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## HIROSHI MIZUTA (1919–2023)

### A Life in Search of the Origin of Democracy

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Apparently, Adam Smith and civil movements appear before me hand in hand.  
MIZUTA, 1975b, p. 136; my translation.

Hiroshi Mizuta, a leading figure in studying the history of economic and social thought, ended his 103-year life journey on February 3, 2023, passing away from old age. He is internationally renowned for his research on the Scottish Enlightenment, as exemplified by his cataloging of Adam Smith's library (Mizuta [1967] 2000a). He also left behind extensive research on modern European economic and social thought in general, much of it written in his native tongue, Japanese. In addition to his significant contributions to the academic world, he was actively involved in civil movements at the grassroots and local levels. Today, I hope to recount his achievements while giving attention to his role as “the fighting scholar,” an aspect of him that seems less well known to people outside Japan.

I begin this eulogy with a brief review of Mizuta's life.

Born in Tokyo in 1919, Mizuta graduated from the Tokyo University of Commerce (now Hitotsubashi University) in 1942. As a member of the Zenya Takashima (1904-1990) Seminar at the same university, he read Hobbes and Smith and approached Marxism. The basic line

of his research on the history of modern European thought ran from Machiavelli through to Hobbes to Smith. The road he would travel had already been established during his undergraduate years, as evidenced by his undergraduate thesis, titled “A Study of the Nation-State in its Generative Period from the Viewpoint of the History of Thought,” which was later developed into the first part of Mizuta (1954). He was sent to Japanese-occupied Indonesia from late 1942 to June 1946. He served as a member of the army until Japan’s defeat in World War II in August 1945 and then remained in Indonesia as a prisoner of war. After returning from military service, he devoted himself to research and took a position at Nagoya University in 1949, where he became a professor in 1958. In 1960, he completed his dissertation and received his PhD in economics from Kyoto University (Mizuta, 1954). During 1974-1976, he was the president of the Japanese Society for the History of Economic Thought, and from 1977 to 1983, he was the president of the Japanese Society for the History of Social Thought. In 1983, he retired from Nagoya University, and in 1998, he became a member of the Japan Academy. In 2001, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society.

Mizuta was known as “the fighting scholar” who never confined himself to his ivory tower but took the initiative to travel to the field. He not only served as the head of many citizens’ peace and antiwar groups but was also actively involved in civil movements opposing the massive, costly bid to host the Nagoya Olympics (1988) and the Aichi Expo (2005); the former campaign proved particularly successful. He was a plaintiff in a lawsuit to stop the deployment of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces to Iraq (2004). Even further, at over 90 years of age, he continued voicing his fierce opposition to the state secrets law (2013) and the right to exercise collective self-defense (2015).

One of Mizuta’s lifelong firmly held beliefs was that “civil movements are an extension of the study of the history of social thought.” In elaborating on this belief, he often referred to Hobbes and Smith because he tried to find in their writings the original landscape of a democratic (or civil) society that a small East Asian island nation lagging in modernization behind the West should aim to achieve. For example, in a report at the International Symposium on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Copernicus’s birth in September 1973 (Cracow, Poland), he argued that

“man’s striving for self-preservation was established by Machiavelli as an undeniable fact and by Hobbes as an inalienable natural right. None of them, however, was able to provide a new social system that would incorporate this fact and right peacefully and consistently. It was given by Adam Smith in his system of social science, especially as it relates to political economy. The economic activities of everyday life underpin the fact and right of man’s self-preservation. This is the Copernican revolution in social science” (Mizuta, 1975b, p. 366-367; my translation). Shortly before that, in a June 1973 report at the International Symposium on the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Smith’s birth (Kirkcaldy, Scotland), he argued that “when I say that Adam Smith gave us almost the complete form of a democratic society, I am not using the word democracy to describe mere forms or procedures of political operation, such as majority rule, universal suffrage, and so on. Smith does not speak of these things. The basic issue is that each person has an equal and inalienable right to self-preservation and that every society or state is made, or ought to be made, by the people for their peaceful enjoyment of that right” (Mizuta, 1975b, p. 338; my translation).

Following the teachings of Smith, who emphasized the importance of plunging into a group of “strangers” from whom one could expect little sympathy, Mizuta boldly jumped into the international network of scholars and published his research results one after another. His first oral presentation abroad, titled “Marxism in Japan,” was given at a symposium of the World Federation of Scientific Workers in Prague in July 1959, which was unusually early for a Japanese historian of thought. His solid command of European languages and his sociable, outgoing, and unpretentious personality brought him into close contact with such influential scholars as Auguste Cornu, R. W. Davies, Maurice Dobb, Roy Harrod, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Lukács György, A. L. Macfie, Ronald Meek, Roy Pascal, Andrew Skinner, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Piero Sraffa, Franco Venturi, Howard Warrender, and others. In particular, Hobsbawm and Sraffa would become his lifelong close friends. These interactions further enriched his international activities.

It is no coincidence that many scholars above were among the so-called “New Left” in Britain. Throughout his life, Mizuta professed to be a Marxist and a harsh critic of the emperor system. According to him, Japan modernized and capitalized while retaining many feudal

social relations, such as the emperor system. During this evolution, the family principle dominated the entire nation, hindering the healthy growth of democracy and the individual's independence or the ability to think and act independently that forms its foundation. With this in mind, and with strong resonance for the English New Left movement, he saw the theoretical core of Marxism as follows: "I think that Marxism was the most potent weapon to criticize feudalism (including the emperor system) in Japan, not only for my generation but also for generations a little earlier. In that sense, Marxist theory was, first and foremost, a theory of democracy that included a theory of the alienation and emancipation of workers" (Mizuta, 1994, p. 79; my translation).

