

**Reconceptualizing Liberty in the Time of Disorder:  
Maruyama Masao's Request for Responsible Liberty in Postwar Japan**

**Min-hyeok Kim**

(Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science department, Indiana University Bloomington)

Prepared for Presentation at The Ostrom Workshop, Indiana University, Bloomington, Sep. 25, 2020

Comments Welcomed ([mk84@iu.edu](mailto:mk84@iu.edu))

**ABSTRACT.**

The ongoing crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic raises a difficult question about the proper relationship between individual liberty and social responsibility, particularly in the time of disorder or public safety crisis, because numerous kinds of irresponsible behaviors—e.g. violation of social distancing rules or refusal to wear face masks—are conducted in the name of “individual liberty” or “personal choice.” Thus, one might ask why we should value individual liberty in the first place if it keeps silence on irresponsible behaviors and, as a result, causes massive social disorder. This question is explored via a reading of the postwar Japanese thinker Maruyama Masao's redefinition of liberty as a notion that involves a high degree of sense of responsibility in order for it to be properly exercised. By offering a contextualized account of Maruyama's postwar thought, I argue that through the notion of responsible liberty Maruyama tried to provide Japanese people with a new understanding of liberty that could produce active and responsible democratic citizenship in the midst of postwar disorder. At the same time, however, Maruyama's request for responsible liberty also left several crucial tensions and problems due to (a) his optimistic view on nationalism, (b) the illiberal implication of the emphasis of personal responsibility, and (c) the ambiguous meaning of responsibility. After critically examining these issues, I conclude with my brief thought on how this sort of different understandings of liberty—in the East and the West—is affecting the different responses to the current public health crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**NOTE.** This essay is written as a second chapter of my dissertation, entitled *Rebuilding Liberalism in Postwar Japan: A Critical Reconstruction of Maruyama Masao's Postwar Thought*. And for the names of East Asian persons discussed in this manuscript, I follow the local custom of placing the family name first.

## **Introduction**

The ongoing crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands across the globe, raises a difficult question about the proper relationship between individual liberty and social responsibility particularly in the time of disorder and public safety crisis. We are observing that numerous kinds of irresponsible behaviors—for instance, violation of social distancing rules or refusal to wear face masks—are conducted in the name of “individual liberty” or “personal choice,”<sup>1</sup> despite the grave danger that those reckless behaviors might pose to the safety and welfare of other fellow citizens. Thus, one might ask why we should value individual liberty in the first place if it keeps silence on irresponsible behaviors and, as a result, causes massive social disorder. Of course, in response to this question one can simply say that individual liberty could be, and even should be, restrained when it conflicts with other important social values such as public safety or social order. But this answer does not seem to help us better address the problem that much because, in practice, we would still need clearer principles of judgment concerning when it is justifiable to limit personal freedom or not. Without such a well-defined principle, those who believe in the supremacy of individual liberty are likely to keep arguing for the inviolability of personal freedom while critics of it would counter-argue that there are other social values—such as, equality or security—that are more important than, or more urgently needed than, individual liberty, at least in a specific situation.

Alternatively, we could choose another way to address this dilemma between individual liberty and public good by redefining the notion of ‘liberty’ as a concept that involves higher degree of social

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, see the following article: “Despite new mandatory mask rules, Trump insists it's everyone's 'personal choice': President Trump has resisted pressure to wear a mask throughout the pandemic” (ABC News, June 29, 2020). <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/mandatory-mask-rulestrump-insists-personal-choice/story?id=71519019>

responsibility in order for it to be properly exercised. In this essay I aim to show that the postwar Japanese liberal thinker Maruyama Masao (1914-96), who lived in the time of great disorder, made an interesting argument about the necessity of redefining liberty as a concept closely coupled with personal and social responsibility, particularly in a context where irresponsible understandings and practices of liberty prevail. The key reason behind this reformulation of liberty was associated with Maruyama's critical view of the 'negative' notion of liberty. To be specific, he held that the understanding of liberty merely as absence of restriction was unlikely to lead postwar Japanese society to achieve other crucial social goals of his time, such as national independence, creation of liberal social culture, and consolidation of democracy, all of which were considered essential for safeguarding individual liberty in the long term. By offering a contextualized account of Maruyama's notion of *responsible liberty*, which was developed through his experience of the Fifteen Years War (1931-45)<sup>2</sup> and wartime fascism, I will show that Maruyama tried to show (a) the unfitness of the "negative" notion of liberty for advancing substantive freedom in non-Western society where the culture of independent individuality has yet to develop and (b) the necessity of *a sense of responsibility* and *a sense of balance* among people as a crucial precondition for constructing a solid foundation for liberty in the modern state.

At the same time, however, Maruyama's request for the responsible exercise of individual liberty also left several crucial tensions and problems due to (a) his optimistic view on nationalism, (b) the illiberal implication of the emphasis of personal responsibility, and (c) some ambiguities associated with the meaning of responsibility. After examining the above issues, I conclude with my brief thought on how this sort of different understandings of liberty—in the East and the West—is shaping the different responses to the current public health crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Fifteen Years War refers to the period of war when Japanese Empire engaged in the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War.

## 1. Liberty in Context

What is liberty and what makes it worth defending for? I begin this essay by asking these seemingly simple and self-evident questions because I believe that these questions are *in fact* not that simple and self-evident, and thus need further investigation. This seems particularly the case in the time of disorder when the meaning of liberty is under contestation. Interestingly, the above two questions have beleaguered numerous East Asian political thinkers during the twentieth century when they were trying to defend and justify a notion of ‘individual liberty’ in societies where such a notion had not existed in her tradition and other crucial public goals, such as national independence and modernization, loomed very large due to the formidable external threats to national independence largely from the Western imperial powers. Therefore, they—that is, many East Asian liberals of the previous century—had to make a strong case that the protection of individual liberty was conducive to, or at least did not conflict with, achieving other crucial social values. In this effort, various sorts of creative and selective appropriation of the Western notion of liberty have taken place so as to accommodate specific local concerns and diverse social situations.

What I want to highlight here is the contextual nature of the plural meanings of liberty that have been developed in diverse social and historical circumstances. And in this section, I argue that, whereas in the Anglo-American political tradition, which has led the formation of the modern liberalism, the notion of liberty has developed in regard to the question of “Why should I obey?” or “What is the permissible limits of coercion,”<sup>3</sup> in East Asian countries (especially during her early modernization period) the notion of individual liberty was introduced and developed largely as a means to learn the core spirit of Western advanced civilization or to transform the existing premodern social order and culture by drawing on foreign ideas. The introduction of the notion of individual liberty into East Asian societies through the translation of the English philosopher John Stuart Mill is a good historical example of this trend. Mill’s *On Liberty* was first translated into Japanese and Chinese in the late nineteenth century by local intellectuals, respectively Nakamura Keiu and Yan Fu, and was widely read by the educated and reformist reading public

---

<sup>3</sup> Berlin (1958); Waldron (1987).

with the huge boom of “Western learning.” (Howland, 2005). As Howland (2005) notes, however, the local translators of *On Liberty* were not so much interested in adopting the Mill’s notion of liberty (which was coupled with his philosophy of individualism) in its original form, but rather interested in translating the notion for the purpose of developing localized and relevant liberal ideas for their own society—with a careful effort to circumscribe the ‘selfish’ or ‘egoistic’ understanding of liberty that might arise from Mill’s individualism. In other words, whereas Mill conceptualizes liberty as a notion that protects individuals from arbitrary and intrusive intervention from external entities such as society or the government and thus provides individuals with opportunities to develop their own ideas and capacities independently, such a form of liberal individualism was deemed hardly applicable to the nineteenth century Japan or China where the tradition of independent and autonomous individuality was much weaker; in addition, a strong social demand for organizing effective collective action loomed very large so that her country could maintain national independence and achieve rapid modernization. Hence, East Asian liberals had to define and justify individual liberty along with pursuing other objectives, such as extensive social reform and modern nation-state building, which were also regarded as being urgently needed to construct modern liberal society.

