




RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Song of Fallen Flowers: Miyazaki Tōten and the making of *naniwabushi* as a mode of popular dissent in transwar Japan, 1902–1909

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Abstract

The popular genre of sung and spoken performance—*naniwabushi*—was the biggest ‘craze’ during the first decade of the twentieth century in Japan. This article uncovers how Miyazaki Tōten (1870–1922), a revolutionary and thinker who became a *naniwabushi* balladeer, was instrumental in the rise of *naniwabushi* as a popular art form during the Russo-Japanese transwar period (1902–1909) and used it to engage in a practice of nihilist democracy. In using a transwar frame to examine the content, audiences, and contemporary reports of his performances, this article concludes that Miyazaki Tōten created ‘new’ *naniwabushi* to deliberately link the techniques and rhetoric of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement from the 1880s to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). He used *naniwabushi* to articulate his concepts of autonomous freedom, nihilism, and anarchist communitarianism in a time usually characterized by the heavy suppression of dissent. It counters the impression of the wholesale embrace of nationalism and support for Japanese imperialism and shows how Japan’s urban poor engaged in political discourse through popular entertainment that was critical of Japanese imperialism.

Keywords: *Naniwabushi*; popular culture; Russo-Japanese War; nihilism; Miyazaki Tōten; transwar

Introduction

That night, the *naniwabushi* that really deeply moved me was that of Hakurōan Tōten [Miyazaki Tōten]. I had already known his name for a long time as he was famous for authoring *My Thirty Three Years’ Dream*, but this was the first time I saw him in person. The performance was *Meiji Kokusenya*... I was uninterested in his technique, but in his [samurai] background and his wild appearance and the contrast between his looming seated figure and the small performing table.¹ At first, these things gave me some sort of deep intrigue, beyond evoking deep sympathy,

¹At six feet tall with a long beard and wild hair, Tōten was a striking figure.

he had tragic way of speaking. He began to sing with a sonorous voice ‘If I had freedom over this floating world, I would clothe the beggars of the Earth in silk.’ In an instant I became numb all over and thought that in his drunken state he seemed not at all like a human being, but like a saviour god of the suffering people (*kyūmin no kami*). No, it was not only me, there were some ladies in the audience who sobbed all night long. This is when I first felt a connection to *naniwabushi*.²

In December 1904, public intellectual and leading critic of Japan’s war with Russia, Ishikawa Sanshirō (1876–1956), suggested to his Heiminsha (People’s Association) colleagues that they should go and see Miyazaki Tōten (1870–1922) perform *naniwabushi*.³ Writing in the *Heimin Shinbun*, Ishikawa quotes the same line as Hara Kagai (1880–1926), above, from *A Song of Fallen Flowers* (*Rakka no uta*) which Tōten sang at the start of every performance. He commented that while the artistry was not very good, Tōten had ‘quietly concealed the spirit of the year in his *naniwabushi*’, by which he meant that Tōten had highlighted the plight of the people (*heimin*) in the face of Japan’s ongoing war with Russia. Ishikawa declared that he could not suppress his sympathy for Tōten.⁴ Ishikawa and the other Heiminsha members who went to the performance were so impressed that they invited Tōten to perform at their New Year’s party.⁵

By 1902, Tōten had played an influential role in the as-yet unsuccessful Chinese revolution alongside Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925). He had attempted to start a farming community in Siam (Thailand), unite the Qing reformers and rebels, ship arms to the Philippines, and encourage secret societies in Hong Kong and Canton to join the revolution. He detailed these mostly failed experiments in his wildly successful 1902–1903 autobiography, *My Thirty Three Years’ Dream* (*Sanjū san nen no yume*), which made him into one of the most famous thinkers and authors in Japan in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁶ It was later described as one of the three great autobiographies of the Meiji period, so much so that one of the pre-eminent postwar historians of Japan and China, Marius Jansen, chose to translate the book in 1982.⁷

Tōten became a *naniwabushi* balladeer in 1902, and by 1906 the *Asahi Shinbun* had declared *naniwabushi* to be one of two ‘crazes of the year’.⁸ Tōten performed

²Hara Kagai, reminiscing about seeing Tōten in 1905: Hara Kagai, ‘Naniwabushi to Boku (Naniwabushi and me)’, *Hirameki* 2, 20 September 1906.

³Ishikawa took along other Heiminsha founders, Nishikawa Kōjirō, Kanazaki Junichi, and Sakai Toshihiko. Ishikawa Sanshirō, ‘Heimin Nikki’, *Heimin Shinbun*, 18 December 1904. Tōten was not part of the Heiminsha, but his anti-war rhetoric garnered interest from the Nonwar Movement. For the Nonwar Movement, see Sho Konishi, *Anarchist modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian intellectual relations in modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 142–208.

⁴Ishikawa Sanshirō, ‘Heimin Nikki’, *Heimin Shinbun*, 18 December 1904.

⁵Sakai Toshihiko, ‘Heimin Nikki’, *Heimin Shinbun*, 1 January 1905.

⁶First serialized in *Niroku Shinpō*, *My Thirty Three Years’ Dream* had ten reprints in its first year, was reprinted in 1926 with a preface by historian and political scientist Yoshino Sakuzō (1878–1933), and was reprinted again in 1943 by Tōten’s son, Miyazaki Ryūsuke.

⁷The ill-fated E. H. Norman and Kuwabara Takeo had planned an English translation some three decades prior. Sinologist Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910–1977) ranked it as one of the top three autobiographies of modern Japan, along with those of Fukuzawa Yukichi and Ōsugi Sakae.

⁸The other being Esperanto, detailed in Sho Konishi, ‘Translingual world order: Language without culture in post-Russo-Japanese War Japan’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 72, no. 1, 2013, pp. 91–114.

naniwabushi until 1910 and proved instrumental in its emergence as Japan's most popular art form in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, despite his popularity, his ability to both capture the mood of the people during the Russo-Japanese War and engender sympathy—to the extent that he moved audiences to tears—at the time, his turn to *naniwabushi* confounded his comrades and family. Likewise, historians have struggled to include this period in any account of Tōten. Marius Jansen and Eto Shinkichi found great importance in Tōten's autobiography for its account of the Chinese (Xinhai) revolution, but they regarded Tōten's turn to performing *naniwabushi* as a break from political activism and consequently irrelevant.⁹

In this article, I dissect Tōten's innovation in 'new' *naniwabushi* to address the chasm between the historical presence of Miyazaki Tōten in the biggest craze of 1906 and the absence of both his performances and *naniwabushi* in the historiography. I find that he reached back to the supposedly defunct grassroots democratic projects that emerged variously in the 1880s, known as the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (*jiyū minken undō*), in what I term the Russo-Japanese transwar period (1902–1909).¹⁰ The Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) is a time typically characterized as a moment of historical rupture signified by Japan's entry into the sphere of advanced nations abroad and of increasing nationalism at home.¹¹ However, by using 'transwar' as an analytical scaffold, I stretch the frame of analysis to the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in the 1880s to explain some of the modes of discontent, themes, and angles of criticism levelled at the Meiji state before, during, and after the Russo-Japanese War. The historiography of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement finishes in 1890 after the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, yet historical actors like Miyazaki Tōten explicitly linked their activism to their Freedom and People's Rights precursors to redraw discussions of nihilism (*nihirisuto/kyomutō*) and freedom (*jiyū*) from that era.¹² I argue that he shifted the locus of his actions to popular performance in Japan to further what he described as a 'world revolution' (*sekai kakumei*), in contrast to the limited extant scholarship on Tōten that views his *naniwabushi*-performing as a curious interlude in his role in the Chinese revolution. I discuss how in his performances he articulated his revolutionary end point of an 'anarchist communitarian society' (*museifu kyōsanshugi shakai*) through his protagonist's engagement with nihilism.

Naniwabushi is a prosimetric style of storytelling, consisting of a performer alternating between singing (*fushi*) and speech (*kotoba* or *tanka*), accompanied by a *shamisen*

⁹Miyazaki Tōten, *My thirty-three years' dream: The autobiography of Miyazaki Tōten*, (trans) Marius B. Jansen and Shinkichi Eto (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. xxv–xxvii.

¹⁰For the build-up to the war when the Japanese media frenetically discussed the potential war; during the war itself when dissent was roundly suppressed; and in the aftermath of the war when many injured soldiers returned and dissatisfaction with the terms of victory led to the Hibiya riots (September 1905) and the era of popular violence, see Andrew Gordon, 'Social protest in Imperial Japan: The Hibiya riot of 1905', *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, vol. 12, no. 29, 2014, p. 1–22.

¹¹See Mark Ravina, *To stand with the nations of the world: Japan's Meiji Restoration in world history* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017); R. H. P. Mason and J. G. Caiger, *A history of Japan*, rev. edn (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1997), pp. 257–264 and 269–270; Curtis Andressen and Milton Osborne, *A short history of Japan: From Samurai to Sony* (London: Allen and Unwin, 2003), p. 96; Elise K. Tipton, *Modern Japan: A social and political history* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 76–77; Andrew Gordon, *A modern history of Japan: From Tokugawa times to the present*, 3rd edn (Oxon: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 177.

