I have often wondered what lies behind that craving for political freedom which in all ages has spurred men to deeds that justly rank among the most momentous in human history; what are the feelings that engender and nurture it. It is quite understandable that when a nation is badly governed it should develop a wish to govern itself. But a desire for independence of this kind, stemming as it does from a specific, removable cause—the evil practices of a despotic government—is bound to be short-lived. Once the circumstances giving rise to it have passed away, it languishes and what at first sight is a genuine love of liberty proves to have been merely hatred of a tyrant. . . . Nor do I think a genuine love of freedom is ever quickened by the prospect of material rewards; indeed, that prospect is often dubious, anyhow as regards the immediate future. . . . What has made so many men, since untold ages, stake their all on liberty is its intrinsic glamour, a fascination it has in itself, apart from all “practical” considerations. . . .

—Alexis de Tocqueville, The Old Regime and the French Revolution

Alexis de Tocqueville is one of those truly great thinkers whose testimonials to the mysteries of history are as instructive to us as they are brilliant. In the passage quoted above, he is referring, of course, to the French Revolution. Readers, especially those familiar with academic discussions of modern Japanese history, might be a bit surprised to see Tocqueville’s paean to the glamour of liberty prefacing a book on the political thought and action during the two decades following the Meiji Restoration, despite the fact that it surely was no less a momentous event than the French Revolution, in terms of its impact on subsequent human history. The early Meiji “revolu-
tion,” that traversed roughly two decades beginning with the de jure collapse of the early modern sociopolitical order in 1868, and ending with the official pronouncement of the Japanese empire reconstituted as a constitutional monarchy in 1889, ultimately gave rise to the world’s second richest nation; one of the global centers for artistic, intellectual, and cultural achievements; and a world empire that helped plunge the world into the most destructive and transformative war that mankind has ever seen. And yet, freedom and civil rights are not the notions often associated with this revolution. Yes, there were Japanese who craved and fought for the freedom to speak their minds, to write down their thoughts, to pursue their goals in life without hindrance from political authority, and who absorbed Euro-American theories of liberalism and democratic theory and sought to transplant them in Japanese soil. Nonetheless, these figures are portrayed in most histories of modern Japan as non-mainstream or out-of-sync, to be admired and cherished as examples for contemporary Japanese to follow, but divorced from larger trends. Looming large above the people in most accounts of the modern Japanese experience is, instead, the state. In these accounts, if the state is not seen as a powerful, oppressive institution that brooked little real opposition, then it is seen as a type of prodigy that anticipated what the people would have wanted and proceeded to give them just that, effectively countermanding any potential opposition.

But was this really the case? Did the state and its enlightened officials during the Meiji period (1868–1911)—such unquestionably astute and talented men as Ōkubo Toshimichi, Itō Hirobumi, and Inoue Kowashi—write the dialogue, prepare props, build the sets, and even employ themselves as actors, in order to present the “Great Drama” of Japan’s modernization for the enjoyment and edification of the sometimes unruly and sometimes appreciative audience, the Japanese people? The objective of this book is to level a challenge against this view. I contend that the Japanese of the early Meiji period—not only exceptional thinkers such as Ueki Emori and Fukuzawa Yukichi, but the “ordinary” Japanese, albeit those who were reasonably literate, not lacking in economic means, and eager to join in civic and political activities—had a significant say in how this drama was written, produced, and performed. The tale told below seeks to illustrate that the intrinsic “glamour” of freedom of which Tocqueville spoke was not a sentiment alien to a large number of the politically conscious Japanese operating outside the state.
The present study was originally conceived as a history of the Popular Rights Movement (*jiyū minka undō*), a broad range of Meiji-period activities demanding political liberty and civil rights between roughly 1871 and 1890. In the course of research, however, it became increasingly evident that, while the Popular Rights Movement still possesses integrity as a heuristic category and in fact was the most prevalent label with which state leaders and civilian opinion-makers characterized a wide range of opposition movements that took place in the 1870s and 1880s, the term is not necessarily the most useful in investigating the discursive and institutional activities of civilian critics. The historiography of the Popular Rights Movement suffers from a propensity toward a teleological narrative that puts the so-called violent incidents (*gekka jiken*)—the Fukushima Incident (1882), Chichibu Incident (1884), Kabasan Incident (1884), and other events involving armed uprisings and illegal, aggressive activism against the state authorities on the part of civilians, and government persecution resulting in deaths or large-scale imprisonments of civilian activists—as the culminating point of the Movement. This narrative presents a lopsided view of the actual influence of radical activism among Popular Rights sympathizers, and neglects to adequately account for the connection between these violent incidents and the broader discursive and institutional movement toward establishment of a constitutional government and a national parliament. Moreover, the major violent incidents are, upon closer inspection, so different from one another that serious doubts are raised about placing them in one all-encompassing category. The Fukushima Incident, for instance, seems to be constituted of, for the most part, regional financial disputes among the local notables, and the subsequent manipulation of these disputes by prefectural governor Mishima Michitsune to crack down on the Liberal Party. The Chichibu Incident has all the hallmarks of an early modern peasant uprising, with the Poor People’s Party, a debtor’s organization, playing an important role. The Kabasan Incident was a failed effort at an act of terrorism directed at Mishima, at that time governor of Tochigi prefecture. Of course, there were many threads in terms of person-

1. For an English-language study that assumes this perspective, see Bowen, *Rebellion and Democracy in Meiji Japan*.
2. For a classic analysis of *gekka jiken* as a whole, see Gotō, “Meiji jūshichinen no gekka shojiken ni tsuite.” Frequently cited studies of the Fukushima Incident include
nel, motivation, and networks of support that connected these incidents to one another, but the differences among them have to be weighed against the commonalities. For this reason, I have made a perhaps controversial decision not to include these violent incidents within the bounds of my investigation.

