitutionalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997. pp. 79

⁷² TY October 15 and October 16, 1923

was thus granted full power to prevent a Nazi uprising.⁷³ However, Kahr was also staunchly anti-Weimar, and was planning his own potential coup against the national government. *The Yomiuri shinbun* reported the rumors that the Bavarian army was planning on marching on Berlin, and that Kahr had sent a letter to Stresemann urging him to follow Bavaria's example and establish an authoritarian system or *dokusaikansei*.⁷⁴ In both situations, Stresemann and Kahr alike were granted temporary full power to prevent an extremist attack. This explains the use of *dokusai* to describe both men and their respective governing. Eventually, Hitler did attempt a coup in November 1923, but his "Beer Hall Putsch" proved unsuccessful.

The Japanese press held a particular fixation on the Kaiser. A 1929 *Yomiuri* article speculated on his potential return to Germany, with a headline that read "government preparing for absolute authority" or *dokusaiken*. The article theorized that Wilhelm could rule potentially with the help of then President Hindenburg, who could put power in Wilhelm's hands using Article 48.⁷⁵ Even before the Nazis gained prominence in the late Weimar Republic, the Japanese were already observing a dissatisfaction in Germany in republican systems and their coverage reflected some Germans' desire for a return to the Second Reich.

The Japanese press' obsession with Kaiser Wilhelm extended to his old general, President Paul von Hindenburg.⁷⁶ On October 6, 1931, Hindenburg issued an emergency decree that cut employment benefits to help mitigate the effects of the Great Depression.⁷⁷ When news reached Japan on October 8th, the *Nichinichi*, *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* newspapers all ran articles on the decree that declared Germany a *dokusaiseiji* or dictatorship.⁷⁸ The *Nichinichi* went as far as to call the move "fascistic", demonstrating the growing ubiquity of fascist ideology with the word *dokusai*. While the articles mentioned the measures taken to cut unemployment benefits, they concentrated on the rights that were being suspended under article 48. Both the *Nichinichi* and *Yomiuri*

⁷³Evans, pp. 192

⁷⁴ TY November 6, 1923

⁷⁵ TY June 29, 1929

⁷⁶ Law, 35

⁷⁷ Evans, 252

⁷⁸ TA, TNN, TY October 8, 1931

shinbun ran a headline that used the phrase *kenri wo teishi*, or “rights suspended”. This fervent coverage was somewhat overblown. Hindenburg had issued a similar decree in June of that year.⁷⁹ Clearly, Japan’s perception of Hindenburg had colored their coverage of this decree.

Despite this, there was no doubting Hindenburg’s power and influence in the years preceding Hitler’s rise to power. Along with his chancellors Heinrich Brüning, Kurt von Schleicher, and Franz von Papen, Hindenburg formed so-called “presidential” cabinets without parliamentary support.⁸⁰ These cabinets systematically attacked civil liberties and freedoms, as well as the republic itself, before the Nazis even came to power.⁸¹ In 1932, Papen deposed the Social Democratic led Prussian state government, citing a violent confrontation that had occurred recently in the Prussian city of Altona.⁸² The *Asahi* declared Prussia “under martial law” due to Papen’s *dokusai*.⁸³ The Japanese press were acutely aware of the abuses of constitutional power being committed by the presidential cabinets, and were quick to label them as *dokusai*. The actions of Hindenburg and his chancellors would ultimately set the table for Hitler, and a continued use of *dokusai* by the Japanese press as more civil liberties were dismantled.

VIII. The “Age of *Dokusaishugi*”

In February of 1932, the *Tokyo Yomiuri Shinbun* printed a critique by Murobuse Kōshin of a piece by Hasegawa Nyozeikan on Fascism. Hasegawa had been one of the preeminent advocates of liberalism in Japan, and stood by his liberal convictions even as party cabinets gave way to military rule.⁸⁴ Even by 1932, however, Hasegawa had little hope for democracy. The *Yomiuri* printed his declaration that, “Today is truly the age of *dokusaishugi*,⁸⁵ the *dokusai* of financial monopolies, communistic *dokusai*, and fascistic *dokusai*. This is the state of the modern age”.

⁷⁹ Evans, 252

⁸⁰ Benjamin Carter Hett, *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2019), pp. 165-166.

⁸¹ Evans, 251-252

⁸² Evans, 343

⁸³ TA July 21, 1932

⁸⁴ Mary L. Hanneman, *Hasegawa Nyozeikan and Liberalism in Modern Japan* (Folkestone, Kent, England, 2007).

⁸⁵ 独裁主義

Hasegawa also predicted the end of “liberalism, social democracy and Marxism.”⁸⁶ The *shugi* (主義) in *dokusaishugi* refers to the governing ideology of *dokusai*, and is frequently translated as *-ism*.

Hasegawa’s comments were a prescient description of the form press coverage in the thirties would take. Use of *dokusai* in Japanese periodicals shot up during the 1930s. Even in 1932, before the Nazi Party took power, things certainly seemed bleak globally for democracy. Italian Fascism had been in power for a decade, Hindenburg was ruling effectively by decree, and Stalin was cementing his position of power in the Soviet Union. 1933 saw the rise of both Adolf Hitler and Franklin Delano Roosevelt to power, at effectively the same time. In a sense, both leaders asserted unprecedented amounts of governmental power: Roosevelt in his handling of the economy with the New Deal, and Hitler in his suspension of civil liberties under the Enabling Acts. It is not surprising, then, why both figures were perceived as *dokusai*. Either way, *dokusai* came to be utilized so often in the press in so many situations that it required extensive qualifiers to specify what it truly meant.

IX. Hitler’s Rise to Power

In late 1932, even as the Nazis were set to be part of a cabinet for the first time, the Japanese press still fixated on the *dokusai* of Hindenburg’s presidential cabinets. In 1932, few in Japan or the rest of the world could have predicted the extent of the power the Nazis would have in Germany within the next year. Any connection of *dokusai* and the Nazi Party in the Japanese press before their rise was attributed to either the *dokusai* of the Hindenburg-Papen cabinet or the *dokusai* of the Italian Fascists. In many respects, the press coverage of the beginnings of Nazi rule mirrored the coverage of the rise of Fascism in Italy a decade earlier.

