BLOOMSBURY
ACADEMIC COLLECTIONS
JAPANESE HISTORY

THE JAPANESE POLICE STATE

The Tokkô in interwar Japan

Elise K. Tipton

BLOOMSBURY

THE JAPANESE POLICE STATE

The Tokkô in interwar Japan

This page intentionally left blank

THE JAPANESE POLICE STATE

The Tokkô in interwar Japan

Elise K. Tipton

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC COLLECTIONS
Japanese History

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published in 1990
This edition published in 2012 by Bloomsbury Publishing plc

Bloomsbury Academic Collections
ISSN 2051-0012

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 9781780939728 (cloth)
ISBN: 9781780933221 (Bloomsbury Academic Collections: Japanese History)
ENTIRE COLLECTION ISBN: 9781780933184 (Bloomsbury Academic Collections: Economics, Politics and History of Japan)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Printed and Bound in Great Britain

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation for the assistance of various people and institutions which have made this book possible. Thanks go to George M. Wilson, Richard Mitchell, Lawrence Olson, and David Titus for reading the original dissertation and making many comments and suggestions for revising the manuscript. In Japan research was made possible by affiliation with the Institute for Social Science at the University of Tokyo. There I benefited from the expertise of Professor Okudaira Yasuhiro. Nakahara Hidenori and the staff of the International Service Section of the National Diet Library were very helpful.

Financial support came from a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Abroad Fellowship and a Comparative History Research grant from the University of California at Santa Cruz. Appreciation also to Julie Manley for typing the manuscript and to Fiona Inglis and the editorial staff at Allen and Unwin Australia for seeing the manuscript through publication.

It is customary to thank children and spouses last, although, as in this case, they often deserve first acknowledgement. Lee and Christine need to be thanked for their patience. Special thanks must go to my husband, Ben, who has acted as a sounding board through the years and whose critical reading of the manuscript was invaluable for the revisions.

Note: Japanese names have been rendered according to the customary Japanese order of surname first.

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

'If you say "Tokkô", even a crying child falls silent.'
Takagi Takeo, 1954[1]

Spectres from the prewar period continue to haunt Japan. Central to the image of prewar Japan is the brooding sense of menace inspired by the Special Higher Police (Tokubetsu Kôtô Keisatsu), commonly known as the Tokkô. In 1954 memories of Tokkô terror remained fresh, but in 1975 the editors of a multivolume documentary history of the Tokkô ominously warned that the Tokkô still lived.[2] In 1984 the author of a history of the Tokkô worried that today's security police was becoming the Tokkô of the future, and a popular NHK television series introduced another generation of Japanese to the picture of Tokkô brutality. Even more recently in 1990, an *Asahi shinbun* article noted that police intervention in certain high schools over teachers' statements about the January general election reminded some people of the prewar Tokkô.[3] This continuing nervousness about a resurrection of the Tokkô derives from analogies made between the Tokkô on the one hand and Hitler's Gestapo and Stalin's State Political Administration, better known as the GPU, on the other. Discussion of the significance of political repression is therefore premised on moral judgements rooted in the shock of defeat 45 years ago.

The Japanese political system suffered a moral as well as a military defeat in 1945. In attempting to explain this double failure, both Japanese and Western scholars have utilised terms such as 'authoritarianism', 'fascism' and 'totalitarianism' to describe the prewar order. However, they have disagreed over both the meaning and appropriateness of these designations. The term 'totalitarianism' arose in the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s to link the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany. Although historians still use it at times descriptively, political scientists in general no longer find it a useful analytical concept. As monolithic views of prewar and even wartime Japan disappeared, the term seemed progressively less appropriate to the Japanese context.

The term 'fascism' has continued to enjoy wider currency than 'totalitarianism' among historians of both Europe and Japan and of both Marxist and non-Marxist persuasion. Nevertheless, after decades of research and debate there is still no consensus on a definition of fascism. Moreover, none of the many definitions can be used to describe Japan without major alterations. If there was a 'Japanese fascism', it differed significantly from European fascism to the extent that theories of fascism lose their explanatory power when applied to prewar Japan.

Dissatisfaction with the concepts of totalitarianism and fascism has led some Japanese specialists to prefer 'authoritarianism'. However, although a suggestive descriptive term, authoritarianism is even less satisfactory than fascism as an analytical concept for it lacks any specific content. Unlike fascism, authoritarianism does not suggest concrete categories of analysis, such as ideology, political organisation or social structure, that could be used to erect an explanatory framework.