The focus of the present study is instead on theories, arguments, and polemics marshaled in support of a representative system of government, their gradual domination of the public sphere in 1870s and early 1880s Japan, and political activities and organizations surrounding the so-called “movement to establish a national assembly” (kokkai kaisetsu undō), referred to throughout this study as the “parliamentarian movement.” The project, reconceived this way, is actually wider in scope than the general history of the Popular Rights Movement as it is usually written. It incorporates into its subject the writings, utterances, and activities of those who operated outside the Movement, including state officials as well as opinion-makers critical of the “radical” theories espoused by Popular Rights activists. Parliamentarian discourse was not a monopoly of local political activists or members of urban academic associations. State officials, especially during the first decade of the Meiji period, were often privileged in their access to European and American political theories. The efforts by the state leaders to keep certain types of knowledge within the confines of the state were repeatedly subverted. True, there was only a small minority of “radical” thinkers who envisioned modern Japan as a republican polity in which the emperor would stand outside the actual running of the government. In the same vein, there was only a small minority of state officials and civilian ideologues who absolutely rejected any form of parliamentarian government as a possible model for Meiji Japan’s political system. Yet, the disagreements within the parliamentarian discourse, discounting these two “radical” and “reactionary” extremes, were sub-

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Shimoyama, “Fukushima jiken shōron”; idem, “Fukushima jiken oboe-gaki”; Takahashi, Fukushima jiken; and Shōji, Fukushima jiyū minken undōshi. For a more recent regionally-oriented perspective on the incident, see Tasaki, “Boshin kara minken e: Aizu chihō no Meiji ishin.” For a general introduction to the Chichibu Incident, see Inoue Kōji, Chichibu jiken. For recent Japanese-language studies problematizing the connection between the Chichibu Incident and the Popular Rights Movement, see Moriyama Gunjirō, Minshū hōki to matsuri and Inada Masahiro, Nihon kindai seiritsu-ki no minshū undō. For studies of the Kabasan Incident, see Miura and Tsukada, Kabasan jiken kenkyū and Takahashi, Kabasan jiken to seinen gunzō.
stantial. These differences had by no means negligible consequences. Labels such as “left” and “right” as well as “liberal” and “conservative” are not particularly helpful in understanding them. In the following chapters I seek to delineate meaningful differences among the positions on establishing a national assembly in Japan, and to explicate what these differences were. As a logical consequence of this approach, this study devotes a substantial proportion of the chapters to the ideas and actions of the Meiji state. I will also clearly establish that the broad consensus on the future form of the Japanese political system that emerged out of the parliamentarian movement and its discourse was not reflected in the Meiji state’s constitutional ideology.

For the two decades between the official announcement of the Restoration and the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution, parliamentarian ideas played an important role in shaping not only the Japanese political system but also the identity of the Japanese as members of a modern nation-state. Introduction, dissemination, and flourishing of parliamentarian discourse through the networks of communication crisscrossing the state and civil society were in themselves processes constitutive of the public sphere. These processes, in turn, were crucial in inculcating the sense of belonging to a nation. In this narrative, the public sphere is identified as the *locus vivendi* for the Japanese people in which both their national consciousness and conceptions of the state and civil society were shaped, contested, and accepted.

The state and civil society in modern Japan were interconnected discursively and materially through myriad forms of communication, information, personnel exchange, and infrastructure. The public sphere was a mediating agency as well as a field of discourse and action in which the members of the state and civil society could participate and interact. The Meiji state devoted much energy to erecting barriers between the state and civil society, ensuring that the connection between the two was maintained only through certain channels. It was by no means entirely successful in doing this, as we shall see in the following chapters.

**Theoretical Considerations**

The present study reformulates the state-society relationship in Meiji Japan by adapting for the first time in the English language the notions of “civil society” and “public sphere” to the historical con-
text of late nineteenth-century Japan. Following Charles Taylor, “civil society” is defined as “a web of autonomous associations of people, independent of the state, which [binds] citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their mere existence or action [can] have an effect on public policy.” Taylor goes on to identify some salient characteristics of civil society. In order for it to function properly, the free associations that comprise it should not be under the tutelage of state power. Such free associations provide building blocks for the society to construct itself and networks through which it can coordinate its actions. In this way they can determine or influence the course of public policy. Taylor presents civil society as something larger than an aggregate of private interests. From this perspective, the distinction between “society” and “civil society” lies not so much in class differences as in the public consciousness and organizational capacity of the latter’s constituents. This view of civil society should be distinguished from one that emphasizes its market-oriented economic activities and regards the ideal role of the state as that of a night watchman.

It must be noted that, in this study, civil society is not necessarily characterized as a herald of a democratic polity, nor is it genetically linked to liberal values. In Japanese, the term “civil society” as used here is not translated as shimin shakai 市民社会, with its connotations of a society composed of politically autonomous citizens (shimin). Instead I opt for the Japanese phrase that Meiji-period contemporaries actually used: minkan shakai 民間社会 or simply minkan. The question of whether there were European-style “citizens” in late nineteenth-century Japan is not going to be settled easily. The present study will not address the applicability of the concept shimin shakai to Meiji Japanese society, which would require a whole new project with a different research design. The critical demarcation line here is between the state (“officialdom,” the realm of kan 官) and social elements that exist outside the state (“civilian sector,” the sphere of minkan 民間), rather than between the absolutist state and the bourgeoisie following the classical Marxist formulation, or, as in the traditional Confucian worldview, between the government and the people as objects of statecraft. Needless to say, the barrier between kan and minkan was

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4. Ibid., 208–9.
porous and mutually penetrable in the early Meiji period, making it possible for them to exchange ideas and personages.