"Alienation", of course, is a key word in Marx's early writings. Mizuta placed great importance on man's awareness of alienation in capitalist society, including economic alienation due to exploitation and political alienation (political distrust) caused by representative democracy, as the starting point for resistance to the existing system. He believed that the expansion of direct democracy through civil movements would pave the way for socialism that overcame alienation. "Direct democracy, or the active participation of citizens in politics, must be constantly demanded and partially realized in order to overcome political alienation and secure the basis of life" (Mizuta, 1985, p. 84; my translation). "The thoroughness of democracy will, for the time being, be pursued as demands for direct democracy in the form of civil movements against representative democracy" (Mizuta, 1985, p. 178; my translation). It is worth noting that Mizuta pointed to the importance of vanguard parties and intellectuals to lead such popular movements, especially in backward countries where political power is repressive and modern individuals are immature. For this reason, he highly evaluated Lenin's thoughts and activity after *What is to Be Done?* (1902). Even so, it should be emphasized that his research findings, based entirely on rigorous bibliographic research and investigation, were presented with a level of scholarship that would be fully appreciated by overseas readers unfamiliar with the underlying problem he had with Japan's immature modernization.

Mizuta did not write a single specialized article on the methodology of the history of ideas, either in English or Japanese, as Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock did. Still, he left his views on this topic as a historian of social thought, albeit in fragments, within his many

research works and essays. In my own way, I would summarize it as follows – because ideas repeatedly change across borders and over time, the study of the history of ideas clarifies both the social context in the broadest sense (including the intellectual environment) that prompted such changes and the essence of the ideas that held the potential for those changes. For Mizuta, democracy and human rights (specifically, the right to resist and the right to live) represent these ideas. It is for this reason that he examined the reception, transformation, and dissemination of these ideas in the works of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Smith, Marx, and others. In particular, Mizuta [2000a] is highly regarded for achieving world-class recognition as a basic resource for answering the question, “What sources did Smith rely on to write his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*?” In 1955, he began researching the more than 1,800 items presumed to represent Smith’s library. From there, he completed Mizuta (2000a) over the course of more than 40 years under the policy of “consulting the actual items as much as possible.” This greatly advanced our understanding of the intellectual environment surrounding Smith.

While Mizuta (2000a) is the masterpiece of his extensive bibliographical research, Mizuta (1975a) is probably the major piece of his purely historical study of social thought. According to the first half of that article, which focused on the genealogy of British moral philosophy, the reason that Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Mandeville, Hume, and others were unable to solve the problem submitted by Hobbes, “How is it possible to construct a peaceful social order from a number of individuals acting on the principle of self-love?” (Mizuta, 1975a, p. 120), was because they could not come to a recognition of the autonomy of civil society. Smith, on the other hand, solved Hobbes’ problem for the moment by recognizing the autonomy of civil society as free competition based on fair play with his “theory of sympathy” – the approval of a stranger (an impartial spectator) and conscience as the internalization of that approval as the basis for judging the propriety of human action. According to the second half of the article, which traces the development of Smith’s thought within the context of the revision of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, “When he considered the formation of man’s conscience in the first edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he saw no possible contradiction between conscience and public opinion” (Mizuta, 1975a, p. 127). However, the

impact of the case of Jean Calas (and perhaps the French Revolution) made him keenly aware of that contradiction, even in relation to class conflict, and led to his recognition of a definitive opposition between conscience and public opinion in the enlarged section of the sixth edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In other words, Smith's view of civil society gradually changed from "homogeneous and harmonious" in his early years to "heterogeneous, or class-structured," in his later years. At the end of the article, Mizuta suggested that these changes reflected the historical fact that civil society before Smith's eyes was "being transformed into a capitalist system" (Mizuta, 1975a, p. 131). I think that this article deserves high praise not only because it demonstrates Mizuta's many outstanding qualities as a historian of social thought and provides a brilliant example of the application of the research method, which he would later call "sophisticated Marxism" (Mizuta, 2000b, p. 315; my translation), but also because it has long since been frequently referred to as a classical study of Adam Smith and civil society.

In addition to the works I have mentioned, Mizuta emphasized translation work to enrich basic research materials and translated many Western classics into Japanese, including those of Hobbes, Smith, Edmund Burke, J. S. Mill, Marx, and Engels. Due to Mizuta's extraordinary efforts, Japanese readers can access all of Smith's works, including lecture notes and drafts, in their native language. Furthermore, he was a teacher to many outstanding historians of social thought who are active internationally, including Yoshio Nagai (British radicalism, Bentham), Yasuo Amoh (the Scottish Enlightenment, Ferguson), Takaho Ando (French Enlightenment, Condorcet), Seizo Hotta (the Italian Enlightenment, Beccaria), and Tetsushi Harada (on German romanticism, Adam Müller)<sup>1</sup>.

Being nearly 50 years younger than Mizuta, I was too young to receive his guidance as a seminar member. Even so, since 1993, when I chose Burke as the topic of my master's thesis, I have been enormously inspired by his research achievements and by exchanging views with him at domestic and international conferences. His diagnosis of "Malthus as the second speaker [against Burke as the first speaker] of British

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1 Hiroshi Mizuta attended and took part, along with Professor Noboru Kobayashi, in the Sir James Steuart and Political Economy Conference, held in Vizille on 14 and 16 September 1995 (Editor).

conservatism” (Mizuta, 1969, p. 26; my translation) has long served, and continues to serve, as a guiding thread for my research.

Mizuta dedicated his life to searching for the origin of democracy to realize a truly democratic society. I would like to be second to none in expressing my gratitude to him for his labor, but coming up with the right words is quite difficult. Regretfully, because I know that he always considered himself an atheist and a materialist, I shall refrain from offering him the words, “May his soul rest in peace.”



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