The one element that the idea of authoritarianism does suggest is domestic political repression. This seems to be the aspect of the notion that has recommended it to scholars. Indeed the repression of political dissent and the pursuit of political dissidents form the common elements of all the terms used to describe the prewar Japanese political system. This suggests that repression is the key element that must be explained. Yet scholars have not looked closely at the police, particularly the Tokkô, nor attempted to analyse its role in the political system as a whole. Until recently studies of the problem of political control tended to focus on individuals and groups that suffered under the prewar regime rather than on the repressors themselves. This served to document abuses, but not to tell why they occurred—to describe the tragedy of prewar Japan, but not to explain why it happened.

Studies of the police in prewar Japan

Considering the importance assigned by contemporary observers and Allied Occupation authorities to the role of the police in prewar Japan, it is surprising that so little Western scholarly attention has been directed to the police.[4] Americans writing in popular magazines, journals and books during the 1920s and 1930s viewed police activity as an important element in prewar Japanese society. They reported the increase in political police activities and growing restrictions on freedom of speech and press, and they speculated on the implications of these developments for the establishment of fascism in Japan.[5] At the end of the war an American intelligence report argued that its political activities made the Tokkô 'a potent political force' and 'in large part responsible for the creation of obstacles to the democratic development of the Japanese people'.[6] General MacArthur accepted this view, describing the police as the 'strongest weapon of the military clique', one that had enabled the military 'to spread a network of political espionage, suppress freedom of speech, of assembly, and even of thought, and by means of tyrannical oppression to degrade the dignity of the individual'.[7] This evaluation of the political role played by the prewar and wartime police became the impetus behind Occupation policies to purge all political police officials immediately and reform the police system as a whole, in order to prevent restoration of a 'police state' and to remove obstacles to democratisation.[8]

Histories of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and other leftist groups by Western scholars all refer to suppressive activities carried out by the police; they consider these activities a major, if not the main, factor in the failure of the Communists and other leftists to sustain an organised opposition movement against the existing political order and elites.[9] However, the focus remains on the leftists themselves; no analysis of the police is made. Richard Mitchell's studies of the Peace Preservation Law administration and of political censorship have begun to fill the gap in our knowledge of the evolution of the government's thought control policies during the 1920s and 1930s.[10] His consideration of the Justice Ministry clearly shows the complexity of the system and points to the need for an analysis of the workings of the key repressive agent in the system, the Tokkô.

In Japanese scholarship the problem is not one of neglect, but lack of impartiality and dispassionate analysis. This is a manifestation of a general problem that until recently has plagued Japanese

scholarship concerning the prewar period. Events of that period have been too close—whether abhorred or embarrassing—to be treated from any emotional and intellectual distance. The Tokkô is often made the supreme example of the 'dark valley' that is supposed to characterise Japanese history in the 1930s and 1940s. It attracts attention in all histories of repression and repressive legislation as well as in studies of the police in general, and it also figures in some studies of administration and bureaucracy.

Interpretations may be described as either 'official' or 'opposition' viewpoints. The opposition viewpoint prevails among most scholars and the general public as well as among the socialist and communist parties. It has much in common with that of Occupation authorities, for it also regards the Tokkô as the Japanese counterpart of Nazi Germany's Gestapo and the Soviet GPU and as a central element in Japanese 'fascism'. It emphasises the omniscient and completely centralised nature of the Tokkô's organisation and activities.[11] Japanese critics, like Occupation leaders, call the Tokkô a weapon or tool of the ruling group. In their terms the Tokkô was established and used by the ruling class and its absolutist emperor system to suppress the non-ruling class. Through use of the Tokkô the ruling class checked the contradictions that accompanied the rapid development of capitalism.[12]

The viewpoint defending the Tokkô may be called the 'official' interpretation because it is generally put forth in official and semi-official government histories of the police, as well as by former police officials. It takes pains to refute analogies between the Tokkô and the Gestapo or GPU, arguing that, unlike the German and Soviet police, the Tokkô was a public administrative agency no different from other branches of the police, with its personnel publicly recorded and performing their tasks openly and based on public laws and regulations. Therefore, the Tokkô was by no means a secret police. Moreover, the argument continues, while some Tokkô officers used extreme methods, most were only faithfully enforcing the laws—strictly controlling both extreme right wing elements and the left wing Communist Party and thereby preventing illegal acts.[13]