Indeed, the patterns of civil society we observe in Meiji Japan resonate with those found in Hegel’s classical model of state and civil society. Hegel envisioned a vibrant, robust civil society, more or less independent from the state. At the same time he thought that only bureaucratic state officials could really know and act upon “public interests.” He apparently did not pay much attention to the possibility that a strong civil society might be able to challenge the state in precisely this domain of determining public interests. The processes the Meiji state used to design and implement its modernizing projects required active participation by members of Japanese society. However, they did not see their interests as engaged in a zero-sum game against those of the state, in a way that would be familiar to, say, the ideologues of contemporary American “conservatism.” As Víctor Pérez-Díaz perceptively observes, “the general tendency toward state growth over the last two hundred years or so has been supported by a vision of the state as the bearer of a moral project, which has been called by different names—nationalism, modernization, social reform, among others.” Yet, already in the first two decades after the modern “state” came into being, civil society in Japan began to challenge the right of the state to determine “public interests” and intervene in the realization of these interests. The state and civil society in early Meiji Japan were indeed engaged in monumental struggles to possess the soul of the Japanese nation. But these struggles did not result in a complete triumph of one side over the other. They were fought as much in the realm of discourse and ideology as on the terrain of institutions and collective movements.

Much of the critical discourse directed at the state in the early Meiji period took shape in various open forums, such as newspapers and lecture meetings, where the members of civil society met and discussed matters of common concern with one another or with the agents of the state. We define these open forums as the “public sphere,” following Jürgen Habermas’s now classic conceptualiza-

5. Recently some political theorists and sociologists have attempted to retrieve Hegel’s theories of state and civil society from the widely accepted interpretation of them as an apologia for authoritarianism. Cf. Cohen and Arato, Civil Society and Political Theory; Pérez-Díaz, The Return of Civil Society, 55–100.
He defines the public sphere as a “realm of social life” that “mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as the bearer of public opinion.” Public opinion, in turn, refers to “the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally—and in periodic elections, formally as well—practices vis-à-vis the ruling structure organized in the form of a state.” Habermas sharply distinguishes the “public” functions of the state from activities of this public sphere, stressing the latter’s roots in the unregulated and manipulation-free public discussions among private individuals. Looking at the early modern history of Europe, Habermas identifies several institutions and spaces as elements of the public sphere: coffeehouses, teahouses, salons, galleries, museums, literary societies, and theaters. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, these were linked to the concurrent profusion of journals, magazines, pamphlets, and other forms of print media. The evolution of the public sphere presaged and in many ways facilitated the transformation from absolutist to constitutional political systems in Europe.

Likewise, in early Meiji Japan, newspapers, journals, public lectures, academic and literary associations, and institutions such as prefectural assemblies and political parties served as components of the newly emerging public sphere. The public sphere so defined maintained a considerable degree of autonomy from both the state and traditional social divisions based on status and regions. Indeed, “public opinion” as we understand it was brought into existence by this public sphere.

The ambivalent response of the Meiji state to public opinion is, again, strongly reminiscent of Hegel’s characterization of public opinion. It, according to Hegel, is “a repository of . . . the eternal, substantive principles of justice, the true content and result of legislation, the whole constitution, and the general position of the state.” Thus it commands respect. At the same time, as public opinion becomes representative of “concrete arguments about felt wants, public affairs, the organization of the state, and relations of parties within it,” it is “infected by all the accidents of opinion, by its ignorance and perversity, by its mistakes and falsity of judgments,” and thus deserving of contempt.

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7. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.
sphere, as can be seen in its initial support for, and later reluctance to ignore, the discourse of kōgi yoron (public opinion or public deliberation). However, state leaders tried their very best to control and limit the development of the public sphere when it began to channel critical discourse from civil society and challenged their self-proclaimed primacy over the process of national development.

The Hegelian conception of the state-society relationship does contain “authoritarian” features that seem unacceptable for ethical as well as political reasons to proponents of democracy and popular sovereignty. Surely few contemporary American citizens would accept without question the idea that the state is a depository of “universal reason.” Yet, it remains a powerful theoretical tool for examining Meiji Japan. The major insight of the Hegelian theory is that it postulates the state and civil society as existing autonomously from one another but also overlapping with one another through mediating spaces, among which Hegel counted representative institutions, for example, a parliament. The Hegelian view that the state had to be the final arbiter of public interests also captures well the views maintained by state leaders in Meiji Japan. Indeed, the antinomy of the Hegelian theory in itself prefigures the discomfiting dilemma faced by Japanese state leaders, who, despite their “progressive” acknowledgment of the need for a robust and autonomous civil society, struggled against surrendering to civilian critics their supreme right.

Two points in applying Habermas’s concept of the public sphere to the history of early Meiji Japan need to be clarified. First, Habermas identifies the public sphere of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe as a “category of bourgeois society.” In the case of Japan, however, creation of an integrated nation-state in many ways predated the growth of the bourgeoisie. It was no accident that early Meiji Japanese were seemingly less preoccupied with the internal life of the private man and more concerned with the question of public action.\textsuperscript{10} I argue that the specific type of public sphere developed in early Meiji Japan can best be construed as a “national public sphere” (kokumin kōkyōken). The emerging awareness of Japan as a modern nation-state among participants in political discourse was a process organically intertwined with the growth of the national

\textsuperscript{10} Such preoccupation with internal life, however, did manifest itself in late Meiji Japan, e.g., in literary works such as the entire genre of “I-novels” (shishōsetsu), the “psychological” fictions of Shimazaki Tōson and Natsume Sōseki, and so on.
public sphere. The citizen-subjects (kokumin) were not fully in existence at the end of the 1880s. Further efforts at building ideological programs and institutions of national integration on the part of the state were needed. In this project of national integration Japan’s imperialist wars against China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905) played significant roles, but they remain outside the scope of this book.