A deeper examination of the way in which the “negative” notion of individual liberty (i.e. liberty as absence of arbitrary intervention by external authorities) is justified by J. S. Mill might be useful to understand the reason why Mill’s individualistic notion of liberty met with some critical responses from East Asian thinkers from the very outset of its reception. In *On Liberty*, Mill defends his liberal individualism by providing the following two major reasons. First, Mill argues that there should be a certain minimum space of individual freedom so that individuals could develop their own moral character and natural faculties. To deny this minimum protection of personal freedom, Mill argues, is to deny the very nature of human being. Second, Mill further argues that giving individuals as much freedom as possible—unless one’s exercise of freedom causes tangible harm to others and thus infringes on others’ right to liberty—is also beneficial to society as a whole because the society will get benefit from a “diversity of character and culture” achieved by individuals’ creative and constructive use of their personal freedom. What Mill fears is excessive and arbitrary coercion from the state and society which stifles the spontaneous

and autonomous development of fruitful personalities—which he believes the best way to advance the human civilization (Brink, 2007; Mill, 2006 [1859]).

But as Berlin (1958) points out in his essay “Two Concepts of Liberty,” Mill’s emphasis on personal freedom as a necessary condition for the growth of spontaneous and creative individuality and progress of civilization is predicated on his (unwarranted) optimistic view on liberal individualism, which does not seem hold true in every situation. For instance, as Berlin notes, such a strong individuality could arise in severely disciplined communities where individual liberty is considerably constrained. Furthermore, the mere provision of individual liberty does not ensure neither the rise of independent individuality nor the progress of civilization, although a certain minimum level of personal freedom would be still needed. This seems particularly true for many societies where a majority of people have an egoistic, passive, asocial, or irresponsible attitude as results of diverse hostile circumstances such as repressive cultural legacy, prolonged wars, civil conflicts, and social disorder. Actually, the prevalence of narrow-minded and selfish mentality in the name of personal freedom has been one of the key concerns for many East Asian liberal thinkers; and the Japanese postwar thinker Maruyama Masao—the central figure of this essay—is one of the most representative thinkers who shared this concern. Thus, his postwar thought focused on overcoming the negative legacies of hierarchical social and the trauma of wartime fascism by reconceptualizing the notion of liberty in a way that could address the postwar disorder in Japanese society. Since he keenly perceived the unfitness of the negative notion of liberty for postwar Japan, Maruyama instead suggested a new way of thinking about liberty through proposing “responsible liberty” that involves high degree of responsibility in order for it to be properly exercised. In the following section, I go deeper into examining how Maruyama conceptualized liberty in the midst of postwar disorder.

## **2. Responsible Liberty: Modern Liberty in the Time of Darkness**

Although the Japanese postwar thinker Maruyama Masao (1914-96) is almost a forgotten figure in the contemporary English-speaking world, his intellectual legacy still remains strong in contemporary East

Asia, even after his death in 1996. Maruyama lived in the time of constant change and disorder during which his country Japan waged all-out wars against China and the United States, which lasted almost fifteen years starting from 1931; and Japan's eventual defeat in 1945 was followed by the occupation of the Allied Powers led by the Supreme Commander General MacArthur. In the wake of war defeat, the severe trauma of wartime fascism and militarism beleaguered the whole Japanese society for a long time, and economic hardship and moral degeneration that occurred as a consequence of protracted warfare made it much more unlikely that the restoration of peace and order could, if possible at all, come true in a near future.

Amidst the ruins of the devastating war, Maruyama Masao, an ambitious and young political theorist-cum-intellectual historian of Tokyo University,<sup>4</sup> embarked on the project of analyzing wartime Japan's "ultra-nationalism"<sup>5</sup> and other associated pathologies deeply rooted in Japanese society. His analysis of Japanese ultra-nationalism, which primarily focused on the distorted mentality of wartime leaders (e.g. their lacking sense of responsibility) and the inappropriate understanding of liberty (e.g. apolitical understanding of personal freedom) widely shared by prewar progressive political actors, was received with surprisingly high enthusiasm both by the Japanese academia and by the general reader who were thirsty for making sense of the root cause of wartime fanaticism which they had suffered from. In particular, Maruyama's publication of an article "Chōkokka shugi no ronri to shinri" (Theory and psychology of ultra-nationalism)" in a Japanese monthly political magazine *Sekai* ("World") in May 1946 brought him remarkable fame, which signaled the advent of a new intellectual icon of postwar Japan.<sup>6</sup>

During the postwar period, Maruyama put huge effort into building a strong cultural and psychological foundation of postwar democracy through the transformation of Japanese people's apolitical and passive mentality and then the inculcation of a responsible and autonomous ethos into the mind of

---

<sup>4</sup> Maruyama was conscripted into and served in the Japanese Army as a private soldier during the last years of the Pacific War, from 1944 to 45, as the Japanese Empire adopted the wartime policy of total mobilization.

<sup>5</sup> The term Maruyama coined so as to highlight the abnormal features of wartime ideologies

<sup>6</sup> Oguma's book. pp. 108-110.

Japanese people—both of which he considered essential for any healthy democracy.<sup>7</sup> Not least, Maruyama’s proposal of the notion of responsible liberty<sup>8</sup> was a product of his profound concern for protecting postwar Japanese democracy, which was established under the auspices of the occupation authorities in the wake of Japan’s war defeat and thus lacked a solid cultural foundation for democratic politics. And he was extremely concerned about the revival of fascist ideology in postwar Japan because, in the aftermath of prolonged war, collectivist mindset still prevailed in Japanese society and the tradition of independent and autonomous personality was largely absent. Moreover, from his reflection on the rise of fascism, militarism, and irresponsible ethos of wartime elites, Maruyama learned a lesson that individual liberty could hardly exist in a society where liberty was understood merely in a passive and negative sense and a sense of responsibility had weak basis among the public. Thus, a new notion of responsible liberty which he proposed for postwar Japanese society features a strong emphasis on the volitional and cognitive dimensions of liberty through which people’s exercise of individual liberty could strengthen the cultural foundation of liberal society.