Since the second half of the 1970s Japanese scholars have begun to move more comfortably between these polemical extremes. Aside from the publication of numerous Tokkô-related documents, there have been attempts at a less partisan treatment of the Tokkô.[14] In 1984 Ogino Fujio published the first detailed chronological history of the Tokkô. His focus is institutional, and Ogino himself says that he has not fully considered the links between the expansion of the Tokkô and developments in social movements.[15] In addition, this approach leaves open the question of why the

government reacted so strongly to such obviously weak movements, lacking in mass support. Equally important, it tends to treat the Tokkô as a passive instrument of the government rather than seek explanations in the internal dynamics of the Tokkô itself. Ogino does not consider the Tokkô's position in the police institution or prewar political system as a whole.

Studies of the police in general

In Western scholarship a similar trend can be seen in studies of police in general. Those concerned with political police have sometimes been limited to moral condemnations of police brutality, terror or 'totalitarianism'.[16] Although more historical studies of police now take an analytical approach, there are still only a few that consider the political and social role of the police.[17] As in the case of the Tokkô, the police elsewhere in the world has usually been portrayed as an obedient agent of the existing regime, as a mere reflection of the political system.[18] Police histories are often institutional histories; they focus on the police as a purely administrative agency and concentrate on organisational and functional developments.[19]

Many criminologists and sociologists have recognised the active social role played by the police, but their concerns have not usually been historical or comparative.[20] Police studies have been dominated by case studies with particular national or historical preoccupations. Consequently, although their interest in police–public relations unveils problems common to the police in many countries, it often leads to hypotheses and conclusions too specific to a given culture or time period to be useful in the interwar Japanese context. Research since the mid 1970s has begun to look across national and cultural boundaries, but comparative police analysis, like police history, remains in the pioneering stage.[21]

Political scientists specialising in modernisation and political development in South and Southeast Asia and Africa have carried out the most helpful and suggestive studies for the historian. A few have analysed the role of the police in these social, economic and political processes.[22] They have argued that the police acts as an agency of political socialisation, meaning that it participates in the process of transmitting political values and behavioural patterns to individual citizens. Children's experiences with police officers are often their earliest contacts with government officials and can condition their

way of viewing the political world.[23] Political scientists are just beginning to realise this, however. Most specialists in political socialisation and development concentrate their attention on schools, churches, the military and the mass media; they exclude the police.[24] One would also expect theories of political communication such as Karl Deutsch's to include the police as an object of research, since police officers have close contacts with citizens and provide a channel for information to flow between citizens and higher levels of government. Again, however, the police has been overlooked.[25]

The police does more than passively reflect the political system. It interacts with its political, social and cultural environment. David Bayley has explored the relationship between police development and historical circumstances in a comparative study of police systems in Britain, France, Germany and Italy. While he still treats the police development primarily as a reflection of external circumstances, he finds that the four police systems did not change in any uniform or automatic way in response to historical events, but rather demonstrated considerable stability or 'impermeability'. He cites the continuities in the French police system before and after the revolution as an example. However, the systems did change, and Bayley recognises the complex interaction that takes place among historical events, police institutions and political life.[26] This tends to reinforce James Q. Wilson's conclusions from his study of eight American urban communities.[27] Wilson suggests a correlation between police work style and political culture. However, he adds that, while police officials are keenly sensitive to their political environment, they are not governed by it.

The political and social roles of the police

Historically, the nature of political systems and their police have often but not always coincided. An outstanding example of a non-coinciding case is the coercive and authoritarian approach taken by the British in nineteenth-century Ireland.[28] Moreover, while instances of police action and policies independent of the government have been more rare than those of the military, the police's role in Ghana during the late 1960s demonstrated the possibility. There the police split and the two factions played separate political roles, the uniformed police allying with the military against Nkrumah and the political police.[29]

The police possesses several traits that endow it with influence in

political and social life. Like the military, police power derives from its control over coercive forces. Unlike the military, police officers are usually the sole wielders of force against members of their own society.[30] Consequently, they are expected to use that force with maximum restraint. The more they rely on it to fulfil their assigned tasks, the less effective they appear to be. The police also differs from the military in its position as the initial point of contact between citizens and the law enforcement machinery. The police derives its strength from possession of authority as well as raw power. That authority carries moral overtones, for laws express the interests, values and beliefs of the ruling socio-political elite.[31] Crimes are actions declared undesirable according to prevailing norms.