By discussing and debating the ultimate political question, that is, what the Japanese political system should be like, and by participating in various political and cultural activities with parliamentarian themes, such as public lecture meetings, production and consumption of newspapers and journals, and, of course, party activism, Japanese people from divergent class and regional backgrounds came to see themselves as members of a shared imaginary space. This imaginary space, the “national public sphere,” in time gained concrete materiality as it came to be institutionalized and systematized in the course of conflict and collaboration between the state and civil society. To put it another way, parliamentarian discourse, which had permeated public opinion by 1881, was transformed into political ideologies by the Meiji state on the one hand and by the opposition parties on the other. These ideologies supplied principles of conduct and justifications of systemic interaction under the “Meiji constitutional system,” the structures of which were consolidated in the aftermath of the parliamentarian movement. In this way, parliamentarianism is revealed to have shaped the contours of the Japanese political system that came into being with the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution in 1889 and the implementation of the First General Election in 1890.

Second, Habermas does not argue that the public sphere emerged only with the advent of modern society. The public sphere had been around for most of the history of human civilizations, in Europe as well as in Japan. Nor am I interested in insisting that the Meiji “public” arising out of Restoration-era modernizing reforms and societal change was qualitatively “advanced” over the public of early modern Japan. What I am concerned with here are the patterns of transformation from one dominant type of public sphere to another.

The reader may notice that I also deliberately avoid the term “democracy” in discussing parliamentarian discourse and movement. Here again, the actual vocabulary employed by Japanese of the Meiji period is given primacy. They did speak of “popular rights” (minken) and, less frequently, of “freedom” (jiyū), but the word “democracy”
had few places in the lexicography of the early Meiji Japanese. In this regard, I turn to Mary Elizabeth Berry's argument that the inner logic of the public sphere in Japanese history can be properly appreciated only if we separate it from the "telos of democracy." Berry argues, in short, that there were plenty of criticisms, oppositions, and even violent revolts against the state in Meiji Japan (and in subsequent periods), but they did not lead to qualitative changes in the nature of the state-society relationship. The public sphere in Japanese history has been the space "where leadership was scrutinized and disciplined by criticism." Protection and maintenance of the "integrity of rulers" rather than direct seizure of power by the populace has been the objective of critical discourses found in the public sphere.

Berry's argument is persuasive and provides an excellent corrective to the tendency among both English-language and Japanese-language historians to cast the history of Japan in the mold of the European standard of "progress," from despotism and feudalism to democracy and industrial capitalism, and to overemphasize the epistemic and institutional rupture between early modern and modern Japan. Nevertheless, the implication of her argument might lead one toward a portrait of Japan still dominated by the state, not because of its inherent strengths, but because its critics had never overcome the prescribed perimeters for systemic transformation. In this view, the "opposition" or even "people" may have wanted a new government, but they really did not want the political system to be completely transformed. However, I argue that the desire for change in the entire political system was widespread, at least in the decades under consideration in this book. The absence of true popular sovereignty in modern Japan, until the promulgation of the "Peace Constitution" in 1947, does not necessarily prove that there were no significant, qualitative changes in the public sphere in preceding decades, and that the nature of the relationship between the state and society was also significantly transformed, in such a way that the state always had to compromise with public opinion and critics in civil society.

The position I take in this study is perhaps closest to one that Berry in her essay identifies as "Gradualist," one that postulates a gradual attainment of leverage by the society against the state over the course

12. Ibid., 139.
of modern history. In substance, though, the Gradualist position as she delineates it still assumes the presence of the overwhelmingly powerful state. For the decades under consideration, we are instead faced with the weak and disorganized state, engaged in an exhausting tug-of-war with the rapidly mutating public sphere and vibrant civil society, weathering armed rebellions, vociferous attacks from the media, and two internal crises that could have destroyed less determined and shrewd men. Thus, it was not really the weak society that struggled against the powerful state and wrested concessions from the latter. In the picture that emerges in the present study, it was the weak state that, by carefully modulating its strategies of compromise and coercion, steadily gained ground against the society.

Moreover, it was not genetically inscribed into this national public sphere that its constituents from civil society would accept as inevitable the compromise and collusion with the state. The parliamen-
tarian opposition did not “lose out” to the state because it was too weak, too fragmented, or too ideologically rigid, as most existing works on the Popular Rights Movement would have it. Indeed, just the reverse may be argued. It was really the strength of parliamen-
tarian discourse, movements, and organizations that compelled the Meiji state to consolidate its ideologies and to establish institutional means to co-opt and suppress civil society. The Meiji state was constrained from adopting extreme measures at both poles: a radical authoritarian solution that would have involved a complete suppression of the critical public sphere with flagrantly violent means, which would have proved to be impractical not to mention dangerous; and a complete capitulation to the demands of parliamen-
tarian forces, creating a polity perhaps far more liberal and open to political participation than were most of the European “democracies” in the late nineteenth century. In the eyes of state leaders, the latter choice would have meant not only loss of their power, for which they fought hard and long, but also would have meant allowing the sociopolitical order of Japan to disintegrate into the chaos and unpredictability of the last days of the Tokugawa shogunate, or even worse, of the French Revolutionary Terror. It was really in the midst of struggles with critical “public opinion” and the political exigencies that grew out of it that the Meiji state learned all its tactics, strategies, and tricks to

13. Ibid., 135–36.
mix “whips and candies” in their handling of the Japanese public. The Meiji constitutional system, with its Imperial Constitution, was as much a product of government leaders’ response to parliamentarianism in the national public sphere as it was of their own foresight. Berry is correct in that the Japanese public sphere was rather deficient in terms of appropriating “democracy,” but the Japanese public did think about, and act upon, freedom to change the basic framework of the political order in which they lived. It is debatable whether we can call the inculcation of this freedom an exercise in democracy, although without a basic commitment to it the most beautifully liberal constitution would be merely a piece of paper, easily subverted by a “democratic” government, say, fighting a “war on terrorism.”

