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RESEARCH ARTICLE

What are the limits of political violence? Ebihara Toshio's murder and the Umemoto-Kuroda controversy in 1970s Japan

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Abstract
On 3 August 1970, a student activist belonging to the Kakumaru-ha (Revolutionary Marxist Faction) was beaten to death by members of the rival Chūkaku-ha (Central Core Faction) at Hosei University, Tokyo. This incident sparked an intense war between Japanese New Left factions that stretched into the 1980s and resulted in dozens of deaths, making Japan a unique case among industrialized nations for its extremely high level of left-wing interfactional violence. Of particular importance in understanding the ideological factors surrounding such an escalation of violence was the debate triggered between Umemoto Katsumi, one of the intellectual founders of the Japanese New Left, and members of the Kakumaru-ha led by Kuroda Kan'ichi around the limits of political violence. This article explores the theoretical confrontation between these two opposing sides that was of such critical importance to the logic of war between Japanese New Left factions in the 1970s and 1980s.

Keywords: Japanese Marxism; Kuroda Kan'ichi; Umemoto Katsumi; New Left; political violence

Introduction

The murder of a student activist belonging to the Kakumaru-ha (Revolutionary Marxist Faction) by members of the rival Chūkaku-ha (Central Core Faction) in Japan in the summer of 1970 sparked a violent war between New Left factions that lasted into the 1980s and left dozens dead. According to Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, the high number of deaths resulting from such interfactional violence within the New Left movement makes Japan an unparalleled case among developed countries of the time.[1] Several works have briefly addressed the facts of this political phenomenon,[2] and only one

[1]Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, *The historical roots of political violence. Revolutionary terrorism in affluent countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 95.

[2]Kazunari Kurata, *Shinsayoku undō zenshi* [The complete history of the New Left] (Tokyo: Ryūdō Shuppansha, 1978); Kōji Takazawa, Masayuki Takagi and Kazunari Kurata, *Shinsayoku nijū nen shi* [Twenty years of history of the New Left] (Tokyo: Shinsensha, 1981); Taisuke Ara, *Shin Sayoku to wa nani datta no ka*

has dealt with them extensively,[3] but an in-depth investigation into the ideological underpinnings of these facts has never been undertaken.

Of particular importance in understanding the ideological factors surrounding such an escalation of violence was the debate triggered between Umemoto Katsumi (1912–1974), one of the intellectual founders of the Japanese New Left, and members of the Kakumaru-ha, led by Kuroda Kan'ichi (1927–2006), around the limits of political violence. On the one hand, Umemoto rejected the legitimacy of retaliatory violence against the Chūkaku-ha on the grounds that the murdered student had been the accidental victim of illegitimate, general violence between factions within the revolutionary camp. On the other, members of the Kakumaru-ha, with Kuroda as their intellectual leader, defended the legitimacy of interfactional violence and condemned the murder precisely because of its accidental nature, which in their eyes indicated a complete lack of political purpose on the part of the Chūkaku-ha members that rendered their use of violence nihilistic and therefore counterrevolutionary.

This article explores the theoretical confrontation between these two positions that were of such critical importance to the logic behind the violent war between Japanese New Left factions in the 1970s and 1980s. The article is divided into five sections. In the first section, I present and contextualize the facts constituting and surrounding the student's murder. In the second, I address Umemoto's explicit response to the murder, analysing his resulting theorization of the limits of political violence as an opposition to interfactional violence. In the third section, I examine the theory of revolutionary violence put forward by members of the Kakumaru-ha—and Kuroda as their intellectual leader—in response to the student's murder and to Umemoto's public stance regarding the incident. In the fourth section, I analyse how Umemoto and Kuroda's political positions on violence stemmed from opposing Marxist conceptions of human subjectivity (*shutaisei*). Finally, as a conclusion, I reflect on the possible ideological factors that made Japan a unique case for its high level of New Left interfactional violence. My attempt in this article to discern the particularities of the Japanese case does not mean observing it on the basis of its *cultural* singularity but rather analysing the *ideological* lines specific to the context of 1970s Japan that led to such dynamics of violence, thus contributing to the understanding and prevention of similar phenomena anywhere in the world.

Ebihara Toshio's murder: Facts and context

In the early hours of 4 August 1970, the corpse of a shirtless young man was found lying at the entrance to a hospital in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo. His entire body appeared to have been beaten, and his face, hands, and feet were swollen and purple. He was also covered

[What was the New Left?] (Tokyo: Gentosha, 2008); Eiji Oguma, *1968: Hanran no shūen to sono isan* [The end of the revolts and their legacy] (Tokyo: Shinyōsha, 2009); Yasutaka Mizutani and Kōichi Kishi, *Kakukyōdō seijikyoku no haiboku 1975–2014. Arui wa Chūkaku-ha no hōkai* [The defeat of Kakukyōdō's politburo 1975–2014. Or the collapse of the Chūkaku-ha] (Tokyo: Hakujunsha, 2015); William Andrews, *Dissenting Japan. A history of radicalism and counterculture from 1945 to Fukushima* (London: Hurst and Company, 2016); Akira Ikegami and Masaru Satō, *Gekidō. Nihon sayoku shi. Gakusei undō to kagekiha 1960–1972* [Upheaval. History of the Japanese Left. The student movement and extremists 1960–1972] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2021); Chelsea Szendi Schieder, *Coed revolution. The female student in the Japanese New Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

[3]Takashi Tachibana, *Chūkaku tai Kakumaru* [Chūkaku vs Kakumaru]. *Vol. 1* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983).

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in over 20 stab wounds. His name was Ebihara Toshio, a 21-year-old student at Tokyo University of Education and a member of the Kakumaru-ha (Revolutionary Marxist Faction). The day before, he had been attacked by members of the rival Chūkaku-ha (Central Core Faction) in a disputed area of Ikebukuro Ward and forcibly taken to that group's stronghold, Hosei University, where he was subjected to a process of 'self-criticism' (*jiko hihan*) through violent means.

It was the first time that a New Left faction in Japan had murdered someone from a rival faction within the movement. Before then, Japanese New Left groups had been using violence against each other with increasing intensity, but the tacit consensus not to kill one's opponent had prevailed.[4] The aim of the violence had not been to kill but to achieve a kind of 're-education' through which the victim was forced to reflect on their alleged mistakes; this is why the weapon commonly used in these incidents was an iron pipe, which is not particularly effective if trying to kill someone.[5] Thereafter, in cases involving the death of the victim, iron pipes would prove to have a convenient psychological function for perpetrators when used collectively: their ineffectiveness made it difficult to determine who had dealt the fatal blow, thus shielding any one person from a guilty conscience.[6]

Before Ebihara's murder, a student from the Sekigun-ha (Red Army Faction) had died in 1969 as a consequence of the same kind of *uchigeba*, or internal fighting, between radical left groups.[7] However, unlike Ebihara's death, this death had not been the direct result of physical violence: the victim had tried to escape through a window of the Chūō University building where he was being held captive by members of the Second Bund, and he died as a result of the fall.[8] In Ebihara's case, he was part of a group of Kakumaru-ha activists who had attacked a Chūkaku-ha student selling copies of the faction's newspaper on a campus in July,[9] and the revenge of the latter got out of hand. According to some accounts, one of the kidnappers was seized with the fear that Ebihara, having seen his face, might later take revenge on him for the extreme level of violence used, so he killed him on an impulse.[10] However, the fact that the students who carried Ebihara's body to the hospital banged on the door repeatedly so that the security officer on night shift would find him immediately prove that they wished Ebihara to live.[11]

[4]Tachibana, *Chūkaku tai Kakumaru*, p. 164.

[5]Ibid., p. 30.

[6]Ibid., p. 33.

[7]According to Masahiro Nakanishi, 'Kakumaru—Portrait of an ultra-radical group', in *Zengakuren. Japan's revolutionary students*, (ed.) Stuart J. Dowsey (Tokyo: The Ishi Press, 1970), p. 216, the word 'geba' derives from the German word 'gewalt', which is pronounced 'gebaruto' in Japanese, and means power, authority, or violence as associated with an 'act of God'. Its student meaning is violence in the revolutionary struggle. Internal fighting between factions is called 'inner-geba' or *uchigeba*.

[8]Oguma, *1968*, p. 296. The Second Bund was a reconstitution of the Bund that had disintegrated in the early 1960s. See later in the article for an explanation of the Bund.

[9]This is the account by Andrews, *Dissenting Japan*, p. 153, and Ara, *Shin Sayoku to wa nani datta no ka*, pp. 193–194. According to Mizutani and Kishi, *Kakukyōdō seijikyoku no haiboku 1975–2014*, p. 416, however, Ebihara had not been directly involved in the attack.

[10]Waseda Daigaku Shinbunkai—Henshūbu, 'Ebihara gyakusatsu mondai wo megutte [Concerning Ebihara's massacre]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika* [What is revolutionary violence?], (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, 1971), p. 124.

[11]Mizutani and Kishi, *Kakukyōdō seijikyoku no haiboku 1975–2014*, p. 418.

