A "BRIEF ERA OF EXPERIMENTATION": HOW THE EARLY MEIJI POLITICAL DEBATES SHAPED JAPANESE POLITICAL TERMINOLOGY

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Overview

During the early Meiji period (1868–1912), Japanese intellectuals fiercely debated such issues as popular suffrage, religious liberty, and press freedom. Simultaneously, they labored to produce fixed Japanese terms for the West's alien political concepts. In the process, a plethora of alternative terms came into circulation; however, by century's end, only a select few "standard" terms remained in use. The purpose of this paper is to determine why some of these terms, known as "translation words," came to be standardized while others did not. The question lies in whether a term's relevance to the major Japanese political debates of the 1870s and 1880s served as a key factor in determining whether it became standard. My research entailed analyzing the use of the terms 権 (*ken*), 自由 (*jiyū*), and 社会 (*shakai*), the standard terms for "rights," "liberty," and "society," respectively, in the *Meiroku Journal*, the magazine of the foremost Japanese intellectual society of the 1870s. I specifically observed how, unlike alternative terms used to signify the aforementioned political concepts, these standard terms were uniquely suited to the task of illustrating the antagonism between the oligarchical Meiji government and the Japanese people, which was a central theme of the major political debates of the 1870s and 1880s. I therefore argue that the antagonism between the government and the people central to the early Meiji political debates played a crucial role in determining which Japanese words became standardized political terminology.

Introduction

With the fall of the feudal Tokugawa shogunate and the rise of the pro-modernization Meiji government in 1868, Japan opened itself to a vast array of political ideas entirely alien to its experience. Specifically,

Japanese leaders worked to adopt these ideas and the political institutions associated with them in order to keep Japan from being overrun by American and European influence as China had been.[1] But because the Japanese language lacked terms that could readily approximate basic western political ideas like "rights," "liberty," or "society," Japan's intellectuals had immense difficulties in communicating those ideas.

Nowhere were these difficulties more evident than in Japanese intellectuals' original writings on the West and their translations of Western political works. In their respective texts, different intellectuals would often adopt different *honyakugo*, or "translation words," to render the same concept. Within a brief span of time, however, this wide array of what I will call "alternative translation words" rapidly gave way to a set of "standard translation words." The translation word 権 (*ken*), for instance, prevailed over the word 通義 (*tsūgi*) as the standard translation for "rights." Similarly, the translation word 自由 (*jiyū)* prevailed over 自在 (*jizai*) and is used today as the standard Japanese word for "liberty." The word 社会 (*shakai*), moreover, has come to serve as the standard translation word for "society," outlasting such alternatives as 交際 (*kōsai*).

A striking commonality among these standard translation words is that several of them came into use between the early 1870s and mid-1890s: a period of intense political debate over popular participation in government, religious and press liberty in Japan. Therefore, this research questions whether the major Japanese political debates of the 1870s played a key role in determining which terms became standard translation words and which ones did not.

The Early Meiji Political Debates

Following the start of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan's government came under the control of a pro-modernization oligarchy. As this new government embarked on its task of remaking Japan's political institutions in the image of those in the West, divisions arose among Japanese elites over how best to implement western-style government in Japan.[2] As a result, throughout the 1870s, three major political debates gripped the country.

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[1] Kenneth Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Lexington: Heath, 1996), p. 78.
[2] Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 115–118.

First, in 1873 the disaffected oligarch Itagaki Taisuke rallied a "People's Rights Movement" that demanded the Japanese government cede power to a popularly-elected assembly. [3] Second, in 1872 the Meiji government's efforts to establish an emperor-centric Shinto as the official state religion sparked debates among Japanese intellectuals over religious freedom. [4] Third, in 1875, publishers and some liberal intellectuals vehemently protested against the government's Meiji Newspaper Law, which gave the government the power to censor political discussions in Japanese newspapers.[5]

What all of these seemingly disparate political debates had in common was a preoccupation with an antagonism between the Japanese people on the one hand and their oligarchic government on the other. The People's Rights Movement, for instance, sought to establish a popularly-elected assembly specifically to redistribute power in government away from the oligarchy and into the hands of the public.[6] The debates over the institution of State Shinto were cast as a conflict between the people and the government over the former's ability to make its own religious choices without interference from the latter.[7] Similarly, the debates over The 1875 Meiji Newspaper Law were cast as a conflict between the people and the government over the people's ability to run their own independent press, and thereby ensure that their voices were not shut out of public affairs by the oligarchy.[8]

Douglas Howland's seminal *Translating the West* notes the centrality to all of the early Meiji political debates of this antagonism between the Japanese people and the Japanese government. As he writes in the introduction for his seminal *Translating the West*:

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[3] Sandra Davis, *Intellectual Change and Political Development in Early Modern Japan* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), pp. 156–158.