Finally, a comment about two heuristic concepts used throughout the book, “discourse” and “ideology,” is due. These terms, often employed interchangeably in many scholarly works, are clearly distinguished from each other in this book. “Discourse” has become accepted as a unit of analysis in most social science disciplines, and most recently in history as well. “Discourse” as used in the following chapters refers to acts of communication, including utterances (speeches, talks, and discussions) and writings (declarations, essays, polemics, and theoretical treatises) that occur in a historically determined social setting. Michel Foucault’s refinement of the term as constituting technologies, strategies, and tactics of power, exercised among various agents of a society and apparently applicable to the entire range of human behavior, has been influential among historians, despite, or perhaps because of, his severe criticisms of the usual approaches of historical investigation.14 Insightful as it is, however, Foucault’s theory tends to neglect the distinction between the relative capacities of the institutions that exercise power, or between coercive and manipulative power. Indeed, the Foucauldian power is too diffuse and “everywhere” to allow one to talk meaningfully

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14. Foucault argued that in order to analyze the “concrete nature of power,” one should take into account “all that had hitherto remained outside the field of political analysis.” Citing the putative subjects of his research, he added, “psychiatric internment, the mental normalization of individuals, and penal institutions have no doubt a fairly limited importance if one is only looking for their economic significance. On the other hand, they are undoubtedly essential to the general functioning of the wheels of power” (Foucault, The Foucault Reader, 56–58).
of “the state” or “society” as analytical categories.\textsuperscript{15} “Discourse” is therefore reconceived here as an instrument for exercising power, employed by the agents of the state and civil society that have specific directional flow, magnitudes of effect, or “concentration points.”

“Ideology,” on the other hand, is stripped of its Marxist connotation of “false consciousness” and identified here as a belief system, a worldview or a set of theoretical positions that lends logic, coherence, rationality, and meaning to one’s actions. Unlike “discourse,” “ideology” is explicitly linked to an institutional or organizational locus. A broad, culture-oriented definition of the term is rejected, for it, like an overly expansive concept of discourse, makes distinctions among the loci of power virtually meaningless.\textsuperscript{16} The narrative of struggles over the notion of parliamentarianism recounted in the following chapters may be described as a history of discursive interaction between the state and civil society, and of how this discourse crystallized into ideological positions as the institutional bases of the state and civil society became solidified. Thus, the members of a civic association in early Meiji Japan, meeting regularly, discussing John Stuart Mill’s theories, and debating the latter’s applicability to the Japanese situation, are involved in the consumption and production of political discourse, but not ideology. When the members resolve to write a platform that explicitly addresses the desirability of creating in Japan the kind of parliamentary system that Mill theorized about, and call for activities to promote its parliamentary stance, the platform of this association now contains its ideology.

\textit{Historiographical Considerations}

The number of Japanese-language studies on the Popular Rights Movement is immense, making even a cursory examination of the general literature impossible.\textsuperscript{17} Yet, among many insightful and

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Giddens, “Foucault, Nietzsche and Marx,” in \textit{Politics, Sociology and Social Theory}.

\textsuperscript{16} This is the problem with Clifford Geertz’s otherwise penetrating study of ideology as “a cultural system” (Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures}).

\textsuperscript{17} The most extensive bibliography of books and articles related to the Popular Rights Movement lists more than 6,000 titles, even though it only contains research
Introduction

through Japanese-language studies written on the subject, only a select few employ an interpretive framework that encompasses the state, civil society, and their interactions. One immediate consequence of this is that, despite the phenomenal, sometimes downright exhaustive, amount of research Japanese historians have lavished on the minutest details of the Popular Rights Movement, its overall portrayal tends to be bound to rigid interpretive schemes.

The mainstream interpretation of the Popular Rights Movement in English-language works still remains influenced by pioneering Marxist studies written in the prewar and immediate postwar periods. Although Marxist historians have advanced varied interpretations, they commonly characterize the Popular Rights Movement as a failed attempt at a bourgeois democratic revolution. Marxist historians view the violent incidents as the orthodox continuation of the parliamentarian efflorescence of the late 1870s and early 1880s, and therefore as the most meaningful approximations of a bourgeois democratic movement in modern Japan. Conversely, they characterize the (ex-) samurai activists and the political parties as “feudalistic” and “backward-looking.”

They downplay institutional and political aspects while providing detailed studies of its socioeconomic determinants and the events to which a model of “bourgeois democratic revolution” can be best applied. As a result, Marxist historians tend to highlight the ultimate weakness and fragility of the Popular Rights Movement, supporting the thesis that it was a “failure.” Miki-so Hane and Robert Scalapino, among others, have adopted interpretations close to the classical Marxist schemata, seeing the Popular Rights Movement basically as a struggle among the elites to hold

conducted up to 1983 (Jiyū minken hyakunen zenkoku shūkai iinkai, ed. Jiyū minken undō).