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The fact that the Chūkaku-ha did not claim responsibility for the murder also proved that his death had been unintentional. In fact, according to some accounts, the activists who killed Ebihara were reprimanded for it by the upper echelons of the organization.[12] At the same time, however, a member of the Politburo, Takagi Tōru, stated the following at a meeting of the Hosei University cell of the Chūkaku-ha in late August: 'Human life is important, but we have entered an era of civil war and deadly struggle […] The purpose of revolution can only be achieved through many deaths in the movement. We will have to cause more deaths in the future.'[13]

Outwardly, the Chūkaku-ha kept silent about the incident, offering no apology or explanation. According to Takashi Tachibana, silence indirectly externalized the guilt felt by the members of the Chūkaku-ha.[14] Another important factor in that silence must have been the fear of criminal reprisals by the state. Be that as it may, silence would be partly to blame for the spiral of retaliatory violence and death that would follow, as a vengeful response from the opposing side could not be prevented without self-criticism.[15] Still, there was more to it than this lack of self-criticism. On the day Ebihara's body was found, one of Chūkaku-ha's leaders made the following statement at a public meeting:

> It must be said that the struggle to overthrow the Kakumaru-ha is of the highest importance. With the supreme goal of smashing the revolutionary left, it has maintained its own faction by carrying out raids on the ranks of our supporters in the hope of destroying them. In the history of the world's socialist movements, is there any group that has been more hostile to the revolutionaries than the Kakumaru-ha? Even the Russian Mensheviks did not aim to violently attack the Bolsheviks.[16]

According to Tachibana,[17] when this public statement was made, the upper echelons of the Chūkaku-ha were presumably aware of Ebihara's murder, so it could be interpreted as a kind of justification of the incident. Yasutaka Mizutani and Kōichi Kishi not only claim that the upper echelons of the Chūkaku-ha were aware of the murder before that public statement was made, but also maintain that Takagi, the Politburo member who in late August would internally justify Ebihara's death, had been present at Hosei University during his incarceration and could have stopped the beating.[18] As Eiji Oguma points out, it has been speculated that because the leader of the Chūkaku-ha, Honda Nobuyoshi (1934–1975), had been under arrest since April 1969, the organization's temporary leadership was disoriented and may not have come to an accurate judgement and consensus regarding the incident.[19] In fact, when Honda was released from prison in March 1971, he was apparently furious at the temporary

[12]Oguma, *1968*, p. 298.
[13]Mizutani and Kishi, *Kakukyōdō seijikyoku no haiboku 1975–2014*, p. 419.
[14]Tachibana, *Chūkaku tai Kakumaru*, pp. 166–167.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid., p. 165.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Mizutani and Kishi, *Kakukyōdō seijikyoku no haiboku 1975–2014*, pp. 417–418.
[19]Oguma, *1968*, p. 299.

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Politburo's response to it and asked Takagi to criticize himself.[20] After almost a year of silence by the Chūkaku-ha, however, Honda was no longer able to correct the retaliatory spiral and instead he decided to go for an 'all-out counteroffensive' against the Kakumaru-ha.[21]

The Kakumaru-ha, in turn, issued the following proclamation the day after Ebihara's lifeless body was found: 'Blood shed must be avenged. Class vengeance against [the Chūkaku-ha], a determined and systematic counterattack, is our mission and our right.'[22] A few days later, the Kakumaru-ha made good on their promise and violently counterattacked the Chūkaku-ha at Hosei University, setting off a spiral of retaliatory violence between the two factions that would leave many dead. As Sánchez-Cuenca points out, despite the existence in 1970s Japan of a particularly large number of radicalized revolutionary activists willing to use violence for their political purposes, the number of terrorist attacks against the state and members of the establishment did not increase due to the intensity of such infighting.[23]

Both the Chūkaku-ha and the Kakumaru-ha saw each other as an originally revolutionary faction that had sold itself to the devil of counterrevolution, and they were convinced that the complete dissolution of the other faction was a prerequisite for revolution. For increasingly radicalized people for whom revolution was the highest mission of their lives, this idea would make killing their opponents a lesser evil. As they attacked each other, the suffering within the ranks of both groups increased, and this strengthened the ties between members of each group to the detriment of external ties, which accentuated sectarianism. Another factor that facilitated the escalation of violence was that the only relatively large political parties claiming to be Marxist-Leninist outside the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) in the 1970s were precisely the Chūkaku-ha and the Kakumaru-ha: if the violent struggle ended with the dissolution of one of the two, there would be only one relatively large party to the left of the JCP, attracting those who had been reluctant to join its ranks because of constant *uchigeba*.[24]

Where did this hostility between the two factions come from? Ebihara's murder was just the tipping point in a long history of increasingly intense confrontation. To understand it, we have to go back at least to the anti-Anpo struggle of 1960, the largest mass mobilization in Japanese history, when the Chūkaku-ha and the Kakumaru-ha had not yet formed.[25] At that time, the only New Left political parties in existence

[20]Mizutani and Kishi, *Kakukyōdō seijikyoku no haiboku 1975–2014*, p. 421.

[21]Ibid., pp. 253–256.

[22]Kakumaru-ha, 'Manshin no ikari wo komete [With full anger]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika* [What is revolutionary violence?], (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, [1970] 1971), p. 8.

[23]Sánchez-Cuenca, *The historical roots of political violence*, pp. 93–101.

[24]Tachibana, *Chūkaku tai Kakumaru*, pp. 36–38.

[25]'Anpo' was the name by which the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan was popularly known. For insight into the 1960 anti-Anpo struggle and its consequences, see Nick Kapur, *Japan at the crossroads. Conflict and compromise after Anpo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Dagfinn Gatu, *Japan in upheaval. The origins, dynamics and political outcome of the 1960 anti-US Treaty protests* (London: Routledge, 2022). The other main political forces that actively participated in the anti-Anpo campaign were the JCP, the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP), the Sōhyō or General Council of Trade Unions (linked to the JSP), and the civic movement Voices of the Voiceless Association

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were the Bund (the name by which the Kyōsandō,[26] or Communist League, was known), which passionately led the anti-Anpo campaign, and the Kakukyōdō[27] (Revolutionary Communist League), whose intellectual leader was Kuroda Kan'ichi.

Kuroda saw the 1960 anti-Anpo struggle as a 'petty bourgeois upsurge' marked by street demonstrations,[28] and criticized the Bund for seeing the situation as potentially revolutionary when in fact there was no economic crisis of capitalism behind it.[29] Kuroda argued that such a sense of crisis led the Bund to an impatient 'mass-movement-ism', that is, the mistaken idea that the function of the vanguard party was to throw itself into social movements as if their intensification would lead directly to revolution, while forgetting the priority of building and strengthening the party itself.[30]

The fact that the Bund quickly disintegrated after the Anpo renewal showed its organizational weakness and greatly legitimized Kuroda's ultra-vanguardist position, which went hand in hand with the attraction of former Bund members to the Kakukyōdō. However, Kuroda was very critical of admitting these new members because, in his eyes, the party was making the mistake of prioritizing quantitative growth to the detriment of its ideological strengthening and consistency. He believed that the Kakukyōdō should have insisted on a process of self-criticism by the former Bund members before they could fully join the party. In the absence of such a process, he argued, the contradictions that had existed between the Bund and the Kakukyōdō were being transferred directly to the latter organization. In other words, despite the disappearance of the Bund as an organization, its spirit or 'Bundism' survived among those joining the Kakukyōdō. This laid the foundations for the split of the Kakukyōdō into two rival groups in 1963: the Chūkaku-ha, which was led by Honda and included a number of former members of the Bund, and the Kakumaru-ha, led by Kuroda.[31] Kuroda then stated: '[The Chūkaku-ha] plotted to *bury* our League in the unfolding of the mass movement and to degrade our League organization itself to the level of a *means for the movement*.'[32]

Honda similarly considered that the 1960 anti-Anpo struggle ended up taking a bourgeois democratic form.[33] However, he believed that when the masses first stormed the Diet on 27 November 1959 that demonstration 'broke the long slump and demonstrated a part of the enormous revolutionary power'. In his view, 'it seemed that the Japanese working class had been liberated and would use the struggle that day as a

(Koe Naki Koe no Kai). All of them broadly shared a moderate and democracy-defence approach compared to the revolutionary aspirations and radical tactics of the New Left.

[26]Abridgement of Kyōsanshugisha Dōmei.

[27]Abridgement of Kakumeiteki Kyōsanshugisha Dōmei.

[28]Kan'ichi Kuroda, *Praxiology. Philosophy of inter-human subjectivity* (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, [1975] 1998), p. 246.

[29]Kan'ichi Kuroda, 'For the creation of a vanguard organization', in *Kuroda's thought on revolution* (Tokyo: Kaihoh-sha, [1961] 2000), pp. 229–230.

[30]Kan'ichi Kuroda, *What is revolutionary Marxism?* (Tokyo: Kaihoh-sha, [1969] 1991), p. 176.

[31]Ibid., pp. 174–183.

[32]Ibid., p. 191.

[33]Nobuyoshi Honda, 'Anpo tosō: sono seijiteki sōkatsu [The Anpo Struggle: Its political summary]', in *Honda Nobuyoshi chosakusen* [Selected works of Honda Nobuyoshi] (Tokyo: Zenshinsha, [1969] 1978), vol. 4, p. 125.

