

BOOK REVIEWS

A Revolution American Style

Reviewed by Hiroshi Tsuchida

BOOK REVIEWED: 有賀 貞, 『アメリカ革命』(東京: 東京大学出版会, 1988, 324pp., ¥4800) Tadashi Aruga, *American Revolution* (Tokyo: Tokyo Univ. Press, 1988, in Japanese)

“Twenty years ago, in 1968,” wrote *Time* magazine, “America--and much of the world as well--felt the dislocations of another *annus mirabilis*.”¹ It was the year of the Tet offensive in Vietnam, an event which made Americans understand that they, too, could be losers. It was the year when President Lyndon Johnson, the champion of social security programs, wept in front of TV cameras and declared that he would never seek another term. It was the year when TV showed to the nation the assassinations of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. The Democratic National Convention in Chicago was dirtied with the blood of young people beaten by police nightsticks. It was clearly the year which brought liberalism to its end.

Yet, at the same time, it was the beginning of the women's movement and the concern for the environment. In this sense, we can say liberalism still lingered. When we turn our eyes to the rest of the world, 1968 may have been the beginning of the changes which we observe today in the East Europe. It was the year the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, crashing the democratic reforms of Dubcek but not the hopes and dreams that “the Spring of Prague” brought to the people of the East bloc.

It was clearly the year of “no-return.” By 1968, the United States

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had lost faith in itself. Confidence in the American way of life had helped America become a superpower. Americans believed they were God-chosen and that their nation was the model for all others in the world. This resulted in the Manifest Destiny, populism, the New Deal and finally Johnson's Great Society. After 1968, however, Americans no longer believed in their "exceptionalism."²

As Americans themselves have gone in search of their identity--who they are, where they came from and where they are going, their questions have led us on the other side of the Pacific Ocean to ask, what happened to America ?

In 1988, the 20th anniversary of 1968, two books that could give some clues to the answer were published in Japan. One was *America: Where Dreams Come True*³ by Isamu Onoji and the other was *American Revolution* by Tadashi Aruga. Although the former was written with the clear intention of searching for the reasons behind today's confusion in the United States, the latter is no less important for its detailed explanations of the causes and developments of the American Revolution.

America: Where Dreams Come True tells us that the identity crisis in the U.S. is due to the modern concept of individualism and the adoption of this concept into the basic system of society through the Revolution. The author, Onoji, deals with the creation of "the thirteen United States of America" as an irony: Individualism was certainly a highly respected value, and it gradually became the cause of constant changes in society. In his argument, which comes across in a humorous, light-hearted way, the American Revolution was an unavoidable result of these constant changes, the culmination of a process of change that had begun in earlier colonial days.

Aruga's *American Revolution* is a good textbook, full of facts which fully explain the causes of the Revolution from the French-Indian War through the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. It explores a wide range of the whole developments of those days: political, economic, social and even military.

This book may be too detailed for beginning students of American history or politics. But this will be a very valuable book for those who want to study the Revolution further.

Through its eight chapters, the book's main theme is the political history of the Revolution, especially the development of political concepts and the establishment of the republic form of government.

What attracted my attention most is Aruga's brief explanation of the works of the Federalists and anti-Federalists. Aruga points out that Federalists, who were for the ratification of the Constitution, were actually nationalists and therefore ought to have been against the true federal form of government. The anti-Federalists, who opposed the new Constitution, in fact upheld the federal system of government. Those who wanted a stronger national government won the political battle of the day, and Aruga thus concludes that the way they referred to themselves became their "official" name, while the true federalists were given the "anti-" federalist label.⁴

On the nature of the new United States government as defined by the 1787 Constitution, James Madison argued in No. 39 of the *Federalist Papers*, "The proposed Constitution... is, in strictness, neither a national nor a federal Constitution, but a composition of both. In its foundation it is federal, not national; in the sources from which the ordinary powers of the government are drawn, it is partly federal and partly national; in the operation of these powers, it is national, not federal; in the extent of them, again, it is federal, not national; and, finally in the authoritative mode of introducing amendments, it is neither wholly federal nor wholly national."⁵ It is obvious even the "Father of the Constitution" could not clearly define the nature of the new government.

Furthermore, we know that Madison himself was first among the Federalists, but that finally he departed from Alexander Hamilton, the main Federalist (or nationalist) and moved to the anti-Federalist faction.

Here we face one of the most confusing aspects of the political situation of the time and find the challenging question of why ratification was possible in the way the so-called Federalists desired, while political ideas on the Constitution were so diverse that even Madison found the concepts difficult to explain.

Although Aruga did not elaborate on this matter, he at least pointed out this fact, which is one of his book's real contributions to

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future students of American revolutionary days. I personally believe that analyzing this matter with more care would lead to better understanding of the situation in America today.

The author should be congratulated for his hard work and devotion to the subject. His earnest research makes this book one of the best on the American Revolution. His explanations cover all aspects of this historical event, including its causes and the development of nation-building.

These are points to commend, but at the same time I have to say they could have been developed more fully. Readers are sometimes left wondering what the author really wants to say.

In comparing Aruga's book with Onoji's, it is apparent Onoji freely developed his own ideas on the changing phenomena of the revolutionary days and its impact on American society. Onoji emphasized the changes in attitudes toward religion and the birth of the concept of individuality through these changes in religious attitudes. His focus and arguments are unique, and they finally lead him to this thought-provoking conclusion: "... it is not that the American Revolution brought the social changes. It is the social changes that brought the American Revolution... the American Revolution is basically of the same quality as the changes in the function and the structure in families, local communities, and churches. Both the American Revolution and the changes in families had the giant wave of modernization as their bases... they are not in the relation in which one of them caused the other."⁶

Aruga's argument, on the other hand, lacks originality. He devotedly collected the theories of many American scholars and organized them to explain "history."

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NOTES

1 *Time*. Jan. 11, 1988, p. 8.

- 2 Recently Daniel Bell argued that Americans never lost their trust in exceptionalism and that it is only this concept that could save the nation. Bell, "American Exceptionalism Revisited: the Role of a Civil Society," in *Dialogue*. No.87. June, 1989.
- 3 小野路功『夢大陸アメリカ？—近代生成の社会史』 彩流社 1988年
Isamu Onoji, *America: Where Dreams Come True*
(Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 1988).
- 4 Aruga, p. 234.
- 5 Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, the *Federalist Papers*
(N.Y. : New American Library, 1961), p.246.
- 6 Onoji, pp. 387-388.