It is important to note that Maruyama’s idea of responsible liberty is original and worth further investigation because his notion addresses some crucial blind spots located in Isaiah Berlin’s famous two-pronged conceptualization of liberty—i.e. liberty as absence of restriction (negative freedom) and liberty as self-realization (positive freedom). In this regard, I argue that Maruyama made a valuable contribution to broadening our understanding of liberty by questioning the liberal optimism which assumes that the

---

<sup>7</sup> Maruyama’s major works during the postwar period include *The Intellectual History of Tokugawa Era* (1974 [1952]), *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (1964), and *Between the War and the Postwar: 1936-1957* (1976).

<sup>8</sup> The original terms Maruyama frequently used (in Japanese) when he described his own notion of liberty were ‘shutaiteki jiyū’ and ‘risēteki jiyū,’ of which literal translation could be ‘autonomous and independent liberty’ and ‘rational and reasonable liberty,’ respectively. Since I believe that the key idea of Maruyama’s liberty is an exercise of personal freedom by a responsible and independent moral agent, I decide to use the term ‘responsible liberty’ to describe his key notion of liberty.

reduction of external restraint to individual's liberty would result in people's constructive use of their expanded personal freedom. To be specific, Maruyama was highly critical of this optimism, which was associated with "negative" notion of liberty, since he held that the mere reduction of the external coercion and restriction to individual persons' behaviors was neither the best way nor a necessary step for safeguarding individual liberty in the modern world—where the power of the state reaches every corner of individual persons' lives. On his account, the notion of negative liberty is particularly unfit for late-developers like Japan (before she accomplished rapid economic development after 1960s) because it is only likely to spread selfish and narrow minds among people, which in turn would have negative ramification on achieving other crucial social goals like the promotion of political integration and national independence. For him, national independence was one of the key preconditions for individual liberty because, without national independence, there would be very little room for claiming individual liberty, considering the dark prospect of liberty under colonial rule. As such, as a non-Western thinker who had a vivid memory of how the nineteenth century Imperialism deprived national independence and liberty from Chinese people and in many other non-Western countries, Maruyama thought that the destiny of country and the destiny of individuals were closely tied. And his understanding of the essentially a-political nature of "negative" liberty led him to conclude that it should not be a guiding notion of liberty in a country like Japan where her national independence was at risk and the political meaning of liberty was not yet clearly debated and defined.

Also, it is noticeable that Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty differs from the notion of "positive" liberty—which is described by Isaiah Berlin as another key tradition of liberty—although several interesting parallels exist between Maruyama's responsible liberty and Berlin's positive liberty.<sup>9</sup> For instance, Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty and Berlin's notion of positive liberty share important

---

<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, most of Maruyama's writings on the notion of liberty were written before Berlin's publication of "Two Concepts of Liberty" in 1958; and thus, in his writing Maruyama did not draw on Berlin's conceptualization of liberty.

commonalities in a sense that they conceptualize the essence of liberty as “being one’s own master.”<sup>10</sup> But, at the same time, the two notions diverge in crucial points. For instance, whereas Berlin defines positive freedom as being predicated on a monistic perspective which assumes that “[T]here is a final solution” (Berlin, p.212) or the ‘true’ higher self—as opposed to my ‘empirical’ lower self—Maruyama does neither accept such a necessary connection between monism and positive liberty (that is, liberty as self-realization) nor agree an inevitable danger of paternalism (i.e. the acknowledgement of higher intelligence who has better knowledge of individuals’ better way of life) associated with the notion of freedom as self-realization and being one’s own master. Rather, Maruyama was highly critical of such a monistic or paternalistic notion which assumed that only a few elites who had a high intelligent ability could understand a superior value and impose it on others. For him, one of the key natures of politics is *uncertainty* and *plurality of values*; and he highlighted the volitional dimension of liberty by saying that individuals could fully exercise their freedom only by actively making their own judgment and decision, not avoiding them, in a given situation and willingly taking responsibility for the consequences resulted from their choice. To put it differently, Maruyama held that only those who were prepared—both in a cognitive and volitional sense—to make autonomous decision and take responsibility could be a genuine master of one’s own fate and thus realize themselves through the responsible and autonomous exercise of personal liberty.<sup>11</sup>

It seems quite clear from his writings on the issue of liberty that Maruyama was well aware of multiple notions of liberty in the history of Western political thought and made his own value judgment on them. In his explanation of the two traditions of liberty, for instance, Maruyama contrasts Thomas Hobbes’

---

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, p. 178.

<sup>11</sup> As can be seen from the comparison between Maruyama and Berlin, Maruyama’s notion of liberty features a strong focus on the “volitional” dimension of liberty whereas Berlin’s description of positive liberty rarely addresses this. In this sense, Maruyama’s notion of liberty seems much more similar with the German political theorist Franz. L. Neumann’s concept of political freedom, which addresses volitional dimension as one of three dimensions of political liberty. See Neumann (1953), “The Concept of Political Freedom.”

notion of liberty with John Locke's one and claims that the latter is superior to the former.<sup>12</sup> To be specific, Maruyama states that whereas Hobbes views liberty as mere absence of opposition,<sup>13</sup> Locke defines liberty as an ability to make one's own decision (i.e. liberty as self-determination) based on one's own independent and rational thinking (Maruyama, 2011 [1976], p. 319).<sup>14</sup> On Locke's notion of liberty, Maruyama adds his own interpretation: what Locke says about liberty implies that, in order to make one's own independent and rational decision, it is necessary that individuals have sufficient time and opportunities to examine the probable consequences of one's action and deeply deliberate on the broader ramifications of it (Maruyama, 2011 [1976], p. 319). And he maintains that this kind of cautious and prudent thinking is a 'prerequisite' of personal freedom.

There are a couple of interesting points concerning Maruyama's interpretation of Locke as the founding father of the tradition that views liberty as rational and autonomous self-determination. First, it appears that Maruyama's description of Lockean notion of liberty is partial, selective, and even somewhat arbitrary. Although it is undeniable that Locke's notion of liberty underscores the importance of rational thinking and self-rule to a certain extent, his theory of liberty also features some absolute protection of a

---

<sup>12</sup> Maruyama Masao, "The Formation and Characteristics of the Notion of Liberty in Japan"

<sup>13</sup> On this point, Maruyama cites the following sentence from Hobbes' *Leviathan*: "Liberty, or FREEDOME, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition; (by Opposition, I mean externall Impediments of motion)."