[4] Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 127–130 and Douglas Howland, *Translating the West* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 107–113.

[5] Ibid., pp. 115–117.

[6] Davis, *Intellectual Change and Political Development*, p. 158.

[7] Howland, *Translating the West*, pp. 111–113.

[8] Ibid., p. 115.

> The point of political argument from the 1860s through
> the 1880s was...government power in the hands of a self-
> appointed oligarchy...the dominant confrontation that
> reappears between the 1860s and 1880s was that between
> the oligarchic government and the people.[9]

Still, Howland never takes the step of linking the antagonism between the Japanese people and the Japanese government to the process by which translation words were standardized. The hypothesis considered in this paper, however, is that it was precisely the context of this antagonism between the people and the government that drove Japanese intellectuals to adopt certain translation words as standard and discard others.

The Meiroku Journal

In order to put the aforementioned hypothesis to the test, it was necessary to analyze translation word usage in political writings from the early Meiji Period. To that end, this paper relies on content analysis of the *Meiroku Journal*. More specifically, the *Meiroku Journal* is used to analyze the relationship between the early Meiji antagonism between the Japanese people and the Japanese government on the one hand and the standardization of certain translation words on the other hand.

The *Meiroku Journal* consisted of articles on a wide variety of subjects, but tended to specialize in politics. It was written and published by members of the Meiroku Society, an intellectual group made up of scholars who had worked as government officials and translators under the Tokugawa shogunate. This group effectively acted as the engine of Japan's "Civilization and Enlightenment" movement, during which saw Japan's intellectuals studied abroad in Europe and the United States and brought their knowledge back to Japan in the form of popular translations, treatises, and journals on western society and government.[10]

The *Meiroku Journal* was selected as this paper's central primary source for three reasons. The first is that the *Meiroku Journal*'s content made it ideally suited to looking at the relationship between the early Meiji political context and translation word standardization. As the foremost

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[9] Ibid., p. 4

[10] Albert Craig, *Civilization and Enlightenment: The Early Thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 144–147.

political journal of the early Meiji era, the *Meiroku Journal* contains articles on all of the major political debates of its day, including those on the creation of a popularly-elected assembly, religious liberty, and press freedom mentioned above.[11] Furthermore, the *Meiroku Journal* was in publication at a time when translation words were still being experimented with, as is evident from the numerous articles it contains on the development of terms for "liberty" and "rights."[12]

Second, many of the intellectuals who wrote for the *Meiroku Journal* were also major figures in the development of translation words. Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nakamura Masanao, and Kato Hiroyuki all developed widely-used translation words, and all published in the *Meiroku Journal*. Therefore, the *Journal* also provides an opportunity to see how the intellectuals who created many translation words in the first place were driven by the political context of the early Meiji era to abandon some in favor of standardizing others.[13]

The third reason is that the *Meiroku Journal's* reputation was unsurpassed during the 1870s. Because it was so widely read among Japan's elites and had such a prestigious reputation, the journal left a lasting influence on how Japanese academics, students, and journalists thought about and wrote about the West.[14] As Yanabu writes, "the expressions of the Meiroku Society's members held an overwhelming influence for intellectuals and young people of the time. The neologisms and idioms of the Meiroku Society's members were words that most people seeking new knowledge [of the West] wanted to use."[15]

Rights: Why 権 (*ken*) Instead of 通義 (*tsūgi*)?

Over the course of the 1860s, several translation words came into use for the concept of "rights." Five terms in particular gained currency:

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[11] Ibid., p. 147.

[12] Shinichi Yamamuro and Toru Nakanome, *Meiroku Journal* 3 (2009), pp. 225–232, 347–355.

[13] William Reynolds Braisted, Adachi Yasushi, and Kikuchi Yūji, trans., *Meiroku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. xxiii–xxxiv.

[14] Ibid., pp. xx–xi.

[15] Yanabu Akira, *Honyaku to wa nani ka* (Tokyo: Hosei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1985), p. 155.