¹²Marius B. Jansen, *The making of modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 389.

player who punctuates the tales with interjections and emphasis.¹³ The chanting style conveyed ‘indignation over injustice and unfulfilled aspiration’.¹⁴ It emerged from street performance arts and could be heard emanating from the side streets, temple squares, and hastily constructed reed huts that served as informal theatres in the *shitamachi* (low town) of Tokyo. *Naniwabushi* connotes a certain unrestrainedness, wildness, or freedom on the part of the performer, and unlike Japan’s formalized arts, singers could start performing their own material within weeks of joining a troupe. Performers sought to evoke deep emotion and empathy in their ‘vulgar, illiterate, and tattooed’ audiences through heavy use of melisma, dramatic pauses, and cliff hangers.¹⁵ In turn, the audiences typically engaged in call-back, enabling a discursive encounter with the performer. *Naniwabushi* exploded in 1906 just after the Russo-Japanese War and remained strikingly popular until the end of the Second World War after which it declined rapidly. Compared to its heyday, *naniwabushi* is relatively unknown in contemporary Japan, with regular performances taking place only at the Mokubatei Theatre and various small venues in Tokyo and the Isshinji Temple in Ōsaka.¹⁶ As a genre, it was regarded by middle-class newspaper commentators and government officials as ‘vulgar’ (*geretsu*) and ‘crude’ (*yahi*), and was generally looked down on, yet it was enjoyed by large swathes of the population.¹⁷ When Miyazaki Tōten decided to become a *naniwabushi* performer in 1902, the outrage among his friends and family was such that one former comrade threw his saké on the ground and shouted ‘what a coward you are! I won’t drink with the likes of you. I’d rather drink with the floor!’¹⁸ In her recollections of Tōten, his wife, Miyazaki Tsuchi (1872–1942), wrote that she nearly fainted upon hearing of his new aspiration and refused to entertain it. She encouraged him to instead follow Sun Yat-sen to Europe and the United States to further his revolutionary activity.¹⁹ They were shocked that someone with a samurai background could

¹³For a detailed description of the musical and oral aspects of *naniwabushi*, see Alison Tokita, ‘Orality in naniwa-bushi: The Taikoki cycle of pieces’, in *Folk and songs in Japan and beyond: Ethnomusicological essays in honour of David W. Hughes*, (eds) Matt Gillan, Kiku Day and Patrick Huang (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022).

¹⁴Faye Yuan Kleeman, *In transit: The formation of the colonial East Asian cultural sphere* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014), p. 36.

¹⁵Descriptions of the *naniwabushi* audiences can be found in Hyōdō Hiromi and Henry D. Smith II, ‘Singing tales of the Gishi: Naniwabushi and the forty-seven Ronin in Late Meiji Japan’, *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2006, pp. 459–508.

¹⁶Today *naniwabushi* is commonly referred to as *rōkyoku*. Following the recent revival of *rakugo*, *naniwabushi* may also be heading for a renaissance. For a contemporary analysis, see Alison Tokita, ‘The narrative worlds of contemporary Naniwa-Bushi (Rōkyoku)’, *Nihon Dentō Ongaku Kenkyū (Japanese Traditional Music Research)*, vol. 15, 2018, pp. 19–40.

¹⁷In the first half of the twentieth century it became one of the most popular genres, with 47 per cent of respondents to an NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) survey in 1932 ranking *naniwabushi* as their favourite form of radio programming. Hyōdō and Smith, ‘Singing tales of the Gishi’, p. 501. It was also extremely popular concurrently among the Japanese diaspora in Hawaii; see Minako Waseda, ‘*Naniwa-Bushi* in Hawai‘i: The rise and fall of a Japanese narrative art in diaspora’, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, vol. 52, 2020, pp. 93–126.

¹⁸Komuchi Tomotsune, in the preface to Tōten’s autobiography. Miyazaki Tōten, *Sanjū san nen no yume (My thirty three years’ dream)*, (eds) K. Shimada and H. Kondō (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), p. 29.

¹⁹His mistress, Tomeka, likewise begged him not to become a *naniwabushi* performer, since, as a former geisha, she would have to return to ‘such disagreeable work’ and her shame at his decision would leave her unable to face her mother. Miyazaki, *Sanjū san nen no yume*, p. 30. In his effort to persuade Tsuchi that

retreat from the direct revolutionary activity he had undertaken in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Siam, and the Philippines to enter into a profession dominated by former outcasts or 'new commoners' (*shin heimin*).

Such is the reputation of *naniwabushi* that, unlike other *yose* (vaudeville) art forms like *rakugo* or *kōdan*, it has not been considered part of Japan's cultural heritage and even today has received little scholarly or popular attention.²⁰ When examined, as by historians Hyōdō Hiromi and Henry D. Smith, the focus is on the 'ascension' of *naniwabushi* into middle-class spheres through efforts to shift performances towards nationalistic content by the Genyōsha (Dark Ocean Society) and government officials. I build on this research by examining *naniwabushi* from the perspective of those who resisted such reforms and, in the case of Tōten, constructed a 'new' *naniwabushi* in line with the values of the *kyōkaku* (honourable bandit) archetype that made the genre appealing to popular audiences. As one of the 'crazes of the year', the number of *naniwabushi* performers doubled from 212 to over 400 in 1906 alone.²¹ Yet, the only historiographical significance given to *naniwabushi* so far is in terms of its role in the making of Japanese nationalism.²² This perspective means that most historical studies of *naniwabushi* focus on its role as propaganda, which sits awkwardly between studies of cultural history and intellectual history. Late-Meiji popular culture has been examined primarily in the context of ethnographic and anthropological studies of performing arts,²³ whereas historical studies of social activists and intellectuals have tended to focus on literature (*bungaku*) and thought (*shisō*) over popular or mass culture.²⁴ When popular movements have been studied, their successes and failures are seen through labour relations, unions, rioting, and electoral participation—to which *naniwabushi* as a popular art form and Tōten's aims were entirely tangential.²⁵ Historians have therefore

becoming a *naniwabushi* performer was a good idea, he took her to see his master Tōchūken Kumoemon perform. Tōten, seeing his wife sobbing throughout the performance out of sadness at his decision, turned to her and said 'Kumo is a great performer isn't he... See, he made you cry!' She returned to Kumamoto the next day. Tsuchiko Miyazaki, 'Bōfu Tōten Kaikoroku', in *Miyazaki Tōten Zenshū* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1971–76) [hereafter *Zenshū*], vol. 5, pp. 509–511.

²⁰The main scholarly contributions are: Manabe Masayoshi (ed.), *Naniwabushi no Seisei to Tenkai: Katari gei no dōtai shi ni mukete* (Tokyo: Serika Shobō, 2020); Hyōdō Hiromi, '*Koe*' No Kokumin Kokka Nihon (Tokyo: Nippon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 2000); Shiba Kiyoshi, *Nihon Rōkyoku Daizenshū* (Tokyo: Rōkyoku Henshūbu, 1989); Shiba Kiyoshi (ed.), *Shinbun Ni Miru: Naniwabushi Hensenshi: Meiji Hen* (Tokyo: Rōkyoku Henshūbu, 1997); Masayoshi Manabe, 'Naniwa-Bushi and social debate in two postwar periods: The Russo-Japanese War and the First World War', in *Music, modernity and locality in prewar Japan: Osaka and beyond*, (eds) Hugh De Ferranti and Alison Tokita (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). Kleeman examines Tōten's work, *Meiji Kokuseriya*, from a cultural-literary rather than a political perspective: see Kleeman, *In transit*. Hyōdō and Smith, 'Singing tales of the Gishi'.

²¹Hyōdō and Smith, 'Singing tales of the Gishi', p. 475.

²²Hyōdō, '*Koe*' No Kokumin Kokka Nihon; Tokita, 'Orality in Naniwa-Bushi'; Manabe, 'Naniwa-bushi and social debate in two postwar periods'; Manabe, *Naniwabushi, ryūdōsuru katari gei*.

²³Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Genkai Geijutsu Ron* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1976); Yamaguchi Masao, *Dōketeki Sekai* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1975); and Minami Hiroshi and Ozawa Shōichi (eds), *Irodoru: Iromono No Sekai* (Tokyo: Hakuuisha, 1981).

²⁴Ogino Fujio, *Shoki Shakaishugi Shisōron* (Tokyo: Fuji Shuppan, 1993); Matsuzawa Hiroaki, *Nihon Shakaishugi No Shisō* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1973).

²⁵See, for example, Andrew Gordon, *Labor and imperial democracy in prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

elided Tōten's 'new' *naniwabushi* as both a form of popular performance and a form of social activism as it does not fit within any of the extant historiographical foci.

In terms of content, I approach Tōten's writing as a form of action. This is more so for his compositions that were performed and concurs with Tōten's insistence that his *naniwabushi* was a form of activism.²⁶ As such, I find Tōten's written and performed 'texts' to be of as much historical importance as his more 'direct' physical actions in China and Southeast Asia. Tōten's biographers have noted his debt to Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers through his brothers (both educated by Nakae Chōmin) and his education at the Ōe Gijuku (Ōe Academy) with liberal giant turned nationalist flag-waver Tokutomi Sohō.²⁷ However, since historians have dismissed his *naniwabushi* performances as an unimportant side project, they have neglected his engagement with anarchism and nihilism. Moreover, due to strict censorship in early twentieth-century Japan, in his newspaper articles he frequently concealed criticism of the Meiji state in terms of the earlier Tokugawa order and other countries, although his anarchist contemporaries clearly saw his work as a critique of Meiji society.²⁸ In *Detarame nikki* (*A Diary of Nonsense*), *Dokushaku hōgen* (*Ramblings of a Solitary Drinker*), and *Tōkyō yori* (*From Tokyo*), all serialized in *Shanghai Nichinichi Shinbun* (Shanghai Daily Newspaper) in 1918–1920, Tōten wrote more explicitly about the ideal society (*risōshakai*) he wanted to bring forth. Only by examining such later works published outside of Japan can those specific aims be confirmed.

Nihilist democracy: The Freedom and People's Rights Movement in transwar Japan

Miyazaki Tōten managed to 'capture the spirit of the year' and move his audiences to tears. The content that provoked such an emotional connection was grounded in his maxim of 'defending the weak and suppressing the powerful' (*fujaku zakyō*). I hold that these performances brought the once thought-suppressed Freedom and People's Rights Movement back into popular consciousness. He used the provocative term 'nihilism' (*kyomutō/nihirisuto*) to articulate his notion of 'world revolution' and as a way of interrogating restrictions on human freedom, rather than the extreme pessimism, withdrawal, or denial of reality often associated with the term. It is instead related to the revolutionary movements associated with Russian nihilism of the Russian Populist Movement that rejected state, church, and familial authority in favour of popular participation and revolution during the absolute monarchy of Tsarist Russia.²⁹ Russian nihilism aimed at the destruction of these institutions in service of the broader goal of

²⁶I draw on both Paul Ricœur's similar hermeneutic theory of reading action as 'text' and of Tōten's use of Chinese philosopher Wang Yangming as an early influence on his equation of thought with action. Paul Ricœur, *From text to action* (London: Continuum, 2008). See also J. Victor Koschmann, *The Mito ideology: Discourse, reform, and insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790–1864* (London: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 4–5; Miyazaki, *Sanjū san nen no yume*, p. 68.

