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# *Save the Name of Democracy*
## *Maruyama Masao*

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*I have a taste for the secret, it clearly has to do with not-belonging.*
—— Jacques Derrida

## *Introduction: The Sensibility for the Name of Democracy*

The period is already gone when we could mobilize different people who each had "a hidden agenda" under very naïve words such as "Peace" or "Freedom", and to give them a superficial meaning in order to form "a common front". Only when each person expresses his opinion to the maximum extent without hiding or avoiding his or her ideas, can we clearly find out which issues we agree or disagree on with each person or group. We can thus *predict* to what extent we can work together on the practical political problems we face. But, at least we, intellectuals, except for a few people whose ideas and principles are clear, don't have this sense of *predictability*, and so we cannot rid our-

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selves from a vague anxiety and suspicion even when we speak the same word. This condition makes us more isolated and more secluded. ("Letter to a Liberal"[1950], in *Shū*, 4: 318)

In this passage, Maruyama points out a sensibility for words that fade away. When words such as "Peace" or "Freedom" are meaningful for everyone, they are able to strengthen the ties of solidarity between people. So the task of liberal intellectuals, according to Maruyama, is to *predict* whether these kind of words are still influential or not. It is necessary to foresee the possibilities for resolving political problems through active discussions between intellectuals. In fact, Maruyama wrote this passage at a period when the term "democracy" began to fade away in Japan. The time was the outbreak of the Korean War, when Japan began to be involved in the global structure of the Cold War. Sensing a revival of militarism, Maruyama tried to *predict* which words are fading away, in order to maintain a sense of solidarity.

Indeed, we might say that since ancient Greece the word "democracy" is always exposed to a risk from the historical aspect. People had denied the claim that the principle of democracy intended to realize an equality between rulers and subjects, because this principle is considered as "the control of the poor" detracting the social nobility against the natural order. Since then, people had often been afraid of what democracy might indicate.[1] In recent years, in the ever-expanding order of neo-liberal capitalism, certain people detest the notion of democracy based on the idea of freedom and equality. Despite the widening inequalities in the world, caused by the global economy being regarded as natural providence, there are discourses in which these inequalities are attributed to personal responsibility, or furthermore to the "destiny" of individuals.

What is happening to the word "democracy" today? If democracy is continually exposed to the risk of fading away, how do we save the name of democracy, or what this name indicates? In this paper, we shall examine these questions in line with what Maruyama tried to *predicate* through the name "democracy."

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1. Cf. Jacques Rancière, *La Haine de la démocratie*, La Fabrique, 2005.

### 1. Maruyama's works on Democracy

Maruyama's works have been criticized from various points of view: He was called a modernist, a liberal, a conservative, a nationalist and an illuminati. For instance, one anti-modernist says that Maruyama applies Western criteria to Japan, in order to search for what exists in the West but not in Japan. A populist points out that Maruyama is so elitist that he cannot stand on the side of the people. An activist comments that Maruyama's political analyses are very acute, but lack effective, practical guidelines. Finally, an anti-nationalist suggests that Maruyama, who points to the homogeneity of Japanese society, is precisely a standard-bearer for the homogenous nation-state.

It is clear that Maruyama is one of the most important Japanese thinkers of democracy in the postwar era. Indeed, people often criticize the influence of his democratic theory on postwar Japanese society.[2] But although many have pointed out some lack in his theory, strangely, the thing that seems to be mostly missing from his work is precisely an explicit theory of democracy.

Indeed, Maruyama published only a few articles that deal directly with the topic of democracy. Those include seminar from 1959 titled "The Historical Background of Democracy" (in *Shū,* 8) ; some short essays that discuss the critical moment of Japanese democracy in the anti-US movement. Other examples are the essays "Determining One's Attitude Today", "August 15 and May 19: the Historical Meaning of Japanese Democracy" (in *Shū*, 8); a roundtable discussion with the Marxist thinker Katsumi Umemoto and the economist Noboru Sato titled "Revolutionary Ideas in Modern Japan" (in *Zadan*, 6); the retro-spective essay "The Origin of Postwar Democracy" (in *Shū*, 15), and a

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2. A part-time worker by the name of Tomohiro Akagi published "I want to slap Maruyama Masao" [*Maruyama Masao wo hippatakitai*] in *Ronza,* January 2007. This article provoked many reactions. Akagi declared that his hope is the outbreak of war, which would put an end to the Japanese democratic society created by postwar intellectuals such as Maruyama. According to him, his endless poverty is due to the economic and social disparity of contemporary peaceful society. Thus he rather longs for the equality between all nations, whether rich or poor, who are all suffering during war.

lecture from 1960.