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springboard to launch a major advance'.[34] By the same logic, years later Honda would see a similar potential in the Haneda Incident of 8 October 1967, when a New Left demonstration stormed Haneda Airport to prevent Prime Minister Satō Eisaku from travelling to South Vietnam in the context of the Vietnam War: 'We had put up with insults for seven years. Finally on October 8th we were swept away by a mass explosion […] For the first time it felt like the […] clouds had parted and we could see a blue sky.'[35] Honda believed that the use of violence by the New Left against the riot police advanced the revolution as it forced the state to reveal its inherently violent nature, which was a sign of its weakening. Focusing on the task of legitimizing revolutionary violence and delegitimizing the state's monopoly on violence, Honda claimed:

> The organs of the bourgeois press and their official critics […] obscured [our] focus—'oppose the Vietnam war, obstruct the visit'—with the so-called problem of violence, castigating the Zengakuren[36] struggle as a 'violent demonstration' and 'armed demonstration', while simultaneously manoeuvring to conceal and defend the fundamental problem of state violence […] On October 8, Zengakuren had its right to demonstrate stripped from it: wasn't it police headquarters and the public safety commission whose suppression through outrageous violence ensured that Zengakuren would be unable to exercise its right even to a one-meter-long march without forcibly breaking through the riot police's obstructing line? And isn't it police headquarters and the public safety commission that for seven years since Anpo have mobilized the well-armed riot police against Zengakuren's unarmed demonstrations, inflicting bloody oppression by blows, kicks, and arrests, causing near-fatal injuries for dozens? For one, the right to be armed and to strike, kick, and arrest; for the other, in order to declare an anti-war intent, the right to be struck, kicked, and arrested—only this is permitted. If this isn't state violence, what is?[37]

Writing in 1973, Honda would regard the violent events of the Haneda Incident as a turning point that paved the way to insurrection: '[We] reached a critical stage in the revolutionary, civil war, and armed development of the class struggle during the five years of fierce fighting since Haneda.'[38] Honda believed that Japan was in the pre-revolutionary stage of a civil war that would culminate during the 1970s, and he argued that the execution of revolutionary civil war actions not only corresponded to the phase of seizing power, but also to the stage that precedes it.[39] By contrast, for Kuroda, that battle-like attitude, which involved taking up arms, had to be adopted

[34]Ibid., p. 131.

[35]Andrews, *Dissenting Japan*, p. 105.

[36]Abridgement of Zen Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sō Rengō: All-Japan Federation of Student Self-Government Associations.

[37]William Marotti, 'The perception of violence, the violence of perception, and the origins of Japan's 1968', in *The red years. Theory, politics, and aesthetics in the Japanese '68*, (ed.) Gavin Walker (London and New York: Verso, 2020), p. 59.

[38]Nobuyoshi Honda, 'Senryakuteki sō hankō: sono shōri no tenbō [Strategic all-out counteroffensive: Prospects for victory]', in *Honda Nobuyoshi chosakusen* [Selected works of Honda Nobuyoshi] (Tokyo: Zenshinsha, [1973] 1978), vol. 4, p. 16.

[39]Mizutani and Kishi, *Kakukyōdō seijikyoku no haiboku 1975–2014*, pp. 256–257.

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only when the proletariat had organized itself sufficiently to liberate itself and at a decisive moment. Following this line, 'the issue [was] not to disseminate the "thought of armed uprisings in general" nor to counter neo-Stalinist "peaceful revolution" with "violent revolution" in a simple, [Maoist] style. The central issue [was]: who uses "violence", when, and how.'[40]

The issues between the Chūkaku-ha and the Kakumaru-ha became irreconcilable after 18 January 1969, when police forces evicted the student activists who had been occupying the University of Tokyo for months. True to its policy of prioritizing its own integrity as a political party, the Kakumaru-ha, which had been participating in the occupation with other New Left groups, abandoned its post the night before the riot police attacked to avoid a mass arrest of its members. For the Kakumaru-ha, this was the most reasonable decision after weighing up how much they would lose and how little they would gain by defending the barricaded university. In fact, Kuroda minimized the importance of that occupation:

> When they not only make a goal in itself out of 'occupying' campuses or businesses in an elitist manner, but also use words like 'commune' or 'liberated zone' to describe the box-garden-like small spaces created by means of barricades, this is essentially nothing but child's play. This is nothing but a caricature of a commune. It is nothing but a cartoon drawn by petty bourgeois philistines who, leaving untouched the existing bourgeois state power, are deluded into mistaking the right to enjoy fortuity temporarily within its framework, for freedom. After accidental freedom has been acquired by such 'occupations' and continued for a time, they dream that this can be continued in a direct, linear progression into the creation of a society in which neither authority nor state power will exist […]. They merely believe blindly that ultra-leftist tactics and the escalation of armed struggle form are proofs of being the true Left.[41]

In contrast, the Chūkaku-ha framed the defence of the occupied University of Tokyo as a battle in the context of a revolutionary war, so it took the Kakumaru-ha's abandonment as nothing less than a defection, a counterrevolutionary act of treason that should be punished by means of revolutionary violence. In this regard, 1969 saw the revival of the theory of violent revolution by the Chūkaku-ha,[42] which increasingly introduced the logics of military tactics into its policy. Although this account might suggest that the Kakumaru-ha was a mere victim of the violent drift of other factions such as the Chūkaku-ha, this was not the case. In fact, before the death spiral of the 1970s triggered by Ebihara's murder, the Kakumaru-ha had been carrying out extremely violent attacks against rivals within the New Left movement. The following account of a student who was attacked for trying to create student

[40]Kuroda, 'For the creation of a vanguard organization', p. 232.
[41]Kuroda, *What is revolutionary Marxism?*, pp. 210–211.
[42]Tachibana, *Chūkaku tai Kakumaru*, p. 137.

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movement structures outside of the Kakumaru-ha at its stronghold of Waseda University is illustrative:

> After being beaten with steel pipes and kicked on campus and having two or three ribs broken, I was put on a truck, half unconscious. Before I knew it, I was being taken up a mountain in Sayama, Saitama Prefecture. One by one, my friends who had been attacked with me were thrown to the side of the road, and in the end I was left alone. I was also abandoned in the mountains.[43]

This student was hospitalized for a month-and-a-half, and a female student who was attacked at the time later committed suicide in despair.[44] As these facts show, the Kakumaru-ha was no less radical in its use of political violence than the Chūkaku-ha, but its violence had different goals and a different logic that generated enmity among the rest of the New Left groups. In this regard, Oguma states: 'That Kakumaru-ha was passive in street struggles and enthusiastic about *uchigeba*, and that it advocated the dissolution of other factions and the expansion of its own faction, are reasons why Kakumaru-ha was hated.'[45]

Umemoto Katsumi's reaction: The limits of political violence

Ebihara's murder sparked a public debate that encapsulated the recent problems of the New Left,[46] particularly its drift towards uncontrolled violence. One of the most influential figures who first spoke out on the matter was Umemoto Katsumi. Having been educated within the Kyoto School circle in the prewar period—he wrote his thesis on the Buddhist monk Shinran (1173–1263) under the supervision of Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960)—Umemoto became a Marxist in the aftermath of the Second World War and joined the JCP in 1947. Marked by concerns inherited from his prewar philosophical background, he sought to fill what he considered to be a gap in Marxism regarding the dimension of human subjectivity. He soon became, in Momo Iida's words, 'the standard bearer of "subjective materialism", which sparked the postwar debate on subjectivity'[47] (*shutaisei ronsō*) against the prevailing objectivist determinism in Marxism of the time. Thus, he can be considered a philosophical seed of the subjectivist Japanese New Left that would emerge in the late 1950s and, as such, he exerted a significant influence on the movement.[48]

[43]Oguma, *1968*, p. 296.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Sō Kōchi, 'Umemoto shutaisei-ron to Kuroda no shisō tenkō [Umemoto's theory of subjectivity and Kuroda's turn of thought]', in *Kuroda Kan'ichi wo dō toraeruka* [How to grasp Kuroda Kan'ichi?], (eds) Soriya Ōkubo et al. (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1971), pp. 46–47.

[47]Momo Iida, *21 seiki no 'ima-koko': Umemoto Katsumi no shōgai to shisōteki isan* [The 'here and now' of the twentieth century: Umemoto Katsumi's life and legacy] (Tokyo: Kobushi Shōbo, 2003), p. 120.

[48]Ebihara himself, like many other New Left activists, had read Umemoto, despite his conflicting ideological positions. Tōkyō Kyōiku Daigaku Zengaku Gakusei Kyōtō Kaigi, 'Ebihara Toshio-kun no koto [On Ebihara Toshio]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika*, (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu, p. 35.