²⁷Katō Naoki, *Muhon No Ko: Miyazaki Tōten no 'Sekai Kakumei'* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobōshinsha, 2017); Uemura Kimio, *Miyazaki Kyōdai Den: Ajia Hen*, 3 vols (Fukuoka: Ashi Shobō, 1987).

²⁸Ishikawa Sanshirō, 'Heimin Nikki', *Heimin Shinbun*, 18 December 1904.

²⁹For the distinction between the present-day popular understanding of nihilism and Russian nihilism, see Nolen Gertz, *Nihilism*. MIT Press Essential Knowledge Series (London: MIT Press, 2019), pp. 1–4.

societal emancipation.³⁰ Similarly, nihilism, to Tōten, was a democratic, radical reappraisal of all restrictive structures and values. His *naniwabushi* balladeering formed what I term nihilist democracy—a people-centred mode of discourse that encouraged people to question and dismantle all restrictions upon their freedom. In this sense he employed nihilism as a concept useful for political action, from his engagement with it via the political novels (*seiji shosetsu*) of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in the 1880s.³¹ With it, he furthered his notion of 'world revolution', a concept that had little to do with state capture by the proletariat, despite his influential role in the Chinese revolution and his admiration for the Russian and French revolutions. He predicted that such a takeover would merely replace one set of 'robbers' with another.³² Instead, 'world revolution' was a process in which all people (*banmin*) could overcome restrictions (*yokusoku*) that limit human freedom.³³ Revolution in this case was more a radical reappraisal of value than political action organized through unions and parties. It was therefore a social or cultural revolution that drew attention to alternative paths to the course of Western modernization pursued by the Meiji government.

Tōten believed that if there could be a successful revolution in China, then Japan could turn away from the West and back towards China, as it had done for hundreds of years. Once the Japanese people saw a free society in China, they too would overthrow their own state. It would, in his mind, spread throughout the world, from Asia to the West and beyond, freeing people from their oppressors everywhere—a 'world revolution'. In his autobiography Tōten explained:

I believed that all the world was one family (*shikai keitei*), and therefore I deplored the present competition between nations. The things I hated had to be destroyed; if not, it would all be an empty dream. I thought it would take direct action to achieve these aims, and therefore I committed myself to world revolution...How was this to be carried out? It seemed to me that there was no way this could be done through debate, but that it would require direct action to get it done.³⁴

He was unusual for including Siam, the Philippines, Annam (Vietnam), and the British colonial territories in Malaya when he conceived of the people who would participate in and benefit from such a revolution.³⁵ So too was his notion that once people in Europe and the United States saw the benefits of freedom from the state and freedom to

³⁰Ibid., p. 36.

³¹'Political novel' is used in this specific case as a translation from Japanese. Of course, any novel is, to a certain extent, 'political.'

³²Miyazaki, 'Detarame Nikki', *Zenshū*, vol. 3 [1920/6/13], p. 410.

³³All people (*banmin*—lit. 10,000 people) in this case refers to all non-elites in Japan and beyond. It emphasizes the multiplicity and diversity of 'people' across caste, class, race, and space. Tōten used this, rather than the more common, but nation-state restricted term, *kokumin*, the people of the nation, and very occasionally used *heimin*, translated variously as the people outside the state and common people.

³⁴Miyazaki, *My thirty-three years' dream*, pp. 284–285. Japanese in parentheses added by the author.

³⁵In 1900 he collaborated with Sun Yat-sen, Hirayama Shu, Inukai Tsuyoshi, Nakamura Haizan, and some Genyōsha members to send arms to the Philippines for the First Philippine Republic's Revolutionary Government fighting the revolutionary war against the United States. The cargo ship, the *Nunobiki Maru*, carrying the weapons sank in a typhoon near the Saddle Islands and their efforts failed.

act independently, they would also follow the Chinese example. He conceptualized this using the phrase ‘universal brotherhood of a united humanity’ (*shikai keitei isshi dōjin*) to include people of every country, race, and class. This world revolution, therefore, would not only free people from the yokes of their rulers, but extinguish the violent national competition that characterized international affairs.

The search for what Tōten termed ‘autonomous freedom’ (*jishu jiyū*) led him to believe that nihilism was a suitable method for attaining such freedom through a world revolution. Autonomous freedom meant each person could be the ‘lord of themselves’—that is, live free from rulers or any authority that would coerce people into relations of subjugation and control and restrict people’s freedom to live their lives the way they wanted to.³⁶ He wrote that autonomous freedom was hampered in contemporary society due to the ‘evil influences’ restraining people: the education originating in the home and the state that taught customs, morality, law, status, and honour.³⁷ Therefore, people are ‘imprisoned by conventions and traditions... and have become spiritually crippled’.³⁸ To eradicate this kind of ‘servile attitude’, people must regain self-awareness of the ‘true meaning of self-freedom’ which is the ‘true value of being human’.³⁹ This would create an ideal society in which people would have ‘unbridled freedom’ (*fukijiyū no shinmin*). Nihilism was the method for interrogating the harm caused by such conventions and traditions, which he explored in his *naniwabushi* performances. He used the protagonist in his *naniwabushi* performance, *Meiji Kokusenya* (1903–1904), to question each social structure and every holder of authority. Tōten makes it clear that if one were to do this, one would find that no person, system, or social organization can legitimately restrict human freedom. He regarded the hardships of the ‘nameless people who propel society’—the poor, destitute, beggars, urban labourers, poor farmers, and tenant farmers—as caused by the ‘conventions and traditions’ of the Meiji state.⁴⁰ He thought that if these people had a way of understanding the causes of their hardship, then they would be able to counter it effectively. Nihilism, as in many political novels of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement in the 1880s, was a leitmotif of Tōten’s *naniwabushi* performances. He believed that once people embraced nihilism, all restrictions would be removed and they would form a society of anarchist communitarianism.

Anarchist communitarianism was, for Tōten, a societal form without a government or state that would allow people to practise real autonomous freedom, since any kind of state is always restrictive.⁴¹ It would be a society of free association and free

³⁶This contrasts with the way earlier Meiji thinkers explained the term: Nishimura Shigeki stated that *jishu jiyū* was a translation of ‘liberty and freedom’, and Fukuzawa Yukichi explained it in terms of ‘rights’ in a liberal, European-style, civilized government. See Joshua A. Fogel, *The emergence of the modern Sino-Japanese lexicon: Seven studies*. East Asian Comparative Literature and Culture 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 95–98.

³⁷Miyazaki, ‘Detarame Nikki’, *Zenshū*, vol. 3 [1920/3/6], p. 306.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid. Miyazaki, ‘Tōkyō Yori’, *Zenshū*, vol. 2 [1919/4/2], p. 113.

⁴⁰Tōten’s contemporary, Yokoyama Gennosuke, referred to the nameless people as Japan’s underclass (*kasō shakai*). See James L. Huffman, *Down and out in Late Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2018).

⁴¹Tōten cites Peter Kropotkin when explaining that cooperatism and personal liberty work together in an anarchist communitarian society. Miyazaki, ‘Detarame Nikki’, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, p. 316.

movement which would permit people to flourish in their individuality. He contrasted anarchist communitarianism with communism and socialism by stressing the importance of individuality. Self-governing communities would be collections of individuals who cooperated on the basis of mutual trust and understanding. This would allow for a democratic society to exist without the confines of a state. His emphasis on autonomous freedom meant he always approached social issues from an anarchist perspective, as he assumed any hardship was due to artificial limits upon freedom. His concept of individual, autonomous freedom was predicated on land not belonging to any individual. He regarded private ownership of land as the ultimate source of restrictions upon people's freedom. States and aristocracies gained their power from land and the apparatus of the state—education, law, bureaucracy, the military—which existed to enforce private ownership. The individual cannot be free with the state and land cannot be private without it. Therefore, both private ownership of land and the state should be abolished. He held that this could only happen through a social revolution, not debate.⁴² Tōten deferred the practical implementation of this to his brother, Tamizō, who founded the Land Equalization Society and tried to communalize several villages in Japan.⁴³ Tamizō asserted that land is not made by anyone but is bestowed by nature. It was therefore illegitimate to claim land as private property as it all belonged to nature.⁴⁴

By using *naniwabushi* as a platform for discussing nihilism, anarchist communitarianism, and autonomous freedom, Tōten was reinvigorating the themes and techniques employed in *seiji kōdan* (readings of political novels) by the members of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement in the 1880s. Activists of his generation grew up in the milieu of political novels, and used popular culture to conceal and articulate radical ideas that would otherwise be censored. Ishikawa Sanshirō and Hara Kagai were familiar with Tōten's method, but found *naniwabushi* to be a new and innovative medium for intellectual discourse.

In his youth, Tōten was an avid reader of Miyazaki Muryū (1855–1889), a member of the *Jiyūtō* (Liberal Party) and an integral figure in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement as well as a prolific writer for the Liberal Party's paper, *Jiyū no tomoshibi* (*The Torch of Liberty*).⁴⁵ Tōten drew on Muryū's work, both the theme of nihilism and the technique of communicating such ideas to a broad audience. Tōten's main innovation in this case was using the new and increasingly popular genre of *naniwabushi* rather than political novels. Miyazaki Muryū was part of the surge in the translation of Russian literature in the 1880s and was central to the popular discussion of nihilism. The *seiji shōsetsu* period peaked in 1887 but its popularity rapidly declined after 1890.⁴⁶ The publication in 1887 of Japan's 'first modern novel' *Ukigumo* by Muryū's friend, Futabatei Shimei (1864–1909), coincided with this peak. The literary quality of Futabatei's work, written in vernacular Japanese, compared to the preceding decade of political novels written using ornate Sinicized language, means it is not usually

⁴²Miyazaki, *Sanjū san nen no yume*, p. 27.