Why did Maruyama publish so few texts explicitly dealing with democracy? The first reason is that, in general, he did not explore in depth political issues, such as the analyses of various institutions or political systems. He dedicated most of his time and energy to a study of the history of political thought and intellectual history in general. Maruyama, who defined himself as a historian of ideas, never discussed political questions from the perspective of a positive analyses of historical facts, nor from the position of a reflection without any historical context. Rather, he tried to think the relationship between the historical observation of a socio-political system, and an idealistic reflection oriented toward universality; namely the relationship between historical science and pure philosophy. This is how Maruyama tried to explore the possibilities of democracy, looking at the relationship between its institutionalization and its idea.

Secondly, Maruyama's approach relies heavily on his style of interpretation which he called "counterpoint" [*taii hō*]. In music, a counterpoint involves several different musical lines that sound harmonious when played simultaneously. The term originates from the Latin punctus contra punctum meaning "point against point". Maruyama, an amateur of classical musician, tends to think together different points of view which sometimes seem contradictory.[3] For instance, Maruyama's inquiry of modernity takes place in the passage between the pre-modern and modern, and between the modern and ultra-modern. As to the political, Maruyama writes that "on a practical level, socio-political problems do not consist of an alternative between the best and the worst, but of choosing the better option."[4] For him, the political appears as a process that takes place between the a-political and the ultra-political. He writes that his method consists of "focusing on the ambivalence in the processes that create thought" (*Shū*, 9: 77).

Finally, we should consider Maruyama's distinction between what he

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3. In this sense, he loved the music of Beethoven: "In order to play Beethoven, one must have within oneself a sense of polar opposites, of contradiction, that is, of a torn-apart consciousness." (Maruyama Masao, *Jikonai taiwa* [Dialogues with Myself], Misuzu Shobō, 1998, p. 163.)

4. "Letter to a Liberal"[1950], in *Shū*, 4: 331.

calls "*Honten*" (the main store or the main branch) and "*Yomise*" (a night stall) (cf. *Zadan*, 9: 287–288). This refers to his conscious separation between his styles of writing and talking: his research of the history of political thought is written in the style of *Honten*, while his discussions of current topics are written in the *Yomise* style. In his research, Maruyama evaluates the spirit of pre-modern Japan in order to imagine an ideal modern spirit for Japan, at the heart of which would be the principle of democracy. At the same time, in his political activities and analyses, he remarks on democracy in a timely fashion, especially in the 1960s. Maruyama was very sensitive to the distinction between the question of how to define democracy on a *theoretical* level and how to intervene in the question of democracy in a *performative* manner. It is possible that, according to Maruyama, in order to question democracy, it is not necessary to elaborate a theory of it, nor to dedicate oneself only to political activities; rather, one has to think democracy between theoretical writings and practical writings, between the styles of *Honten* and *Yomise*.

All this might explain why Maruyama lacked an authoritative theory of democracy itself, while also looking for "an understanding of politics that is the name of democracy" (*Shū*, 8: 90). For him, maintaining a sound democracy means saving the name of democracy without giving it a final definition.[5]

## 2. The Chiasm of Nationalism and Democracy

After the fascist period of the Second World War, Japan saw a period of an absence of nationalism. Released from the ultra-nationalist society, people tended to look for a new political regime. In fact, in 1946, Maruyama was asked to give public lectures and seminars on the mean-

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5. Should we detect here the character of a negative theology of democracy? In fact, the title of my paper is inspired by Jacques Derrida's book on negative theology, *Save the Name* (*Sauf le nom*, Galilée, 1993). Derrida uses the word "save" in a double meaning: "removed" and "preserve". Negative theologians try to preserve the supremacy of God without defining it through human language. Not to offer a name to God is to preserve the presence of God itself.

ing and function of democracy in the Common University [*shomin daigaku*] of Mishima. He felt such an extraordinary fervor in the audience that he later described this period as "the peak of democracy, which contains its various chaotic possibilities" (*Zadan*, 6: 7). At the same time, leftist forces defended the idea of democracy while avoiding that of nationalism. A few groups of unorthodox leftists and liberals sought to piece together democracy and nationalism in 1940's. Maruyama agreed with this direction, saying that "just now, after having broken away from the yoke of ultra-nationalism, true nationalistic movement should connect with the democratic revolution."[6] According to Maruyama's view, the linkage between nationalism and democracy continues to provide the spiritual energy of people. This was the case until the protest movement against the Japan-US New Security Treaty in 1960.