18. Gotō, Jiyū minken (1983); idem, Jiyū minken (1971); idem, “Jiyū minken undō kenkyū no kadaitei: Shimoyama Saburō-shi no hihan ni kōtaete”; idem, Jiyū minken undō no tenkai; idem, “Jiyū minken undō to nōmin ikki”; idem, Jiyū minken (1971); idem, “Shizoku minken no rekishiteki hyōka”; Hirano, Jiyū minken to sono hatten; idem, Burujoa minshushugi kakumei; Shimoyama, “Jiyū minken undō”; idem, “Minken undō ni tsuite”; idem, “Minken undō nōto”; Tōyama, Jiyū minken to gendai; idem, “Jiyū minken undō ni okeru shizokuteki yōso.” The above list represents only a fraction of the important Marxist studies on the Popular Rights Movement, just enough to illustrate its major orientations and trends. The same goes for the works of the minshūshi school and the empiricists listed in notes 10 and 11. In English, Roger Bowen has conducted research on the three gekka jiken—the Fukushima, Chichibu, and Kabasan Incidents—in this mode of analysis (Rebellion and Democracy in Meiji Japan).
onto state power, despite the infusion of activism by local farmers and merchants.19

In my view, such a sweeping assessment of the Popular Rights Movement in early Meiji Japan is exaggerated at best, distorting at worst. The view that parliamentarian movement and political mobilization of the local notables and urban intellectuals can be considered a “bourgeois democratic movement” may be a persuasive thesis. However, the majority of Marxist scholarship focuses on the *gekka jiken*, generally ignoring the national efflorescence of parliamentarian discourse and activism in the 1870s and 1880s. In the English language, Bowen’s study focuses on the *gekka jiken* as an expression of bourgeois democratic ideas and movement. As Stephen Vlastos points out, however, it is doubtful that all *gekka jiken* can even be brought under the rubric of one analytical category. Moreover, Bowen’s study assigns only subordinate roles to the local political associations, parliamentarian discourse, and the public sphere in the development of the Popular Rights Movement.20

In terms of balanced perspective in its choice of subjects and themes, and of its comprehensiveness, Ike Nobukata’s study represents a wonderful example of a pioneer’s landmark study having successfully weathered a half-century of cumulative scholarship. Yet even Ike’s work, very much a product of its own time, is dominated by the class-bound interpretations of prewar Marxist historiography. The book retains a rather dismissive attitude toward the participants in the Popular Rights Movement who were not “summit thinkers,” such as Ueki Emori and Nakae Chōmin, or ex-samurai activists from Tosa (Kōchi). To give an example, the 1874 Proposal for Establishing a Popular Assembly, while given solid attention, is interpreted almost exclusively by Ike as an extension of the intrastate struggles among government officials. He dismisses in three sentences the historical significance of the public debates ignited by the 1874 Proposal, about which literally hundreds of essays, arguments, and rebuttals were written in the fledgling news media, whereas he devotes an entire chapter to the political theories of Ueki and Chōmin.

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over, for Ike, and for the majority of prewar Marxist historians, the point of the 1874 Proposal was that Itagaki Taisuke and the Kōchi activists who composed it were not “true democrats.” Nothing else about the impact of the Proposal is touched on, in spite of the fact that Ike and others acknowledge that by galvanizing the public it had spawned the entire Popular Rights Movement. This type of “class-bound” (but in truth closer to “elitist”) approach simply cannot account for the efflorescence of parliamentarian discourse and its monumental impact on the political history of early Meiji Japan.

In the 1960s, this dominant Marxist paradigm began to receive strong criticism. Irokawa Daikichi and other historians often considered as members of the “people’s history” (minshūshi) school excavated valuable local sources and refined our understanding of local politics and their agents, particularly the wealthy peasantry (gōnō). Irokawa, in particular, contributed tremendously to renewing interest in the Popular Rights Movement through his tireless research and prolific writing. In the early 1980s he and other minshūshi historians led the citizens’ movement commemorating and celebrating the Popular Rights Movement Centennial as an alternative to the government-backed celebration of the Meiji Restoration Centennial.

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21. Ike, The Beginnings of Political Democracy in Japan. Ike writes on the 1874 Proposal’s impact: “A running debate was now begun. The newspapers took sides, some supporting Itagaki, some opposing him. Kato’s attack on the memorial evoked several replies, including one by Itagaki, Soyejima, and Gotō. It is not necessary to give a detailed account of these replies, except to note... [that clearly] Itagaki did not intend that the great bulk of the population should enjoy the fruits of self-rule. Only the samurai and the wealthy peasants and merchants were to be represented in the assembly which he proposed” (59). The reader will find in the subsequent chapters of this study that whatever Itagaki Taisuke may or may not have thought about the extent of popular participation in a national assembly is probably the least important feature in my analysis of the 1874 Proposal and its reverberations.

22. Irokawa, Jiū minken; idem, Jiū minken no chūkasai; idem, Minken hyakunen; idem, Kindai kokka no shuppatsu. Also Emura and Nakamura, Kokken to minken no sōoku; Irokawa, Ei, and Arai, Minshū kenpō no sōoku; Makihara, Meiji nanenen no dai-ronsō. On the reports about the centennial events for the Popular Rights Movement, see Jiū minken hyakunen zenkoku shūkai jitkō iinkai, Jiū minken hyakunen zenkoku shūkai hōkoku: Jiū minken hyakunen no kiroku; idem, Jiū minken hyakunen zenkoku shūkai hōkoku: Jiū minken to gendai. Aside from the works of Irokawa, other senior minshūshi historians have not produced major works on the Popular Rights Movement. Haga Noboru, for example, suggests that the “preoccupation” with the Popular Rights Movement should give way to a greater interest in the lives of the ordinary, presumably “apolitical,” people in Japanese history (Meiji kokka to minshū, 121-25). Irokawa is well represented in English-language publications. See Irokawa, The Culture of the
Irokawa has challenged the “failure” thesis of the Marxist narrative by evoking in vivid detail the booming of the movement, especially among the gōnō figures in various local regions. Even though his interpretations proved a timely corrective to the negative view of the movement, Irokawa and other students of local jiyū minken activism may have pushed the pendulum to the other extreme, overemphasizing “indigenous” democratic tendencies in traditional communities.