<sup>14</sup> Concerning Locke, Maruyama draws on Locke's following description of liberty appearing in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: "All the actions that we have any idea of reducing themselves, as has been said, to these two, viz. thinking and motion; so far as a man has power to think or not to think, to move or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far is a man FREE... So that the idea of LIBERTY is, the idea of a power in any agent to do or forbear any particular action, according to the determination or thought of the mind, whereby either of them is preferred to the other: where either of them is not in the power of the agent to be produced by him according to his volition, there he is not at liberty; that agent is under NECESSITY. So that liberty cannot be where there is no thought, no volition, no will; but there may be thought, there may be will, there may be volition, where there is no liberty."

certain minimum area of individual rights, such as life, liberty, and property. This is why Isaiah Berlin locates him in the tradition of negative freedom along with J. S. Mill. Second, Maruyama's interpretation that Locke's notion of liberty demands cautious and prudent thinking as a precondition for it appears not so much Locke's original voice as the message Maruyama wanted to underscore to his postwar audience.<sup>15</sup> The last point I want to highlight regarding Maruyama's choice of Locke is about the principles of freedom of conscience and toleration, which lie in the basis of Locke's political theory. Maruyama regarded these two Lockean principles as highly relevant and needed in the postwar Japanese society because those principles were considered essential for promoting independent individuality and liberal political culture, which allow people to freely express opinions and exchange thoughts without fear of repression.

Maruyama's emphasis on prudent and careful thinking about the social ramifications of one's behavior, which he considers necessary steps prior to the exercise of individual liberty, also contains his understanding of personal responsibility in modern society. For instance, in his essay "The Determination of Attitude in the Modern World" Maruyama expressed his view on the social nature of human beings and our obligation as a member of society in the following way:

"For our society is established and sustained by our individual behaviors, we have an obligation to bear social responsibility for our own behavior or non-behavior... In this sense, only God could be entirely irresponsible being [because he owes nothing to anyone]. Therefore, to understand and to make a decision are our destiny as human beings (not as God) who live in the world where numerous contradictions exist. And to live as a human being is to willingly accept this destiny and to take responsibility for the consequences of decisions that we made" (Maruyama, 1997 [1964], p. 510, translation is mine).

To put it differently, Maruyama, who was well aware of the danger of irresponsibility through the extensive examination of the problematic mindset of wartime Japanese leaders and the underlying ethos of prewar

---

<sup>15</sup> Maruyama's essay "John Locke and His Principle of Modern Politics" was published in 1949.

Japan, strongly underscored that making decisions as an independent and autonomous agent and taking responsibility for one's own choices as a responsible member of society were the basic conditions of our social and political life. In this context, the mere absence of restriction could not be a satisfactory answer for safeguarding individual liberty and preventing the revival of fascism in postwar Japan. For Maruyama, the key to be free is to be an independent and autonomous agent who is ready for taking full responsibility of one's own. This is why Maruyama was harshly critical of Hobbesian notion of negative liberty which, on his account, failed to take into account the socially embedded and political nature of individual liberty.

It is also important to note that Maruyama's interpretation of the gist of Lockean liberty shows how Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty differs from Isaiah Berlin's notion of positive liberty, though the two notions share some crucial goals or languages such as 'self-determination' or 'self-realization.' Perhaps one of the most distinctive features that Maruyama's notion of liberty differs from Berlin's positive liberty might be Maruyama's strong denial of 'higher,' 'truer' or 'transcendental' self. As is well known, one of the key goals of Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty" is to reveal the paternalistic misuse of liberty in the name of a 'higher' level of freedom (Berlin, p. 179). Berlin concerned this problem because he observed numerous examples of misleading use of the notion of liberty in forms of nationalism, fascism, and Communism during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> For Berlin, the biggest problem of the 'positive' notion of liberty was that it could be used as a justification for arbitrary and excessive coercion of individuals under the pretext of higher or common goals of community. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous statement of "he will be forced to be free" (*The Social Contract*, Ch. VII) was exactly the logic Berlin feared (also see Müller, 2008).

As a victim of wartime fascism and Japanese nationalism who himself experienced the misery of Fifteen Years War, Maruyama was also well aware of the danger of collectivist ideologies; and he was also highly critical of the paternalistic idea that assumes a small intelligent elite group could identify and decide what is good for the society on behalf of ignorant ordinary people. In fact, this kind of paternalism directly

---

<sup>16</sup> Berlin's critique of the notion of "social" liberty

conflicts with Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty as the idea denies the importance of individuals' cognitive ability and free will to make an independent decision and take responsibility for it, which are central in Maruyama's postwar thought. Thus, Maruyama never accepted the idea of two selves—i.e. the division of an empirical and lower self and a transcendental and higher self—that Berlin identified as the root cause of the illiberal implication associated with the “positive” notion of liberty.

However, there still remain some practical problems concerning how to persuade (or motivate) individuals to develop and maintain a strong sense of responsibility and how to construct liberal political culture in a society where hierarchical and paternalistic culture has dominated for a long time. Although Maruyama did not provide a direct answer on these questions to my knowledge, the following two keywords from his postwar thought seem crucial: ‘balance’ and ‘toleration.’ To put it in a nutshell, Maruyama held that a sense of balance was essential for individuals to become an independent and responsible agent particularly in the modern times when radical ideologies frequently appear and prevail across the globe;<sup>17</sup> and he believed that the principle of toleration, which was defined and defended by liberal thinkers like Locke, was essential in the rise of liberal political culture in the modern Western civilization. Hence, Maruyama urged that postwar Japanese people develop a sense of balance so that they would no longer be swayed by neither radical collectivism nor extreme individualism. And he also suggested that Japanese people adopt the principle of toleration so that diverse ideas and opinions could be freely expressed and interact each other. Maruyama believed that the memory of the misery of war and fascism—which was commonly shared in postwar Japanese society—could serve as a key motivation for Japanese people to

---

<sup>17</sup> Maruyama's postwar political thought features strong emphasis on finding a “balance” between opposing forces, rather than merely combining conflicting values in an unprincipled way. For instance, Maruyama held that unrestrained liberty (i.e. license) was as much harmful as lack of liberty because unprincipled pursuit of individual liberty could promote selfishness and hedonistic behaviors and destroy people's sense of social responsibility. Therefore, Maruyama's postwar thought put much emphasis on striking a balance between *selfish* individualism and *paternalistic* collectivism, both of which turned out to be destructive in the history of prewar Japan.

develop such liberal virtues so that a similar kind of disastrous fanaticism would not take place again. In other words, he thought that Japanese people had already learnt many lessons from their experience of the Fifteen Years war.

Maruyama's unique approach to the notion of liberty made a deep impression on the broad audience in postwar Japan; and his strong emphasis on the necessity of creating responsible and independent notion of liberty as a new foundation of postwar democracy paved the way for the revival of liberalism during the 1940s and 50s in Japan. The one of the key strengths of Maruyama's approach on the diagnosis of the wartime fanaticism was in its straightforward revelation of the connection between Japanese people's deep-rooted habits of mind, which had been mostly formed and developed during the Tokugawa era, and what had happened—which were tragic and absurd—during the prewar and wartime periods. Also, Maruyama's postwar thought provided Japanese people a new starting point of rebuilding solid and peaceful political order which should be based in a balanced approach to nationalism, active participation in social and political life, and socially responsible pursuit of individual liberties. Unlike many so-called postwar “old liberalists”<sup>18</sup> who still supported the retention of the emperor system due to their distrust of the Japanese people's capacity to self-rule, Maruyama's new notion of liberty demanded active participation both in the process of democratic politics and in the creation of liberal social culture in the sphere of civil society so as to protect postwar democracy from any movement of fascist backsliding. In addition, since Maruyama uncompromisingly argued for the importance of being a master of one's life and being a responsible citizen of democratic and independent postwar Japan, his new liberalism became particularly popular among the young generation who had a vivid memory of the horribleness of war.