In the election of July 1932, the Nazi Party won a stunning victory in the Reichstag, winning 230 seats and becoming the largest party in the Reichstag.⁸⁷ Though the Nazis lost seats in the following election in November, they remained the largest party and a formidable threat to

⁸⁶ TY, February 28, 1932.

⁸⁷ Hett, pp. 150.

Papen's presidential cabinet.⁸⁸ With mounting violence from the paramilitary factions of the Nazi Party, Papen and Hindenburg attempted to bring Hitler and the Nazis into the cabinet. After the November election, on the 23rd, the *Yomiuri Shinbun* reported that Hitler was demanding that Hindenburg make him a presidential chancellor; that is, a chancellor ruling under the emergency presidential powers granted to Hindenburg by Article 48 of the Constitution. The *Yomiuri* described Hitler proposal as *nachisu handokusai* (ナチス半独裁), or "Nazi half-*dokusai*".⁸⁹ This was again in reference to the presidential emergency powers.

Eventually however, Hitler agreed to a cabinet that was a coalition between the Nazis and the right-wing German National People's Party (DNVP), led by Alfred Hugenberg. The cabinet included Hitler as Chancellor, Papen as Vice-Chancellor and Hugenberg as Minister of Economics.⁹⁰ Papen and Hindenburg thought that by allowing Hitler to form a coalition government, they could keep him in check. The Japanese press seemed to agree. On January 31, 1933, upon reporting on Hitler's swearing in as chancellor the previous day, the *Yomiuri*'s headline read "Papen has the actual power".⁹¹ The next day, upon the release of a statement by new Interior Minister and Nazi Party member Wilhelm Frick declaring the cabinet's intention to abide by the Weimar Constitution, the *Yomiuri* declared that "Hitler softens like a cat...rejects *dokusai*".⁹² In reporting this statement, the press took the Nazis at their word; in their view, Papen's gambit had worked.

However, this declaration was premature. February of 1933 saw widespread violence perpetrated by the Nazis against their opponents. Just three days after the publication of Frick's statement in the *Yomiuri*, Hindenburg signed a decree that greatly increased the powers of the police. On February 24th, police raided and closed the headquarters of the German Communist Party⁹³. The press in Japan did not turn a blind eye to this violence, and duly reported on it. The

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 158-159.

⁸⁹ TY November 23rd, 1932.

⁹⁰ Hett, pp. 180-181.

⁹¹ TY January 31, 1933.

⁹² TY February 1, 1933.

⁹³ Hett, pp. 185-186.

Asahi Shinbun covered the Nazi violence in the leadup to the March 5, 1933 election, running an article that stated “The Hitler cabinet’s interference...is becoming increasingly obvious”.⁹⁴ Despite their thorough coverage of anti-democratic violence in Germany, the press never called it *dokusai*. Even when the Nazis were referred to as *dokusai*, it was frequently qualified with a comparison to Mussolini’s Italy. In an editorial in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* on February 24th, Kita Reikichi, a liberal columnist, sought to differentiate the Nazis from the DNVP for his readers. “The DNVP are supporters of the Kaiser’s restoration, and have considerable capitalist inclinations. On the other hand, Hitler’s party is opposed to the republican system and democracy, advocating for a *dokusaisei*”.⁹⁵ The *sei* (制) in *dokusaisei* means “system”. This assertion of *dokusai* however, was still framed in the context and model of Italian Fascism. While explaining the recent violence against the Communist Party, Kita highlights that “Mussolini also concentrated on suppressing communism after seizing power”. Kita’s conclusion seemed to be that if the Nazis were *dokusai*, they were within the frame of the Italian Fascists already in power. One reason that the press tiptoed around *dokusai* in their coverage of the early Hitler cabinet could have been that in a German context, *dokusai* had become shorthand for the emergency powers stipulated by Article 48.

On February 27th, 1933, the German parliament building, the Reichstag, was set aflame. The alleged culprit was Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch former communist. While van der Lubbe claimed that he had set all the fires himself, the Nazis declared it a communist plot, and used it to justify further restrictions. Hitler had Hindenburg sign the Reichstag Fire Decree, an invocation of Article 48 that effectively suspended all civil liberties.⁹⁶ The press reacted similarly to Hindenburg’s previous uses of the emergency powers. The *Asahi*, for example, used the phrase *kinkyūrei* (緊急令) or, “emergency orders” to describe the new decrees handed down by Hindenburg.⁹⁷ This language was consistent with the press’s descriptions of the other times Article 48 was invoked by the president during the Brüning and Papen cabinets. Notably, the word *dokusai*

⁹⁴ TA February 16, 1933.

⁹⁵ TA, February 24, 1933.

⁹⁶ Hett, pp. 184-191.

⁹⁷ TA March 2, 1933.

did not appear in assessments of the Reichstag Fire Decree. This could possibly be due to the banality of the use of Article 48 in previous cabinets, when it was effectively used to govern Germany without a legislature. The press was using virtually the same language it had used in Hindenburg's previous uses of his emergency powers, as well as following the precedent established by reporting on the temporarily appointed *dokusaikan* of the 1910s and 1920s.

However, the press had to deal with an entirely new situation when Hitler acquired powers beyond the scope of Article 48. Hitler began demanding that the Reichstag pass an Enabling Act that would give him legislating power for a period of four years.⁹⁸ Even as the legislature contemplated a law that would give Hitler essentially absolute power, the Japanese press still could not help but mention the precedent of Fascist Italy. The *Yomiuri Shinbun* stated that Hitler “wishes for *dokusaiseiji*⁹⁹ like Mussolini.”¹⁰⁰ By the passage of the Enabling Act of 1933 on March 23, however, journalists seem to have recognized the significance of what was happening. The *Tokyo Nichinichi* ran the report of the Enabling Acts' passage on their front page with the headline “Hitler seizes *dokusai* authority.”¹⁰¹ The *Tokyo Asahi*'s headline read *nachisu dokusai no hagyō* (ナチス独裁の覇業) or “the domination of Nazi *dokusai*.”¹⁰² The use of an active verb like “seize” by the *Nichinichi* and “domination” by the *Asahi* aptly described the impact of the Enabling Acts. They allowed Hitler to govern without consent of the legislature, and more importantly, Hindenburg. Up until the passage of the acts, the only person endowed with the power to solely legislate was the president. Hitler's effective superseding of Hindenburg's powers under Article 48 is what likely drove the newspapers to use such strong language in their headlines.