⁴³Matsuzawa Tetsunari, 'Miyazaki Tōten Ni Okeru "Kakumei"', *Zenshū*, vol. 4, pp. 463–465.

⁴⁴Miyazaki Tamizō, *Tochi Kinkyō: Jinrui no Taiken* (Tokyo: Shinshin Shokyoku, 1906).

⁴⁵Miyazaki, 'Bōyūroku', *Zenshū*, vol. 2, p. 521.

⁴⁶Yanagida Izumi, *Seiji Shōsetsu Kenkyū*, 3 vols (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1935), vol. 1, p. 47.

considered a ‘political novel’.⁴⁷ However, his work was grounded in Russian translation practice, and he was drawn to the plain language and realistic depiction of the suffering of ordinary Russians in the works of Gogol and Turgenev. For Futabatei, his love of literature was less a scholarly interest; rather, he wrote that he was ‘fascinated with the observation, analysis and predictions of social phenomena or problems which the Russian writers dealt with in their work—matters about which I had been quite ignorant. I began to take delight in observing, analysing, and foreseeing the outcome of the social phenomena presented in literature.’⁴⁸ An urge to depict social and political issues undergirded his naturalistic technique. He drew on the theme of nihilism: his translation of Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* was titled *Tsūzoku kyomutō katagi*, or *The Character of Ordinary Nihilists*. As such, he sought to depict the ‘social problem’ (*shakai mondai*) in Japan using the same modes of satire and democratic language. Famously, he wrote numerous draft passages of his novels in Russian, before translating them into vernacular Japanese.⁴⁹

Futabatei Shimei, Muryū, and others tapped into popular dissatisfaction with the Meiji government in the 1880s. Freedom and People’s Rights advocates protested against the stranglehold the Meiji oligarchs had over modern Japan and pushed for liberal reforms. While there was certainly an element of high politics for some members, it was largely a grassroots movement in which political novels played a central role. The popular literature produced by the likes of Muryū and Futabatei drew on the emotional aspect of this discontent. They saw parallels between the unfulfilled promises for equality of the Meiji Ishin and the Russian nihilist movement.⁵⁰ They translated and adapted Russian literature and linked anarchist and nihilist themes to the emotions of the readers. Futabatei read Kropotkin, Bakunin, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, and began to identify as a socialist. As such, he brought these figures to a general audience through literature.

In 1884–1885 Muryū serially published an adaptation of Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii’s *Underground Russia*, entitled *Kyomutō Jitsudenki: Ki shūshū* (*A Lamentation of Lost Souls: An Authentic Account of the Nihilists*). In it, he defined nihilism as ‘the purest form of individualism’, claiming that ‘historically it arose in response to the utmost corruption in politics’ and that it ‘describes the miseries of the ordinary people’s lives’.⁵¹ Individualism in this case is more like individuality or multiplicity, rather than libertarian individualism as it is often understood today. Of the 65 books on Russian populism and nihilism published in Japan between 1881 and 1884, *Ki shūshū* was one of the most popular.⁵² Stepniak’s version is an account of historical events, but Muryū blended history and fiction to draw together the three separate parts of *Underground*

⁴⁷Atsuko Sakaki, ‘Kajin No Kigū: The Meiji political novel and the boundaries of literature’, *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2000, p. 91.

⁴⁸Futabatei Shimei, ‘Yo ga hansei no zange’, in *Futabatei Shimei zenshū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1985), vol. 4, p. 289. See also Marleigh Grayer Ryan, *Japan’s first modern novel: Ukigumo of Futabatei Shimei* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1967).

⁴⁹See Konishi, *Anarchist modernity*, pp. 82–85.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

⁵¹Kyoko Kurita, ‘Kōda Rohan and the origin of modern Japanese romanticism’, PhD thesis, Yale University, 1992, p. 12.

⁵²Konishi, *Anarchist modernity*, p. 44.

Russia into a single narrative.⁵³ He gave particular attention to the female activist Vera Zasulich (1849–1919), detailing her shooting of Colonel Fyodor Trepov and subsequent acquittal by jury at trial. The attempted assassination of a violent political figure was embraced by the public as a righteous act, and became a model for a new kind of political action.⁵⁴ Muryū's work is part of the Meiji trend in historical writing that blended real events with fiction, allowing history to be dramatized for non-elite audiences. Kyoko Kurita describes it as 'literature of the people, by the people, for the people'.⁵⁵ Likewise, Tōten used nihilism as a positive, democratic mode of discourse in his *naniwabushi* performances. Nihilism's basis in individualism appealed to Tōten as he found it incompatible with state socialism. The connection between nihilism and people's ability to organize themselves led him to eschew the label of socialist in favour of a broad identification with anarchism. He even stressed that Kropotkin, whom he associated with anarchist and nihilist ideas, should not be confused with Marx, since autonomous freedom was the basis for his ideal society and Marxism as a statist ideology did not allow for this.⁵⁶

Muryū's *Ki shūshū* was widely read in Japan throughout the 1880s, and it is understood as being on the more radical end of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement.⁵⁷ Muryū was imprisoned for this particular work, which most likely contributed to its popularity among young rebellious men like Tōten, who read it at some point between 1885 and 1889. Tōten read it along with Muryū's work *Ukiyo no namida* (*Tears of the Floating World*), adapted from Edward King's *The Gentle Savage* (1883), which pointed out the hypocrisy of the major powers' claims to be civilized while committing extreme violence against other groups.⁵⁸ These works were read aloud to audiences as *seiji kōdan*. Tokutomi Roka reminisced that large crowds gathered to hear Muryū's *Jiyū no kachidoki* (*Freedom's Victory Cry*), and would occasionally cheer with excitement.⁵⁹ Muryū himself also read his work aloud, allowing those who could not afford to buy his work or were unable to read it to engage with his ideas. By the time Tōten was performing *naniwabushi* with much the same intention, *seiji kōdan* was banned. However, unlike the general appeal of 'novels' to intellectual and middle-class groups, *naniwabushi* appealed only to mass audiences. It appears that censors paid little attention to *naniwabushi* performances, perhaps because it was assumed that no one of importance attended them.⁶⁰

⁵³ Yanagida, *Seiji Shōsetsu Kenkyū*, vol. 1, p. 159.

⁵⁴ Christopher Ely, *Russian populism: A history* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), pp. 116–117.

⁵⁵ Kurita, 'Kōda Rohan and the origin of modern Japanese romanticism', p. 17.

⁵⁶ Miyazaki, 'Detarame Nikki', *Zenshū*, vol. 3, p. 519.

⁵⁷ Konishi, *Anarchist modernity*, p. 88.

⁵⁸ Miyazaki, 'Bōyūroku', *Zenshū*, vol. 2, in *Shanhai Nichinichi Shinbun*, 13 May 1919–8 March 1920. Edward King is perhaps more famous for his deeply racist depictions of the post-civil war southern United States, which is considered part of the backlash against Reconstruction. However, Muryū's adaptation of *The gentle savage*, *Ukiyo no namida*, was influential in Japanese critical circles and similar stories were used to criticize the Meiji government's suppression of the Ainu, as in Kōda Rohan's *Yuki funpun*, which criticized Japanese fraud and racial discrimination against the Ainu. See Kurita, 'Kōda Rohan and the origin of modern Japanese romanticism', p. 21.

⁵⁹ *Jiyū no kachidoki* was an adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' *Ange Pitou*, which Muryū read in the English translation, *The taking of the Bastille*. Yanagida, *Seiji Shōsetsu Kenkyū*, vol. 1, p. 40. See also Ochi Haruo, *Kindai bungaku seiritstuki no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1984), pp. 219–220.

⁶⁰ It was considered distasteful and vulgar, but not politically dangerous.

Miyazaki Tōten's *naniwabushi* balladeering created a transwar linkage between the popular themes of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement and the struggles of ordinary people during the Russo-Japanese War. It formed an instance of nihilist democracy, in which the urban poor who most enjoyed *naniwabushi* were, in Tōten's eyes, able to cultivate a personal awareness of the restrictive nature of society. He hoped that this would eventually lead to a 'world revolution', after which an anarchist communitarian society with true freedom could be realized.

'New' *naniwabushi*

If I could make those in this fleeting life free, the beggars of the world would wear silk, and ride in fine carriages, the starving peasants would be adorned in jewels, and all the world would come together as one family, a paradise of equality for all four classes. If we are to build such a world, do we follow Germany, France, America, and the arrogant land of Russia? Or do we see enlightenment (*kaika*) as the enemy? With explosives and pistols, should we assassinate the kings and aristocrats, and tear down the structure of the present society?⁶¹

At the start of the twentieth century *naniwabushi* was in a state of flux. It was torn between government ministers trying to 'improve' (*kairyo*) *naniwabushi*, on the one hand, and social activists and performers trying to retain it as an art of the people (*heimin geijutsu*) to 'protect the weak against the powerful', on the other. While Tōten pushed against the reforms originating in the government and the nationalist Genyōsha and Kokuryūkai (Black Dragon) groups, he too was innovating in *naniwabushi*. He described his work as 'new' *naniwabushi*, a nihilist democratic mode in which he synthesized the rebelliousness he saw as integral to the art with ideas about nihilism and anarchism. Drawn to 'all popular types of music', *naniwabushi* stood out as the genre he wanted to perform as it centred on stories of *kyōkaku* and *gimin* (righteous commoners).⁶² Using the *kyōkaku* archetype as a familiar figure of rebellion, he invited his audiences to imagine how rebellion and resistance could happen through nihilism and anarchism in contemporary Japan.

Critically, in *naniwabushi* he found a democratic forum for intellectual discourse for the 'people' (*banmin*), who were its main audience. Mainstream newspapers denounced these audiences as being covered in tattoos, wearing *hanten* coats with gang symbols, and revelling in vulgar jokes.⁶³ The *Ōsaka Mainichi Shinbun* described them as 'day labourers and coolies', and maintained that *naniwabushi* was so vulgar it could offer them no hope of 'improvement'. Worse still, if it became popular beyond these crowds it would surely corrupt polite society.⁶⁴ There was a widespread perception that *naniwabushi* was not an art (*gei*), but a 'vulgar' form of entertainment. The *Niroku Shinpō*, the

⁶¹Miyazaki, 'Meiji Kokusenya', *Zenshū*, vol. 3, p. 91.