Wide visibility enhances police effectiveness. In contrast with most other government officials, police officers wear uniforms setting them apart from ordinary citizens. Moreover, their diverse responsibilities bring them into more contact with individual citizens.[32] Maintenance of domestic order and stability heads the list of responsibilities. However, police officers perform administrative tasks beyond crime prevention and detection even in societies such as Britain and the United States, which have adopted a narrow definition of police work. In interwar Japan, where a broad definition of police work was accepted, police officers performed a multitude of tasks that brought them into daily contact with citizens. Consequently, they and other low-ranking officials, rather than remote members of the Diet, cabinet and higher civil service, came to personify political power for ordinary Japanese people.[33]

While perhaps more political 'agents' than 'principals', police officers may be significant in political socialisation. The manner in which they carry out their responsibilities influences their environment as much as the nature of the responsibilities themselves. As Wilson has emphasised, police officers are supposed to have minimal discretion, but in practice discretion is inevitable since laws require interpretation to be applied. Police officers decide whether or not to enforce a law and how to enforce it. In sharp contrast with most other large organisations, discretion within a police organisation increases as one moves down the hierarchy.[34] How police officers exercise discretion can affect people's attitudes towards their government and the political process in general. Do they operate openly or secretively? How do they treat individuals in their public contacts? Do they act impartially or in the interests of a particular group or groups? As an important element in all citizens' direct political experiences, relations with the police therefore shape their conceptions of law and political authority. Gabriel Almond and

Sidney Verba appreciated this in their study of civic culture when they used people's expectations of treatment by the police as an indicator of 'output affect' in the five countries surveyed.[35]

Finally, the police may be influential because it develops into a corporate entity.[36] However closely the police is associated with the regime, it also develops its own public and self-image, its own aims and ideals, and its own norms and style of operation. Its recruitment and training needs often lead to establishment of its own educational institutions and publications or may stimulate other institutions to meet these requirements. A police organisation also socialises its own members. The self-image developed influences individual police officers' views of their society and the role they should play in it. This includes their attitudes about the extent of a political role that the police should play.

The police official thus combines many roles. Balzac elevated police work to the noblest profession because it encompasses the work of three other noble professions: the soldier, who is guardian of society and protector of citizens; the priest, who is guardian of morality; and the artist, who seeks to explore motive and understand the human condition.[37] A New York police officer put it in contemporary terms:

> 'Cops aren't just crime fighters—we're in the aid business. Each time I answer an emergency. I have to think, "What am I on this one—minister, psychiatrist, social worker, marriage counsellor or law-enforcement agent?" '[38]

Both views demonstrate an insight into the involvement of the police in some of the most fundamental problems of society. Its responsibilities necessarily make its role more complex and influential than that of a 'nightwatchman'.[39] Depending on circumstances the police may contribute to maintenance of political stability or to processes of social change. A focus on the Tokkô's role in the suppression of the interwar Japanese left can therefore contribute to a reassessment of police roles in general as well as to an understanding of interwar Japanese politics and society.

The Tokkô in prewar Japan: factors to consider

The complexity of both the police officer's role and the specific and non-specific factors of time and place that shape this role suggest that a broad range of factors would need to be considered in an explanation of the position and actions of the Tokkô. Certainly, the interwar Japanese police, both as an institution and as a group of

individuals, interacted with the specific historical circumstances of the 1920s and 1930s. The shift in government policy towards the left from repression to vigorous and systematic suppression was in part the political authorities' response to a sense of crisis popularly expressed by many individuals and groups during the late 1920s. The widespread feelings of social, economic and political dislocation pervading Japan were closely linked with the decline of Taishô democracy and with a shift in the balance of power elites in favour of the military. The suppression of the left was one aspect of authorities' response to this increasingly insecure and anxiety-ridden situation.