The passage of the Enabling Act, for the Japanese press, brought about a time of unprecedented power grabs by the Nazi party. The *Tokyo Asahi*, especially, seemed caught off guard by each action Hitler took to restrict civil liberties or consolidate power. Upon the passage

⁹⁸ Hett, pp. 205.

⁹⁹ 独裁政治, or *dokusai* government

¹⁰⁰ TY March 11, 1933

¹⁰¹ TNN March 25, 1933
dokusaiken wo nigiru or, 独裁権を握る

¹⁰² TA March 25, 1933.

of the Enabling Act, the second headline the *Asahi* ran following *nachisu dokusai no hagyō* was *tsui ni kansei naru* (ついに完成なる), or “finally become complete”, in reference to the Nazi’s *dokusai*. The words *kansei* (完成) and *kanzen* (完全) both meaning “perfect” or “complete” appeared in many headlines in Hitler’s first year in power, often attached to *dokusai*. In a report of election violence in February, the *Asahi* described Hitler as, *kanzen naru jitō no tenka* (完全なる自党の天下) or, “having complete supremacy over his party.”¹⁰³ Following a November 1933 election, in which the Nazis were the sole legal party and therefore won every seat in the Reichstag, the *Asahi* claimed *nachisu dokusai kansei* (ナチス独裁完成) or, “Nazi *dokusai* complete”.¹⁰⁴ The final use of this language came in October 1934, when the *Asahi* reported *hi-torā no dokusai iyoiyo kanzen ni kakuritsu* (ヒトラーの独裁、愈々完全に確立), or that “Hitler is increasingly establishing perfect *dokusai*.”¹⁰⁵ The article also claimed that Hitler was “robotizing the legislature.”¹⁰⁶

Asahi journalists were thoroughly unprepared for the extent of control Hitler and the Nazis would exert over Germany, as demonstrated by their declaring the Nazi’s *dokusai* complete after each development in Hitler’s consolidation of power. This may have been due to the view of the word *dokusai* itself as a temporary phenomenon, in both the context of classical Rome and the emergency powers of Article 48. In calling Hitler’s *dokusai* “perfect” or “complete”, journalists were trying to convey that Hitler’s power surpassed the *dokusai* of Hindenburg during the era of presidential cabinets. What was also likely occurring among *Asahi* journalists was the realization that with a rubber stamping legislature, Hitler could remain in power in perpetuity, and that Nazism was here to stay. By 1935, with the prospect of long term Nazi rule fully realized, the *Asahi*’s language around *dokusai* became more banal, and the newspaper’s use of *kanzen* and *kansei* stopped.

¹⁰³ TA March 8, 1933.

¹⁰⁴ TA November 14, 1933.

¹⁰⁵ TA October 18, 1934.

¹⁰⁶ 国会をロボット化する

Soon, coverage of Hitler in Japanese newspapers began to resemble their earlier obsessive coverage of the Kaiser. Details like his birthday and marital status became newsworthy.¹⁰⁷ In newsprint, the *dokusai* of the Nazi party faded and was replaced by the *dokusai* of Hitler. In June of 1934, Hitler carried out his first diplomatic visit as chancellor to Italy, where he met with Benito Mussolini. The Japanese press focused heavily on this first meeting of two fascist leaders, with the *Asahi Shinbun* dubbing them *ryō dokusaiō* (両独裁王), or, “the two kings of *dokusai*.”¹⁰⁸ The dubbing of both Hitler and Mussolini as “*dokusai* kings” stemmed from their positions as new twentieth century authoritarians in Europe. They were viewed as deeply populist by the Japanese press. The *Asahi* reported Hitler arriving for the meeting, “flying the flag of the people’s revolution.”¹⁰⁹ However, more importantly, *dokusai* was already filling the pages of newspapers in other contexts. The redundancy of the term *dokusaiō* was likely due to the increasing need to establish one form of *dokusai* from another. As the next section will explain, the beginnings Roosevelt’s New Deal were being covered in the same pages as the articles describing Hitler and Mussolini, and demonstrated a different type of *dokusai*, more similar to its original definition.

X. Roosevelt and the New Deal

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was sworn into office virtually simultaneously with the passage of the Enabling Acts in Germany. Inaugurated on March 4, 1933, Roosevelt inherited an economy wracked by the Great Depression, and had to deal with failed farms, banks, and record unemployment.¹¹⁰ In response, Roosevelt would greatly increase the role of the government within the American economy. This was unprecedented, especially among classical liberals who advocated a free market. Within the Japanese press, *dokusai* in regard to the New Deal was both a descriptor of policy and a criticism.

¹⁰⁷ Law, pp. 52.

¹⁰⁸ TA June 9, 1933, June 16, 1933.

¹⁰⁹ TA June 9, 1933.

¹¹⁰ Eric Rauchway, *The Great Depression & the New Deal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 56.

One of the first actions Roosevelt took after taking office was declaring a bank holiday. To accomplish this, he requested that congress pass the Emergency Banking Act, which retroactively affirmed his action.¹¹¹ In closing the banks on his own authority, Roosevelt was performing an act of, as Eric Rauchway calls it, “dubious constitutionality”.¹¹² The *Tokyo Asahi* reported it as such, using language that paralleled the word choice around the temporary *dokusaikan* of the 1910s and 1920s. They called Roosevelt’s move *hijōji dokusaiken* (非常時独裁権), or “*dokusai* authority of extraordinary times”.¹¹³ *Hijōji* was a common phrase used in newspapers to describe the chaotic state of the 1930s.¹¹⁴

However, as Roosevelt continued his intervention in the American economy through New Deal programs, the press translated the names of some of his policies using *dokusai*. The word usually applied when Roosevelt took sole control of something usually left to either the free market or legislation by congress. In April of 1933, Roosevelt issued an executive order that required that Americans turn in their gold to the federal reserve. The *Tokyo Asahi* called this move *tsūka chōsetsu no dokusaiken* (通貨調節の独裁権), or “*dokusai* power over currency regulation.”¹¹⁵ From 1933 to 1934, Roosevelt sought the power to set foreign tariffs, normally set by congress.¹¹⁶ The *New York Times* reported on Roosevelt’s fight with congressional Democrats to gain power over tariffs in 1933.¹¹⁷ Japanese newspapers speculated on this tariff bill extensively. In May 1933, the *Yomiuri* identified the potential powers granted by the tariff act as *kanzei dokusai*, (関税独裁) or *dokusai* over tariffs. They further warned that “the President would have

¹¹¹ Ibid., 57.

