

Public Opinion and the Press: The Origins of Media and Communication Studies in Prewar Japan, 1920-1937

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Abstract

Japan in the 1920s and 1930s has been seen as a time of great intellectual diversity. In his latest book on the history of the social sciences in modern Japan, Andrew E. Barshay described these decades as a "pluralizing moment" after the almost state-controlled knowledge-transfer in the preceding Meiji Period. In contrast to earlier German concepts of state-science and national-economics, a great variety of new theories have not only been introduced, but also proactively altered to become applicable to the cultural context of modern Japan within newly founded disciplines like sociology, political science and economics.

It seems to be taken for granted that basic research into mass-media and the processes of communication did not start before the introduction of American communication research to Japan in the post-war years. However, I will argue that inquiries into mass-media and communication had already taken root in the pre-war years. In my paper I will focus on the perspectives of intellectuals from very different professional and intellectual backgrounds who contributed to the formation of a pre-war intellectual discourse on "newspaper" (shinbun) and "public opinion" (yoron).

In particular, I will juxtapose the diverging views of two contemporary thinkers: the newspaper and propaganda researcher and wartime ethnologist Koyama Eizō (1899-1983) and the Marxist critic Tosaka Jun (1900-1945). Although both shared the same intellectual starting point of German sociology and newspaper studies, Koyama formed a constructivist perspective later emphasized by him to be the main key for propagating a common ethnic Japanese race in wartime Japan. On the other hand Tosaka fundamentally questioned the uncritical application of bourgeois concepts like the "press" and "public opinion".

Dr. Fabian Schäfer received his Ph.D. from Leipzig University. His current research interests include Japanese cultural studies, media and cultural theory and transnational intellectual history. During his one year stay in Leiden, Dr. Schäfer will transform his Ph.D. thesis *The Origins of Media and Communication Studies in Prewar Japan. Early Theoretical Approaches to the Press, Journalism and Public Opinion, 1920-1937* into a book and revise his German translation of selected critical writings of Japanese Marxist critic Tosaka Jun.

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