Other scholars have approached the Movement from the perspective that gives primacy to the development of state institutions and the patterns of struggle among its leaders. Because they prefer to study government institutions using archival documents deposited by the state, they are most interested in the mid-to-late Meiji period when the institutional framework of the state had been solidified. Among them, Banno Junji has proven himself to be an exception, contributing idiosyncratic but often highly stimulating works on Japanese politics of the 1870s and 1880s.23 Itō Takashi’s introductory essay on party politics of the Meiji period depicts a tableau in which central and local organizations as well as government and opposition leaders were enmeshed in a series of conflicts and compromises. Deeply suspicious of theoretical schemes, but implicitly subscribing to a positive view of the state-guided modernization that had taken place in Meiji Japan, Itō criticized characterizations such as “conservative,” “progressive,” “absolutist,” or “bourgeois democratic,” arguing that these terms cannot adequately capture the shifting allegiances and underlying commonalities between the government and the opposition.24 He and other historians working in this mode point out the “fuzziness” of the demarcation between “the state” (kan) and “the people” (min) and the problems that can result from pigeonholing the divergent political actors of the Meiji period. Car-

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23. Ariizumi, Meiji seiijishi no kiso katei; Banno, “‘Aikokusha rōsen’ no saihyōka”; idem, “Meiji shonen no Inoue Kaoru”; idem, “Seikan ronsō go no ‘naichi-ha’ to ‘gaisei-ha’”; idem, “Sōron”; idem, Kindai Nihon no shappatsu; Itō, “Hanbatsu to minō”; idem, “Meiji jūnendai zenhan ni okeru fukenkai to Rikken Kaishintō”; Mikuriya, “Jūyönen seihen to kihon rōsen no kakutei”; idem, Meiji kokka no keisei to chihō keiei; Toriumi, Nihon kindaiishi kōgi. For an introduction to this “empiricist” approach to political history, see Akita, “Trends in Modern Japanese Political History.”

ried to the extreme, however, they tend to dismiss the differences between the Meiji state and its outside critics as a matter of choosing differing means to the same end. Some scholars who share this approach regard the firm and largely benevolent guidance of the state in modernizing Japan as a historical inevitability, without seriously considering the influence of civil society or public opinion on the overall development of Meiji-period politics.25

An exchange between Irokawa Daikichi and Banno Junji on the interpretation of the Popular Rights Movement, occasioned by the celebration of its centennial, illustrates the differences in historical approach between their respective schools of historiography. Banno, in one of his essays, criticized the unproductive bifurcation between a study of “system” (taisei) and a study of “movement” (undō), polemized into the two parallel celebrations of the Meiji Restoration and the Popular Rights Movement. Pointing out that differences of opinions and ideas within the “system” were at least as significant as those between the “system” and the “movement,” he called for a balanced perspective that would “do justice to both the ‘system’ and the ‘movement,’ [especially in terms of studying] the era of nation-building.”26

In a rebuttal to Banno’s arguments, Irokawa reiterated that the Popular Rights Movement was a social movement in pursuit of basic rights and a democratic political system, fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed to the repressive Meiji state. Irokawa admitted that the Movement declined partly because the state took preemptive measures to “liberalize” Japan’s political system, but he resisted the idea that some form of legitimate, morally acceptable compromise could have been reached between the state and the activists. He also criticized Banno for exaggerating the state of “bifurcation” in the study of Meiji Japan. Irokawa argued that minshūshi historians understood very well that “the conflict between the ‘system’ and the ‘movement’ [as well as between] the ‘state’ and the ‘people’ ought to be grasped in a unified, correlative, and structural manner.”27

In fact, Banno and Irokawa, in their respective arguments, acknowledged that historians must incorporate political conflicts and ideological struggles taking place in various sectors of the nation into

25. In English, see Akita’s Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan.
one comprehensive picture of the period. Both scholars would agree that any history of the Popular Rights Movement must treat the state and civil society in a balanced way, while remaining attentive to their dynamic relationships. Indeed, in their own works, they have sought to overcome the artificial barriers historians have erected among subdisciplines and schools of historiography. Banno’s research demonstrates an impressive coverage of the documents concerning local notables, minor party activists, and their political ideas in particular. Irokawa’s works display an astute, nuanced perception of the divergent intellectual and political orientations of state leaders. The present study has obviously drawn upon their towering scholarly achievements, and is also a response to their clarion calls for constructing more balanced and inclusive interpretations of politics and society in early Meiji Japan.

Chapter Organization

The narrative below begins in 1868 with the symbolic declaration of the Restoration of the monarchy and ends with the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution in 1889. However, I have eschewed a strict chronological order and have organized the chapters around analytical problems. The book uses two major political crises in the Meiji state as landmarks, the Expedition to Korea controversy of 1873 and the expulsion of Ōkuma Shigenobu in 1881. Significant moments of public debate on the character and form of the Japanese political system are also examined in detail, after the Proposal to Establish a Popularly Elected Assembly was submitted in 1874, during the petition drive of 1880, and surrounding the Hokkaidō Colonial Office scandal of 1881.

Part I sets the stage for the analyses and delineations that follow. Chapter 1 investigates the transformation of the public sphere in transition from Tokugawa to Meiji Japan, and analyzes changes brought about in the news media and other constituent elements of the public sphere from the late eighteenth century to the 1860s. The concept of kōgi yoron is introduced as one of the key ideas that emerged from the politics of the late Tokugawa period and helped entrench the setting for the eventual flourishing of parliamentarian discourse. I examine in reasonable detail the transmutation of the discourse of kōgi yoron into a very close approximation of the Euro-American understanding of public opinion, even before the modern news media came into its own in the 1870s.
Chapter 2 presents the modernization policies of the Meiji state implemented between 1868 and 1874 and the concomitant evolution of political discourse and activism arising outside the government, both drawing upon the late-Tokugawa conceptions of kōgi yoron as well as Euro-American models of the representative system. It also includes a survey of the news media that came into being with the help of the state, which provided the material conditions for parliamentarian discourse to infiltrate and eventually to dominate the public sphere.