権利 or 権理 (*kenri*), 権義 *(kengi),* 通権 (*tsūken*), 公権 (*kōken*), and 通義 (*tsūgi*).[16] As the list of terms shows, two types of translation words came into use for "rights": the four that use the term 権 (*ken),* a character that literally means "power" or "authority," and the one that does not: 通義 (*tsūgi*).[17] The precedent for using *ken* as a translation word for "rights" derives from W.A.P. Martin's 1864 Chinese translation *Elements of International Law*, in which *ken* was used "to cover a field of political and legal terminology that included right, power, authority, sovereignty, force, jurisdiction, status, and legitimacy."[18] Martin's translation drew on English-Chinese dictionaries of the time, which equated *ken* not only with "rights" but also with "legal power." This, in turn, can be traced to the equivalence translators drew between *ken* and *regt*, which, in Dutch, means both "rights" and "law."[19]

But given *ken*'s strong connotation of "power" and "authority," the leading intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi chose to develop a new translation word for "rights" that omitted *ken* altogether: 通義 (*tsūgi*). *Tsūgi*, which literally means "general moral principle," purposefully omitted *ken* to avoid conflating "rights" with "power."[20] In fact, in his *Conditions in the West*, Fukuzawa placed his translation for "rights," *tsūgi*, into direct opposition with *ken*:

> 随意に人を囚われるの**権**を一二の菅使に付与するか、若しくは無上の君主をして此**権**柄を握らしむることあらば、諸般の**通義**一時に廃滅すべし。

> If the **ken** to seize people at will were conferred on one or two officials, or if an all-powerful monarch possessed this **ken**gara, various **tsūgi** would be destroyed immediately.[21]

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[16] Howland, *Translating the West*, pp. 127–128.

[17] Yanabu Akira, *Honyakugo Seiritsu Jijō* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1982), pp. 158–159.

[18] Howland, *Translating the West*, p. 124.

[19] Yanabu, *Honyakugo Seiritsu Jijō*, pp. 163–164.

[20] Howland, *Translating the West*, p. 127; and Yanabu, *Honyaku to wa Nanika,* p. 102.

[21] Yanabu, *Honyaku to wa Nani ka*, p. 104.

In short, for Fukuzawa, *ken* could not be a translation word for rights because he understood *ken* as constituting a threat to rights. This was a sentiment shared by his contemporary, Sakatani Shiroshi, who writes in the *Meiroku Journal* that "The character *ken* is harmful. Advocating *ken* only serves to generate opposing power. This is certainly not the intention of European and American intellectuals when they advocate 'rights.' Therefore, [*ken*] is not an appropriate translation [for "rights"]."[22]

The question, then, is why *ken* became the standard translation word for rights—specifically, through the word 権利 (***ken**ri*)—while *tsūgi* fell out of use as a translation word for rights. The answer, I argue, lies in the political context of the early Meiji period and its preoccupation with the antagonism between the Japanese government and the Japanese people. This is most evident in the way that the concept of "rights" was understood in discussions of Itagaki Taisuke's campaign to establish a national legislature.

In the memorial announcing the formation of his Patriotic Public Party, Itagaki and other leaders of the People's Rights Movement wrote the following:

> According to our observations, the political power in our country lies neither in the imperial household nor in the people but in the officials…Thus, we conclude that the only way is to listen to public opinion; and the only way to do this is to establish a national assembly chosen by the people. This is the way to restrain the power of the officials and to maintain the people's happiness and security.[23]

In this way, the People's Rights Movement cast the fight for political "rights" not as one that staked a claim to "general moral principles"—the understanding of "rights" embodied in Fukuzawa's translation word *tsūgi*—but rather as a struggle between the Japanese people and the Meiji oligarchs for power in government.

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[22] Sakatani Shiroshi, "On Concubines," *Meiroku Journal* 3 (2009), p. 114; and Braisted, *Meiroku Zasshi*, p. 395.
[23] Davis, *Intellectual Chance and Political Development*, p. 158.