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In 1950, as a member of the JCP's International Faction that advocated an immediate revolution, against the moderate official line of the Mainstream Faction, Umemoto was expelled from the party, only to rejoin it after the Sixth National Congress—popularly known as Rokuzenkyō—in 1955. However, he ended up definitively distancing himself from the JCP in 1959 after tensions that included the party's ban of the publication of one of his books.[49] From then on, Umemoto was considered fully part of the Japanese New Left movement.[50]

It should be noted that Umemoto, despite advocating an immediate revolution, had been concerned about the limits of violence in the communist movement for many years. In 1949, while defending the centrality of revolutionary theory in Marxism, he wrote: 'It is my sincere wish that the proletariat should be "educated and intelligent", so that it does not […] become obsessed with the unnecessary use of force.'[51] More than 20 years later, fearing that the Kakumaru-ha would respond to Ebihara's murder with more killing, Umemoto published an article in the *Asahi Janaru* titled 'What is to be revolutionized? The logic of party and the logic of revolution', in which he criticized the fratricidal *uchigeba* between New Left groups. The starting point of the article was a paradoxical contrast between the logic of politics and the logic of revolution:

> 'He is an enemy, kill him', this is the logic of politics […].[52] Revolution is the manifestation of this political logic in extreme circumstances. No revolution has yet escaped this logic. But there seems to be a difference between being revolutionary and being political. The revolutionary captures our hearts because in it there is a challenge to the logic of politics. For in a soul that cannot yield to violence, there is a soul that cannot be paralyzed by violence.[53]
>
> I believe that to be revolutionary is, in the extreme, to be something other than political. There is no revolution without political action and organization. That is true, but I think we have to make a decisive distinction between being revolutionary and being political. Revolution is doing what is politically impossible.[54]

Here Umemoto presented a totally dialectical conception of revolution whereby the revolutionary and the political were mutually necessary but, ultimately, mutually exclusive. In other words, for him revolution was the contradictory process of using politics in a way that ultimately denied politics itself. This approach was the opposite to that of Stalinism, which affirmatively made politics absolute to the point of taking it to extremes, and thus to the logic of purge, with the result that any revolutionary

[49]Iida, *21 seiki no 'ima-koko'*, pp. 11–14.

[50]J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and subjectivity in postwar Japan* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 96.

[51]Katsumi Umemoto, 'Kyōsanshugi to bōryoku no kongen—Inoki Masamichi hihan [The roots of communism and violence. A criticism of Inoki Masamichi]', *Tenbō*, November 1949, p. 13.

[52]This definition of the logic of politics came from Haniya Yutaka (1909–1997).

[53]Katsumi Umemoto, 'Nani wo kakumei suru no ka—Tōha no ronri to kakumei no ronri [What is to be revolutionized? The logic of party and the logic of revolution]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika* [What is revolutionary violence?], (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō [1970] 1971), pp. 114–115.

[54]Ibid., p. 119.

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aspect disappeared. According to Umemoto, the main ideological axis of the student movement to which both the Chūkaku-ha and the Kakumaru-ha belonged had started with the goal of breaking away from Stalinism, but this originally anti-Stalinist movement was falling into the logic of Stalinism by embracing the dynamics of purge.[55] Moreover, Umemoto considered *uchigeba* to be an elitist drift, leading to a breach with the masses, without whom the revolution was not possible:

> When I think of the vanguard these days, the image that comes to my mind is that of a yakuza-like man acting arrogantly on a bus or train, and everyone closing their eyes […] If you dig into the depths of *uchigeba*, you will find that there is always a 'vanguard' consciousness haunted by a sense of privilege […] This sense of privilege, of being allowed to do things that ordinary people are not allowed to do because you are the vanguard, inevitably generates contempt for the masses, and this contempt leads to self-absolutization and the denial of others.[56]

In this regard, for Umemoto the role of the vanguard party should be the opposite of self-absolutization, namely self-denial (*jiko hitei*). The party's practice should be based on protecting something outside the party, which itself should have nothing to protect. Only when such a practice was asserted could the relationship between the vanguard and the masses be advanced. At this point, Umemoto pulled the thread of the dichotomy between the logics of politics and the logic of revolution to make it parallel to the dichotomy between the logics of party and the logic of revolution:

> There is no revolution without political partisanship, but revolution dismantles the logic of party. The established theory of revolution divides this process into two stages. Revolution by political factions and the dismantling of the factions after revolution […] Stalinist revival cannot be prevented unless this established theory is broken. The two stages must be dismantled in the movement produced by the antinomy that runs through the revolutionary process. Through their dismantling, the logic of a new processive organization must be pursued.
>
> It is difficult, but there is no other way. If one does not have the principle of self-dissolution and only asks others to dismantle, what emerges is self-absolutization based on the logic of party.
>
> What was intended is not realized, and a fraction of what was intended is realized due to unintended consequences. That would be the historical reality. But does that make human intentions in history futile? Unintended results cannot be produced without human intentions and actions based on those intentions.[57]

The last part of this quote from Umemoto shows the same intention as his previous sentence—'revolution is doing what is politically impossible'—namely, to counter the logic of realpolitik in favour of a truly revolutionary world view. To those who appealed to political realism to justify *uchigeba*, Umemoto responded: 'Although internal strife

[55]Ibid., pp. 118–119.
[56]Ibid., p. 120.
[57]Ibid., p. 122.

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is inherent in every revolution, revolutions have not succeeded through internal strife. The Meiji Restoration was successful because it gave up internal strife […], which was not [due to] the success of revenge […].'[58] Having introduced the issue of revenge, Umemoto appealed specifically to the Kakumaru-ha regarding *uchigeba*, and secondarily to the Chūkaku-ha:

> To bring about revolution is to do difficult things. When it comes to the Kakumaru-ha, the most difficult of these things would be not to exclude oneself from the root of the disease that caused this corruption, and to be the 'leader' in the self-examination of the root of this disease. […] Then the public will finally know that an anti-Stalinist vanguard has been born. The same can be said of the people inside the Chūkaku-ha. […] It is easy for me to say this, but it is difficult for you to do it. […] For me to say this is just a criticism. But for you to say this is a revolutionary act. Perhaps it will require a revolutionary, even heroic, determination.[59]

Umemoto concluded the text with an explicit reference to Ebihara's murder: 'This incident was not carried out with the intention of murder from the beginning. It is the result of the violence of those who are paralyzed by *uchigeba*.'[60] It follows from this statement that, in Umemoto's eyes, what led to Ebihara's murder was not the logic of a particular party such as the Chūkaku-ha, but rather the general logic of the New Left, immersed in the dynamics of *uchigeba*. In other words, rather than being a victim of the Chūkaku-ha, Ebihara was a victim of *uchigeba*.

Days after the publication of this article, members of the Kakumaru-ha went to Umemoto's home to interview him about, or rather to debate with him, Ebihara's murder and the limits of political violence. What ensued was a kind of looping conversation in which the members of the Kakumaru-ha repeatedly justified the need for retaliatory violence against the Chūkaku-ha, resorting to arguments apparently based on pure logic, while Umemoto more intuitively rejected *uchigeba* based on a position of principle. The former tried to determine the level of responsibility of each political force in the *uchigeba* and the internal logic of the Chūkaku-ha as leading to Ebihara's murder, while the latter, according to Sō Kōchi's account, defended himself against the aggressive criticism being thrown at him as follows: 'Although you say that intuition alone is not enough, we still have no choice but to go about our business based on intuition.'[61]

One of the Kamumaru-ha members brought up the historical case of the Spanish Civil War, citing the example of Stalinists murdering Trotskyists, and then asked Umemoto whether the latter should not have counterattacked the former to defend

[58]Ibid., p. 120.
[59]Ibid., pp. 121–122.
[60]Ibid., p. 123.
[61]Sō Kōchi, Fumio Asakura and Waseda Daigaku Shinbunkai—Henshūbu, 'Umemoto Katsumi-san ni kiku [Asking Umemoto Katsumi]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika*, (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu, p. 141.

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themselves. Umemoto replied that the case of the Spanish Civil War was not the same as the *uchigeba* between the Chūkaku-ha and the Kakumaru-ha, since the former was about violence between non-revolutionary forces (Stalinists) and revolutionary forces (Trotskyists), while the latter was about violence between forces within the revolutionary camp. Therefore, Umemoto did not reject the exceptional possibility of using violence against political opponents, but he placed the limits of political violence at the borders of the 'revolutionary camp'.[62]

However, the Kakumaru-ha members did not consider the Chūkaku-ha to be part of the revolutionary camp, especially after Ebihara's murder. Umemoto conceded that if the Chūkaku-ha did not rectify the situation (presumably referring here to the decision to remain silent regarding Ebihara's murder), it could no longer be considered part of the revolutionary camp.[63] At the same time, however, he set a second limit on the use of revolutionary violence: according to him, the fact that Ebihara's murder had been the result of 'temporary passion', rather than an intentional killing, removed the legitimacy of retaliatory violence as used with a defensive logic.[64]

After stating the need for the Chūkaku-ha to rectify the situation, Umemoto then attacked the Kakumaru-ha by accusing it of self-absolutization and a lack of internal criticism. In his view, Kakumaru-ha members approached Kuroda's texts as the Chinese Red Guards approached Mao's Little Red Book, without the slightest doubt as to the correctness of the leader's theories.[65] Umemoto even compared the Kakumaru-ha to a religious sect: 'There is no such thing as an authoritative person without mistakes […] Even Lenin constantly said "I was wrong", but when I look at Kakumaru-ha's newspapers, I never see anything like that […] It is very similar to the Soka Gakkai.'[66] Here Umemoto was astute: having been attacked for being illogical, he countered by suggesting that the Kakumaru-ha members, under the guise of rational arguments when attacking external rivals, neglected critical thought internally, just as religious sects do.