⁶²Miyazaki, 'Kyōkaku to Edokko to Naniwabushi', *Zenshū*, vol. 4, pp. 193–194; Miyazaki, *Sanjū san nen no yume*, p. 25.

⁶³Hara Kagai, 'Yokosuka yori', *Hikari*, December 1905, p. 7, in Tomoko Seto, "'Art" and socialism in Hara Kagai's *Kōdan* and *Naniwabushi* performances, 1905–6', 2013 Symposium: Reading Kuzushiji, University of Chicago, 22 June 2013, p. 136. Hara was sympathetic to the audiences but could not resist criticizing them and blaming them for his lack of success as a performer.

⁶⁴*Ōsaka Mainichi Shinbun*, 1 April 1907, in Shiba, *Shinbun Ni Miru*, pp. 183–184.

more working-class, anti-government, reform-minded newspaper, which published Tōten's autobiography and *naniwabushi* work, was more sympathetic. Promoting his performances in 1909, it claimed that listeners would be deeply moved by his stories and, moreover, since he was a close associate of Sun Yat-sen and a conspirator in the Chinese Revolution, there would surely be more to hear than *naniwabushi* alone.⁶⁵

In contrast to the mainstream newspapers, Tōten depicted his audiences positively. He regarded the urban poor in Japan's fast industrializing cities as being in fundamentally the same position as the pre-Meiji Edo townsfolk. The rowdy energy that Meiji cultural commentators found so off-putting was evidence to Tōten of their vital spirit. He saw them as present-day *Edokko*, or Edoites—the commoners living in what is now Tokyo—who developed a spirit of defiance and self-reliance to protect one another from the frequent 'flowers of Edo' (fires and fights) and from exploitation by the samurai class.⁶⁶ Given the right tools—in this case nihilism—with which to question norms and authority, the self-reliance and vital energy of the Edoites could allow them to overcome the harm he saw being inflicted on them by the Meiji government. Crucially in 1904–1905, this included being conscripted to fight Russia.

Uemura Kimio describes these audiences as Japan's lumpenproletariat.⁶⁷ Certainly, the gamblers, sex-workers, moneylenders, day labourers, and various outcasts that comprised the audiences could be categorized in such Marxian language. However, although Tōten's efforts were oriented towards these groups, he saw them not as a monolithic class but as an assemblage of multiple peoples with their own lives, dreams, and ideas. Seen in this sense, the (in)ability of the *banmin* to realize their dreams remained unchanged from the Tokugawa period. They still lacked the autonomous freedom he saw as contingent for a purposeful life. He repeatedly castigated the Meiji government in his writing and performances, arguing that it was not only the samurai who exploited Japan's poor in the past, but today 'those in government service stand up for government service, that those with gold shield that gold, and cause the commoners (*gemin*) to suffer... It is plain to see by both young and old that the bad winds afflicting us are increasing day by day.'⁶⁸ He paid attention to those suffering in Meiji society, and questioned the premise of the state's quest for civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*). Before each performance Tōten sang *A Song of Fallen Flowers*, in which he laid bare the harms of Japan's imperialism for the ordinary Japanese. 'One general's success rests on countless withered bones/Although this land prides its prosperity and strength/The people of below (*shimobanmin*) shed tears of blood/... Is this civilisation or enlightenment?'⁶⁹ He found them to be the weak members within Meiji society, and therefore worthy of defending against the strong.

Both Ishikawa Sanshirō and another Heiminsha member, Hara Kagai, quoted sections of this opening passage which provided their initial spark of admiration for Tōten, and in Hara Kagai's case, enjoyment of *naniwabushi* in general. Hara was also opposed to the 'improvement' of *naniwabushi* and became a *naniwabushi* balladeer himself.⁷⁰ He too sought to use *naniwabushi* for a social activist purpose. Unlike

⁶⁵Niroku *Shinpō*, 3 July 1909, in Shiba, *Shinbun Ni Miru*, pp. 261–262.

⁶⁶Miyazaki, 'Kyōkaku to Edokko to Naniwabushi', *Zenshū*, vol. 4, p. 189.

⁶⁷Uemura, *Miyazaki Kyōdai Den: Ajia Hen*, vol. 2, p. 39.

⁶⁸Miyazaki, 'Kyōkaku to Edokko to Naniwabushi', *Zenshū*, vol. 4, p. 189.

⁶⁹Miyazaki, 'Rakka no Uta', *Zenshū*, vol. 1, pp. 233–234.

⁷⁰Hara, 'Naniwabushi to Boku'.

Tōten, however, he struggled to gain a following and found the rowdy audiences too boisterous.⁷¹ He ended up performing for captive audiences of workers on their lunch breaks. Commentators who saw Tōten perform, on the other hand, were mostly positive. Despite disparaging his speaking voice and singing, they praised the content of his performances. His opening message criticizing the existing order and asking about alternatives seemed to excite listeners. The *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shinbun* noted that he ‘took up the mantle of the improvement of society and correction of the culture through promoting the vitality of the *heimin shakai* (society of the people)... And was single-handedly putting democratic thought (*heimin shisō*) into practice, like his brother Hachirō.’⁷² Nakano Torao (pen name Nihi), a student of Russian language and proponent of Russian nihilism, became an admirer of Tōten after seeing him perform. Nakano travelled to Ōmuta in Kyūshū to support Tōten, and collaborated with him in publishing the magazine *Revolutionary Critique* (*Kakumei Hyōron*) in Tokyo three years later.⁷³ He worked on the translation of Stepniak’s *Underground Russia* for Tōten in 1906 but died suddenly.⁷⁴ One of Japan’s leading anarchists, Kōtoku Shūsui, was also pictured with Tōten and Nakano in Ōmuta, although what he thought of Tōten’s music is unknown.⁷⁵ Tōten’s balladeering drew socialist and anarchist figures who saw the potential of *naniwabushi* for social change.

Tōten situated ‘new’ *naniwabushi* firmly within existing themes of the genre. Rather than abandoning tales of Edo commoner heroes for stories about samurai, as nationalist ‘improvers’ of *naniwabushi* eventually would, he leaned into the aesthetic and narrative conventions of *kyōkaku*. His work was ‘new’ in that he composed original work and shifted the time period from the Edo to the early Meiji period and integrated it into his intellectual discourse. The *kyōkaku* archetype was central to the appeal Tōten found in *naniwabushi* and the way he styled himself on stage. He claimed that he had become a ‘beggar artist’ (*kotsujiki geinin*) and, like the *kyōkaku* characters, he wore his hair and beard long and donned a scruffy kimono.⁷⁶ The values of poverty and self-sacrifice were also essential to the *kyōkaku* figure, which again he sought to mirror in his life as a ‘high-class beggar (*kōtō katai*) who has devoted himself to the world of *naniwabushi*’.⁷⁷ Various descriptions as knights-errant, honourable bandits, and *rōnin*-like outsiders, *kyōkaku* embodied a single overriding virtue in Tōten’s view—that they

⁷¹Hara Kagai, ‘Yokosuka yori’, *Hikari*, December 1905, p. 7i. Seto, ‘“Art” and socialism’, p. 136. Seto, by looking at Hara, outlines the post-Russo-Japanese War link between the socialist movement and youth culture in Tomoko Seto, ‘Nichiro sengo no wakamono bunka toshite no shakaishugi undō to naniwabushi’, in *Naniwabushi no Seisei to Tenkai*, (ed.) Manabe Masayoshi (Tokyo: Serika Shobō, 2020), pp. 174–177.

⁷²Miyazaki Torazō shi kōho ni tatsu’, *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shinbun*, 14 January 1904. Known as the ‘Rousseau of Kyūshū’, Miyazaki Hachirō was a founding member of the Freedom and People’s Rights forerunner, the Kumamoto kyōdōtai, and was killed in the Seinan War fighting against the Meiji government.

⁷³Uemura Kimio, *Miyazaki Kyōdai Den: Ajia Hen*, 3 vols (Fukuoka: Ashi Shobō, 1996), vol. Chū, p. 232.

⁷⁴Tōten’s son, Miyazaki Ryūsuke, eventually finished this translation in 1918. Miyazaki, ‘Detarame Nikki’, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, p. 366.

⁷⁵At the Heiminsha New Year’s Party at which Tōten performed, Tōten arrived after Kōtoku Shūsui left. The photograph was taken at the inauguration of the Tochi fukken dōshikai (The Land Equalisation Association of Kindred Spirits), founded by Tōten’s brother, Tamizō. Others pictured are Tōchūken Kumoemon, his wife and *shamisen* player, Ohama, Nakano Nihi, and Yoshida Torao. Kimio Uemura, *Miyazaki Kyōdai Den: Ajia Hen* (Fukuoka: Ashi Shobō, 1996), vol. 2, plate 39.

⁷⁶Miyazaki, ‘Keiben Kotsugai’, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, p. 488.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p. 487.



Figure 1. Isshinte Tatsuo (left) and Miyazaki Tōten, pictured in 1907 in Kōbe on their way to their Kyūshū tour. Source: Courtesy of the Miyazaki Kyōdai Shiryōkan in Arao City, Kumamoto Prefecture.

aid the weak and suppress the powerful.⁷⁸ The term *kyō* (Ch. *xia*) is an action-oriented term that can be translated as ‘chivalry’ and refers to the adventurers in the Chinese epic *The Water Margin*. It therefore had a romantic classical appeal which endured in popular culture, and Tōten clearly identified himself as such a figure. As Hara Kagai noted, this aesthetic of poverty and self-sacrifice drew sympathy from the audience.