¹¹² Ibid., 57.

¹¹³ TA March 9, 1933.

¹¹⁴ Law, pp. 48.

¹¹⁵ TA April 21, 1933

¹¹⁶ “New Deal Trade Policy: The Export-Import Bank & the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act, 1934,” Office of the Historian (U.S. Department of State), accessed March 23, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/export-import-bank>.

¹¹⁷ “ROOSEVELT FACES IMPORT TAX FIGHT; Preparing for Trade Deals, He Must Seek Repeal of 'Tariffs' Backed by Democrats. CANADA SEEKS BENEFITS Bennett Stressed Need In Talks, Lumber Concessions Being the Dominion's Chief Aim.” The New York Times. The New York Times. Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1933/05/02/105129613.html?pageNumber=2>.

complete freedom to increase tariff rates”.¹¹⁸ The journalists of the *Yomiuri* were apparently unaware that Roosevelt and the Democrats sought to lower tariffs,¹¹⁹ but the threat of a U.S. tariff increase would certainly have adversely affected Japanese trade. That is likely the reason why the tariff issue was covered so closely in Japanese newspapers.

The powers given to Roosevelt, such as those of the Reciprocal Tariff Act, were temporary.¹²⁰ These powers, granted to the President in a time of so-called “extraordinary times” were similar to the first European definitions of *dokusai*. However, Roosevelt did not dominate in all affairs; his powers were confined generally to issues of the economy. This was reminiscent of Japan’s coverage of *dokusai* in the turn of the century and their criticism of the Bank of Japan. Newspapers outside of Japan also reacted to Roosevelt’s extraconstitutional powers with similar language. In the United States, the *New York Times* reported that Roosevelt had been granted “practically dictatorial powers” when congress allowed him to determine federal salaries and pensions.¹²¹ Unlike Hitler or Mussolini, however, Roosevelt was never called a *dokusai* king or a figure that had “complete” or “perfect” *dokusai*. In fact, it was not Roosevelt himself that was labeled *dokusai*, but his economic implementations. In this regard, this *dokusai* was temporary and described the dominion of one person over one matter, more in line with the classical definition of *dictator* or even *dokusai*’s original use in the Book of Jin.

XII. *Dokusai* in Japanese Scholarship and Domestic Politics

The dubbing of many Western leaders as *dokusai*, from Hitler and Mussolini to Roosevelt in the United States prompted not only a rise in the use of *dokusai* in the early 1930’s, but also a dire need for its reevaluation from Japanese scholars. Their analysis indicates that *dokusai* had effectively become semantically ubiquitous with the word *dictator*. Many of these scholars, in

¹¹⁸ TY May 29, 1933

¹¹⁹ “New Deal Trade Policy”

¹²⁰ “New Deal Trade Policy”

¹²¹ “SPLIT ON VETERANS' CUT; Democratic Leaders in House Make 'Roosevelt Support' the Issue. CAUCUS HALVES SAVINGS But Rainey Prevents It Binding Party -- Republicans Aid McDuffie in Floor Victory. SENATE ACTION TOMORROW Harrison Puts Bill Through the Committee Unchanged -- Lobby Groups Fight It to End. HOUSE PASSES BILL FOR BIG ECONOMIES,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*), accessed April 1, 2021, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1933/03/12/105116991.html?pageNumber=1>.

newspapers and other periodicals, examined *dokusai* through the lens of economic and political liberalism. Japan had a solid history of classical liberal politics stretching back to the Meiji Era, as demonstrated by the *Yomiuri Shinbun*'s use of *dokusai* in criticizing government interference in the Japan Hypothec Bank in 1899. This liberal legacy was brought to bear during the reign of Emperor Taishō (1912-1926), especially after the First World War.

Frederick R. Dickinson argues that, despite imperialist policies abroad and domestic restrictions on civil liberties, the late Taishō and early Shōwa (1926-1989) eras saw a continuation of advocacy for arms reduction and economically liberal policies.¹²² 1929 saw the ascent of the *Rikken Minseitō*, or “Constitutional Democratic Party” to power, a party advocated more economically and politically liberal policies. In response to the global market crash of 1929, *Minseitō* Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi reintroduced the gold standard and imposed severe austerity measures. These classically liberal responses to economic downturn proved very popular among both the press and the public, and Hamaguchi's government claimed an absolute majority in the February 1930 general election.¹²³ Hamaguchi and his government also orchestrated the signing of the London Naval Treaty, an arms reduction treaty with the United States. This move also was lauded with by the press, and enabled by public pressure against the measure's opponents.¹²⁴ Clearly, the press was sympathetic to liberal policies as late as two years before the May 15 Incident: the beginnings of political unrest that would result in military rule over Japan. This context is essential to understanding Japanese scholars' approach to *dokusai* in the first half of the 1930s. Heavily influenced by Classical Liberalism, Japanese scholars expressed as much fear over economic *dokusai* as political *dokusai*.

These anxieties manifested themselves in scholars' analyses of fascism. Baba Tsunego, a political commentator, who had served as an editor of both *The Japan Times* and the *Kokumin Shinbun*, frequently wrote editorials in both the *Yomiuri* and *Asahi* newspapers regarding current events. In July of 1932, Baba published a series in the *Yomiuri Shinbun* entitled: “*In What Direc-*

¹²²Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 189-90.