From Maruyama's standpoint, it is important to affect a social-institutional reform, but also to accomplish an internal innovation in the spiritual structure of the Japanese people. To do so, it is first necessary to destroy the ideology of the homogeneous structure of Japanese society formed around the emperor, which reached its zenith during the fascist period. In 1951 Maruyama writes: "as long as democracy is accepted as an elevated theory or an edifying sermon, it remains a foreign import, and cannot link together internally with nationalism. This might sound bizarre, but in order to accomplish this linkage, democracy should be *irrationalized* in proportion to the *rationalization* of nationalism" ("Nationalism in Japan" [1951], in *Shū*, 5: 75). For Maruyama, Japan has to translate the idea of democracy into reality, without keeping democracy as a rational principle born in the West. At the same time, it has to take precautions to maintain Japanese nationalism, while not letting it fall into ultra-nationalism.

For a long time now many people have criticized national democracy and pointed out its limitations in modern history. The idea of the nation can give rise to a structure of exclusion of those who don't share political rights, or to oppress people to belong to a certain nation. The modern inventions of nation, nationality and nationalism are insepara-

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6. "Kuga Katsunan"[1947], in *Shū*, 3: 105.

ble at their origin from racism, imperialism, colonialism, as historical studies have well shown. Some people voice objections not only to dysfunctional parliamentary democracy based on the national framework, but also to the socio-political representative system at the global level (the United Nations General Assembly, the World Bank, IMF, WHO, etc.). Various people have explored ways of coordinating between citizens of the world beyond the attributive categories of class, race or nation.

Keeping in mind this historical context of global democracy, how should we interpret Maruyama's aspiration for national democracy in the 1940s? As an example of his sensibility for cosmopolitanism, let us take an essay from the 1970s:

> Real cosmopolitanism means: this place where I stand is precisely the world, the world doesn't exist "outside" Japan. However, images of "the world" or "the international" are always regarded to exist somewhere outside Japan. This is precisely false universalism. In response to this images, the group of those who are "inside" forms an idea nationalism to which they can belong. We have no choice but to break out of this vicious cycle. ("The Relation to Hao" [1978], in *Shū*, 10: 360)

When Maruyama thought about the linkage between democracy and nationalism, he placed emphasis on the balance between universal and particular: the universal concept born in the West and the particular situation of Japan. For him, breaking the correspondence of images of outside and inside will be a starting point for reflecting on national democracy. It is of small interest to accept the universal from the outside, because the universal will arrive only when there is no longer a frontier between inside and outside.

## 3. Towards Associative Democracy

In the 1950s the fear of communist influence on American institutions led to the practice of accusations of disloyalty or subversion and the period known as McCarthyism. Maruyama was very sensitive to

this phenomenon and described it as "a Time of Terror [*kyōfu no jidai*]". He found there a strange counterpoint of democracy and totalitarianism. So-called enemies of democracy were eliminated in the name of democracy, democracy became normative, authentic and uniform with the practice of violent exclusion (cf. *Zadan*, 2: 280). Maruyama wrote: "Even in a typical democratic state, the masses are subconsciously subject to being controlled and directed towards a particular way of thinking through advertising and mass media" ("Man and Politics"[1948], in *Shū*, 3: 220). Maruyama was aware of the danger of nationalism metamorphosing into simple populism, under the influence of the uniforming power of mass media. He therefore tightened his guard against "the reverse course" towards the prewar era. In fact, after publishing the article "Nationalism in Japan", Maruyama never spoke explicitly about the rebirth of nationalism. In 1952, although keeping the framework of the nation, he began to propose the idea of political pluralism:

> In order to make democracy work, first of all, the practice of voting once every few years should not be the only medium for the political voice of people. It is essential above all that the channels of popular will be formed in multiple ways, by the energetic activities of autonomous, private associations. ("The World of Politics" [1952], in *Shū*, 5: 189)