Tōten’s ‘new’ *naniwabushi* is distinct from the ‘improved’ *naniwabushi* that his initial master, Tōchūken Kumoemon (1873–1916), popularized for middle-class and elite audiences (see below). On the one hand, their relationship demonstrates why the historical and popular perception of *naniwabushi* is that of nationalist propaganda and, on the other, allows us to reassess the popularity of *naniwabushi* during the Russo-Japanese War as being related to war resistance rather than support. So dramatic was the relationship between the two men that it was made the subject of a play in 1971, which was restaged in October 2022.⁷⁹ After parting ways with Kumoemon in 1903, Tōten apprenticed himself to another master, Isshinte Tatsuo (1880–1974), who was one of the leading performers in the first half of the twentieth century (pictured together in Figure 1). Isshinte remained true to what Tōten saw as ‘real’ *naniwabushi*, eschewing

⁷⁸Miyazaki, ‘Kyōkaku to Edokko to Naniwabushi’, *Zenshū*, vol. 4, p. 189.

⁷⁹The play was written by Miyamoto Ken (1926–1988), a playwright from Kumamoto. The play, *Yume: Tōchūken Ushiemon no*, was paired with a play about the High Treason Incident of 1911.

stories about the Akō Gishi (Forty-seven Rōnin) and performing tales about *kyōkaku* and *gimin*.⁸⁰

From a rural samurai (*gōshi*) family, Tōten did not have a natural entry point into the world of street performing, so he had to rely on his reputation as a revolutionary. In 1902 he approached the performer Tōchūken Kumoemon. A talented singer from a family of performers, Kumoemon quickly became famous in his youth. But after a series of incidents involving him stealing the wife and *shamisen* player of his master, he had been shunned by the performing community in Tokyo by the time Tōten met him. Tōten accosted Kumoemon backstage after a performance, and asked to become his disciple.⁸¹ As Tōten describes the encounter, a copy of *Niroku Shinpō* was lying around, with his autobiography on the front page, which he picked up and showed Kumoemon to verify his identity. Tōten was old to become a performer at the age of 33 and from a samurai background, so Kumoemon was initially sceptical of his request, but after meeting Tōten again at his house he realized he was serious.⁸² Since Tōten was older than Kumoemon, they agreed upon an ‘exchange’ rather than a master-student relationship. Kumoemon would mentor Tōten in the art of *naniwabushi*, and the classically educated Tōten would provide ‘a broader knowledge’ for his stories or improve their literary quality.⁸³ Tōten took the performing name Tōchūken Ushiemon.⁸⁴ He substituted the character for cloud (*kumo*) in Kumoemon’s name for ox (*ushi*).

Due to Kumoemon’s unpopularity among the performing community in Tokyo and Tōten’s lack of funds, they first travelled to Osaka, then to Tōten’s hometown of Kumamoto. *Naniwabushi* was unknown in Kumamoto in 1902, so Tōten leant on his newspaper contacts at the *Kyūshū Nippō* to advertise their performances. The *Kyūshū Nippō* was the mouthpiece of the Genyōsha run by Fukumoto Nichinan (1857–1921). Genyōsha founder Tōyama Mitsuru (1855–1944) had influence over the paper, as did the founder of the Kokuryūkai, Uchida Ryōhei (1873–1937). Tōten knew them both intimately from his efforts to send arms to the Philippines in the Philippine-American War (1899–1902).⁸⁵ To garner publicity, Tōten introduced Kumoemon to the Genyōsha. They, along with government minister, law specialist, and *bushidō* enthusiast, Koga Renzō (1858–1942), encouraged Kumoemon to switch from tales of *kyōkaku* to *bushidō kosui* (promoting *bushidō*). Koga’s love of *naniwabushi* was unusual for someone of high status, but he disliked the lack of ‘refinement’ in the genre; in Kumoemon he found a performer he could encourage to promote the ‘healthy’ official values of filiality, loyalty to the emperor, and patriotism.⁸⁶ This switch in content allowed Kumoemon to enter respectable society and official venues.

⁸⁰A recording of Isshinteī’s version of the ‘great *kyōkaku*’ Akao Rinzō is available in digital archive: <https://kutsukake.nichibun.ac.jp/rsp/?reg=525949>, [accessed 17 November 2023]. Isshinteī was also master to another social activist performer, Matsuzaki Genkichi (1874–1944).

⁸¹Miyazaki, *Sanjū san nen no yume*, p. 355.

⁸²Ibid., p. 356.

⁸³Hyōdō and Smith claim there is no evidence of Tōten improving the quality of Kumoemon’s stories. Hyōdō and Smith, ‘Singing tales of the Gishi’.

⁸⁴After splitting from Kumoemon he frequently went by Hakurōan Tōten, and newspapers usually identified him as Miyazaki Tōten, the author of *Sanjū san nen no yume*. See Shiba, *Shinbun Ni Miru*.

⁸⁵Tōten and Uchida fell out over their failed attempt to ship arms to the Philippines in 1901, in which Uchida left Tōten bleeding after cracking a plate over his head. Miyazaki, *Sanjū san nen no yume*, pp. 318–319.

⁸⁶See Hyōdō and Smith, ‘Singing tales of the Gishi’, p. 494.

As such, with Koga's encouragement, Kumoemon altered the content of his performances from *kyōkaku* to the Akō Gishi. By the end of 1903, they comprised three-quarters of his stories. The transcripts of his performances from 1906 to 1910 were published with only one non-Gishi story in that time.⁸⁷ Prior to this introduction, Kumoemon had little interest in the genre—in fact it was his renditions of the *gimin* Sakura Sōgorō that made him famous in the 1890s, but Koga sought to 'improve' *naniwabushi* by persuading performers to 'promote *bushidō*, the highest philosophy of our national tradition, and provide texts about loyal retainers, chaste women, and filial children'.⁸⁸ The *Kyūshū Nippō* provided positive reviews and publicity—music to the former Kumoemon's ears. Kumoemon began to denounce the *kyōkaku* stories in which he had formerly specialized. He claimed that such tales would 'utterly fail to stimulate the interest of those whose intelligence is to any degree advanced... Therefore I have selected stories about loyal retainers (*chūshin resshi*) and intend to deliver them with all my spirit and passion as a form of popular education (*tsūzoku kyōiku*).'⁸⁹

The change in content was accompanied by a change in spatiality and soon led to Tōten splitting from Kumoemon's troupe. Kumoemon left behind the temporary, street-side *yose* theatres that crowded Tokyo's poorer districts and gained entry to the formal theatres. To Kumoemon and his sponsors, this was evidence of the 'elevation' of *naniwabushi* to an art (*gei*). The popular perception of *naniwabushi* as a genre valorizing loyal retainers and promoting nationalism is the result of Kumoemon's strategic shift to gain popularity and influence among more 'respectable' audiences and commentators. Because of the 'approved' nature of his content, middle-class newspapers began to soften their dislike of *naniwabushi*, and other performers, seeing Kumoemon's mainstream success, began to imitate his style of dress, stage settings, and content.

Tōten, on the other hand, mainly performed in low-class and ad hoc venues to the crowds that had drawn him to *naniwabushi* in the first place. Naturally, this limited his appeal, but it allowed him freedom to develop his 'new' *naniwabushi* content that questioned the Meiji state and Japanese imperialism. In Tōten's criticism of Kumoemon he explained that 'real' *naniwabushi* had nothing to do with pandering to middle-class audiences with stories about loyal retainers. In Tōten's view, during the 200 years of peace brought about by the force of the Tokugawa regime, the samurai enjoyed 'wine and women' while the peasants starved as the wealth of the former 'lay entirely on tyrannising the common folk (*gemin*)'.⁹⁰ *Kyōkaku*, he instead argued, presented the true spirit of the people (*banmin*), which was a valorous defiance of the established order that kept them poor. They respond to the people's requests, since 'they feel a resentment towards prideful people which they cannot suppress, and a compassion towards the weak which they cannot control', unable to rest without carrying out their convictions.⁹¹ He found that the persisting appeal of *kyōkaku* in Meiji society was evidenced by the offerings left at the grave of the 'great *kyōkaku*' Banzuiin Chōbei.⁹²

⁸⁷It was mainly an extended story of Sakura Sōgorō. Tōchūken Kumoemon, *Giretsu Hyakketsu: Bushidō Kosui* (Tokyo: Seikadō, 1910), pp. 114–167. See Hyōdō and Smith, 'Singing tales of the Gishi', p. 495.

⁸⁸As quoted in Hyōdō and Smith, 'Singing tales of the Gishi', p. 494.

⁸⁹Byōbyō-an Tenchō' [1907], pp. 65–66, in Hyōdō and Smith, 'Singing tales of the Gishi', p. 496.

⁹⁰Miyazaki, 'Kyōkaku to Edokko to Naniwabushi', *Zenshū*, vol. 4, p. 189.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁹²*Ibid.*

Bushidō was inferior as an ideology to the spirit of the *kyōkaku*, since the samurai fought out of self-interest, and the *kyōkaku* fought to aid the weak and suppress the powerful, as Tōten wrote:

Since long ago, it is said that ‘sakura are the best of flowers and samurai are the best of men’ and the essence of the country is *bushidō*. Surely no one would object to this. Nevertheless, it is thought that the nature of the *kyōkaku* and *machi yakko* is an attitude of beauty the samurai cannot reach. Samurai, from the start, had a stipend and were therefore never worried for food. Not just from one generation, but their descendants, barring any major disaster, would be sustained indefinitely. Moreover, the road to advancement through loyalty of service is clear. To be frank, they are nothing more than bribed fighting dogs. Even dogs risk their lives fighting for their master... There is nothing exceptional about samurai fulfilling the terms of their contracts and they need not be praised for their loyalty to their masters... On the other hand, once *kyōkaku* see the weak being oppressed by the strong, their emotion is agitated and they can focus on nothing else. They care not for payment, nor their descendants, nor their lives. If they can just achieve their aim of aiding the weak and suppressing the powerful, they can reach salvation in death. They look for nothing other than helping people and to perish doing so. We could compare the way Japan’s samurai rejoice in life and in death like sakura, but there is no flower to which we could possibly compare the *kyōkaku*. One cannot help but be brought to tears by this.⁹³

Tōten found that Kumoemon’s new repertoire no longer reflected the core values of *naniwabushi* and arraigned it accordingly. He was ambivalent about the effectiveness of using *naniwabushi* to promote *bushidō* and regarded the nationalist propaganda as having little effect on people’s inner thought (*shisō*).⁹⁴ He found a glimmer of optimism in observing that people would take whatever message they liked from the tales of the Akō Gishi, saying in an interview that while some may admire the loyalty of the retainers, ‘a conspirator’ (*inbōshugisha*) would ignore their loyalty, ‘but will feel deep sympathy for his twenty-two months of perseverance. He will then rejoice on hearing of the success of the night attack and imagine that he himself can also succeed.’⁹⁵ This lack of effect was because ‘real’ *naniwabushi* had to be the ‘ally of the weak’. He claimed ‘those who sing the [Akō Gishi] tales have no thoughts on the matter, while their audience will interpret it as they please.’⁹⁶ Tōten was not alone in this view, as social reformer Shiga Shinato argued in the 1920s that *naniwabushi* was not a ‘nationalist art’ (*kokusui geijutsu*) but a ‘social art’ (*shakai geijutsu*).⁹⁷ He went on to say that *naniwabushi* was the creation of the masses (*minshū sōsaku*). Shiga indicated that *naniwabushi* did not stem from the creativity of the performer but rather

⁹³Ibid., pp. 191–192.

