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UEKI EMORI
AND
THE USE OF HISTORY

A sub-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of East
Asian Studies in the Australian National University

By

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To Pei Ling

Affirmation

This thesis is the sole work of the author, Loh Kwok Cheong, and except where due acknowledgement is made in the text, does not, to the best of my knowledge, contain material previously presented, published or written by another person.



Loh Kwok Cheong

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Abstract

German historian Michael Sturmer ascribes a functional role for historical consciousness: "in a country without history, he who fills the memory, defines the concepts and interprets the past, wins the future."¹ Although Sturmer was concerned with the way in which understanding of history shapes contemporary discourse in post World War Two Germany, his statement also aptly described the manner in which history has been used in Japan since the advent of the modern century. With my long-term goal of a study of the "use of history" by intellectuals in Japan and, perhaps later, a comparative study of Japan and Germany, I felt a need to embark on a smaller study to lead the way in. As history is a continuum of accumulated experience, it is necessary that I should look at an earlier attempt at historical construction in Japan. The present study was conceived upon this premise.

In this study, I have restricted myself to looking at a "lesser name" in Meiji intellectual history, Ueki Emori (1857-92). Situated in a time marked by the breakdown of the traditional order and influx of new Western ideas, Ueki and his peers were confronted with the task of relating their discredited past to their present and the need to define new paradigms for the future. I shall be investigating the intellectual formation of Ueki and how it was shaped by his social upbringing, the prevailing ideology and Western liberal ideas. After identifying the source of tension in Ueki's thought as the conflict between traditional values and new Western ideas, I intend to argue that he attempted to resolve it through the "use of history." While Ueki was not known as a historian, I find a conspicuous historical dimension to his writings. His "use of history" involved reinterpreting historical symbols, portraying the Japanese "people" and "rights of resistance" as traditional sources of democracy in Japan, and thus inscribing democracy as part of its history. Through such historical reconstruction, Ueki ultimately wanted to promote democracy and liberty as universalistic principles consistent with the notion of a "world without boundaries."

Rather than judge the "intellectual legacy" of Ueki in Japanese thought, I am more

¹Sturmer, "Suche nach der verlorenen Erinnerung," quoted by Jurgen Habermas, "Settlement of Damages," in *New German Critique*, 44 (Spring/Summer 1988): 28.

concern with the problems faced by him and other Meiji intellectuals in that age of immense social and ideological upheaval, in redefining their past and defining the future, and in relating their ideas of *bunmei kaika* to the social context of their times. This study is, therefore, not an intellectual biography. It is not a conclusive appraisal of the thought of Ueki either. Instead, I believe this study would assist in understanding of problems that confronted Japanese intellectuals in the immediate postwar period. Disillusioned by the trauma of the Second World War, they too, in Sturmer's words, through the "use of history," tried to reinterpret Japan's relationship to its past, redefine their culture and identity, and construct a new national self-consciousness to guide future actions. The significance of this study lies in such understanding.

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