¹²³ Dickinson, pp. 172-178

¹²⁴ Dickinson

tion *Will Japan Go?*”. The July 29th editorial concerned, as Baba called it, “trendy fascism” (*ryūkō no fassho*).¹²⁵ The first and foremost objection that Baba raised to Fascist ideology was so-called “*dokusai sensei*,”¹²⁶ over “finance and financiers”.¹²⁷ This statement dramatically differed from Nagai Tōru’s editorial ten years earlier, which had called Italian Fascism the “*dokusai* of the capitalist minority”.

Baba’s editorial was also heavily critical of political *dokusai*. He concluded his piece writing, “Instead of acknowledging the slave-like citizenry of *dokusaiseiji*.¹²⁸ Those who advocate for communism and fascism today do not imagine themselves as the citizenry under *dokusaiseiji*, they imagine themselves as dictators.”¹²⁹ Baba’s criticism of fascism stemmed from its suppression of both civil liberties and the free market, two central principles of classical liberalism, and the common phrase shared between these two was *dokusai*. Most scholars published in Japanese periodicals criticized and defined fascism through the lens of classical liberalism, which discouraged both government control of civil liberties and the market. In this respect, *dokusai* in all its forms represented this control.

Many of Baba’s statements demonstrate the dramatic change in use and meaning that *dokusai* had undergone in the past three decades. In the Meiji Era press, *dokusai* was used to describe an individual with large power over a singular body or policy, such as Ito Hirobumi and the *Seiyūkai*. Now, *dokusai* could mean the absolute rule of one person or a *group* of people over an entire nation. Baba explicitly defined the rulers of *dokusaiseiji* as either “one person or one and a friendly few.”¹³⁰ This reflected the coverage of the rise of one party states such as Soviet Russia under the Communist Party, as well as Mussolini’s Fascist Party in Italy.

The 1930s also saw the use of *dokusai* in a Japanese context for the first time since the late Meiji Era. While *dokusai*’s early use matched its original use in the Book of Jin, it now was

¹²⁵ 流行のファッション

¹²⁶ 独裁専制

¹²⁷ TY July 29, 1932

¹²⁸ *dokusai seiji* or 独裁政治

¹²⁹ *dokusaisha*

¹³⁰ *jibun hitori moshiku wa jibun no nakama sūnin* or 自分一人もしくは自分の仲間数人

used to describe the rise of anti-democratic movements within Japan. Many saw the rise of these movements as a result of ineffective governing on the part of party cabinets. While Prime Minister Hamaguchi's disarmament policies were popular within the press and among the general public, the military and Japan's far right severely opposed them. His reintroduction of the gold standard also proved ineffective and his popularity severely waned. Hamaguchi fell victim to an assassination attempt in November 1930. Though he survived the initial attack, he was forced to resign because of his wounds in April of 1931. Hamaguchi's cabinet was succeeded by another *Minseito* government, led by Wakatsuki Reijirō. The Wakatsuki government failed to respond effectively to the Manchurian Incident of September 1931, when the Japanese Kwantung Army blew up part of the Mantetsu railway in Mukden and claimed that it had been sabotaged by Manchurian troops. This was done without the consent of Wakatsuki's government, and the event sewed such disunity within the cabinet that it was forced to resign three months later. They were replaced by a *Seiyūkai* cabinet led by Inukai Tsuyoshi.

The press, who had been vocally supportive of Hamaguchi's policies in 1929, took a more critical turn as the party cabinets failed in their response to both the Great Depression and militarism. The *Yomiuri Shinbun* ran an editorial in April of 1932 titled "The Incompetence of Political Parties". The editorial lamented the "deadlock" of political parties and declared "the liveliness of discourse has been lost". It continued stating that "In response to the apathy of political parties, voices have been arising in support of the growing *dokusai*-like¹³¹ trend of a one-party cabinet and legislature". The editorial was not an expression of support for these anti-democratic factions, but rather served as a warning to political parties of the threat of anti-democratic movements. "By the time political parties come to their senses, a new power may overpower and consume constitutional liberalism."¹³²

The April 1932 column did not name any specific advocates of *dokusai*, but a month later the *Yomiuri* ran another editorial entitled "The Problem of the Fascist Movement."¹³³ This was not a critique of European fascists, but of a fascist movement within Japan. The editorial named

¹³¹ 独裁的 or *dokusaiteki*

¹³² TY April 6, 1932

¹³³ *mondai no fassho undou* or 問題のファッショ運動

Hiranuma Kiichirō, the leader of the far-right nationalist *kokuhonsha* (国本社) organization as part of this movement. “Mr. Hiranuma’s statements purport the *kokuhonsha* to be completely different from fascism. In reality, he wishes to disregard the establishment parties and supersede their influence... There is no mistaking his *dokusai*-like inclinations. There is a distinct fascistic color visible in his movement.” The *Yomiuri* also identified politicians within the “establishment parties” who could be seen as fascists. They identified Nakano Seigo, who had served in the Hamaguchi cabinet as part of the *Minseitō*, was identified for his advocacy of so-called *shakaikokuminshugi* (社会国民主義) or “national socialism”. Again however, this editorial struck a critical tone toward antidemocratic movements, while also identifying the “powerless and incompetence of establishment parties” as their root cause. It concluded with a call on constitutional parties to “...break out of the past and create a new path for the future.”¹³⁴

The two editorials summarized above present the first use of the contemporary definition of *dokusai* in a Japanese context. The May 1932 *Yomiuri* editorial called the rise of antidemocratic movements “unlike anything we’ve seen in this country’s past.” The identification of the *kokuhonsha* as “fascist”, was due to their “*dokusai*-like” inclinations. The *kokuhonsha*, in fact, did advocate what they called *kokumin zentaishugi* (国民全体主義) or “national totalitarianism”. According to historian Christopher W.A. Szpilman, national totalitarianism was envisioned as an “inclusion of all sections of the Japanese state and society in one embracing whole” and that “national totalitarianism suited ‘the mentality of the Japanese’ better than any Western-style democracy because, ‘in contrast to Jews or Chinese,’ the Japanese were ‘incapable of living without a state.’”¹³⁵ The use of *zentaishugi* or “totalitarianism” by the *kokuhonsha* may have motivated the *Yomiuri* editors to identify them as *dokusai*, and the best parallels to their race-based and anti-semitic ideology could be found in the Nazis, who, while not yet in power, already used racial appeals in their propaganda and campaigning. As shown previously, Nazism and Fascism were often conflated in early Showa Japan, so it would not be out of reason for the press to label

¹³⁴ TY May 11, 1932

¹³⁵ Christopher Szpilman, “Japan in the Fascist Era,” in *Japan in the Fascist Era*, ed. E. Reynolds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 76.

the *kokuhonsha* as “fascist” on that basis. Clearly however, among Japanese liberals, *dokusai* itself was one of the clearest defining qualities of fascism.