In the period when Maruyama said yes to the political possibilities of associations, the labor unions still had power under Japanese capitalism. In 1953 and 1960, for instance, strikes were undertaken by labor unions in the Mitsui Miike Coal Mine in northern Kyūshū, against the forced dismissal ordered by the Mitsui company. It is said that this labor unrest represents one of the climaxes in the confrontation between capitalistic powers and labor unions in Japan in general. At the time, Maruyama pointed out the importance of labor unions in promoting associative democracy in Japan. This emphasis seems to have moved from forming representative relationships between the nation and democracy, towards creating various public spheres and a multilayered communication between different discourses. The political pluralism proposed by Maru-

yama is envisaged not only as the framework of the representative system, but also as the heart of the various social communities. So it is the very tension between the political and the "nonpolitical" that Maruyama now attaches importance to:

> An autonomous association, such as Meirokusya, whose purpose is nonpolitical, constantly develops a critique of various important topics—including political ones— from its own point of view. Only after this tradition is rooted will our habitual mentality, which tends to distinguish between politics and culture, will be broken down. We can then expect to spread an ordinary ethics of modern citizens who make political statements from the nonpolitical field. ("Opening the Country" [1959], in *Shū,* 8: 83)

For Maruyama, it is politicians and journalists who never talk about politics but rather distort the image of politics. Democracy is given an active life only by the general public who does not "specialize" in politics. Maruyama says yes to the political activities of those non-professional politicians, even calling them "lay Buddhism [*zaike bukkyō*]":

> The development of democracy means the process by which democracy has gradually gained its freedom from the world constituted by professional politicians, from the state of politics monopolized by the so-called "political community [*seikai*]". That means that democracy contains a paradox. Democracy can be given an active life only by political activities performed by those who don't originally need politics, those who don't aim at politics. ("Determining One's Attitude Today" [1960] , in *Shū*, 8: 315)

As is well known, Yoshimoto Takaaki criticized Maruyama for not paying attention to people's daily life.[7] However, we can see that, at least in a sense, Maruyama did emphasize this aspect. So far as he respects "involuntary political activities out of very nonpolitical motives, such as

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7. Cf. Yoshimoto Takaaki, "Essay on Maruyama Masao" [1962–63], in *The Collected Works of Yoshimoto Takaaki*, Vol. 12, Keiso Shobo, 1969.

learning or arts,"[8] it might be that he rather tends towards being an activist. Between the professional attitude towards politics and indifference to it, it is essential that democracy will maintain the voluntary political movements of amateurs.

So did Maruyama think about which conditions are adequate or inadequate for democracy? In 1960, he detects an anti-democratic attitude in a speech by the Minister of Labor, Matsuno, against the strike ("15 August and 19 May" [1960], in *Shū*, 8). On the one hand, Matsuno calls for respect for positive law, saying that "Democracy has laws. It is very presumptuous that the ones breaking the law advocate democracy." On the other hand, he emphasizes the significance of conversation, saying that "The law of democracy consists of having a discussion within the law". Maruyama felt odd about Matsuno's bureaucratic attitude, because Matsuno wanted to enhance legal democracy by seeking an acquiescent consciousness of the subjects. Here we must be sensitive in our interpretation of Maruyama's critique. He is not necessarily opposed to respecting law and a harmonious conversation. But he hopes that the respect for law, institutions and debate, will not arise from bureaucratic power but from the non-professional, even amateur, activities of people.

## 4. Predicating Democracy to Come

As a starting point to describing the contradictory unity of democracy, Maruyama affirmed certain principal divisions. He tried to trace a permanent movement of democracy in different directions at the same time, namely in the style of counterpoint:

> Democracy is the Trinity of idea, movement and institution. So the institution [the institutional aspect] is one of these [three] elements. Although I feel uncomfortable repeating the same topic I talked about decades ago, democracy as idea and movement is precisely "a permanent revolution". Neither capitalism nor socialism is such a permanent revolution. Both indeed include the idea, and are in the end historical

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8. "To 'be' and to 'do'"[1959], in *Shū*, 3: 39.

institutions. However, only democracy has existed since ancient Greece, and furthermore it will be unending no matter in which institution. It exists only as persistent democratization. ("The Point of Origin of Postwar Democracy" [1989], in *Shū*, 15; 69–70)

For Maruyama, it is indeed important to analyze the various aspects of democracy, but we cannot reach a synthesis of these elements in a unified picture.[9] That is why we cannot say that we belong to the system of democracy, which is precisely the contradictory unity between idea, movement and institution. There thus remains something of a secret in this relationship that constitutes democracy. What kind of a taste for the secret of democracy did Maruyama have?