This understanding of *ken* as strongly denoting "power" can also be seen in the dictionaries of the period. In the 1868 edition of the Japanese-English dictionary *Waei Gorin Shūsei*, the entry on *ken* reads:

> Power, authority, influence,—wo furū, to show one's power.—wo toru, to hold the power, to have the authority. —wo hatte mono wo iu, to talk assuming an air of authority.[24]

Especially significant in this entry is the expression 権を張ってものを言う (*ken wo hatte mono wo iu*), whose adverbial phrase *ken wo haru* was a mainstay in the rhetoric of the People's Rights Movement. A famous anthem of the People's Rights Movement, *Minken Inaka Uta*, included the lyrics 権利張れよや国の人。。。権利張れよや (*kenri hare yo ya kuni no hito...kenri hare yo ya*).[25] The People's Rights Movement thus urged the Japanese people not to "claim their general moral principles," but rather to "assert their power"—specifically, against the "power" or "authority" of government officials.

Simply put, the early Meiji political debates conceived of rights as a form of power, not as abstract principles or moral entitlements. Specifically, the People's Rights Movement argued for the establishment of a national assembly not because the people were morally entitled to one, but so that it could be used as a tool to temper with the power of the oligarchs who controlled the Japanese government. Yanabu remarks that:

> Participants in the People's Rights Movement sought for themselves power (*ken*) oriented against and essentially equal to the power (*ken*) of the government. What they sought were, first-and-foremost, voting rights and the power one derives from politics. "Rights" such as those one refers to when speaking of "fundamental human rights" were not really at issue.[26]

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[24] Yanabu, *Honyakugo Seiritsu Jijō*, p. 160.
[25] Ibid., p. 170.
[26] Ibid., p. 171.

However, this understanding of rights as a form of power rather than as "general moral principles" was not limited to the rhetoric of the People's Rights Movement. It can also be seen in the broader discourse on the issue of establishing a national assembly carried out in the *Meiroku Journal*. In the second issue of the journal, Kato Hiroyuki offers an exposition on the meaning of "liberalism" in which he writes:

> 。。。リベラール党はつとめて国権を減縮し、つとめて民権を拡張せんと欲す。

> A liberal party seeks to reduce the government's rights, and thereby expand the people's rights.[27]

Similarly, in an article entitled *An Explanation of Liberty*, Mitsukuri Rinsho writes:

> 人民の代理者に立法の権を委するに至れば。。。君主の権次第に衰え、人民自由の権ようやくに隆盛に趣くを徴するに足れり。

> ...since the various nations have severally reached the point of entrusting legislative rights to...the people...this is sufficient to indicate that the rights of kings are gradually declining, while the rights of the people are flourishing at long last.[28]

Finally, in an article appropriately titled *On the Divergent Interests of Government and People*, Nishimura Shigeki writes:

> 人民よりこれを言えば、これがために束縛に罹り、圧制を受け、少しも己が権理を伸ぶることを得ざれば、これを害と云わざることを得ず。

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[27] Kato Hiroyuki, "In Response to Mr. Fukuzawa," *Meiroku Journal* 1 (2009), pp. 66–67.
[28] Mitsukuri Rinsho, "An Explanation of Liberty," *Meiroku Journal* 2 (2009), p. 39; and Braisted, *Meiroku Zasshi*, p. 182.

しかれども政府よりこれを言えば、政府の権を殺し、人主
の威を減じ、事をなすにつねに掣肘矛盾の患いあれば、
これを害と云わざることを得ざるなり。[29]

From the people's point of view...one must term
[expanded government rights] injurious if, because of it,
men suffer restrictions, are subjected to repression, or are
unable in the least to advance their rights. Yet from the
government's point of view, the people's rights must be
termed injurious if the rights of the government are
consequently destroyed, the power of the ruler is reduced,
and the government always fears conflicts with or
interference by the people whenever it undertakes
anything.[30]

All three of these excerpts clearly reflect the early Meiji political debates'
preoccupation with the antagonism between the Japanese government and
the Japanese people. But they also demonstrate how the context of this
antagonism drove Japanese intellectuals to adopt *ken* as the standard
translation word for "rights" instead of *tsūgi*. Kato, Mitsukuri, and
Nishimura all see rights as a form of power over which the people and the
government are locked in a zero-sum antagonism. In order for the people to
expand their "rights," the government's "rights" must be reduced by an
equal extent, and vice-versa. In essence, the early Meiji political debates did
not allow for an understanding of rights as "general moral principles," as
embodied in Fukuzawa Yukichi's translation word *tsūgi*. What the context
of this antagonism demanded instead was a word for rights that carried the
meaning of "power" or "authority"—namely, *ken*.