XIII. Miyazawa Toshiyoshi and Defining *Dokusai*

As shown previously, the rise of figures like Hitler and Roosevelt in 1933-1934 prompted a reassessment and redefinition of the word *dokusai*. This need for redefinition also appeared in Japanese scholarship. In 1934, Miyazawa Toshiyoshi, a professor of constitutional law at Tokyo Imperial University, wrote a piece entitled “*dokusaiteki seiji keitai no honshitsu*” (独裁的政治形態の本質), or, “The Essence of *dokusai* forms of Government”. This piece was published in the periodical *Chūō Kōron*, a monthly magazine that provided a platform for liberal political criticism.¹³⁶ Miyazawa heavily drew on European political philosophers in his analysis of *dokusai*, and attempted to define the word in strictly western terms. Miyazawa attempted on his own to draw a common thread through all forms of *dokusai* in order to reconcile the many differing uses of the term. In essence, Miyazawa’s analysis of *dokusai* made it virtually synonymous with the western term “dictator” as he drew from only Western scholars and histories. Miyazawa’s writing also demonstrates *dokusai*’s divorce from its classical Chinese origins by discussing it exclusively in the frame of classical Rome.

Miyazawa first defined *dokusaisei* (独裁政, or “dictatorship”¹³⁷) in contrast with *minshusei* (民主政 or “democratic rule”). He claimed that *minshusei* advocates the concept of *jidousei* (自同性) which he defined as the idea that those governing and those being governed come from one and the same group of people. *Dokusaisei*, on the other hand, rejected the concept of *jidousei*, and those governing and those being governed are therefore separate, disconnected groups. Proceeding with this definition, Miyazawa stated: “The character ‘独’ is very inadequate in defining *dokusaisei*.” Because the character “独” (*doku*) signifies “alone” or “one person”,

¹³⁶ Gregory J. Kasza, *The State and Mass Media in Japan: 1918-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 44.

¹³⁷ Miyazawa uses the German word “Diktatur”, or “dictatorship” to translate *dokusaisei*. From here on I will consider this term synonymous with “dictatorship” and use that word in the translation of any occurrence of *dokusaisei* in Miyazawa’s piece.

Miyazawa argued that it falsely implied that *dokusaisei* is rule by only one person. He stated that “those governing can be one person...a few people...a political party...or a social class.”¹³⁸ He recommended the word *zetaisei* (絶対政), meaning “absolute rule” instead.¹³⁹ Miyazawa’s argument was explicit evidence that *dokusai* had transcended its original meaning in the Book of Jin, as well as the individual meanings of its characters. Miyazawa was observing a contradiction between the semantics of the kanji “独” and the semantics of the word *dokusai*. Baba Tsunego had observed the same phenomenon in 1932 when he stated that *dokusai* could mean the rule of “one and a friendly few”.

Miyazawa furthered his definition of *dokusai* through the lens of German philosopher and political theorist Carl Schmitt’s *die Diktatur*. Schmitt wrote the work during the Weimar era, and evaluated “dictatorship” in the context of both classical Rome and the Emergency Powers granted under Article 48 of the Weimar constitution. One of Schmitt’s central arguments in this piece was that commissary dictatorship (*kommisarisches Diktatur*), had become sovereign dictatorship (*souveräne Diktatur*). Schmitt defined a commissary dictatorship as, “a dictatorship that, despite all its extra-legal authorisation, remains within the prescriptions of a constitutional order and in which the dictator is constitutionally mandated” and sovereign dictatorship as “exercised by a national assembly that has at its disposal state power without legal limitations when the existing constitutional order has been abolished – say, after a revolution – and the new constitution has not yet been implemented.”¹⁴⁰ Miyazawa translated “commissary dictatorship” as *inindokusaisei* (委任独裁政) 委任 mean “entrusted”, and “sovereign dictatorship” as *shukendokusaisei* (主權独裁政), 主權 being the word for “sovereign”.

Miyazawa elaborated on his definition of *dokusai*, by claiming that what all *dokusai* governments have in common are the “invocation of ‘gods’”. He stated that “the authorities of dicta-

¹³⁸ Miyazawa Toshiyoshi, *Tenkōki No Seiji* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha), accessed March 15, 2021, <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1278344?tocOpened=1>, pp. 38-39.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 40.

¹⁴⁰ Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship: from the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to Proletarian Class Struggle*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), xxiv.

torships are, in this view, representatives of the gods.”¹⁴¹ Using this qualification, Miyazawa drew a common thread between Italian Fascism, German Nazism, and the Soviet “dictatorship of the proletariat”. He asserted that the “gods” each of these ideologies invoke are not religious gods. Fascism and Nazism invoked the god of *kokumin*, or people of a country; Miyazawa provided the example of the concepts of the *stato popolare* in Fascist Italy and the *Volksgemeinschaft* in Nazi Germany as examples of this appeal.¹⁴² In Soviet Russia, the “god” invoked was the proletariat.¹⁴³ However, Miyazawa saw these appeals to “gods” as purely material. “In Russia and countries under fascism, nothing changes under the government of the people...the ways in which Fascism’s dictatorship is practiced has little difference with Soviet Russia.”¹⁴⁴

Miyazawa paid lip service to what he called “governments with *dokusai*-like inclinations”: namely, Roosevelt’s America under the New Deal. He rejected the notion that Roosevelt was leading a *dokusaisei*, because his “legislative and executive power was not at all absolute”, adding that “there is no absolute authority such as a *Duce* or a *Führer*.”¹⁴⁵ However, he conceded at the end of his piece that the U.S. could be “at most, a commissary dictatorship,”¹⁴⁶ referring back to Carl Schmitt’s *die Diktatur*.