Finally, Umemoto reiterated that the revolutionary thing to do in the present situation was to break with the current dynamics and open up a completely new path, which would mean renouncing *uchigeba*. The Kakumaru-ha members then criticized Umemoto for, in their eyes, urging them to go through the experiment of becoming Christ, referring to the word 'experiment' as something beyond realism. Be that as it may, Umemoto replied, his stance against *uchigeba* came from the bottom of his heart,[67] in the same way that he had opposed China's nuclear tests in response to those of the United States, despite harbouring rational doubts.[68]

[62]Ibid., pp. 134–135.
[63]Ibid., p. 141.
[64]Ibid., pp. 137–138.
[65]Ibid., pp. 141–142.
[66]Ibid., p. 143. Soka Gakkai is a Buddhist religious movement, the largest of Japan's new religions, based on the teachings of the thirteenth-century priest Nichiren (1222–1282).
[67]Ibid., pp. 149–152.
[68]Ibid., p. 160.

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Kakumaru-ha's reaction: The theory of revolutionary violence

In early 1971, the Kakumaru-ha responded to Umemoto's public statements on the limits of political violence by publishing a book entitled *What is Revolutionary Violence?* Its authors emphasized Umemoto's personal circumstances, which they said prevented him from adequately using logical reasoning: due to a circulatory disorder, he had not been able to read much in recent times and had to keep up with current affairs mainly through radio and television. (In fact, he would die a few years later, in early 1974, at the age of 62.) They even explicitly downplayed Umemoto's importance, claiming that 'to treat [him] as an enemy [is] to overestimate and glorify him'.[69] Ironically, however, the *raison d'être* and approach of Kakumaru-ha's book was largely a response to Umemoto's words. The central axis of the text criticized Umemoto for excusing the Chūkaku-ha on the grounds that Ebihara's murder had been unintentional. For the Kakumaru-ha, it was precisely the lack of political intentionality that rendered the murder unforgivable:

> There are limits to the use of revolutionary violence [...] There is no place for private [...] interests in the use of violence in partisan struggles [...] If we say 'that was a mistake caused by temporary passion', then passion, that is, private [...] feelings and interests, is standardized and principled. This lacks any organizational judgement or party sense of purpose. [...] Every struggle must be carried out systematically, under the responsibility of the leadership and with iron discipline.[70]
>
> Ebihara's massacre at the hands of the Chūkaku-ha was not, in short, an organized act of terror, but a lynching in the essential sense of the word.[71]
>
> Violence regulated by political ends does not allow impulsivity to kill unintentionally. It can be said that revolutionary violence is organized only when the impulsiveness of violence is eliminated [...] This murder, but let's add the unplanned abandonment of the corpse for this kind of 'sequence of chance', and the 'after-the-fact' treatment bullshit [...] are an escalation of violence based solely on hostility [...] Such impulsiveness is the greatest crime.[72]

Based on this theorization, the Kakumaru-ha concluded that the non-political use of violence, for the sake of violence itself or 'based solely on hostility', made the Chūkaku-ha a dangerous counterrevolutionary agent and that it was therefore necessary to eliminate this faction through political, revolutionary violence. As Tachibana cleverly points out, if we are to strictly follow the logic developed in the text, the use of violence by the Chūkaku-ha against the Kakumaru-ha would have been justified if it had

[69]Sō Kōchi, 'Umemoto Katsumi ni okeru jiko kaitai no genjitsu [The reality of self-dissolution in Umemoto Katsumi]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika* [What is revolutionary violence?], (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, [1970] 1971), pp. 177–178.

[70]Kakukyōdō—Chūō Gakusei Soshiki Iinkai, 'Bukuro = Chūkaku-ha wo kakumeiteki ni kaitai seyo [For the revolutionary dismantling of the Bukuro = Chūkaku-ha]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika*, (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu, p. 79.

[71]Ibid., p. 83.

[72]Sō Kōchi, 'Seiji to bōryoku-ron nōto [Notes on the theory of politics and violence]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika*, (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu, pp. 197–198.

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been exercised with political intentionality; at some point, however, the text made it clear that 'it is not acceptable for the Chūkaku-ha to deliberately murder a member of the Kakumaru-ha'.[73] It was to resolve this contradiction that the text included the limitations of political violence perpetrated by 'true Marxism-Leninism'. The nuance introduced by the adjective 'true' was decisive because a range of organizations beyond the Kakumaru-ha, from the JCP to the Chūkaku-ha, claimed Marxism-Leninism as their ideology. In the end, in the eyes of the Kakumaru-ha, only it was entitled to use violence against other organizations. Following the line of this more tautological than logical argument, the Kakumaru-ha responded to Umemoto's claim that the logic of purge was synonymous with Stalinism as follows:

> We must reject the Stalinist purge because it is nothing more than an expression of the Stalinist theory of organization, and there is absolutely no problem with purge in general. Clearly anti-class and anti-party elements in the class struggle must rather be thoroughly purged from within us.[74]

From this point of view, what characterized Stalinism was not so much its wrongful practice as its corrupted theory of socialism in one country, from which the illegitimacy of that practice emerged.[75] Following this logic, it would seem that purge was justified as long as it was carried out as a practice intended to protect or purify a truly revolutionary theory. In the end, however, it was the Kakumaru-ha itself that answered the question of which theory was truly revolutionary, and therefore which party was entitled to exercise the right to purge on the basis of that theory. The answer to the question was always obvious: the Kakumaru-ha, based on Kuroda's correct theories, was the only vanguard party whose logic of purge was revolutionary and therefore justified. Accordingly, the Kakumaru-ha did not condemn internal violence per se, nor did it consider Ebihara's murder to be the result of general *uchigeba*, but rather of the corrupt logic of the specific organization that had committed the murder:

> We have not criticized Ebihara's massacre at the hands of the Chūkaku-ha for its brutality. We have not denounced murder as terrorism in general because it is morally wrong. We are far from taking petty, moralistic, humanist positions. We are pointing out the words and deeds of the Chūkaku-ha as the problem in the […] struggle between those who aspire to be the only vanguard party to organize the working class and lead the fight for its self-liberation, and other parties who are not that vanguard.[76]
>
> The sectarian line of violence of the Chūkaku-ha has been released from political restrictions and has spread to the point of senseless killing […] It

[73]Tachibana, *Chūkaku tai Kakumaru*, p. 173.

[74]Masaomi Kojima, 'Gyakusatsusha shūdan wo menzai suru Umemoto Katsumi [Umemoto Katsumi's exoneration of the group of murderers]', in *Kakumeiteki bōryoku towa nanika*, (ed.) Zen-Nihon Gakusei Jichikai Sōrengō Jō-senbu, p. 107.

[75]Ibid., p. 108.

[76]Kakukyōdō—Chūō Gakusei Soshiki Iinkai, 'Bukuro = Chūkaku-ha wo kakumeiteki ni kaitai seyo', p. 78.

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> reveals the ideological and organizational decadence of the upper echelons of the political organization.[77]
>
> It goes without saying that this was the greatest class crime against the Japanese anti-Stalinist movement […] But it is causal. This is because what gave birth to it was none other than the thought, logic and organizational structure of the Chūkaku-ha as a whole.[78]

In this regard, the fact that Ebihara's murder was an impulsive act with no political purpose did not mean that it was an accidental murder. Rather, it was the result of a particular political logic that the Chūkaku-ha had developed over the years as an heir to the spirit of the Bund, or Bundism, which consisted of an impatient sense of crisis that led the organization to throw itself into mass movements, with intensifying violent tactics as if in a revolutionary context. As the mass movements of the 'Japanese long 68'[79] cooled down with the end of the campus occupations in 1969 and the second renewal of the Anpo in 1970, the violent inertia of the Chūkaku-ha was increasingly directed against the Kakumaru-ha as a reaction to its political failure.[80] In the eyes of the Kakumaru-ha theorists, the propensity of the Chūkaku-ha to merge with the masses through permanent direct action, while neglecting the strengthening of the vanguard party organization, was in line with Umemoto's notion of self-denial based on the dialectical dichotomy between politics/party and revolution:

> As long as it exists in the political world, even the revolutionary vanguard is inevitably political. However, it is determined by the purpose of breaking down the logic of politics itself, and political action is carried out as a means to this end. Politics to eradicate politics, it must be said that the paradox of fighting as the vanguard party of revolution lies in this dichotomy. […] However, while Umemoto knows that such political action is inevitable, he demands that our alliance deny it […] Umemoto uses irrational logic here.[81]
>
> By requesting that the future be realized directly in the present, Umemoto denies the present, that is, politics and vanguard […] In order to annihilate politics, it is first necessary to overthrow state power and elevate the proletariat to the status of ruling class. Political organization is essential. Therefore, just as the proletarian political power must take the first step towards its own extinction as soon as it is established, this logic of self-sublation of the proletarian

[77]Tachibana, *Chūkaku tai Kakumaru*, p. 71.