Liberty: Why 自由 (*jiyū*) Instead of 自在 (*jizai*)?
        A similar phenomenon can be seen in the standardization of the
translation word for liberty. It is curious how the term 自由 (*jiyū*) became
the standard translation word for liberty while the alternative term 自在
(*jizai*) fell into disuse. Compared to the other translation words considered

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[29] Nishimura Shigeki, "On the Divergent Interests of Government and
People," *Meiroku Journal* 3 (2009), p. 283.
[30] Braisted, *Meiroku Zasshi*, p. 480.

in this analysis, *jiyū* has had an especially long and complicated history as a translation word. It first came into use in the 1850s as a translation for the Dutch word for liberty, *vrijheid*. At that point, the Tokugawa shogunate's interpreters began to list *jiyū* in the entry for *vrijheid* in Dutch-Japanese dictionaries alongside terms like *wagamama*, which means "selfishness" and *katte*, or "willfulness." [31] As a result, *jiyū* took on the negative connotations of those words, which, in turn, led prominent intellectuals like Kato Hiroyuki and Tsuda Mamichi to avoid using it in their writings as a translation word for "liberty."[32]

Instead, Kato and Tsuda opted to rely on an alternative term: *jizai*. What is important to understand about *jizai*, however, is that Kato and Tsuda used it to refer to a very limited and conservative conception of liberty. Specifically, they took pains to stress that *jizai* did not provide individuals absolute freedom from external interference by the government. As Howland notes, "in Kato's formulation of...liberty, when tyranny and monarchy no longer provide external limits on the autonomy of the individual...public peace and morality justify legal restrictions upon...liberties."[33] In short, when rendered with Kato and Tsuda's *jizai*, "the liberty of thought" and "the liberty of faith" was understood as reconcilable with the government's circumscription of those liberties.

In the 1870s, however, two of Kato and Tsuda's contemporaries, Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nakamura Masanao, took it upon themselves to rehabilitate the term *jiyū* as a translation word for "liberty." Where Kato and Tsuda took the term *jizai* and imbued it with a conservative understanding of "liberty," Fukuzawa and Nakamura took *jiyū* and grounded it in discussions of rebellions against despotic governments, like the French Revolution. Of this more "liberal" conception of liberty embodied in *jiyū*, Howland observes that "...we are to imagine a self-interested people whose autonomy is defined less by self-rule and more by the exclusion of external interference."[34] In short, whereas *jizai* was used to refer to "liberties" allowed within limits set by the government, Fukuzawa and Nakamura use *jiyū* to refer to a more abstract and broader state of being, free from external interference by the government.

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[31] Howland, *Translating the West,* p. 103; and Yanabu, *Honyaku to wa nani ka*, pp. 110–111.
[32] Howland, *Translating the West*, p. 104.
[33] Ibid., p. 100.
[34] Ibid., pp. 103–105.

Now, in order to understand why *jiyū* became the standard translation word for "liberty" instead of *jizai*, it is necessary to return our attention to the context of the early Meiji political debates and, more specifically, to their preoccupation with the antagonism between the Japanese people and the Japanese government. Especially instructive are two early Meiji debates that Howland considers in *Translating the West*: those over the issues of religious liberty and press freedom.

In the fifth issue of the *Meiroku Journal*, Kato Hiroyuki pens a translation entitled "Church and State in the United States" in which he writes:

しこうして合衆国兆民この本権を有するの制度たる
や、政府本教のほかになお諸教派を容認する制度の
比にあらずして、さらに自由なる制度というべし。
合衆国においては、政府、官使を選任するに、その
するところの信奉するところの教派如何を問い、あ
るいは政府、この教派を保護し、かの教派を妨害す
るなどのことは、決して許さざるなり.

The system by which the American people possess this basic right may be termed one of complete [religious] liberty (*jiyū*), which is distinct from a system under which other faiths are tolerated alongside a state religion. When officials are appointed in the United States, the government is never allowed to inquire into their religious beliefs. Nor may the government ever protect one church or injure another.[35]

Although these are technically the words of a Westerner, Kato had a reason for translating this passage in particular. That reason, as discussed above, was the ongoing debate over the 1872 Three Standards of Instruction, through which the Meiji government worked to transform Shintō into a state religion on the one hand and suppress the various Japanese Buddhist sects on the other hand.[36] Given the context of this antagonism between the

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[35] Kato Hiroyuki, "Church and State in the United States," *Meiroku Journal* 1 (2009), p. 198; and Braisted, *Meiroku Zasshi*, p. 68.
[36] Howland, *Translating the West*, p. 108.