⁹⁴Miyazaki, ‘Tōkyō Yori’, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, in *Shanghai Nichinichi Shinbun*, 28 June 1919, p. 173.

⁹⁵Ibid. Tōten was most likely on the side of the ‘conspirator’, as this is what his protagonist ends up becoming at the end of *Meiji Kokusenya*. Pace the interpretation by Hyōdō and Smith, ‘Singing tales of the Gishi’, p. 494.

⁹⁶Miyazaki, ‘Tōkyō Yori’, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, in *Shanghai Nichinichi Shinbun*, 28 June 1919, p. 173.

⁹⁷Shiga Shinato, ‘Naniwabushi to kokuteru’, *Dai-Ōsaka*, 3 March 1927, in Shiba, *Shinbun Ni Miru*, pp. 435–439.

the performer read the expectations of the audience and realized them in the performance.⁹⁸ Kumoemon's tub-thumping performances, sponsored by the nationalist Genyōsha and Kokuryūkai groups who were pressing for Japan's imperial expansion on the Asian continent, were therefore, at least in Tōten's view, ineffectual. Furthermore, Tōten's 'new' *naniwabushi* used the *kyōkaku* archetype to show how 'a conspirator' could begin dismantling contemporary society. The Edo era figure was translated into the Meiji with its new political reality.

Tōten and Kumoemon's relationship reached the point of no return in 1903 due in part to the gap between Kumoemon's moralizing, nationalist rhetoric and his behaviour backstage. Tōten claimed that Kumoemon and his entourage would start to gamble and fornicate even before breakfast, and 'they play around with underage girls, other's wives, and widows, stealing their money'.⁹⁹ Kumoemon went on to perform for Princess Arisugawa in Kōbe in 1907, which garnered extensive press coverage, before performing a 20-day run at the Hongō-za in Tokyo, the centre of Japanese imperial cultural space.¹⁰⁰ Historiographically, Kumoemon's 'ascent' is presented as *naniwabushi*'s entry into mainstream Japanese culture, yet it was Tōten and Isshinte who remained in the temporary theatres and roadside venues throughout the Russo-Japanese War performing to *naniwabushi*'s intended audiences of the *banmin*—far away from the royal patronage and government approval afforded to Kumoemon.

Meiji Kokusenya as popular intellectual discourse

Under Isshinte Tatsuo, Tōten continued composing his *naniwabushi* magnum opus, *Shin Naniwabushi Gaisei Kidan: Meiji Kokusenya* (*New Naniwabushi, A Dangerous Tale Deploring the Course of Current Events: Meiji Koxinga, 1903–1904*). Published weekly in *Niroku Shinpō*, the work spans 112 chapters and charts the intellectual development of the hero, Sakai Tetsuo (lit. World Iron Boy). Tetsuo was the audience's window into the world of a Meiji *kyōkaku* hero. Beyond the violent retribution that characterized Edo *kyōkaku* stories, Tetsuo was a witness to, and eventual participant in, how the *banmin* could be defended and defend themselves in the new global reality of modern nation-states. It is a transformative narrative in which Tetsuo starts out as an 'Uchida Ryōhei-type' staunch anti-European (specifically anti-Russian) nationalist.¹⁰¹ Then through a series of encounters, his ideology changes to the belief that through a transnational, nonimperial 'brotherhood of mankind' (*jinrui dōhō*), the poor of Asia could be freed from the dire poverty afflicting them.¹⁰² Tetsuo finally adopts the position of a 'nihilist', which is presented as someone willing to sacrifice themselves in a 'world revolution'. The aftermath of the revolution brought about by the nihilists is articulated in terms of anarchist communitarianism. The story ends abruptly with Tetsuo travelling to France, Italy, and then China to try and connect nihilist comrades and hasten the destruction of contemporary society. The chapter in which Tetsuo

⁹⁸Manabe explores Shiga's involvement in the 1920 national census in Osaka, which *naniwabushi* performers were enlisted to promote. Manabe, 'Naniwa-Bushi and social debate in two postwar periods'.

⁹⁹Miyazaki, 'Naniwabushi no kairyo ni tsuite', *Zenshū*, vol. 5, pp. 130–134.

¹⁰⁰Hyōdō and Smith, 'Singing tales of the Gishi', p. 483.

¹⁰¹Matsuzawa, 'Miyazaki Tōten Ni Okeru "Kakumei"', *Zenshū*, vol. 4, pp. 457–481, p. 461.

¹⁰²For an alternative reading, see Kleeman, *In transit*, pp. 21–43.

finally becomes a nihilist was published on 29 January 1904, just three months before *Niroku Shinpō* was shut down for criticizing the government.¹⁰³

Written in the build-up to the Russo-Japanese War and performed throughout the war, *Meiji Kokusenya* is strikingly blatant in its criticism of the Japanese state and its war effort. While Tōten does not criticize the war directly and was not a pacifist in all instances, having supported violent rebellions in China and the Philippines, audiences seeing him perform *naniwabushi* would have connected the story to contemporary events. Although anti-war dissent was suppressed in the print media during the conflict, it appears as though *naniwabushi* continued to be a site for critical discourse.¹⁰⁴ The subtitle alone indicates Tōten's dissatisfaction with Japan's trajectory towards imperialism. He relentlessly questions the logic of imperialism and might-based international order in the performance and the audience sees these positions being dismantled through the protagonist. Due to the critical nature of his *naniwabushi*, the very performance of such material was a political act. Likewise, attendees going to hear about 'a dangerous tale deploring the course of current events' during the Russo-Japanese War were participating in satire and mockery of the Meiji government. As such, Tōten's *naniwabushi* performances served as a venue for a form of directly democratic political expression for those excluded from formal political participation. Between early 1902 and September 1910, Tōten performed in venues from Kagoshima to Hokkaido, with an extensive tour of the Hokuriku coast in between. In eight years he covered at least 90 venues in 88 towns and 21 prefectures. In 1904 and 1905 alone, he performed at 24 venues in Tokyo and Kanagawa, and four in Fukuoka, typically in two-week runs.¹⁰⁵ The majority of these venues were the informal *yose* theatres catering to ordinary commoner audiences. The *Miyako Shinbun* and *Niroku Shinbun* reported in 1909 that Tōten was going to tour Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka before crossing the sea and touring Korea, Manchuria, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore, indicating his desire to reach beyond the ordinary people of mainland Japan to a South and East Asian audience.¹⁰⁶ However, he never managed to perform overseas as his mother suddenly died from a stroke, and he had to cut the tour short and return home.

Meiji Kokusenya is a reimagining of the historical figure known as Koxinga (Zheng Cheng-gong, 1624–1662; Kokusenya in Japanese). Koxinga was born to a Chinese father and Japanese mother in Hirado, Kyūshū. Koxinga was a well-known figure in Japan through Chikamatsu Monzaemon's 1715 historical play *The Battles of Koxinga* (*Kokusenya Kassen*), a staple of *bunraku* and *kabuki* theatre. He was a Ming loyalist who fought against the Manchu Qing invading China at the time. He led his army to Formosa (Taiwan) and, with the native Formosans, ejected the Dutch. Tōten also fought against the Qing and clearly found multiple parallels between the time of Koxinga and the early twentieth century, including Koxinga's success in defeating Western colonists. Symbolic of Tōten's connection to China and his desire to draw on historical Asian interaction and unity, he transplanted the Koxinga character to the Meiji period.

¹⁰³It reopened later in the year as *Tōkyō Niroku Shinpō* with a new editorial board.

¹⁰⁴See, for various modes of dissent, Yu Sakai, 'Survive to be critical: The wartime graphic as a "masquerading" media in the Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905', *War in History*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2021, pp. 797–824.

¹⁰⁵Tōten no *naniwabushi junjyō chi* (dōfukubetsu), Miyazaki Kyōdai Shiryōkan, Arao shi, Kumamoto ken, Japan.

¹⁰⁶Shiba, *Shinbun Ni Miru*, pp. 261–262.

Like Koxinga, *Meiji Kokusenya*'s protagonist, Tetsuo, was born in Hirado to a Japanese mother and Chinese father. Aged 12 he learns about the ceding of Karafuto (Sakhalin) to Russia under the treaty of St Petersburg (1875). Enraged, he vows he will one day take the territory back for Japan. Tetsuo learns Russian and Jūdō, then, under the pretence of going to China to study, he stows away on a ship to Karafuto.