Part II examines the efflorescence of parliamentarian discourse and its eventual mobilization of various social groups into political activism. Chapter 3 focuses on the public debates ignited by submission of the Proposal for the Establishment of the Popularly Elected Assembly in 1874, along with analyses of the Meiji state’s efforts to create an effective national leadership and infrastructures of power. The 1874 Proposal started a nationwide debate on the desirability of a representative government, about which hundreds of editorials and letters were written and circulated. Considered in mainstream scholarship as a minor episode in the grand narrative of Japanese modernization, this debate and its implications receive the careful scrutiny they deserve. I also delineate political development of the late 1870s that resulted in the elimination of the military and terrorist option for challenging the Meiji state as well as the loss of opportunity for a possible compromise between state leaders and the parliamentarian opposition following the 1875 Osaka Conference.

Chapter 4 deals with metropolitan intellectual associations in Tokyo, hitherto completely ignored in English-language scholarship. Government bureaucrats, journalists, educators, lawyers, and other urban professionals actively participated in disseminating Euro-American knowledge to the rest of the nation through these intellectual associations, which by the early 1880s had constructed nationwide communication networks. Many of the intelligentsia in these organizations were affiliated with the state bureaucracy, but their writings and, later, activities, made significant contributions to the growth of political consciousness among the public and the elevation of the level of public debate.

Chapter 5 moves to the local regions and investigates the rise of local notables as the main agents of parliamentarian activism. Prefectural assemblies, which the state instituted to control and manage local notables, were usurped by the same notables and served as
springboards for launching their national political careers. A potent alliance between the Tosa-Kōchi group of parliamentarians (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2) and these local notables resulted in a “wave of petitions” in 1880 demanding immediate establishment of a national assembly. In discussing the local notables and their parliamentarian activities, the existing interpretations of the nationwide mobilization of parliamentarianism are examined and critiqued.

Chapter 6 investigates public lectures as communicative and performative activities, analyzing the construction of national communication networks based on the organization and mobilization of “lecture circuits” and presents a close observation of the evolution of the public lecture as a medium for disseminating parliamentarian discourse into the public sphere. This chapter also includes a section devoted to women lecturers, who recognized that the performative nature of political lectures made them more open to women’s participation than were the written media.

Part III, consisting of Chapters 7 and 8, shifts the focus of investigation from civil society to the state. First, Chapter 7 examines the efforts by the state to intervene in the public sphere and to control public opinion through a wide range of legislative and administrative means, in addition to the constitutionalist ideas held by state leaders. A sizable section of the chapter is devoted to their responses to parliamentarianism in the public sphere, which were by no means uniform or consistent. Their prescriptions for the appropriate form of representative government for Japan diverged from one another. My research reveals that the state leaders remained deeply divided until 1881 on the appropriate form of government for Japan, but were also united in their resolve to control and manage the process of constitutional development against parliamentarian opposition.

Chapter 8 advances a new interpretation of the crisis in 1881 and the expulsion of Ōkuma Shigenobu from the ranks of state officials. The so-called Hokkaidō Colonial Office scandal (1881) is discussed for its impact on state leaders’ decision to close ranks behind the Prussian model of government and to embark on a series of steps to consolidate the ideologies and administrative power of the Meiji state. To do this, the Scandal is situated in the context of the evolution of public response to financial misconduct in the government, regarding it as a culmination point in the long history of the Japanese public’s engagement with the corruption and favoritism practiced by state officials.
By 1880, state leaders had reached an informal consensus on the need to consolidate state ideology and provide firm guidance on the process of liberalizing the political system. However, political disagreements about how to proceed continued to weigh them down. Despite its astonishing success in transforming Japan into a centralized nation-state in such a short period, the Meiji state in 1880 still remained a coalition government, torn by factional politics and intrabureaucratic struggles. However, the impact of parliamentarian opposition on the government ironically provided an impetus for state leaders to embark on these long-term projects. By late 1880, the parliamentarian movement was powerful enough to genuinely shake the confidence of state leaders in maintaining control over Japan. This was reflected in the increasing stringency of legislation designed to deal with the movement. Ōkuma’s suspected collaboration with critics in civil society was the final catalyst state leaders needed to overcome their political differences and reach concrete compromises, rather than just an informal consensus, on matters of public finance and constitutional development.

Part IV takes a detour from the chronological narrative and analyzes two essential components of the Meiji constitutional system, the national constitution and political parties, or rather their origins in the interaction between the Meiji state and parliamentarianism, the national constitution, and political parties. Chapter 9 examines the dialectic between the state and the public sphere regarding the contents of the yet-to-be established constitution. The chapter introduces “civic constitutional drafts” to English-language scholarship. These model constitutions were written and circulated among the opinion-makers in civil society. This chapter brings fresh perspectives to interpreting these documents, situating them in the broader context of parliamentarian discourses.

Chapter 10 discusses the political parties, the Liberal Party (Jiyūtō) and the Constitutional Progressive Party (Rikken Kaishintō), their organization as well as ideologies. These parties are characterized as institutions directly produced by the parliamentarian movement, responding in turn to state efforts to take the initiative in establishing a representative government. In the light of preceding chapters, the relationships between central party organizations and their local branches as well as between communicative networks of the public sphere and routes of recruitment and mobilization used by the parties will receive close attention.
Chapter 11 briefly discusses the Grand Solidarity Movement (*daidō danketsu undo*) and the discourse on Japan’s political system found during this phase of the revitalized party movement, centering on the notion of the party cabinet system (*seitō naikakusei*), as a continuing investigation into the institutionalization of parliamentarianism. The book concludes with a brief reflection on the historical significance and implications of parliamentarianism and the development of the national public sphere in early Meiji Japan.