[78]Kōchi, 'Seiji to bōryoku-ron nōto', p. 198.

[79]Blai Guarné and Ferran de Vargas define the 'Japanese long 1968' as a period of political revolts led by the student movement from 1966 to 1972. The main areas of activism that made up this historical phenomenon were the anti-Vietnam War protests, the occupation of university campuses by the Zenkyōtō student movement, the Sanrizuka struggle against the construction of the Narita International Airport, the demonstrations for the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty, and the campaign against the second renewal of the Anpo. Blai Guarné and Ferran de Vargas, 'Japan's long 1968 cinema: Resistance, struggle, revolt', *The Sixties*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2022, pp. 121–125.

[80]Kakukyōdō—Chūō Gakusei Soshiki Iinkai, 'Bukuro = Chūkaku-ha wo kakumeiteki ni kaitai seyo', pp. 85–93.

[81]Kojima, 'Gyakusatsusha shūdan wo menzai suru Umemoto Katsumi', p. 109.

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> political power […] must also be the form and movement logic of the vanguard organization of the proletariat itself.
>
> […] Umemoto only passively accepts the party, and contrasts the logic of politics with the logic of revolution supported by the masses. By treating the party as a mere political faction, the party and the class are opposed in advance […] We create a political organization and carry out political movements precisely for the sake of annihilating the state and politics. And we are never free from this real world of politics, nor can we directly transcend the prevailing logic of politics. This does not mean a fall into politicalism or an immersion in the logic of real politics. This is because the political movement unfolding there takes the universal goal of the proletariat's self-liberation as its absolute standard, and everything is subordinated to it.[82]

Three conclusions can be drawn from these words. First, Umemoto's dialectical thinking, that is, his embrace of the irreconcilable contradiction between politics/party and revolution as the basis of praxis in the here and now, was for the Kakumaru-ha synonymous with 'irrational logic' and anti-vanguardism severed from the real world. Second, the Kakumaru-ha saw no opposition between the proletariat and the vanguard party: the party was the most advanced agent within the proletariat. Accordingly, to strengthen the party was to strengthen the proletarian class. Therefore, just as the proletariat had to assert itself until it became the ruling class and then self-sublate in a classless society, the vanguard party, as the most advanced agent of the proletariat, had to self-sublate only after becoming the ruling political power. Third, the legitimacy of action was once again 'subordinated' to theoretical goals such as 'the proletariat's self-liberation'. Thus, in the name of rational logic, the Kakumaru-ha advocated a tautological a priori whereby all action was judged on the theoretical premises of the subject who performed it. This meant that the criticism of the Kakumaru-ha's action was truncated from the very start.

It is important to stress that the ideological leader of the Kakumaru-ha, and therefore the intellectual figure behind this highly sectarian theory of revolutionary violence, was Kuroda. In the figure of Kuroda, the Kakumaru-ha was by 1970 unique among the New Left groups for having its own philosopher.[83] This is consistent with the fact that the Kakumaru-ha differentiated itself from the general tendencies of the movement, and those of the Chūkaku-ha in particular, in giving maximum importance to theory production, logical argumentation, and ideological struggle above direct action. Knowing Kuroda's theoretical position in the controversy about political violence is therefore fundamental to understanding the stance of the Kakumaru-ha. In

[82]Kakukyōdō—Chūō Gakusei Soshiki Iinkai, 'Bukuro = Chūkaku-ha wo kakumeiteki ni kaitai seyo', pp. 81–83.

[83]Nakanishi, 'Kakumaru—Portrait of an Ultra-Radical Group', p. 203. While prominent figures of other New Left groups, such as Honda in the Chūkaku-ha, wrote extensively about current affairs, history, and political theory, Kuroda was a philosopher in the sense that he also dealt with issues such as human subjectivity, alienation, epistemology, ontology, the relationship between substance and functions, Hegelianism, etc.

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this regard, it is worth quoting his personal criticism of Umemoto's public posture on Ebihara's murder:

> One wonders whether [Umemoto's] contention has any more value than a moralist postulation attempted on a plane totally unrelated to the harsh reality in which it becomes impossible, though striving to eradicate the bourgeois state and politics, to secure our current existence as a party aiming for revolution and achieve our own mission and objectives, without sometimes carrying out struggles conforming to the logic of real politics [...] At the base of this 'entreaty' by the philosopher Umemoto lies a thoroughgoing nihilism regarding party organization [...], as well as a fear of revolutionary violence.[84]

> We cannot completely rule out the possibility that, in a critical condition (for example, when a theoretical struggle over a certain issue is escalated to its limits), organized struggles within a party or with other parties may sometimes involve the use of force or give rise to violent clashes. Such *limited use* of force, however, must be made on the basis of Marxist principles and communist ethics, and under the control of the leading organ of each party [...] It is only in an exceptional relationship with other parties or factions, or under special circumstances that the issue of whether or not to use force as a complement to the ideological=organizing struggle, as a supplementary means of revolutionary disbandment of a specific faction which has committed anti-proletarian mistakes, emerges as a realistic one.[85]
>
> From the end of 1968 and throughout 1969, groups of infantile anti-JCP leftists resorted to left-wing adventurism in the form of absolutizing armed uprisings. They repeated antagonistic actions against revolutionary organizations [...] The defeat in the 1970 struggle[86] was the inevitable outcome of the mistaken strategy and tactics of these 'radicals' [...] In order to cover up their bankruptcy and collapse, these petty bourgeois radicals not only glorified violence and intoxicated themselves with unprincipled destructive action, but also made violent attacks on other factions with naked sectarianism [...] The fact that Ebihara Toshio was actually murdered by some infantile radicals [...] was a typical indication of the ruin of these 'radicals' [...] [Umemoto] attached the label 'Stalinism in the name of anti-Stalinism' to revolutionary communists who carried out an organized counterattack on the murderers.[87]

Kuroda went further, arguing that in order to understand Umemoto's 'wrong' political theory it was necessary to understand its underlying philosophy: 'The question is to find out what is the philosophical base of [Umemoto's] "subjectivity", which was

[84]Kan'ichi Kuroda, *Dialectics of praxis. Umemoto's philosophy of subjectivity and Uno's methodology of social science* (Tokyo: Kaihoh-sha, [1971] 2001), pp. 21–22.

[85]Kuroda, *Praxiology*, pp. 250–251.

[86]This refers to the second renewal of the Anpo.

[87]Kuroda, *Praxiology*, pp. 251–252.

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exposed in relation to the issue of Ebihara's murder, or why the erstwhile philosopher of subjectivity had to appear before us in such a pitiful condition.'[88]

Kuroda's attack on Umemoto's theory of subjectivity

Ironically, Umemoto had been Kuroda's mentor in the field of philosophy,[89] decisively inspiring his initial education as a communist, focusing on the dimension of human subjectivity (*shutaisei*). The young Kuroda had been attracted by Umemoto's idea that Marx's academic work was not only the result of scientific studies driven by the pursuit of objectivity, but also of his own subjective world view, and that Marxism was not only a social science, but also a philosophy concerned with the relationship between subject and object. In this regard, Kuroda claimed:

> 'Economics as social science', or *Das Kapital* […] is not unrelated to the praxicality of the Subject who created it, and his proletarian value consciousness or ideology […] *Das Kapital*, as the quintessence of Marx's creative study, cannot be generalized without at the same time internalizing the praxicality, value consciousness or ideology of the Subject who created it. This praxicality is called the 'standpoint of negation' […] in which petite bourgeois consciousness [is] 'eliminated' […]
>
> Even when creating a system of *Wissenschaft* [science], the praxical *tachiba* [standpoint] or value consciousness of the Subject who creates it not only constitutes its premise *an sich*, but always penetrates within the system […] This never means that the cognition of the object should be distorted or trimmed by projecting one's subjective consciousness or by adopting a certain view or ideology. The […] proletarian value consciousness is the premise *an sich* for us to grasp correctly […] the objective laws that determine the material world or objective reality […]
>
> Science places in parentheses the issues of the objective/non-objective domain which concerns the praxizing=cognizing Subject itself, or in other words issues concerning the source of subjective creation which is historically and socially determined, but at the same time, transcends such determination […]
>
> The domain proper to philosophy in Marxism consists of a reflective objectification of the *objective/non-objective* structure of the very cognizing=thinking activity which is set aside in science. In other words, this domain concerns toposical cognition which has the structure of being determined and determining. This is what Umemoto Katsumi once taught us.[90]

However, Kuroda believed that as early as 1953 Umemoto had departed from his own materialist philosophy of subjectivity by elaborating a mistaken theory of

[88]Kuroda, *Dialectics of praxis*, p. 22.
[89]Kazunobu Kobayashi, *Kuroda Kan'ichi-ron* [Essay on Kuroda Kan'ichi] (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1972).
[90]Kuroda, *Dialectics of praxis*, pp. 13–16.

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alienation in his book *On Human Existence—On Praxis*, which he expanded in his subsequent works.[91] Consequently, although he had been initially inspired by Umemoto's Marxism, Kuroda developed his own qualitatively different philosophy of subjectivity by criticizing his mentor.