However, the fact that the Japanese government had followed a repressive policy towards socialism since its inception as an organised political movement in 1901 suggests that the suppression of the late 1920s and 1930s was not prompted by immediate circumstances alone. Moreover, from an external point of view there seems to be little justification for a sense of political danger on the part of government authorities. Despite the popularity of leftist ideas among intellectuals, students and industrial workers, no leftist organisation ever became a major political force; certainly none ever threatened the takeover or overthrow of the existing government or imperial system. As JCP specialist George Beckmann concludes, the Japanese communists 'never became a serious threat to the modern synthesis that was being built by Japan's dominant conservative forces. The Communists, like the Socialists, were only dissidents on the fringes of society; they never became a mass force.'[40]

It is important to explain the contribution of the police to this failure of organised leftist movements in the interwar period. However, since the left never posed an objective threat to the government or political system, there arises the more broadly significant question of why it was perceived by the police as a profound challenge—a challenge not only to the established political and economic system, but even to the foundation of the so-called national polity. One must go beyond the immediate events and conditions of the 1920s and 1930s to answer this question, for the answer depends in part on an understanding of conditions derived from the Japanese past and traditions before the 1920s, in part on an appreciation of the ideology of the police, and in part on a consideration of Japanese political culture as a developing set of patterns of attitudes and behaviour. Beyond the national context, characteristics that the Japanese police shared with all police and bureaucratic institutions also can be seen to contribute to a systemic and cultural explanation of Tokkô repression.

Three basic questions account for the order of topics. What were

the perceptions and policies of the police towards the left during the 1920s and 1930s? What were the reasons for those perceptions and policies? Finally, what were the consequences and implications of those perceptions and policies for the left, the police and the political system as a whole? Explanations of Tokkô repression must be set against the background of the government's policies. The history of police perceptions and policy towards the left and the problems the left posed during the 1920s and 1930s highlights continuities and identifies changes in policy. It also shows areas of disagreement among scholars of the suppression and the problems with some of the previous explanations of the suppression and the role of the Tokkô.

The reasons for the way in which police officials perceived the leftist problem and carried out policy in a particular manner fall into four categories: history and traditions of the police; the legal framework; police recruitment, socialisation, ideology and other internal elements; and relations between the police and its external environment. The history and traditions of the police institution, especially the position of the political police in that institution, provide a good starting point. Setting the interwar police into its historical context is particularly important for understanding its repressive role. Inheriting essentially unchanged the organisation established during the Meiji period, police officials continued to look for inspiration to the conceptions enunciated by the founder of the modern Japanese police, Kawaji Toshiyoshi, regarding their role in Japanese society. The police tradition therefore supplied models for attitudes and behaviour for Tokkô officers during the 1920s and 1930s.[41]

Most political police laws and regulations were also part of the historical legacy received by the interwar Tokkô. They are important for understanding Tokkô actions because they designated political tasks and responsibilities and defined the scope of police operations. The interwar police, including the Tokkô, repeatedly insisted on the importance of law as the basis of their authority. At the same time the Tokkô was notorious for abusing the laws. A resolution of this apparent inconsistency lies in police officials' concepts of the role of law in Japanese society. Since the laws in any country are always subject to interpretation, such concepts and other fundamental political values undergirding the legal framework are as important as the specific content of laws for understanding police behaviour.

Recruitment, training, ideology and rewards constitute another cluster of factors affecting police attitudes and behaviour. Their social, economic and educational backgrounds and the criteria by

which they were recruited partly determined the qualities of Tokkô officers. The kind of training and socialisation they experienced after entering the police strongly influenced their attitudes. Training and socialisation mean not only the knowledge and skills taught to police officers, but also the self-image and ideology promoted by police authorities. The latter includes the purpose and aims of the police, views of law and the relationship of the police to the people and the state. Japanese police leaders made strenuous efforts throughout the 1920s and 1930s to professionalise the police but met with limited success. Appreciation of this failure to achieve professionalism contributes not only to an understanding of the suppression of the left, but also to an understanding of the functioning of bureaucratic structures during the interwar period.

Relations between the police and other institutions, particularly the Justice Ministry and Kenpeitai (Military Police), not only shaped policies and the nature of their execution, but also changed the actual scope of police operations and stimulated redefinition of the police's role in Japanese society. This redefinition of role, embodied in an ideology of the emperor's police (*tennô no keisatsu*), also had its source in the larger external environment of the police. It was both a response to the shared sense of general social and political crisis and the outcome of competition with other institutions.