It is unclear whether Miyazawa, writing in 1934, was aware of Schmitt’s influence in the Nazi Party, which Schmitt had joined the previous year.¹⁴⁷ Schmitt used his historical analysis of dictatorships to espouse his theory of “decisionism”, that, “in times of crisis or emergency sovereign power must be bestowed upon one individual and not derived from an abstract and depersonalized set of norms and rules.”¹⁴⁸ Schmitt would, in turn, use this idea to justify the rule of the

¹⁴¹ Miyazawa Toshiyoshi, *Tenkaiki No Seiji* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha), accessed March 15, 2021, <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1278344?tocOpened=1>, pp. 42-43.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 43

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 50

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 52

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 55

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 55

¹⁴⁷ Scheuerman, Bill. "Carl Schmitt and the Nazis." *German Politics & Society*, no. 23 (1991): 71-79. Accessed March 30, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23735189> pp. 73.

¹⁴⁸ Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship: from the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to Proletarian Class Struggle*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), pp. xxiv.

Nazi party. Miyazawa's writings seem to parallel Schmitt, in the sense that he rejects the Kantian concepts of "natural law". He argues that "government is the domination of people over other people,"¹⁴⁹ and this appeal to the control of human behavior over any laws or rules is reminiscent of Schmitt's argument in favor of decisionism. However, what distances Miyazawa from Schmitt is his critique of *dokusaisei*, or dictatorship? Firstly, classifying the Nazi regime as "absolutist" is already a deviation from Schmitt's arguments justifying the regime through decisionism. Beyond that, Miyazawa's essential criticisms of *dokusaisei* cast it in a negative light. He highlights the contradiction between the populist sentiments of *dokusaisei* and the practice of excluding the common people from government.

Miyazawa did not regard Schmitt's ideology and opinions as sacrosanct; rather, he used his ideas as a framework for explaining the evolution of the term dictator, and in turn, *dokusai*. Indeed, one phenomenon that Schmitt's theory explains are the classical origins of the Western term "dictator" and its own semantic shift. The conversion of "dictator" from a temporary, constitutionally embedded role to what Miyazawa called an "absolutist" role is what Schmitt observes in his analysis of commissary and sovereign dictatorships. Miyazawa also highlights the fundamental semantic dissonance between the characters representing *dokusai* (独裁) and its modern meaning. However, he makes no mention of its origin in the Book of Jin, rather explaining its origin from the etymology of the western word "dictator". This indicates that by 1934, *dokusai* was almost completely divorced from its original meaning. Miyazawa's attribution of absolute rule to *dokusai* also shows that Schmitt's so-called "sovereign dictatorship" had supplanted "commissary dictatorship" as its preeminent meaning of *dokusai*.

In the past two sections, I've highlighted several scholars who discussed the meaning of *dokusai* at length within periodicals. Most of these thinkers were liberals who fundamentally criticized *dokusai* as a governing system. These thinkers also struggled with *dokusai*'s semantic shift that came with the rise of Fascism, Nazism and Communism in Europe. However, after 1935, many of these writers' works disappeared from the editorial pages of Japanese periodicals. This was fallout from the Minobe Crisis of 1935, in which the press and government denounced Mi-

¹⁴⁹ Miyazawa Toshiyoshi, *Tenkōki No Seiji* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha), accessed March 15, 2021, <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1278344?tocOpened=1>, pp. 36.

nobe Tatsukuchi, Miyazawa Toshiyoshi's mentor and predecessor at Tokyo Imperial University, and a member of the House of Peers. This denunciation was in response to his "emperor-as-organ" theory, which argued that the emperor was an organ of the state, and not sovereign.¹⁵⁰ This initiated a blacklisting of liberal writers and critics of the military in Japanese periodicals. Newspapers stopped accepting the writings of Baba Tsunego, and Miyazawa appeared on a list of "authors to avoid" given to the *Chūo Kōron* by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police in 1942.¹⁵¹ While the use of *dokusai* continued in the press, its use in liberal critiques began to diminish more or less in the aftermath of the Minobe Crisis. This blacklisting of liberals was a sign of the growing influence of the military in Japanese political thought, and by the beginning of the Pacific War, these voices were all but silenced.

XIV. Transnational Nazism and *Dokusai*

Even as the use of *dokusai* shifted radically in the press, it still held pejorative connotations. In Japanese editorials dating back to 1899, *dokusai* was used in liberal critiques of both far left and far right movements, as well as individuals who, in the mind of the press, wielded too much power. Despite the damper on liberal commentaries on *dokusai* after the Minobe crisis, the word's use continued to describe the new dictators of Europe, Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. Miyazawa's paper shows that by 1934, Japan had recognized the new definition of "dictator" in practice and applied it to *dokusai*. However, the negative connotations of *dokusai* continued, even as the Japan began to ally itself with Nazi Germany in 1936.

In *Transnational Nazism*, Ricky W. Law demonstrates how Japanese newspapers like the *Yomiuri*, *Asahi* and *Nichinichi* gradually became admirers of Hitler in the first half of the 1930s. While first critical of the Nazis' violence and suppression of free speech, the press began to identify common causes such as fighting the threat of communism.¹⁵² This common cause manifested itself in the name of the treaty signed between Germany and Japan in 1936, the "Anti-Comintern Pact". The press's warming to Nazism coincided with Japan itself experiencing a large shift to

¹⁵⁰ Kasza, pp. 129-130.

¹⁵¹ Kasza, pp. 183-184.

¹⁵² Law, pp. 54.

the political right. However, even while the press's admiration of Hitler and the Nazis grew, the prospect of fascism and *dokusai* in Japan remained frowned upon, even by right-wing nationalists.

Law notes how the *Asahi Shinbun* reassured its readers that Japan would not become fascist, after the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact.¹⁵³ The English-language *Japan Times* also reported that Japanese rejected fascism.¹⁵⁴ Even the Prime Minister Hirota Kōki, while trumpeting the accomplishments of the Anti-Comintern Pact, was obligated to denounce *dokusai* in Japan in the same breath. In January 1937, the *Tokyo Asahi* printed Hirota's remarks at a session of Japan's lower house, wherein he declared "our government is broadly building a policy of diplomacy reform", referencing the Anti-Comintern Pact by name. Hirota continued, "I do not think this cabinet is a *dokusaiseiji*, nor do I think the public views our policies as such".¹⁵⁵ He also defended his cabinet selection, stating he made an effort to include a balance of military and party officials. Clearly, neither fascism nor *dokusai* was viewed as a desirable goal within Japan.