---

<sup>18</sup> “Old liberalists” See Oguma's book pp. 243

### 3. Reconceptualizing Liberty in the Midst of Postwar Disorder

Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty was an outcome of his reflection on the tragic historical routes that Japan had taken during the prewar and wartime periods. Among others, what stoke Maruyama the most in the wake of Japan's war defeat was the irresponsible and non-autonomous ethos of Japanese political leaders who had led the Japanese empire during the wartime and thus deeply engaged in numerous decision-makings concerning waging the war.<sup>19</sup> For instance, in the "Thought and Behaviour Patterns of Japan's Wartime Leaders" (1949), Maruyama described the typical mindset of Japanese wartime leaders as "dwarfishness"—emphasizing the abnormal, immature, and trepid features of their attitude—by referring to their coherent denial of personal responsibility over the decisions made by the wartime government, despite their continuous participation in the decision-making process as high officials. Through the extensive reading and analysis of the shorthand reports of "International Military Tribunal for the Far East," Maruyama identified an interesting pattern that, in their defense argument to the Tokyo War Crimes Trials (1945-48) in which they were indicted for war crime, the indited Japanese wartime leaders commonly tried to avoid their war responsibility by blaming *uncontrollable external situations* for their decision or by emphasizing their "unwilling" participation in the implementation of the war. For instance, in his cross-examination with the president of the court, General Minami Jirō (the former Governor-General of colonial Korea) defended his use of the term "Holy War" concerning the Second Sino-Japanese War in the following way: "My idea was that this was not an aggressive war but one that had arisen owing to *unavoidable circumstances*" (Maruyama, 1966 [1957], pp. 94-95, emphasis added).

---

<sup>19</sup> Starting with the publication of "Theory and psychology of ultra-nationalism" in 1946, in his postwar publications (e.g. "The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism" (1947) and "Thought And Behaviour Patterns of Japan's Wartime Leaders" (1949)) Maruyama argued that the distorted, passive, and non-independent mentality of Japanese people was the primary cause of numerous irrational and irresponsible decisions having been made under the totalitarian wartime government (Maruyama, 1966 [1957]).

As such, it was commonly observed from the indicted Japanese wartime leaders that, rather than acknowledging their personal responsibility concerning the negative consequences of the war decisions in which they took part, they tried to defend or justify their own (evidently) culpable behaviors by referring to such “unavoidable circumstances” which were beyond their control. Although this response might be interpreted as a tactic to lessen their punishment in the War Crimes Trial, Maruyama concluded from his observation of the Trial that this sort of irresponsible mindset was *actually* prevailed among Japanese wartime leaders. In addition, Maruyama further analyzed that this pathological problem of wartime leaders’ irresponsible attitude primarily originated from prewar Japan’s lacking tradition of autonomous individuality and independent personal agency. In the absence of such a tradition of autonomous and independent individuality throughout the history of Japan, Maruyama concluded, the national project of rapid modernization and nation-state building project of prewar Japan lost its brakes and the whole system was eventually dominated by irrational passions (such as expansionist nationalism and militarism) or collective irresponsibility. It was a tragic irony, on his account, that while no one harbored a genuine sense of responsibility over the enormous risk they should bear, at the collective dimension the wartime leaders were making decisions towards waging all-out wars against neighboring countries—that was also driven by the militarism of bellicose army elites and aggressive nationalism prevailed among the general public.

Although it was primarily the wartime elites who made such horrible and irrational decisions of the Fifteen Years war that resulted in the disastrous consequences, Maruyama held that the root cause of the problem was deeper and wider. On his account, the rise of militarism and fascism in prewar Japan was possible because a majority of Japanese people at the time supported such movements or, at least, did not protest against them effectively. Moreover, Maruyama argued that major prewar political actors only had a narrow and negative understanding of liberty—that is, liberty as mere absence of interference or intervention—because many of them naively believed that individual liberties would gradually expand as Japan adopts more and more Western ideas and as the process of modernization in Japan proceeds. For instance, Maruyama quoted the following passage from Kōno Hironaka (the leader of the Liberal Party during the prewar period) and criticized his naïve attitude in his adoption of Mill’s notion of freedom: “I

[Kōno] was riding on horseback when I first read this work [Mill's On Liberty]... [M]y entire way of thinking was revolutionized... Now all these earlier thoughts of mine...were smashed to smithereens...*only by ruling out the moral principles of loyalty and filial piety*. At the same moment I knew that it was human freedom and human rights that I must henceforth cherish above all else” (Maruyama, 1966 [1957], p. 5 emphasis original).

What Maruyama thought problematic from the above statement was that the traditional moral principles of loyalty and filial piety—which had constituted the core essence of moral life in traditional Japanese society—were simply ruled out and replaced by the imported notion of personal freedom without serious deliberation on the political and social implications of this ideational change. Since early Japanese liberals of this kind merely adopted the foreign notion of liberty without proper effort to develop new relevant moral principles and independent individuality, Maruyama argued, the social ground for the idea of individual liberty was weak and vulnerable. Actually, Maruyama pointed out that numerous prewar liberals converted to nationalist ideology or became a supporter of sensual pleasure because they did not have a proper understanding of the complicated fate of individual liberty in the modern state. Without such a political awareness, Maruyama argued, some prewar liberals equated their personal pursuit of pleasure with the essence of personal freedom, while other earlier liberals identified their own desire to self-realization with the imperialistic expansion of the Japanese state.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, Maruyama also examined the limitations of prewar liberalism—an intellectual and social movement that appeared during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-1925) periods developed based upon newly introduced liberal ideas—through the example of the People's Rights Movement (1874–1890), the first modern and liberal political movement in the history of Japan. The key objectives of the Movement were to establish the first Japanese parliament and to expand the rights of people (Maruyama, 2011 [1976], pp. 330-331). Although the Movement paved the way for the enactment of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan in 1889, Maruyama criticized that it was a huge mistake for its activists to merely

---

<sup>20</sup> Maruyama Masao, “The Formation and Features of Freedom Consciousness in Japan”

satisfy with the enactment of the Constitution, because it established a fragmented and unbalanced political system behind the façade of western-style parliamentary democracy. Therefore, he concluded that prewar liberals who participated in the Movement was politically naïve in that they were ignorant of the potential danger of the authority given to emperor that allowed him an ultimate authority to coordinate disagreements among diverse political institutions.<sup>21</sup> For Maruyama, this was an alarming example of the error of prewar liberalism because the earlier liberals merely buried themselves in the goal of the expansion of individual rights and liberty granted by the state without due consideration of the potential danger of the unchecked and unlimited concentration of power of the state.