On a stop in Vladivostok, he meets a Chinese doctor called Son Katei, who gives him a manifesto entitled *Ōdō jindō ben* (A Discourse on the Way of Kings and the Way of Men).¹⁰⁷ Upon reading the book Tetsuo realizes that the fate of Japan is intimately connected to the fate of China and all of Asia. He then advocates revolution in Asia on the basis of the doctrine of universal brotherhood (*shikai keitei shugi*). At this stage, Tetsuo becomes an Asian, rather than Japanese, nationalist. He retains his aim to fight against Russia, but now cares about the fate of China as well as Japan. After a series of adventures, he once again meets Dr Son in Shanghai, and finds that he is the leader of the Chinese revolutionary party. Here, he announces that the fates of China and Japan are one and the same, and 'our enemy is the same, Russia'.¹⁰⁸ Upon concluding that Russia was their common enemy, he becomes Son's disciple in the Chinese revolution, and joins him in planning an uprising. At this point, Tetsuo abandons his loyalty to the emperor, and becomes a republican after Son points out to him that even though the Shogun has relinquished power and Japan remains a country that has never been taken by outside forces, 'how was it that the situation of the people was virtually unchanged?' Japan must also have a real revolution to free the people from tyranny. Tetsuo fights for the revolution for a while, but once the uprising fails, he flees. Tōten shies away from directly criticizing the emperor in his own voice, but Tetsuo's decision to become a republican follows the same argument he employs elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ Son's argument mirrors Tōten's criticism of the Meiji state, in that the level of freedom for ordinary people had not changed despite the old order being overthrown.

Towards the end of the piece he boards a ship and meets a French doctor whom he teasingly refers to as 'Dr Alors'.¹¹⁰ The doctor gives a frank assessment of the state of society:

How to get good out of evil, isn't this the urgent question? I think the most important thing is to destroy the root of evil, in other words the cause of sickness and the things I said before, all these evils come from bad customs, bad education and bad ethics. Isn't it the case that monarchs are the possessors of the nation's belongings which their ancestors stole? Countless politicians, educators, and scholars seem loyal, but they all get income from the system. However, isn't it so pitiable that the masses pay taxes, moreover, they are used by the military who are actually at the command of the robbers, but do not have the right to participate in politics. Isn't it so pitiful that everyone is misled towards the idea that the ideal way is to have an honourable death in the battlefield. By saying this, it is already obvious what the cause of society's suffering is. With what kind of medicine and with what kind of method can we cut the root of suffering and

¹⁰⁷The name is very similar to Tōten's close friend and comrade, Dr Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925).

¹⁰⁸See Kleeman, *In transit*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁹See Miyazaki, 'Kyōkaku to Edokko to Naniwabushi', *Zenshū*, vol. 4, p. 191.

¹¹⁰Miyazaki, 'Meiji Kokusenya', *Zenshū*, vol. 3, p. 205. (Arō 亜郎).

social problems? I do not have a good solution, which is why I am asking you. What kind of solution do you have?¹¹¹

Tetsuo asks the doctor: is this not nihilism? The doctor initially feigns outrage at being associated with ‘such people’. The captain of the ship, listening in, explains that ‘in my land of the sea, there are no politicians, no governments and no monarchs, how could there be Nihilists?’ to indicate that nihilism was a method for removing politicians, governments, and monarchs, and there would be no need for nihilists in a world without authority. The captain and Dr Alors refuse to admit to being nihilists at this point in the narrative, but Tetsuo reasons that they must be. He muses about how the imperial nation-states of his time emerged from a long history of human progress where robbers went from being chieftains to kings and emperors. The robbers got bigger and fatter and were always motivated by war. A unifying movement was out of the question as, first, ‘as long as there are countries, war is essential... this cannot be thought of as enlightenment (*kaika*)’ and, secondly, ‘if a great robber came and unified everything would this solve the issues? After a flood there is another flood, after a great robber comes another great robber, there would be no end to this!’ Finally, he thinks that an East Asian alliance would not be a bad thing to counter the Europeans, but it would be a grave mistake to construct such an alliance using the same system of thought as the Europeans in which the ‘strong devour the weak’. As such, he held that the current system of international relations must be destroyed.¹¹² Nihilism was the method for questioning and destroying the system that supported the ‘robbers’ and the nation-states. Only a world without coercive leaders and private property could bring peace for the people of the world (*sekai banmin*). This was Tōten’s world without governments or private property, which he had described as a state of anarchist communitarianism based on autonomous freedom.

In the final part, Tetsuo alights from the ship in St Petersburg and stays in a tiny hostel in the poor part of the city. Tōten details the lives of ordinary Russians, and their dissatisfaction with needing to work to be able to buy enough bread to survive, which if they cannot afford, they will be unable to work. An old man gives an impassioned speech about how he will die tomorrow as he has no money for food. A male and female musician enter the hostel and perform a song about a little serf girl who is abused by her lord. Tetsuo is overcome by a sense of unfairness and after some dramatic scenes, sets off into the Russian countryside. Eventually, he arrives at a small abandoned-looking house. There, he is beckoned inside by, to his surprise, the musicians from a few days before. They explain they are nihilists and are plotting the revolution from here. As he goes further into the house he discovers the doctor and the ship’s captain from earlier, the hostel owner, and the old man from the hostel. He is introduced to everyone and shown pictures of Mikhail Bakunin and comrades who have given their lives for the nihilist cause. Dr Alors says to Tetsuo,

We are what the world calls Nihilists. We are linked through a secret society to destroy the present organisation of the world, even women like the one you see

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 209–210.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 211.

before you are in support and risking their lives for this cause. I spent a long time in the East to gather comrades, but it was hopeless. The thinking was old, and it was difficult to share ideas. I thought the East was lost, but in the end you have come to us. There is no more theory we can talk about, what do you think, will you or won't you join in our plan for destruction?

Tetsuo gladly accepts, and then travels around France and Italy before returning to China to 'attempt a great plot'. The story ends with Tōten saying that today no-one knows where Tetsuo is, but we should remember him as a person of rare courage and intensity.¹¹³

Couched in the voices of his characters, Tōten leads the audience towards his own perspective that an ideal society, founded on anarchist communitarianism, could be achieved through revolutionary action based in nihilism. The characters discuss an understanding of nihilism that they not only agree upon, but believe to be a completely reasonable response to the inequality and exploitation they saw. Nihilism, as he articulates it, is the method for the 'world revolution'. Tōten's views are concealed within Tetsuo's different interactions. In Tetsuo, Tōten created a *kyōkaku* tale for the modern age—someone who felt deep sympathy for the poor and was eager to carry out direct revolutionary action to alleviate their suffering. He goes further by including *banmin* in the narrative as revolutionary actors who join the nihilist cause to improve everyone's lives. Even in the midst of heightening Japanese-Russian antagonism, Tōten located radical thought as emerging from Japanese-Russian intellectual interaction. Tetsuo, the half-Japanese half-Chinese protagonist, wrestled with numerous worldviews before finding his *raison d'être* as a nihilist in Russia. Tōten was reaching across the increasing divide between the two countries to find sources of revolutionary knowledge useful for ordinary people.

Tōten performed *Meiji Kokusenya* for around seven years. In continuing to draw audiences over such a long period, Tōten's balladeering is a rare window into the appetite for ideas about alternatives to Japan's imperialism in the Russo-Japanese transwar period through nihilism and anarchism among those who were excluded from Meiji political and intellectual discourse. The exuberance for Japan's war with Russia in mainstream newspapers should not be read as wholesale approval for Japan's imperialism—given that newspapers like *Niroku Shinpō* were shuttered for criticizing the war and only reopened when their editorial policies fell in line with government messaging.¹¹⁴ Unlike newspapers, *naniwabushi* as a form of popular culture remained a place for ideas critical of the state and the war to be shared.

Conclusion

In the midst of Japan's first total war, dissent was not confined to back rooms and the upstairs of coffee shops, but also rowdily sung from the roadsides of Japan's poorer neighbourhoods. The *kyōkaku* tales that comprised most *naniwabushi* performances were frequently set in the Tokugawa period, yet their relevance for the daily lives of Japan's non-elite audiences remained. The difference was that now the exploitation

¹¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 218–219.

¹¹⁴Or hid in plain sight, as in Sakai, 'Survive to be critical'.

happened on behalf of imperial projects like the Russo-Japanese War, rather than for the samurai caste—although Miyazaki Tōten would be first to point out that the new Meiji oligarchy was composed almost entirely of former samurai. Tōten innovated in creating ‘new’ *naniwabushi* set in the Meiji period that promoted an idea of freedom linked to the 1880s political novels of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement. In taking a transwar approach, I explicated how ideas developed from the 1880s leading up to and through the Russo-Japanese War. Although the war was a transformative moment in Japanese society, this transformation was not solely in favour of Japan’s imperial successes. Social activists found a renewed cause for their efforts to promote freedom for ordinary people who disproportionately suffered in the war. Tōten drew on nihilism to expound his idea of an ideal way forward for Japan that put autonomous freedom first, from which a world revolution could follow and then an anarchist communitarian society would emerge. Tōten’s nihilism was a callback to the themes initially touched on by the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, in which the most successful political novels centred on the nihilists as sympathetic protagonists. This form of nihilism was understood as a celebration of individuality and difference, in stark contrast to the order being imposed by the Meiji state—something reflected in *naniwabushi* as an unrestrained, or wild, art form and site of nihilist democracy.

Tōten’s ‘new’ *naniwabushi* flew in the face of attempts to ‘improve’ *naniwabushi* at the time, and provides a challenge to its linear ‘rise’ in the historiography. Couched in the voices of his characters, Tōten espoused a rhetoric of rebellion that questioned not just the war, but the existence of the state and premise of enlightenment (*kaika*) itself. ‘New’ *naniwabushi*, therefore, is a necessary part of building a new history of transwar Japan that uncovers widespread dissatisfaction with Japan’s trajectory among those who bore the costs of industrialization and war. Not just objects of pity and oppression, Japan’s ‘*hanten*-wearing’ ordinary people were actively involved in political and intellectual discourse through such popular entertainment. This article has demonstrated the value in using the transwar period as an analytical frame for examining social movements that grew before, during, and after the Russo-Japanese War. By taking popular performance and their content seriously, examining performer-activists like Tōten can break through the drumbeat of nationalism to listen to the voices that imagined alternatives to Japan’s imperialism.

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