According to Kuroda, the fundamental basis of Umemoto's distortion was his view of history as a process of the loss of the human essence ontologically caused by the historical birth of private ownership. This led to a Hegelian, circular philosophy of history represented in the schema 'whole human being who is not alienated (classless society) → alienated human being (class-divided society) → return to a whole human being (communist society)'.[92] Thus, in Kuroda's eyes, Umemoto shifted from his initial effort to conjugate existentialism with Marxism to an embrace of humanist essentialism.[93] Umemoto's new 'reversed Hegelianism'[94] had led him to the idea that a spontaneous understanding emerged from wage workers, arising from their intrinsic human nature, towards an awareness of their own alienation or loss of human essence. This leaning was reflected in Umemoto's theory as follows:

> The cognitive system of *Das Kapital* premises a dual structure wherein the commodity as an object of cognition is at the same time the commodity as a subject of cognition, namely, [the human being] as a commodity […] Within the contradiction brought forth from the externalization through the commoditization of labour power, [the human being] is compelled to cognize [themselves], not from outside of the commodity, but from the inside of it, namely, from the inside of things. The initial sensuous expression of this cognition from the inside appears as a negation of one's self. This is because this cognition is the first appearance of the return movement to one's self, a movement produced by the contradiction that what is not a thing has become a thing […] Science assists this process of self-awareness [of the human being] by an objective analysis of this movement of externalization.[95]
>
> Alienation represents the relationship in which the achievements of human praxis have objective independence in a form that cannot be controlled by the subjective volition of the individual, and come to control [the human being] as a producer. It is a relationship in which human freedom is negated by this control. The economic laws of bourgeois society have realized this relationship in its highest form […] Because the objective world itself that is developed under the principles of economics consists of [human beings] at the same time, inevitably produced within [the human being] is the moment of cognition which urges them to be conscious of alienation as alienation.[96]
>
> We cannot understand the existence of the proletariat if it cannot ask what it means to take account of the whole of human history once again in the

[91]Kuroda, *Praxiology*, p. 264.
[92]Kuroda, *Dialectics of praxis*, pp. 27–29.
[93]Ibid., pp. 37–38.
[94]Ibid., p. 60.
[95]Katsumi Umemoto, *Marukusu-sugi ni okeru shisō to kagaku* [Thought and science in Marxism] (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1964), pp. 107–108.
[96]Ibid., p. 124.

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> contemporary contradictions created in the objective world, and find in these contradictions the meaning of the whole to return to. In order for the proletariat to become a class *für sich* in the contemporary age, it will have to find the essence to return to in these contradictions.[97]

According to Kuroda, Umemoto was mistaken in thinking that the starting point of the worker's objective cognition of the proletariat's alienation is to be found in the subjective experience of alienation itself; in other words, that the *praxical* experience of alienation is at the same time the *logical* beginning of the philosophico-scientific system of Marxism.[98] Kuroda criticized this view as 'the error of turning an ontology into an epistemology'.[99] His *rejection of ontology* consisted in not believing that the worker acquires objective cognition of alienation by the mere fact of being historically (ontologically) turned into an object (commodity) by the capitalist system and consequently intuiting the loss of their original essence as a human being. Instead, his *embrace of epistemology* consisted in believing that the subject acquires objective cognition of their position through self-reflection (epistemologically), which is nothing other than Marxism's subjectivization or interiorization.[100]

For Kuroda, the objective cognition of the proletariat's alienation, and thus of the necessity of subverting capitalism, did not arise spontaneously from the highly contradictory position of the worker as subject (human being) and object (commodity) generated by the capitalist system itself, but was mediated by the initial abstractness of scientific cognition.[101] In this regard, Kuroda criticized Umemoto for treating reality as a process of 'man in history', as if the subject's consciousness were a direct consequence of the contradictions generated by history itself, rather than as a process of 'history in man', whereby a person subjectively interiorizes the movement of history and acts upon it.[102]

Therefore, Kuroda believed that the focus should be on 'how the worker sublates the subjectivistic nature of [their] self-cognition or the immediacy of [their] sensuous intuition […] through the subjectivization [or interiorization] of the objectified philosophico-scientific system [Marxism]'.[103] However, he added the nuance that this philosophico-scientific system must be based on the praxizing subject experiencing alienation.[104] In short, he identified two necessary conditions for the worker's objective knowledge of their own alienation as part of the proletarian class: (1) the worker must go through a direct revolt against the 'topos' in which they are placed, or a subjective struggle mediated by their sensuous intuition regarding the essence of this 'topos'; and (2) the worker must acquire scientific cognition of this 'topos' as springboarded by this intuition.[105] As Soriya Ōkubo puts it, for Kuroda, what made the proletariat

[97]Ibid., p. 139.
[98]Kuroda, *Dialectics of praxis*, pp. 51–56.
[99]Ibid., p. 55.
[100]Ibid., pp. 93–94.
[101]Ibid., p. 63.
[102]Ibid., pp. 95–96.
[103]Ibid., p. 74.
[104]Ibid., p. 88.
[105]Ibid., p. 94.

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interested in Marxism was its practical intuition, and what mediated the process of the proletariat's objective awareness of itself as a class was Marxism.[106]

Deep political implications arose from this philosophical discussion. Whereas for Kuroda the objective cognition of the need to subvert capitalism came from Marxism and thus from the vanguard party, for Umemoto what came from outside the worker was not the cognition of the need to subvert capitalism, but the ethical decision and commitment to subvert it as a historical mission. Umemoto's theory started from the worker's practice as the core revolutionary principle, and thus the main role of the vanguard party was to assist and inspire the proletariat, while Kudoda's theory started from Marxism as the core revolutionary principle, and thus the main role of the vanguard party was to guide and enlighten the proletariat. Hence, for Umemoto, the highest expression of revolutionary subjectivity was the ethical self-negation of the party in order to eradicate politics in support of the masses, while for Kuroda the party should not self-deny but constantly strengthen itself, since it was a community that had to embody the future communist society in the capitalist present. Kuroda's theory of subjectivity, as opposed to Umemoto's, was summed up in the following words:

> We, as proletarians, are actually and praxically created as the Subject of revolution when we subjectively grasp Marx's economic system that has such an objective=subjective structure, by placing ourselves in the *tachiba* [standpoint] of Marx who created this system, and grow out of our daily consciousness into revolutionary self-awareness, and when we attain self-awareness through the medium of organizational praxis which is the material foundation of this self-awareness and mediates it. Moreover, in the immediate sense, this *elevation in consciousness* of the wage worker [proletarian *für sich*], which is mediated by the assimilation of Marxist ideology or *Das Kapital* and concrete praxis, is impossible without starting with [their] subjective confrontation with the 'topos' in which [they are] placed. Neither can it be realized without the mediation of organizational working by a vanguard party which has proletarian class consciousness and struggles of the wage worker to organize [themselves] into the vanguard party. This is because a so-called proletarian *an sich*, though [they have] mentally and materially fallen into capitalist self-alienation, [are] completely unaware of this. The matter cannot be handled so easily as to say that 'cognition always starts from inside alienation'.[107]

The universal particularities of the Japanese case

The pattern identified by Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, whereby New Left groups embraced armed tactics when the wave of student revolutionary mobilizations of the long 1968 waned without tangible results,[108] was fulfilled in Japan. There are

[106] Soriya Ōkubo, 'Puroretaria undō ni okeru shutaisei no kakuritsu towa nanika [What does the establishment of subjectivity in the proletarian movement consist of?]', in *Kuroda Kan'ichi wo dō toraeruka*, (ed.) Ōkubo et al., p. 19.

[107] Kuroda, *Dialectics of praxis*, p. 119.

[108] Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, 'Unwanted children: Political violence and the cycle of protest in Italy, 1966–1973', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 14, 1986, pp. 607–632.

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factors shared by other societies where this pattern was also attained, such as Germany and Italy, that explain this phenomenon, especially the contrast between an extremely activated revolutionary subjectivity by highly ideologized sectors of society, on the one hand, and objective conditions that were unpropitious to the materialization of such a subjectivity due to the complete lack of crisis in the structures of capitalism, on the other. However, these factors do not explain why in Japan, unlike in Germany and Italy, this embrace of armed tactics mainly took the form of interfactional warfare.

Cultural factors have been suggested to explain the particularity of the Japanese case. Patricia Steinhoff, in her analysis of the deadly purge that happened within the Rengō Sekigun (United Red Army) in the early 1970s, has pointed to groupism and hierarchy as characteristic features of Japanese culture that partially explain the phenomenon. According to this interpretation, as Japanese people, party members felt a particularly powerful sense of responsibility to the group and an extreme fear of being isolated from it and therefore easily abandoned private objections, and followed formal authority regardless of the leader's actual performance, all of which kept them emotionally detached from their victims.[109] Moreover, Steinhoff compares the sessions of forced self-criticism that New Left activists often imposed on each other to 'the traditional *zen*-based samurai ethic of overcoming all physical limitations through a higher union of spirit and the body'.[110] It should be noted that Steinhoff was not alone in comparing Japanese New Left activists to samurais: Masahiro Nakanishi did so too, drawing a parallel between the samurais' equipment and the students' use of wooden poles (*gebabo*) and helmets to fight each other.[111] From these observations, Steinhoff concluded that:

> The personal dynamics among the individual members of the group and the universal social-psychological processes to which we are all vulnerable might have sparked such an internal conflict in any society, but the characteristics of Japanese social organization gave it added momentum.[112]

Without going into the accuracy or inaccuracy of these culturalist conclusions, I think it is appropriate here, now that we have explored the discursive elements surrounding the dynamics of Japanese New Left internal violence, to highlight the more ideological factors that help to explain the political phenomenon in question. Thus, the conception of this phenomenon will be freed from its confinement to area studies and may be used to understand similar phenomena on a universal level.