The police response to the leftist problem illuminates the functioning of the political system as a whole. The Japanese police was not simply a dependent variable nor merely a passive instrument in the hands of the ruling elite. The police institution interacted with other elements of the system in a complex and changing manner, particularly in its relationships with the Justice Ministry and the Kenpeitai. From the outside the government appears to be a single-minded monolith in its response to the leftist challenge, but from the inside it appears as a more complicated structure, affected by philosophical as well as bureaucratic rivalries. Throughout the evolution of the thought control system, however, the Tokkô remained a crucial element, and police leaders helped to shape as well as to administer that system. Consequently, the elucidation of the Tokkô's internal and external developments offers a new perspective on the problem of defining the prewar Japanese political system. It also provides terms and conditions useful in comparisons with other countries.

Totalitarian, fascist or authoritarian?

Was Japan totalitarian, fascist or authoritarian? There are problems with all these labels when they are applied to Japan. As indicated at the beginning of this Introduction, the term 'totalitarianism' has become outmoded because of its now obvious Cold War biases. In addition, detailed study of the Nazi and Stalinist states has revealed that the term gives a crude and misleading picture of even Germany or the Soviet Union. 'Totalitarianism' was at most an ideal of those regimes but certainly never a reality. Still less does it describe Japan of the 1930s and 1940s.

Since the revival of interest in the concept of fascism in the 1960s a whole literature has developed on the subject, but theoreticians have not even approached a consensus on a definition of the term.[42] There is not even unanimity over whether or not both Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany should be considered fascist. Marxists may be less divided than non-Marxists, but even here there are internecine disagreements. Recent writers such as Nicos Poulantzas have criticised the Stalinist conceptions of fascism in the Comintern theses of the 1930s as being too economistic, but they still view fascism as the process in which monopoly capital establishes its dominance over society.[43] Examination of Japanese police leaders' image of their communist enemy indicates that Marxists have exaggerated the degree of capitalist control over repression policies, oversimplifying the situation by portraying a manipulative relationship based on purely class interests. The police did not always act in strict accordance with economic class interests. They developed an independent ideological rationale for their approach to social problems, a rationale rooted in part in a critique of the abuses of the capitalist system. Moreover, the existence of serious differences between police and Justice Ministry officials over peace preservation policies shows that the government was far from being united on these issues. Marxist works may be valuable in directing attention to the relation between fascism and class, but as they stand they provide inadequate explanations of prewar Japanese domestic policies.

Interpretation of prewar Japan as fascist according to non-Marxist definitions is also misleading. More than one attempt has been made to discard the term as a description of the prewar state, without denying the existence of fascist movements or ideas.[44] The reason is that, even setting aside the problem of a common definition, none of the many definitions available fits the Japanese situation without the omission of one or more crucial elements. Elements commonly found in definitions of fascism include a radical, often

anti-modern ideology, a mass movement centred on a party, and a charismatic leader. Many individuals and groups in Japan during the 1920s and 1930s expressed anti-communist and in addition, anti-modern and anti-capitalist ideas. However, none sought mass support. In particular, the movement of young military officers, which is usually viewed as fascist, consisted of a small segment of the ruling elite. Moreover, none of these radical anti-modernist groups were able to put their ideas into practice. Aside from the young officers' movement, another example would be the New Order movement of 1940. Even with Prime Minister Konoe's support, the movement could not overcome opposition from Diet politicians, big business and the bureaucracy to its proposals for eliminating the Diet and drastically restructuring the capitalist system.[45] As for a charismatic leader, by the 1930s the potential of the Japanese political system for such a leader had been absorbed by the routinised charisma embodied in the imperial institution.

Maruyama Masao's formulation of a special kind of Japanese fascism has been very influential in both Japan and the West. He has rejected the necessity of fascism being established by a mass movement from below and argued that Japanese fascism was imposed from above.[46] However, qualifications such as this and a preoccupation with pointing out distinctive features of Japanese fascism render his definition of fascism problematical as a comparative concept. If the establishment of fascism meant no change in the social basis of political elites or in the institutional structure of the political system, what is to distinguish the 'fascist' government from what came before it? European fascist movements invariably described themselves as revolutionary, but Maruyama's definition precludes a revolutionary transformation in the political structure.

In the search for alternative labels and analytical concepts, scholars have often turned to 'authoritarian' or 'highly authoritarian'.[47] However, these seem unsatisfactory as well. The main problem is that they cover a very broad spectrum of regimes, too broad for making meaningful comparisons. Almost any repressive state may be described as authoritarian, regardless of the nature of its ideology, or the socio-economic basis of its support or the stage of its economic development.

The concept of a police state

Was Japan a 'police state'? The notion of a police state offers a useful supplement, if not an alternative, to the time-worn and much