To recapitulate, in his analysis of the failure of prewar liberalism, Maruyama identified a couple of theoretical weaknesses of prewar liberalism (ibid. pp.349–359). First, Maruyama pointed out that the early liberals did not seriously think about a potential conflict between the people's demands for both individual liberty and national independence. Second, the early liberals did not notice the necessity of formulating a new alternative normative value system which was urgently needed when the traditional Confucian value system was rapidly collapsing. Last, Maruyama concluded that the early liberals should have paid more attention to the means for safeguarding individual liberty—such as a freedom of conscience and political freedom—from the rapidly-growing state power (ibid. p. 351).

To Maruyama's mind, therefore, the essential spirit of modern liberal society ought to include free, independent, and responsible individuality, which enables and empowers individual citizens to formulate their own morality and proper political order by using their own political agency (Maruyama [1976] 2011, 351-3). Since this sort of strong and independent mind was absent in prewar liberalism, in Maruyama's view, prewar liberalism ultimately revealed its ideological vulnerability vis-à-vis its rival right-wing ideologies and could not play a safeguarding role against the unrestrained rise of nationalism, which took

---

<sup>21</sup> Hence, the Meiji Constitution shaped a misleading fantasy that substantive political power was devolved to the ordinary people and their political representatives, while in reality only marginal changes were made concerning the central position of the emperor in the political structure of Meiji Japan.

place in tandem with the breakout of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1931. Hence, a new movement of postwar liberalism, which was led by Maruyama Masao and his intellectual comrades, came into the scene of postwar Japan as a critical response to the prewar Japanese liberalism and other totalitarian wartime ideologies.

#### **4. The Hidden Tensions: Nationalism, Modern Ethos, and the Boundary of Responsibility**

In the previous two sections, I have examined how and why Maruyama came up with a new notion of liberty—responsible liberty—for postwar Japanese society. And I have stated that Maruyama’s conceptualization of ‘responsible liberty’ is an outcome of his critical reflection on the prevalent notion of liberty in Japan, which viewed liberty simply as absence of external constraint or behave as one pleases without restriction from external party. He found this negative notion of liberty inappropriate for a country like Japan because he thought that whether substantive liberty could be protected largely depended on other relevant factors such as national independence, horizontal and liberal culture, and the ideological landscape surrounding liberal ideas. Thus far, I have argued that Maruyama seriously engaged with these issues and proposed a new notion of liberty by redefining it as a concept which is coupled with individuals’ sense of responsibility in order for it to be properly exercised. And this suggestion was generally welcomed by the Japanese postwar public because the notion of responsible liberty, along with his analysis of the wartime fascism and militarism in Japan, was seen as a reasonable and feasible way for recovering liberty in the midst of postwar disorder.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Maruyama’s notion of responsible liberty contains some problematic aspects which may arouse suspicion of the illiberal implication of his postwar thought. In this section, therefore, I will focus on the following three major points: (1) the problem concerning optimistic view on nationalism, (2) the problem concerning illiberal implication of the emphasis of personal responsibility, and (3) the problem concerning ambiguous meaning of responsibility. And I argue that these three points reveal the limitations or tensions involved in Maruyama’s notion of responsible liberty, despite

his contribution to broadening our understanding of liberty particularly when the term ‘liberty’ is used in an irresponsible manner.

First, the most controversial aspect of Maruyama’s postwar thought arises from his complicated theory on the relationship between liberalism and nationalism. For instance, he consistently claimed that, in the modern nation-state system, the rise of liberalism was inseparable from the process of political integration at the national level and the creation of national identity associated with the development of healthy nationalism. Maruyama’s logic behind this view is simple and straightforward. He held that in the modern world where every nation-state compete each other in order to keep its national independence and maximize her national interests, it was nearly impossible for a country to make full use of its potentiality without granting its people a certain degree of liberty so that they could freely develop their own faculty. At the same time, Maruyama believed that the expansion of individual liberties should be accompanied by corresponding progress of national integration so as to ensure political stability and maintain national independence if they encounter a threat from other states.

Of course, Maruyama was well aware of the destructive force of nationalism, as he experienced the extreme form of it during the wartime period. Nevertheless, he believed that it was inevitable for late-developers to adopt the advantages of the two ideologies at the same time so that they could maximize her national potential and maintain national independence. In “The Thought of the Meiji State,” for instance, Maruyama (2011 [1976]) defines two central spirits of the Meiji state as “Sonnō jōi” (revere the emperor and expel the western barbarians) and “kōgi yoron” (decision-making based on public opinion); and he explains the former as a principle of “the concentration of political power” and the latter as “the enlargement of political base” (p. 229). Although these two principles seem conflicting each other, however, Maruyama claims that both principles could complement each other and create a synergy effect especially when a country is in a national crisis.

To be specific, a delicate balance between the principle of the concentration of power and the principle of horizontal expansion of political basis is particularly important in Maruyama’s theory of national crisis because only this way could maximize the full capacity of nation by creating room for

people's active and voluntary participation into the collective national effort for overcoming a crisis (pp. 229-230).<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Maruyama's emphasis of the balanced approach to liberalism and nationalism involves his critical view of an individualistic tradition of liberalism, which should be complemented by some sort of public-mindedness and a sense of social responsibility associated with nationalism. On his account, the ideals of liberalism and nationalism could strengthen each other if a healthy balance between the two ideologies are maintained.

Maruyama's argument for the healthy relationship between liberalism and nationalism, however, went too far when he chose the Meiji imperialist thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi as a model for postwar liberalism—despite his controversial engagement in the prewar Japan's expansionist policy (Toshio, 2014; Yasukawa, 2003).<sup>23</sup> Japanese historian Yasukawa Junosuke is one of the leading critics regarding this point who revealed Maruyama's unfair description of Fukuzawa Yukichi as an exemplary prewar liberal; and Yasukawa has shown Maruyama's several critical misinterpretations of Fukuzawa's political thought which hide and absolve Fukuzawa's responsibility for supporting aggressive military campaigns against neighboring East Asian countries. In short, this kind of post-colonial criticism of postwar liberalism, which began to develop since early 2000s, has exposed postwar liberals' inappropriate idolization of Meiji nationalism and thus contributed to the deconstruction of the intellectual aura of its main thinker, that is, Maruyama Masao.

While I generally agree with the postcolonial perspective's critique of Maruyama for his problematic defense of the Meiji period expansionist thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi and of his nationalist underpinning of liberalism, however, I disagree with describing Maruyama as an 'hidden imperialist thinker' (Yasukawa's view) or 'disguised collectivist thinker' (Nakano's view). This is because these interpretations

---

<sup>22</sup> These examples clearly show how a sense of balance and a sense of crisis play its pivotal role in Maruyama's postwar thought.

<sup>23</sup> As Matsumoto (2017) correctly points out, Fukuzawa Yukichi was the only Japanese liberal thinker whom Maruyama chose to examine in depth in his study of Japanese intellectual history.

do not take seriously into account Maruyama's complicated view on the relationships between individual liberty, responsible personality, social conditions of modern democracy, and national independence. Of course, it is hardly deniable that Maruyama's obsession with the healthy balance between nationalism and liberalism created no small tension within his theory of liberty. Nonetheless, Maruyama did not go so far as to defend Fukuzawa's engagement in prewar Japan's imperialistic activities. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that Maruyama's choice of Fukuzawa as an exemplary Japanese thinker was more to do with the idea of liberal nationalism that early Fukuzawa preached than what he has done as an activist of Japanese imperialism. All things considered, therefore, Maruyama's optimistic view on liberal nationalism reveals both the centrality of national independence in his theory of liberty and the blind spots that his theory of balance fail to catch.