Japanese people and the Japanese government—which is referenced indirectly through discussion of the United States in Kato's translation—religious liberty is understood not as a liberty to worship within bounds stipulated by the government, but rather as a state of being liberated from government interference in religious matters. Tsuda Mamichi, who writes in the June 1874 article "On Government," further drives this point home:

> 教部の教則を定め、教官を任ず、教法の自由に害あり。司法の拷問ある、人民の自由に害あり。文部の出板条件ある、出板の自由に害あり。戸籍の法を設くるや、行事の自由に害あり。

> Religious liberty is harmed when [government] offices of religion determine religious regulations and appoint churchmen. The liberty of the people is harmed when law officers employ torture. Press freedom is harmed when the Education Ministry establishes press regulations. Freedom of movement is obstructed when laws for the household registration of the population is imposed.[37]

This particular writing of Tsuda's comes before the Meiji government's implementation of the 1875 Press Law, which created resentment toward the government among newspaper publishers and sparked a debate among intellectuals over the merits of press freedom due to its censorship of political discussions in newspapers. Indeed, its understanding of press freedom—among other forms of liberty—encapsulates the understanding of liberty seen in press freedom debates after 1875. As Howland notes, the "early Meiji rationale for liberty of the press follows logically from the earlier discussion of liberal freedom... [it is] a politically important source of public power to check or support public affairs."[38] Looking at Tsuda's passage above, it is clear that press freedom is understood not as the freedom to publish what one wishes within limits imposed by the government, but rather as the absence of those limits.

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[37] Tsuda Mamichi, "On Government," *Meiroku Journal* 1 (2009), pp. 363–364; and Braisted, *Meiroku Zasshi*, p. 142.
[38] Howland, *Translating the West*, p. 115.

In sum, in the early Meiji political context, there was no place for an understanding of liberty in which the people's liberty and government interference could be reconciled, as was the case with the translation word *jizai* developed by Kato and Tsuda. Ironically, the writings of the two men who pioneered the use of *jizai* show that the early Meiji context of the antagonism between the Japanese people and the Japanese government required instead Fukuzawa and Nakamura's translation word *jiyū*, which views government interference as a transgression of the people's liberty. For this reason, I argue that *jiyū* became the standard translation word for "liberty" rather than *jizai*.

Society: Why 社会 (*shakai*) Instead of 交際 (*kōsai*)?

Finally, this paper will consider the emergence of the standard translation word for "society." Of the three Western political concepts considered here, "society" had the largest variety of alternative translation words in circulation prior to the emergence of 社会 (*shakai*) as the standard translation word for "society." Among their number were 交際 (*kōsai*), 人間交際 (*ningen kōsai*), 交わり (*majiwari*), 国 (*kuni*), and 世人 (*sejin*).[39] As Fukuzawa Yukichi's translation word for society, *kōsai* was by far the most prominent of these alternatives.[40] Hence, the intrigue arises in knowing why *shakai* became the standard translation word for society instead of *kōsai*.

Before delving into the standardization of the translation word for society, however, it is necessary to understand that, during the feudal period that immediately preceded the Meiji era, Japanese people did not conceive of themselves as being part of anything approximating the Western notion of "society." As Yanabu notes, "in Japan at the time, there was no such thing as a 'society' outside of 'government' that...shapes policy."[41] Rather than a "society," there were merely *kuni* provinces and *han* feudal domains in which a person's relationships with others were defined by their *mibun*, or feudal class role.[42]

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[39] Yanabu, *Honyakugo Seiritsu Jijō*, p. 7.

[40] Ibid., p. 8.

[41] Yanabu, *Honyaku to wa nani ka*, pp. 139–141.

[42] Akira Yanabu, *Shakai—The Translation of a People Who Had No Society,* trans. Thomas Gaubatz (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 52–53.

It is in this context that *kōsai* emerged as a major alternative translation word for "society." *Kōsai* was a term adopted by Fukuzawa Yukichi that literally means "interaction" or "intercourse." In this way, the "society" referred to by Fukuzawa's *kōsai* is defined not as a distinct entity in-and-of-itself, but rather as a set of concrete connections among individual people—an idea much more accessible for Japanese readers than, say, the Western idea of a broad and abstract "civil society."[43] That said, with the coming of the early Meiji political debates and their preoccupation with the antagonism between the Japanese government and the Japanese people, *kōsai*'s shortcomings as a translation word for "society" were laid bare.