The main ideological component behind the self-destructive drift of the Japanese New Left was the centrality of the idea of self-criticism (*jiko hihan*). Formal self-criticism had already been practised within the JCP in the 1950s, but in the late 1960s the New Left went a step further by conceiving of the individual's subjective self-transformation as the core channel of social transformation. This was a central value

[109]Patricia Steinhoff, 'Death by defeatism and other fables: The social dynamics of the Rengō Sekigun Purge', in *Japanese social organization*, (ed.) Takie Sugiyama Lebra (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), pp. 206–217.

[110]Ibid., p. 113.

[111]Nakanishi, 'Kakumaru—Portrait of an ultra-radical group', pp. 213–214.

[112]Steinhoff, 'Death by defeatism and other fables', p. 223.

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shared by all sectors of the movement, whether in its more horizontal variants such as the Zenkyōtō[113] (All-Campus Joint Struggle Committees) or its more vertical ones such as the Kakumaru-ha, the Chūkaku-ha, and the Rengō Sekigun. This introspective tendency of the Japanese New Left may be due in part to a victimizer mentality stemming from a strong sense of responsibility for the weak internal opposition to Japanese prewar fascism and its expansionist drift in Asia, and for the perception that an increasingly powerful Japan was again expanding its influence in the continent in the postwar period as an accomplice to American imperialism.

Umemoto, as an intellectual of the Japanese New Left, was the first to introduce the centrality of subjectivity (*shutaisei*) as the individual's self-negation (*jiko hitei*) into the mainly objectivist Marxism of the immediate postwar period led by the JCP. When the New Left movement emerged in the late 1950s as a result of its political break with the JCP, this break went hand in hand with the centrality of subjectivity that Umemoto had claimed years earlier. Then, in the 1960s, the idea of subjectivity as self-negation was developed and interpreted in multiple ways by different sectors of the New Left. Some assembly movements, such as the Zenkyōtō, materialized this idea in the free self-criticism and self-transformation of activists in the immediate context of their everyday political struggle, and Umemoto stated that he was sympathetic to this trend.[114] However, when the idea of subjectivity as self-negation was not framed in a horizontal context in which self-criticism emanated voluntarily from the individual but was externally imposed, as was the case in those sectors of the New Left that were organized through Leninist democratic centralism such as the Kakumaru-ha and the Chūkaku-ha, they often went as far as to employ physical violence as a complement to forced self-criticism.

However, the pre-eminence of physical violence as a political tool was widespread in the Japanese New Left as a whole. In addition to being a consequence of the strong feeling that the Japanese were involved in the Vietnam War through their nation's logistical support for the United States, and of a general disdain for intellectualism,[115] New Leftist violence was also a consequence of deep-rooted male chauvinism. In this regard, Akira Asada draws a comparative reflection to illustrate this point and its consequences: 'In Japan […] the romanticism of the movement was more martial and male-chauvinist [than in the West]. So when its impetus was frustrated, it turned more quickly and disastrously to internal violence.'[116] As Setsu Shigematsu explains, a feminist movement or *ribu* would emerge in 1970s Japan out of the criticism of such New Leftist male chauvinism, seen as inextricably related to self-negation:

> *Ribu* women often referred to the common practice among New Left men of bragging and testing each other by saying, 'Hey, were you there during the fight against X, Y, or Z, on such and such day?' This form of testing and competing with each other was the way to prove their masculinity and revolutionary intent.

[113] Abridgement of Zengaku Kyōtō Kaigi.

[114] Umemoto, 'Nani wo kakumei suru no ka', pp. 118–120.

[115] For insight into the general disdain for intellectualism and even for words, see Ferran de Vargas, 'Throwing ideology away: Yoshimoto Takaaki's theory of *taishū* and Terayama Shūji's film parody of the people', *Japan Forum* (2023), online.

[116] Akira Asada, 'A Left within the place of nothingness', *New Left Review*, no. 5, Sep/Oct 2000, p. 19.

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> They were 'man enough' if they could prove themselves in the battles against the riot police and against other leftist men. The men who fled from violence were deemed cowardly, unmanly, and not devoted enough to the revolution […]
>
> The *ribu* women saw that the logical extension of [the] practice of self-negation was the tendency toward self-destruction. This willingness to sacrifice and destroy oneself for the sake of justice was what *ribu* activists identified as a historical repetition of a masculine mode of constituting a homosocial identity through displaying loyalty toward one's male counterparts. It was a male-centered social formation that allowed men (and women) to prove themselves by cutting themselves off from other men, women, and children.[117]

Chelsea Szendi Schieder provides some illustrative, concrete examples of what *ribu* women criticized that are directly related to the violent feud between the New Left sects exposed in this article. During the occupation and barricading of the University of Tokyo, graffiti on a wall read: 'With this, the University of Tokyo has also become a man'. In other graffiti, a student denigrated the Kakumaru-ha, which, as mentioned before, did not consider the occupation as strategically essential and therefore decided not to commit itself to its defence at all costs: 'Male University of Tokyo fought. Female Kakumaru does not fight'. Later, in a display of extremely violent masculinity, some Kakumaru-ha members attacked a female member of the Chūkaku-ha by raping her. 'Using rape and sexual violence to punish women was an everyday thing,' recalled one woman involved in the Japanese New Left.[118]

In conclusion, the combination of a kind of political subjectivism obsessed with self-transformation and individual self-perfection, on the one hand, and the lack of individual autonomy characteristic of certain Marxist-Leninist organizations, on the other, plus the impetus of a prevailing male chauvinism extolling physical violence, proved lethal in Japan. The idea of self-transformation per se was not the problem. The problem was rather the idea of *forcibly making* others self-transform.

Eventually, *uchigeba* or internal fighting between New Left groups left over a thousand gravely wounded[119] and around 113 dead; 71 Kakumaru-ha members were killed by the Chūkaku-ha and its ally Kaihō-ha (Liberation Faction), and 15 members of the Chūkaku-ha and the Kaihō-ha were killed by the Kakumaru-ha. The conflict reached its peak in 1975 with 21 deaths,[120] including that of the Chūkaku-ha leader Honda on 14 March 1975, brutally killed in his apartment in retribution for the death of a senior member of the Kakumaru-ha. Rather than being attenuated, the Chūkaku-ha paramilitary tendency was accentuated by the assassination of Honda and the new leadership of Shimizu Takeo, who had written a book entitled *The Logic of Civil War and Armament*

[117]Setsu Shigematsu, *Scream from the shadows. The women's liberation movement in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), pp. 55–56.

[118]Schieder, *Coed revolution*, p. 106, p. 108.

[119]Kevin Coogan and Claudia Derichs, *Tracing Japanese leftist political activism (1957–2017). The boomerang flying transnational* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 78.

[120]Ara, *Shin Sayoku to wa nani datta no ka*, p. 186.

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(*Nairan to busō no ronri*, 1971).[121] More than half of the deaths in 1975, 14 in total, were murders of Kakumaru-ha members to avenge Honda.[122]

The police made dozens of arrests related to *uchigeba* but, according to William Andrews, they could have made dozens more: they were aware of the self-inflicted damage of *uchigeba* to the reputation of the New Left, and were often happy to release details of the latest incidents to the press.[123] Umemoto's fears were more than realized, and the Japanese population increasingly distanced itself from a violent New Left, perceived as similar to the yakuza. A 1994 survey of former student activists found that 40 per cent declared that *uchigeba* was the reason they had ceased their involvement in activism, while only 7.4 per cent cited graduation, employment, or marriage.[124] Since the 1970s, the perception that protest movements—not to mention the idea of revolution—are a dangerous thing has been widespread in Japanese society.[125] As Steinhoff points out, the retrospective negative collective memory of the whole period of student conflict has served to reinforce an outcome in favour of social order and helped weaken the potential for social conflict in Japan.[126]

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[121]Ikegami and Satō, *Gekidō*, pp. 195–196. Shimizu published the book under the pseudonym Tsukui Yoshikazu.

[122]Chian Fōramu, *Kagekiha Jikenbo 40 nen shi* [40-year history of extremist case files] (Tokyo: Tachibana Shobō, 2001), pp. 70–72.

[123]Andrews, *Dissenting Japan*, p. 156.

[124]Schieder, *Coed revolution*, p. 126.

[125]Eiji Oguma, *Shakai wo kaeru ni wa* [To change society] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2012), p. 153.

[126]Patricia G. Steinhoff, 'Memories of New Left protest', *Contemporary Japan*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2013, p. 163.

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