Second, Maruyama's understanding of liberty as autonomous self-determination with a strong sense of responsibility also involves the danger of value universalism (i.e. prioritization of a certain way of life over others) and some potential illiberal implications. To be specific, Maruyama's project of cultural transformation or public enlightenment harbors risk of prioritizing some values over others in a paternalistic way since it requires people to adopt certain values (e.g. personal responsibility and active political participation) that he regarded as important for being a genuinely liberal agent.<sup>24</sup> For instance, in the short essay "On Modern Liberalism" (1948) Maruyama argued that the substantive liberty of people could be properly protected and realized in the modern times only when liberalism distinguishes itself from relativism or the principle of *laissez-faire* and actively defends *a specific way of life* that promotes individual persons' independent personality and responsible mindset. In addition, Maruyama expressed his concern about the optimistic view that the substantive liberty of people would be guaranteed if there existed institutional mechanisms for checking and controlling the abusive power of the government (Maruyama, 2011 [1976], pp. 383-386). For him, the fundamental safeguard for liberty in the modern world was the

---

<sup>24</sup> On this point, it might be useful to see Gray's (2000) critique of value universalism associated with modern liberalism.

underlying liberal culture and mindset of people, not political institutions. The historical examples of the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, where formal institutions of liberal democracy existed before fascists took power, taught him a lesson that modern liberal democracy could not be protected only through formal institutions.

Of course, Maruyama's vision of responsible liberty—which emphasizes the importance of strong independent self and personal responsibility—should be understood from the historical context of postwar Japan where passive and dependent mentality prevailed among the Japanese public. Under the enormous influence of the Confucian political culture, Maruyama argued, Japanese people had long taken their traditional hierarchical social system for granted and been forced to constrain individual pursuits or individual pleasures when they conflicted with the social order of feudal system. Maruyama held that this long history of the oppression of personal pleasure then resulted in the pursuit of unrestrained sensual pleasure and self-indulgence as the old regime began to crumble, Western ideas of individual liberty were introduced and spread, and no other alternative normative social order was yet to be developed. In short, Maruyama's conceptualization of responsible liberty reflects his deep concerns on the fragile status of the independent and autonomous self, which he thought as essential precondition for a new moral and social ground of liberal democracy in postwar Japan.

Nevertheless, Maruyama's prioritization of responsible and autonomous ethos as the most urgent task for rebuilding liberalism in postwar Japan involves the danger of idolizing the ethos of self-determination and active judgment-making regardless of its dictatorial or non-liberal implication. For instance, in his comparison of the patterns of fascism between wartime Japan and Nazi Germany, Maruyama tends to describe, albeit in a nuanced way, Nazi Germany's fascism as being healthier and more rational than wartime Japan's fascism on the grounds that the Nazi leaders generally showed an unabashed and bold attitude at the war crimes trials whereas Japanese wartime leaders looked intimidated and scared

at the court.<sup>25</sup> Although Maruyama did not intend to fully defend the fascism of Nazi Germany through this comparison, it is still puzzling whether this comparison of ‘strong-minded’ German fascism and ‘dwarf’ Japanese fascism implies Maruyama’s favorable view on some illiberal type of strong-minded leadership such as charismatic dictatorship.<sup>26</sup> In addition, as in the case of Maruyama’s positive interpretation of Fukuzawa Yukichi, it appears that Maruyama assumed two faces of dictatorial leadership, that is, a positive function of dictatorial leadership and a negative function of it, and viewed that a healthy dictatorship and a sick dictatorship, and viewed that the former (i.e. a positive function of strong leadership) as necessary for building a healthy democracy due to its connection with autonomous and active ethos.<sup>27</sup> The problem of this assumption, however, is that it is unwarranted whether a strong-minded and responsible ethos will necessarily lead us to liberal democratic order in most circumstances or not. Maruyama seemed to believe it will, but as in the examples of Nazi Germany or the Meiji imperialist thinker Fukuzawa, the illiberal implication of the emphasis of strong and responsible ethos still looms large.

The last problem concerns the ambiguous meaning of personal responsibility in Maruyama’s theory of liberty. It might not be necessary to repeat that Maruyama’s emphasis of personal responsibility as an inevitable foundation of modern liberty was closely related to his concern about the worrisome revival of conformist and politically indifferent attitudes among the postwar Japanese public. And this point also

---

<sup>25</sup> See “Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism” (Maruyama, 1966 [1957]), pp. 8-13. Here Maruyama famously describes that “[a]t the war crime trials Tsuchiya turned pale and Furushima wept; but Göring roared with laughter” (p. 12).

<sup>26</sup> Related to this point, it is important to further delve into Maruyama’s realism and his reading of realist thinkers like Machiavelli and Carl Schmitt. This discussion will be conducted in Chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> On this point, Kim (2015) interprets that Maruyama’s seemingly positive description of Nazi leaders (of course, only within the context that he compares them with Japanese leaders) should be seen as a means towards criticizing the distorted mentality of Japanese wartime leaders, not his genuine praise of Nazi leaders. I partially agree with this interpretation, but I still believe that Maruyama’s positive description of Nazi leaders reveals a theoretical tension located in Maruyama’s thought on the relationship between liberty and responsible ethos.

explains why Maruyama argued for a voluntarist notion of democratic citizenship and viewed democracy as a way of life, not merely an institutional arrangement. However, Maruyama's excessive stress on independent personality and demanding requirement of personal responsibility also created serious tensions because the scope and the ultimate objective of responsibility in his theory of liberty is somewhat unclear and ambiguous. Simply put, what does it mean to exercise individual liberty responsibly and what would be the pros and cons of this approach in comparison with an alternative notion of liberty?

As I described it earlier, Maruyama defined liberty—by drawing on Locke's notion of liberty—as an ability to make one's own decision in a prudent and responsible manner so that our exercise of individual freedom does not conflict with our obligations as a member of society. But, to my knowledge, he did not provide a clear answer about how we should take responsibility for the consequences of decisions that we made, although he apparently drew on Max Weber's ethic of responsibility when discussing this issue. Where Maruyama diverges from Weber's ethic of responsibility was the scope of application, that is, to whom the principle should apply. Whereas Weber thought that it was primarily political leaders who should follow the ethic of responsibility, Maruyama held that it was every individual person who should follow the ethic of responsibility when their behavior affects others.