Because *kōsai* focuses on person-to-person relationships in defining society, it could not be used to refer to society as a distinct and unified entity that could act upon or be acted upon by the government. The translation word *shakai*, however, refers precisely to that understanding of society. *Shakai* is a compound of two *kanji* characters that literally translates to "a group of groups" or a "collective of collectives." 社 (*sha*) first entered consistent use in the early Meiji era as a way to refer to small groups of people pursuing a common purpose. Literary organizations were termed *bungaku-sha*; the Japan Red Cross was known as the *Nippon Sekijūji-sha*; and the "Meiroku Society" itself was known as the *Meiroku-sha*.[44]

In 1874, however, the Meiroku Society intellectual Nishi Amane took the innovative step of pairing *sha* with the character 会 (*kai*), which carries a similar meaning of "association" or "collective," and used the resulting neologism *shakai* as a translation word for "society." [45] In particular, in his *Meiroku Journal* article "Criticism of the Essay on the Role of Scholars," Nishi discusses Fukuzawa Yukichi's contention that Western scholars should avoid taking government positions in order to avoid compromising their ability to make demands on—or, in Fukuzawa's phrase, to "stimulate"— the government from the outside. He writes:

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[43] Ibid., pp. 54–55.
[44] Yanabu, *Shakai—The Translation of a People Who Had No Society,* pp. 56–57.
[45] Yanabu, *Honyaku to wa nani ka*, pp. 153–154.

政府はなお人身の生力のごとく、人民はなお外物の
刺衝のごとし。。。すなわち民間志氣の振るうなり
、社会の立つなり、きわめて可なり.[46]

The government is like the life force of the body, and the
people are like an outside stimulus...it is, therefore,
superlatively desirable that the will of the people should
be exercised, and that *shakai* should be formed.[47]

Here, too, the *Meiroku Journal* provides evidence of how the early Meiji
political debates' preoccupation with the antagonism between the
government and the people drove the standardization of certain translation
words over others. As was the case with the standard translation words for
"rights" and "liberty," *shakai* was far better suited to describing "society" in
the context of the antagonism between the government and the people than
kōsai. Whereas *kōsai* conceived of society solely in terms of person-to-
person relationships, *shakai* rendered society as an abstract "group of
groups"—in essence, a "civil society"— that, in Nishi's phrase, exercised
the will of the people vis-a-vis the government. Furthermore, this use of
shakai was evident outside the *Meiroku Journal*. Yamagata Aritomo, one of
the leading Meiji oligarchs, spoke of society as a distinct entity that was
"maintained" by the government's laws with such phrases as 社会を維持す
(*shakai wo ijisu*).[48]

Conclusion

In sum, the early Meiji period is best described as a "brief era of
experimentation" in which, initially, a wide variety of translation words
entered circulation, only to quickly give way to a single standard translation
word for any given Western political concept.[49] The aim of this research has
been to elucidate how the context of the early Meiji political debates drove
the standardization of certain translation words over others. Specifically, it

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[46] Nishi Amane, "*Higakusha Shokubun Ron*," *Meiroku Journal* 1 (2009),
pp. 80–81.
[47] Yanabu, *Shakai—The Translation of a People Who Had No Society,* p.
57.
[48] Howland, *Translating the West*, p. 171.
[49] Ibid., p. 114.

posits that the consistent antagonism between the Japanese government and the Japanese people seen in the early Meiji political debates over popular suffrage, religious liberty, and press freedom worked to drive Japanese intellectuals to adopt certain translation words as standard over others. *Ken*, I argue, became the standard translation word for "rights" instead of *tsūgi* because it was better suited to describe rights as a form of "power" over which the government and the people were locked in a zero-sum struggle. Similarly, *Jiyū*—rather than *jizai*—became the standard translation word for "liberty" because it embodies an understanding of the people's liberty as antagonistic toward government interference, rather than as reconcilable with government interference. *Shakai*, finally, became the standard translation word for "society" because it embodied an understanding of society as an abstract "association of associations" that could be placed into antagonism with the government—in essence, a civil society—in a way that *kōsai* could not. In this way, it is evident that the very words Japanese uses to represent fundamental political concepts have been shaped by Japan's unique political experience.

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