The lack of calls for *dokusai* in Japan, even by the far-right, may be explained by its foreignness. Miyazawa's piece on *dokusai* demonstrated that it had become almost synonymous with the Western term "dictator", as he cites the origin of the concept in the Roman *dokusaikan*. The ideology of many Japanese right-wing movements, including the *kokuhonsha* led by Hiranuma Kiichirō, rejected any kind of western governing philosophy.¹⁵⁶ Just as confounding was *dokusai*'s association with the communist "dictatorship of the proletariat". In the eyes of Japanese right-wing nationalists, these associations likely caused them to avoid the word in their vision of a post-democratic Japan.

While *dokusai* was taboo in a Japanese context, admirers of Hitler embraced it in their approval and admiration. Chief among them was Kuroda Reiji, the *Asahi Shinbun*'s Berlin correspondent. Kuroda had begun as a leftist, who had heavily criticized the Nazi crackdown on free

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 63.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 64.

¹⁵⁵ TA January 22, 1937.

¹⁵⁶ Szpilman, pp. 77.

speech in 1933, but began expressing sympathy for Hitler and the Nazis by 1935.¹⁵⁷ Law calls Kuroda a “Transnational Nazi”, and this is certainly reflected in Kuroda’s writings.¹⁵⁸ In 1936, Kuroda published his biography of Hitler, *Dokusaiō Hittorā* 「独裁王ヒットラア」 or *Hitler the Dictatorial King*. According to Law, Kuroda’s work, ostensibly an objective look at Hitler’s life, “so impressed the German Embassy that it forwarded a copy to the Chancellery.”¹⁵⁹ Kuroda’s use of *dokusaiō* was not without precedent. The *Yomiuri shinbun* had dubbed Hitler and Mussolini *ryōdokusaiō* (両独裁王) during their meetings in the Italian alps in 1934. I have argued that the coining of *dokusaiō* arose out of the need to distinguish the *dokusai* of fascism, that is, absolute rule over a whole body, from others, such as the economic *dokusai* of Roosevelt or the Soviet Union’s proletarian *dokusai*. The use of the character “王” for “king” amplifies the implications of absolute power within fascist *dokusai*. Kuroda’s use of *dokusaiō* achieves the same effect.

It was Kuroda’s transnational Nazism that allowed him to view a *dokusaiō* in a positive light. Other biographers of Hitler like Ikeda Ringi and Sawada Ken had both expressed the potential need of a Hitler-like figure in Japan to guide the nation through uncertain times.¹⁶⁰ With the perceived looming threat of communism to the West and North in China and the Soviet Union, and increased trade pressure from the United States, some Japanese no doubt had the feeling of being encircled by enemies. With this feeling came the willingness to potentially accept a charismatic leader like Hitler to lead Japan. However, even as Japan allied itself with the Nazis, the Japanese government rejected *dokusai* in their statements. For some with a more foreign outlook, such as the transnational Nazis, the word *dokusai* probably lost its negative connotation with Hitler.

¹⁵⁷ Law, pp. 51.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 91.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 125.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 124.

XV. Conclusions

The word *dokusai* underwent a massive semantic shift in the first half of the twentieth century, and the rise of authoritarian states like Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union prompted this shift. Beginning with its origin in the Book of Jin, *dokusai*'s evolution into a foreign term began as a translation for the concept of Czarist autocracy in Russia. Eventually, it became the translation of the classical Roman office of “dictator” and Karl Marx’s “dictatorship of the proletariat”. The rise of right-wing authoritarians like Hitler and Mussolini, created a new definition for “dictator” and *dokusai*, closer to what Miyazawa Toshiyoshi would call “absolutism”. Roosevelt’s New Deal also created a new *dokusai* of extraconstitutional economic control, beyond the standards of classical liberalism. The “Age of *Dokusaishugi*” prompted a scholarly reassessment of *dokusai*, brought on by its widespread use during the 1930s.

In researching for this project, one thing I distinctly recognized was the difficulty of translating Western concepts into a language based on Chinese characters like Japan. One reason that phrases like *dokusai* were used to translate concepts was a desire of the Japanese to merge their classical history with the West’s. “Dictator” had a classical origin, and so did *dokusai*. In translating Western concepts using Eastern script, Japanese intellectuals were making an earnest attempt to make a foreign idea comprehensible for readers in a rapidly modernizing Japan. In the case of *dokusai*, however, the phrase became so closely associated with its western translation, that by the 1930s, its Chinese origins had been largely forgotten. As “dictator” transcended its original definition, *dokusai* transcended its original use in the Book of Jin, and even the individual meaning of 独 and 裁.

In the postwar era and beyond, it became much more common for foreign terms to just be transliterated in *katakana*, the script reserved for foreign words. Despite this, Chinese character translations of Western concepts, including *dokusai*, remain prominent in today’s Japanese press. With an increasing rise in authoritarian and anti-democratic sentiments around the world, *dokusai* is a prescient word to study in the 2020s. In 2020 and 2021, the largest use of *dokusai* in the Japanese press came in coverage of China. Given China’s proximity, growing economic power and authoritarianism under the Chinese Communist Party, it is no surprise that Japan would consider China *dokusai*. At the outset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the *Tokyo Mainichi* reported the

“possibility of *dokusai* countries controlling reported cases.”¹⁶¹ The *Asahi Shinbun* reported reluctance on the part of the German government to impose of a lockdown in March 2020, and explained it as “a result of the history of infringement on personal freedoms under the *dokusai* governments of Nazi and East Germany.”¹⁶² While the definition of *dokusai* has remained more or less consistent since the end of World War II, observing what situations the press addresses as *dokusai* reflects the inner thoughts and attitudes of Japan toward the outside world. For that reason, it remains an important word to keep track of as we enter another potential period of *hijōji*, or extraordinary times.

¹⁶¹ TNN April 12, 2020

¹⁶² TA March 23, 2020

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