A brief comparison between Mill's harm principle and Maruyama's notion of responsibility might be useful to examine some tensions located in Maruyama's notion of liberty. Through the harm principle, Mill requires those entities who try to restrain an individual's liberty to prove whether the person's behavior caused a clear and tangible harm to others. Hence, the burden of proof is largely on the party who tries to restrain someone else's liberty in accordance with Mill's harm principle. However, in the case of Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty, it appears that individual persons who are exercising their personal freedom are also required to share the burden of proof as they are expected to deliberate on the social consequences of their behavior. If this is the case, Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty has two faces: on the one hand, it is likely to enhance the social support of the value of individual liberty as it requires people to exercise it responsibly; on the other hand, however, the notion of responsible liberty

might repress people's exercise of liberty as it put another hurdle on it by requiring them to prove that their behavior does not cause unjustifiable harm to others.

## 5. Conclusion

At the very outset of this essay, I raised the issue of what we are to make of the notion of liberty in the time of pandemic, the situation that pushes us hard to think and rethink about the relationship between individual liberty and the responsibility we owe to others when we exercise our liberty. And in this essay, I have examined the postwar Japanese thinker Maruyama Masao's interesting thoughts and theory on the importance of people's responsible use of liberty in defending and justifying a reasonable form of individual liberty in a society where the social value of individual liberty has yet to be established or is under contestation. Since he was concerned about the vicious cycle between irresponsible or apolitical understanding of liberty and the decreasing support for liberalism (e.g. the failure of liberalism in prewar Japan), a new notion of liberty—which could generate a virtuous cycle between individual liberty and public good—was proposed by Maruyama as a remedy for the trauma of wartime fascism and hierarchical culture of Japan.

Of course, it is also important to note that Maruyama's theory of responsible liberty contains several theoretical tensions due to his unbalanced view on nationalism and the illiberal implication of personal responsibility. In addition, the scope of responsibility and how individuals ought to take responsibility seem somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, I still believe that Maruyama made an important contribution to broadening our understanding of liberty by making a point that, without responsible exercise of liberty, there would be less and less room for individual liberty at all. As Maruyama worried, the rise of authoritarian or totalitarian ideologies oftentimes comes with the critique of irresponsible liberty or negative effects of individual liberty on other social values.<sup>28</sup> Hence, if individual liberty lost its due connection with

---

<sup>28</sup> The Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's famous speech on illiberal democracy is a good example of this. The full text of his speech is available online: 'Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open

responsibility, there would be less and less ground for defending it. This is one of the key messages that Maruyama highlighted.

In addition, the ongoing controversy on mask wearing provides us a useful example about how the notion ‘liberty’ is differently conceived in the East and the West. For instance, in most East Asian societies where the notion of liberty has developed through the contestation with traditional communitarian social culture, it has been rarely argued that mask wearing is up to individual’s choice or freedom when it conflicts with the public health policy of society.<sup>29</sup> However, in many Western societies, not least in the United States, where the culture of individualism prevail, anti-mask people’s disobedience of what the public health authorities strongly recommends has been frequently combined with the claim of “individual liberty,”<sup>30</sup> because those who are on this side think that the public authority should not interfere with whether individuals were a mask or not. Some people further expressed their concern that the expanded authority of the government due to their response to the Covid-19 pandemic might result in the revival of Hobbesian Leviathan, which in turn poses a huge threat to individual liberty.<sup>31</sup>

---

University and Student Camp.’ Website of the Hungarian Government (July 29, 2018), <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp>.

<sup>29</sup> The following piece from BBC News contains some interesting analysis on the cultural aspect of mask wearing issue across the globe. It states that “In mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Taiwan, the broad assumption is that anyone could be a carrier of the virus, even healthy people. So in the spirit of solidarity, you need to protect others from yourself.” See ‘Coronavirus: Why some countries wear face masks and others don’t.’ *BBC News* (May 12, 2020) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52015486>

<sup>30</sup> Examples of this can be seen from numerous relevant episodes delivered by news media.

<sup>31</sup> On this point, see David Runciman’s recent piece, ‘Coronavirus has not suspended politics – it has revealed the nature of power.’ *The Guardian* (March 27, 2020).

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/27/coronavirus-politics-lockdown-hobbes>

Although this essay did not go deeper into this issue, my analysis of Maruyama's notion of responsible liberty informs us that our understanding of liberty is largely shaped by our own experiences as well as the historical contexts in which the notion of liberty has developed. And especially in the time of disorder, the notion of liberty could, and probably should, change depending on the specific situation that we are dealing with.

### References

- Berlin, Isaiah. (1958). *Two concepts of liberty : an inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Brink, David. (2007). Mill's moral and political philosophy. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2018 Edition)*. URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/mill-moral-political/>>
- Gray, John. (2000). *The two faces of liberalism*: Polity Press.
- Hobbes, Thomas, & Tuck, Richard. (1991). *Leviathan*. Cambridge [England] ;: Cambridge University Press.
- Howland, Douglas. (2005). *Personal liberty and public good : the introduction of John Stuart Mill to Japan and China*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kim, Hang. (2015). *Cheguk ilbon ũi sasang : p'osŭt'ŭ cheguk kwa tong asiaron ũi saeroun chip'yŏng wihayo (The Political Thought of Imperial Japan)* (Ch'op'an. ed.). Kyŏnggi-do P'aju-si: Ch'angbi.
- Locke, John, & Winkler, Kenneth. (1996). *An essay concerning human understanding*. Indianapolis ;: Hackett.
- Maruyama, Masao. (1966 [1957]). *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (Ivan I. Morris Ed. Expanded ed. ed.). London: Oxford University Press.
- Maruyama, Masao. (1974 [1952]). *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (Mikiso Hane, Trans.). Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.

- Maruyama, Masao. (1997 [1964]). *Hyundaejungchiyi Sasanggwa Hangdong (Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics)* (Seok-gun Kim, Trans.). Seoul: Hangilsa.
- Maruyama, Masao. (2011 [1976]). *Jeonjunggwa Jun-hoo Sa-yi (Between the War and the Pastwar Era)* (Seok-gun Kim, Trans.). Seoul: Humanist.
- Matsumoto, Reiji. (2017). Maruyama Masao and Liberalism in Japan. In Alan S Kahan & Ewa Atanassow (Eds.), *Liberal Moments: Reading Liberal Texts*: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Mill, John Stuart. (2006 [1859]). *On liberty ; and, The subjection of women*. London ;: Penguin.
- Müller, Jan-Werner. (2008). Fear and Freedom On `Cold War Liberalism'. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 7(1), 45-64. doi:10.1177/1474885107083403
- Neumann, Franz L. (1953). The concept of political freedom. *Columbia Law Review*, 53(7), 901-935.
- Oguma, Eiji. (2019 [2004]). "Minshu" to "aikoku" : sengo Nihon no nashonarizumu to kōkyōsei ("Democracy" and "Patriotism) [\*Korean translation] (Shohan dai 8 satsu. ed.). Tōkyō: Shin'yōsha.
- Toshio, Nakano. (2014). 大塚久雄と丸山眞男：動員, 主体, 戦争責任 (Shinsō ban. ed.). Tōkyō: Seidosha.
- Waldron, Jeremy. (1987). Theoretical foundations of liberalism. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 37(147), 127-150.
- Yasukawa, Junosuke. (2003). 福沢諭吉と丸山眞男：「丸山諭吉」神話を解体する. Tōkyō: Kōbunken.