Generally stated, the modern system of indirect democracy consist of a representative mechanism in which various opinions seem to be reduced to only one will. Modern democracy is not only a form of government, but the very constructive principle of the state. The idea of a fictive calculation is essential to this institution of democracy.[10] Democracy depends on how to count different opinions, how to form a political consensus through the technique of counting. It is this fictive calculation that makes the democratic movement or idea into an actual institution. For Maruyama, who considered democracy as "a 'permanent' movement beyond any particular system" (*Shū*, 8: 174), the essence of democracy is precisely to escape the logic of fictive calculation:

Representative parliamentary democracy is an institutional expression

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9. From this perspective, Maruyama commented about the university dispute in the late 1960's: "At any rate, I wonder whether they are using the word 'postwar democracy' to indicate the system of postwar Constitution, the actual political system, the reality of so-called 'democratic' movements, including socialist movements and labor movements, or the idea of democracy, the world's first idea which no political force can any longer openly negate. I just want them to distinguish these notions for the sake of the discussion." (Maruyama Masao, *Jikonai taiwa*, *op. cit.*, p. 186)

10. In ancient Greece, this principle of calculation relates to counting the number of one's friends. "How many friends can we have?" is then one of the crucial questions regarding the notion of friendship. That implicitly means "how many citizen-members can we accept?", which thus contains the question of friend versus enemy. On the relationships between democracy, calculation and friendship, see Jacques Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié,* Galilée, 1994.

of democracy in a certain historical context. But there never exists, neither in the past nor in the future, an institution which is concretely perfect democracy. At most we can talk about more or less democracy. In this sense, "a permanent revolution" is precisely a fitting name for democracy. ("An additional statement for *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (expanded edition)" [1964], in *Shū*, 8: 173)

It was on August 13, 1960, just after the movement against the Japan-US New Security Treaty, that Maruyama scribbled in his notebook the expression "Democracy as a permanent revolution". Maruyama took part in political activities within this movement on various levels. He participated in many public demonstrations, and often visited the home of Takeo Miki, an influential politician outside the main stream of the Liberal Democratic Party. In those meetings he recommend to dissolve the House of Representatives. We see that at that time Maruyama was committed to democratic movements, and also intervened in the internal affairs of the state. Together with both non-professional protestors and professional politician, Maruyama put himself in an ambivalent situation between the movement and institution of democracy. What did he think about such a political agent, who assumes this contradiction of democracy? In 1947 he wrote:

If it were natural that human beings always acted "badly" in every situation, there would simply be no room for true political intervention. The basis of politics as an art is that the human being can be good or bad, an angel or a devil, according to the circumstances. [...] It is such an "enigmatic" human that politics presupposes. ("Man and Politics" [1947], in *Shū*, 3: 212)

Maruyama develops his reflection on politics from an ambivalent image of man. The substance of politics stems from the necessity of systematically regulating this enigmatic essence of the human being. As Bismarck said, "politics is the art of possibilities". But, on the other hand, for Maruyama, who considers democracy as the contradictory unity between idea, institution and movement, democracy is beyond this art of possibilities. Should we then say that, for Marumaya, politics

as an art is always exposed to a kind of impossibility? Did he not indicate the essence of the human being and of democracy at this threshold between the possibility and impossibility of politics? Wouldn't it be only from this threshold that we can predicate what democracy means, without it ever being completely accomplished?

Two of the key concepts of Maruyama's thought, from his early period on, are "fiction" and "invention [*sakui*]". Maruyama often appreciated "modern thinking", with which people are able to invent not reality as it is, namely the natural order [*shizen*], but a mediated reality that is a fiction:

> The spirit of believing in the sense of a fiction is opposed to the spirit of making absolute a fiction already created. Rather, it constantly prevents such an absolutization and relativizes it. ("From Carnal Literature to Carnal Politics" [1949], in *Shū*, 4: 220)

For Maruyama, the importance of "the modern spirit" means neither to remain inside reality as it is, nor being entirely skeptical about the fictional aspect of our world. It means recognizing and living the reality of a fiction. Maruyama attempted to think politics through this tension between the natural order [*shizen*] and invention [*sakui*], in order to open the new temporality between the two. For Maruyama, democracy as "permanent revolution" is a name we should always predicate, in order to radically question the practice of the enigmatic human being.

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